

January 12, 2009

A Footnote to Paul Beaver's Award as the *Courier's* Citizen of the Year for 2008

I write in praise of fellow Lincoln, Illinois, Bicentennial Commissioner Paul Beaver, professor emeritus of history at Lincoln College, for receiving the *Courier's* Citizen of the Year award for 2008. Paul richly deserves this honor and recognition. Often, people who teach in higher education are stereotyped as obsessively pursuing specialized research projects of interest only to a few like-minded experts--of living in an ivory tower and "piling higher and deeper." Paul's example, as described in the *Courier's* recent article announcing the award, clearly gives the lie to that myth.

Paul's lifework teaches that academics can and should apply their expertise to the challenging arena of community service. Paul has for many years worked tirelessly "to take history public." His efforts continue to improve our understanding of the unique heritage of Lincoln and Logan County, and throughout his long career, he has been actively but quietly engaged in promoting that heritage to attract visitors to the heart of the Land of Lincoln.

I confess that in recent years some of my work, too, has had these purposes, and Paul's example has been instructive and inspirational to me. Here, I briefly explain. As a faculty member at Missouri State University, I was encouraged to apply its main mission of promoting public affairs toward my research and writing for publication. One way I chose to do so has been developing and promoting the Lincoln community history Web site for the purpose of increasing civic pride and heritage tourism.

The publications of Paul Beaver and Paul Gleason as well as Nancy Gehlbach and Sam Redding's fabulous *Our Times* have been essential to my research for that project, and the Lincoln history Web site includes extensive borrowings and citations of those various works. Additionally, Paul's *History of Logan County 1982* was especially useful as model for writing history with an emphasis on collaboration. That remarkable book results from the combined work of dozens of people he directed. The book, available in the Lincoln Public Library, includes personal experience accounts that he and many other local citizens provided, and those accounts produce "human interest," truly bringing history alive.

In developing my community history Web site, I followed the example of Paul's 1982 history by locating many alums of Lincoln Community High School from mid 20th century. Some live in Lincoln, but most are scattered throughout the nation. For several years I emailed those folks to invite them to contribute remembrances and photos. These contributions greatly enrich that online history, covering a wide range of topics, including the local gambling raids of the 1950s and William Maxwell's treatment of blacks from Lincoln, Illinois. These subjects had not previously been included in local histories.

Also, more recently Paul has supported my work on the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission of Lincoln, Illinois. In fact, he (along with Ron Keller and Wanda Lee Rohlfs) recommended me for membership on this Commission. That appointment encouraged me to research and create the play script for the re-enactment of the 1858 Abe rally and speech and to

write the article about it that will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*.

For these reasons, I heartily congratulate Paul Beaver and his family. And I compliment the *Courier* for honoring Paul with its prestigious award. Link to *Courier* article: <http://www.lincolncourier.com/archive/x1621229021/Paul-Beaver-gets-icing-for-his-cake>.

For more information about Paul's history scholarship, including sample pages from his books and a 1970 photo of him on the job with the late, legendary Lincoln College president Raymond Dooley, see <http://www.geocities.com/findinglincolnillinois/historians.html#paulandsuebeaver>.

Sincerely,

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