



History on Trial to Highlight Alton School Segregation Cases Building Being Renamed Scott Bibb Center to Honor Education Champion

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GODFREY – Lewis and Clark Community College is hosting the upcoming History on Trial: Alton School Cases event, and renaming its Alton Community Learning Center in honor of Scott Bibb, a courageous defender of integrated public schools.

Bibb, an African-American father of two school-age children, was at the center of seven circuit court trials that resulted in five appeals to the Illinois Supreme Court from 1897-1908. Bibb and the African American community resisted the newly imposed racial segregation in the Alton school system. These cases were alternately known as the Alton School Cases, or the Bibb Case.

The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission's History on Trial series event is one of three across the state this spring that will highlight the Alton School Cases, and will take place at 7 p.m. Monday, April 20, in the Hatheway Cultural Center.

Despite an Illinois law enacted "to protect colored children in their rights to attend public schools," (1874), Alton officials, including then-Mayor Henry Brueggeman and Superintendent Robert Haight, decided to defy the state law and segregate Alton schools in 1897.

"During the summer of 1897, the school board, city council, mayor and the superintendent at the time built two new schools for the African-American children to attend," said Shirley Portwood, a professor emeritus of SIUE and a current SIU Board of Trustees member, who has done extensive research in Illinois African-American

history. “By September of that year, 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.”

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 seemingly little known history with our local communities,” said L&C Vice President of Academic Affairs Linda Chapman.

To learn more, or to purchase tickets for the event, visit www.historyontrial.org.

In addition to hosting Monday’s event, Lewis and Clark is renovating and renaming the former St. Patrick’s School building in Alton in honor of Scott Bibb.



“It is apparent from his dedication to the issue that Scott Bibb believed in quality education for all,” said Val Harris, L&C director of Adult Education. “It’s fitting that the newly named Scott Bibb Center builds on this legacy by bringing access to college to the Alton community and its residents.”