

L&C to Host History on Trial Program Highlighting Alton School Segregation Cases

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GODFREY – The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission's History on Trial series is coming to L&C to highlight the Alton School Cases at 7 p.m. Monday, April 20, in the Hatheway Cultural Center.

The Alton School Cases were a series of seven circuit court trials and five Illinois Supreme Court appeals from 1897 to 1908, in which Scott Bibb, an African-American father of two school-age children, resisted the newly imposed racial segregation in the Alton school system. He was joined by the Alton black community, which used ties of kinship, friendship, church and community to organize their challenge of separate schools for 11 years.

Despite the Illinois Supreme Court's ban on segregated schools in the 1870s, Alton officials, including then-Mayor Henry Brueggeman and Superintendent Robert Haight, decided to defy the state law.

"By September of (1897), they had segregated the schools, and the black community responded strongly. They sat in at the existing schools, refused to attend the two new schools and they took the case to the courts," said Shirley Portwood, a professor emeritus of SIUE and current SIUE Board of Trustees member who has done extensive research in Illinois African-American history.

When Bibb's children, Ambrose and Minnie, tried to go back to Washington School, they were told they must attend a new school designated for black children, located more than a mile from their home, even though they had attended Washington School, four blocks from home, the year before.

Even though Bibb won all five appeals at the Illinois Supreme Court, Alton schools remained segregated for nearly 50 years after the cases.

"Given that these significant cases took place right here in Alton, Lewis and Clark is pleased to share this legal history with our local communities," said L&C Vice President of Academic Affairs Linda Chapman.

L&C's event, the first of three being held across the state this spring, will begin with a one-act dramatic presentation, followed by a brief intermission, and a panel discussion that will offer the audience a chance to submit questions for the panel.

Mandatory continuing legal education (MCLE) credit will be available for lawyers in attendance through the Illinois State Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Association.

The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission was created in 2007 to assist and advise the Illinois Supreme Court in acquiring, collecting, preserving and cataloging documents, artifacts and information relating to the Illinois judiciary.

History on Trial is a series of presentations highlighting important, and often little known, lawsuits in Illinois and American history. The purpose is to demonstrate how the law remains a living, breathing element of society and these cases continue to have relevance today.

To purchase tickets at \$10 each, visit the ticket portal on the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum's website, <http://bit.ly/1x1AQVD>.

For more information, visit the www.historyontrial.org, or contact John Lupton, executive director of the Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission, at (217) 670-0890, ext. 1, or john.lupton@illinoiscourthistory.org.