





NEWS

Justice Stephen A. Douglas
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STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS:
THE POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP, 1833 - 1843

Biographer's Speech on Douglas in Winchester To Mark 204th Anniversary of Little Giant's Birth

The author of a recent biography of U.S. Sen. Stephen A. Douglas claims that it was the citizens of Winchester who stirred the interest in politics of the young easterner who was to become the nation's most powerful Democrat in the mid-19th century.

"Douglas hadn't intended to stay in Jacksonville when he arrived there in November 1833," said Reg Ankrom, whose book "Stephen A. Douglas: The Political Apprenticeship, 1833-1843," was published in 2015. "He was interested in law but found that thwarted by Morgan County lawyers at the time. Chance put him in Winchester the next month, and it was there that the community's citizens stirred his passion for politics."

"Douglas in Winchester" is the subject of a speech Ankrom will deliver in the Scott County courthouse at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 23. The date is the 204th anniversary of Douglas's birth. The program will be sponsored by the Winchester City Group and will be free and open to the public.

Douglas found Winchester distinctly different from Jacksonville, Ankrom said. He discovered that the Whig Party had wrested control of local politics from Jackson Democrats in Jacksonville. But in Winchester he found himself at the center of the county's Jacksonian Democracy. Douglas said that adoption."

Experiences in Winchester as a school teacher, practitioner of law, and nascent politician established the foundation that Douglas decades later credited for the beginning of his success. His political career rose meteorically in the mid-19th century. Douglas held off a challenge by Abraham Lincoln for his senate seat in 1858 and lost the presidency to him in 1860.

Douglas returned to Winchester 25 years after his first days there and would remember with great fondness the earlier generation that welcomed him there.

The biography of Douglas's first decade in Illinois is one of three books Ankrom is writing about Douglas. His most recent publication was a contribution to the new book, "The Quincy Miracle," which describes the rescue of the 5,700 members of the Mormon Church expelled from Missouri in by 1,500 residents of Quincy during the winter of 1838-39.

From Jacksonville, Ankrom earned his bachelor's degree from Illinois College and master's from the University of Kansas. He is a frequent contributor to historical journals and a speaker on Douglas, Lincoln, and antebellum Illinois and U.S. history.