

## At Wheatland, a chance to 'Live & Learn'

Intelligencer Journal

Published: Aug 16, 2008

01:24 EST

Lancaster, PA

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This weekend offers Lancaster County residents a chance to meet face to face with history.

The Live & Learn Weekend, jointly sponsored by the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Pennsylvania Office of Tourism, takes a look at the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. It is the fourth and final weekend where guests are encouraged to read a specific history book and then discuss it in an open dialog.

"The theme of the series has been the American presidency, and all of the books have centered around the Civil War period and the Underground Railroad," said Alice Sanders of the visitors bureau.

The book for this weekend is "Lincoln and Democracy," which presents Lincoln's speeches and was edited by former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo and Harold Holzer.

Leading the discussion today from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. will be Louise Stevenson, professor of history and American studies at Franklin & Marshall College. She will take excerpts from the book for discussion.

"Lincoln was one of the smartest presidents who ever lived," Stevenson said. "Whenever I read his speeches I am just blown away with the careful thought and structure of thought that went into them."

The forum will take place at the Pennsylvania Dutch Visitors Center theater, 501 Greenfield Road. Drop-in attendees are welcome, and the program is free.

The weekend event kicked off Friday with a reception at Wheatland, the home of Lincoln's predecessor, James Buchanan. And while neither the 15th nor 16th president was in attendance, some of their 1800s contemporaries — in the form of the Pennsylvania Past Players — were.

"Tonight is a reception, and there will be a briefing about what the weekend is all about," Sanders said. "The living history players will just mingle with the guests."



*A member of the Pennsylvania Past Players portraying Willam Goodrich addresses the crowd during a reception at Wheatland on Friday. Photo: Vinny Tennis / Intelligencer Journal*

The Past Players work through the state Office of Tourism. Taking the role of someone from the period 1838 to 1878, the players learn about that person, dress like that person and, in fact, become that person.



*A member of the Pennsylvania Past Players portraying Lydia Hamilton watches as two people shake hands on Wheatland's porch.  
Photo: Vinny Tennis /  
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"They are here to talk about the quest for freedom that not only involved enslaved people and freedom seekers, but also free men and women of color and abolitionists," said Lenwood Sloan, director of Heritage Tourism with the Pennsylvania Tourism Office and founder of the Past Players.

He said the historical visitors represented an anti-slavery group called the Liberty Bell Forum, "bridging the dialog of James Buchanan in those four controversial years, 1856 to 1860, and looking at the issues that were on the threshold when Mr. Lincoln was inaugurated in 1861, and his 'five Aprils,' 1861 to 1865, which changed America."

The players related stories, such as the burning of the Wrightsville Bridge on June 28, 1863, as told by poet Frances Harper.

The fact that Rebel troops helped put out fires that spread from the bridge to the town, said the author of "Home Sweet Home," one of Lincoln's favorite poems, "foreshadowed our coming together again as a Union."

Mary Shaw Leader, the Hanover newspaperwoman who covered Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and was one of the few journalists who

liked it, said, "We are here to celebrate Lincoln and democracy with the people of today, of 2008. And being a strong Lincoln supporter, I am very much honored to be part of the group."

One visitor from the past was local Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, who, with Lydia Hamilton Smith on his arm, looked distinctly uncomfortable in the home of a man he so vehemently opposed.

"I was half-expecting to be stopped at the door and sent back," Stevens said.

Hamilton agreed.

"I'm sure he'd be quite surprised to see us here," she said.

Whether Buchanan would have welcomed Stevens or not, Lisa Bowman, marketing director for Wheatland, was happy to host the event.

"We've got a great Civil War history to tell here in Lancaster," she said. "And I think we're really starting to work together as a community to share the story."

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*Pennsylvania Past Players portraying historical figures Lydia Hamilton Smith and Thaddeus Stevens at Wheatland during a reception Friday.  
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