

My name is Steve Colburn, and I represent Barnstorming, a community organization based in Eureka, Illinois. The purpose of Barnstorming is to preserve and restore the historic Davidson barn, relocating it to the banks of Lake Eureka, where it will be re-purposed as a community center. With me today to help in this presentation are Mel Hallam, from the Barnstorming board and my wife, Minta Colburn.

One major motive for the preservation of the barn is historical. In the Fall of 1830, Caleb and Martha Davidson, along with their four small children, made the long journey by horseback and wagon from Graves County, Kentucky, to a farm near current day Eureka, Illinois. This was the winter of the "Great Snow," which slowed their progress. They arrived four months later to occupy a small one-room log cabin on the banks of Walnut Creek. Here, Caleb established a farm and cattle ranching operation. The growing cattle herd required shelter and storage for hay and grain, so in 1838, he hired Plinny Monroe, a professional barn builder, who, with his wife, moved into a lean-to attached to the cabin, and began constructing a large barn.

In addition to serving its agricultural purpose, the barn also served as a community gathering place during the 1830s and 40s, as the population grew in this frontier settlement. Annie Davidson, Caleb's and Martha's granddaughter, wrote in a 1943 reflection, "This barn was the scene of many interesting events in the development of community life in Walnut Grove, now Eureka. My father, William A Davidson, . . . remembers vividly standing, leaning on his mother who was holding his baby brother Franklin, . . . in her lap, and being thrilled by some school boy dramatics, in an 'exhibition' held in the barn. He said his mother wore a new bonnet and shawl, purchased in St. Louis (the nearest shopping place) and he thought she looked so pretty.

"The Eureka Christian Church organized in 1832, the first church in this community, which owned no 'meeting house' until 1847, held several 'Big Meetings' or 'Protracted Meetings' in the barn, one of which was held by Barton W. Stone. Baptisms were administered in Walnut Creek, which meanders through the farm. Often a hole had to be cut in the ice for the purpose.

"Doubtless many husking bees and spelling schools were held in the building."

In the 1850s, Caleb Davidson hired attorney Abraham Lincoln to represent him in a trial at the Metamora Courthouse involving the theft of cattle from their herd. William Davidson was a young teenager and had been the herdsman at the time of the theft. He later recounted how, when he was called as a witness, Lincoln had spoken to him. "He took my hand in his and talked to me in [such] a kind and sympathetic way that he won my confidence and quieted my fears. He then told me that all he wanted me to do was to tell them all I knew about the case, which I did. Every time the lawyers on the other side tried to bully and frighten me, Lincoln appealed to the Judge in my behalf. He so won my childish affections that he always held a warm place in my heart." Family legend recalls that Lincoln visited the Davidson homestead many times, stabling his

horse in the barn. In the Davidson family, this is called the Lincoln chair, and is said to be the one he always sat in when visiting the Davidson home.

A second motive for preserving the Davidson barn is the nature of the barn itself, both the materials and the construction. It was built from white oak trees found in the surrounding woods. Caleb cut and trimmed the logs and hauled them to the hillside site where they were hand-hewn into timbers and connected with pinned mortise and tenon joints to form the structure of the barn we see today. The workmanship is really remarkable. It has three levels and is built into a hillside. An unusual attribute of the Davidson barn is the double-wide threshing floor spanned by a large swing beam. Swing beams—and the large threshing floor they accompany-- are relatively rare in Illinois. One noted barn historian says he is only aware of one other Illinois barn with a similar swing beam.

Clearly, historic preservation should favor restoration on site if at all possible. In this case, it is not possible. The next-best option seems to be to relocate the barn in such a way that its historic framework is directed to meeting contemporary needs and it is situated on public land.

Last October, the Eureka City Council voted to approve the restoration and relocation of the Davidson barn to Eureka Lake Park, where it will serve as a community and cultural center. It can be built into a lakeside hill so that the lower level will be usable as office and meeting rooms, while the main level will be a larger meeting and/or performance space. A service unit will be added to provide space for more modern features like restrooms and an elevator.

We are working with architect Paul Young Associates from Bloomington and with Trillium Dell Timberworks, who will be doing the dismantling and rebuilding. We are hopeful that in the future, even though there may not be any husking bees or protracted meetings, the Davidson barn will again be a center of cultural, community, and family life as it was in the decades immediately following its building.

We invite you to visit this historic barn and Lincoln site on Saturday, June 25, at 1:00 pm for a tour. Our handout provides additional information.

Thank you