

**Darold Leigh Henson**, Ph.D., professor emeritus of English at Missouri State University, Springfield

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Researching Illinois social-cultural history, and the heritage and rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Professor Emeritus Publishes Book About the Namesake Heritage of Lincoln, Illinois**

Springfield, MO--April 12, 2011--D. Leigh Henson, Ph.D., announces the publication of his new book, *The Town Abraham Lincoln Warned: The Living Namesake Heritage of Lincoln, Illinois*. According to legend, in 1853 when the town's founders asked their attorney, Abraham Lincoln, if they could name the town for him, he quipped: "You'd better not do that, for I never knew anything named Lincoln that amounted to much."

Henson, professor emeritus of English at Missouri State University, was born and raised in Lincoln, the first town named for Mr. Lincoln before he became famous. There, Lincoln christened the town in his name with watermelon juice in 1853, practiced law, owned property, and engaged in politics. The town of Lincoln has been the seat of Logan County since 1854.

Henson's book explains how this community has searched for, commemorated, exploited, and sometimes neglected its Abraham Lincoln-related history. Accordingly, Henson tells the stories of how the town has developed its historic sites, celebrations, festivals, re-enactments, historical markers, and such related art as statues, busts, and paintings. Overall, these are "success stories" involving the interaction of people in government, business, education--especially people from Lincoln College--, tourism, and other nonprofits. Yet, these stories sometimes show controversy, irony, and missed opportunity.

The book is a case study of how academics can engage in public service based on scholarship. Using the Internet for research and communication with civic leaders in Lincoln, Henson for several years has contributed to his hometown's Lincoln heritage.

In 2007 he publicly debated the question of whether Mr. Lincoln had practiced law in the first Lincoln Christian Church in 1857. For the Lincoln Bicentennial Celebration beginning in 2008, Henson proposed a re-enactment of Mr. Lincoln's two-hour political rally and speech on the lawn of the Logan County Courthouse during the Lincoln-Douglas senate race of 1858. Henson researched the event and discovered newspaper articles not previously identified in *The Lincoln Log*, the official record of Lincoln's day-by-day activities. Henson then composed the play script used for that re-enactment. He also proposed a historical marker and statue of Lincoln to commemorate the original event. In 2010 Henson became involved in the public debate over whether the fallen Civil War Union soldier statue on the Logan County Courthouse lawn should be replaced with one of marble, a twin of the original, or one of bronze. Included in the book are explanations of all of these activities.

The book's final section recommends strategies to expand, preserve, and promote this Lincoln heritage. Henson has sent complimentary copies to more than a dozen local civic leaders, including Mayor Keith Snyder, Dave Armbrust of the City Council, Jan Schumacher of the Logan County Board, Wanda Lee

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Rohlf of Main Street Lincoln, and the presidents and trustees of Lincoln College and Lincoln Christian University. These individuals are in key positions for considering the book's proposals.

This book is a fresh approach to writing social-cultural history: it offers a model of explaining how a heritage develops from history at the grass-roots level and how that heritage forms "a usable past." The significance of this work has been recognized by leading Illinois historians and others, who have described it as "a fine book," "a splendid story," "a true labor of love," and "a gold mine for civic leaders" (in Lincoln and elsewhere).

The book features 73 black-and-white images, including original photos, picture postcards, and pages from newspapers and history books. On the outside and inside of the cover are four original color photos. Henson and his wife, Pat Hartman, did all of the pre-press work for the book, including graphics editing.

Copies have been donated to the Lincoln Public Library, the Missouri State University Library, the Illinois State University Library, and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

The author has created a Web page providing more details and ordering information:

<http://findinglincolnillinois.com/townabewarned.html>. A companion resource for Henson's book is his extensive, award-winning community history Web site of Lincoln: <http://findinglincolnillinois.com>. At the top of its homepage is a link to his curriculum vitae (PDF).

Henson attended Lincoln College his freshman year and earned undergraduate and graduate degrees at Illinois State University. Henson taught English at Pekin Community High School in Pekin, Illinois, for thirty years before going to Missouri State University, where he taught technical communication for fourteen years. Missouri State University, the second largest public university in that state, is Missouri's only university with a dedicated public affairs mission.

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