

**WHERE IS ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S FIRST CLIENT???****Abe Lincoln's First Client - David Woldridge - Gravestone Found at Bulldozed Grave Site****By Jeanie (Hale) Lowe**

*I*Imagine the peaceful setting of rolling meadows, wild flowers, with a summer breeze gently blowing through the family cemetery at the back of your property. For more than a century, that was the scene in the rural Illinois county of Menard, where David and Margaret (Hawthorn) Woldridge were buried in 1857.

Now imagine more than a century later, the sounds of a bulldozer ripping that same serene cemetery apart. Plowing down the stones which mark the graves of the honest, hardworking people who lived and died on this land. Pushing the stones over a ravine to hide their crime. Imagine the devastation. Why?

Whatever the reason or the thinking at that time, we may never know. We do know that now the land is farmed with crops being planted over the top of where the bodies were originally interred and it is believed that they are still there. Adequate words escape to describe the shame and the outrage that is felt with this action.



Above is the area in the field where we believe the bodies are still buried. All photos here taken by Stan Lowe on Sunday, 13 May 2007. The flowers in the front of this picture are wild flowers that came up on their own and are throughout the area. (Photo courtesy of Jeanie (Hale) Lowe)

"Thank God the quest is over!" Vic Woldridge of Davis, IL said. "The search for the burial site of my great great grandparents David Woldridge and Margaret Hawthorn Woldridge ends a quest begun almost five years ago. When I learned that the stones of David and Margaret were found, a wave of emotion washed over me. Then when I saw the pictures of the stones themselves I was not only ecstatic but also humbled. It felt as though they were telling me, "Thank God we're found?"

How could this happen?"

## Editor's Message

*D*ear Readers:

I am pleased to present this issue of the ISGS Quarterly to you.

This issue is all about *finding* things: gravesites, letters, immigrants, ports, causes, property, the right resolution, ethnic resources and network connections. You'll find something in each article.

We also look forward to our Fall Conference with contributions from some of our featured speakers. What a fantastic way to anticipate the topics and get a glimpse of what will be offered at the conference. Don't forget the checklist on page 22!

We welcome your stories, too! Please send any article submissions, with graphics, photographs, documentation, to my attention at the address below or on the inside front cover.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Enjoy and read on.

Sincerely,

Monica C. Tenuta

Quarterly Editor

mctenuta@aol.com

### Illinois State Genealogical Society      1916 - 1947 Death Certificate Project

ISGS provides a service to assist members and researchers who do not have easy access to the Illinois State Archives to continue to be able to obtain death certificate copies. Utilizing the Illinois State Archives database, <<http://www.ilsos.net/GenealogyMWeb/idphdeathsrch.html>> researchers can locate an individual, date of death, certificate number and date certificate was filed.

Supplied with this information, ISGS can provide the microfilm copy of the death certificate. The cost per certificate is \$6.00 for ISGS members, \$10.00 for non-members. You may send as many requests at the same time as you wish - requests will be filled using a "first come-first served" basis.

Request information available at the ISGS website: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilsgs/> or on page 60 of this Quarterly

Now that we know for sure that the Woldridge Cemetery was bulldozed and the headstones pushed into a ravine one wonders how could this happen in our America, a country founded on solid Christian principals. How could any company, local government, or individual show such callousness. Destroying the final resting place of individuals who lived, loved, married, prospered, raised families, and were a part of the growth of the community in which they lived is something that should not be tolerated. I'm sure the plot of ground that held perhaps 20 or so graves did not produce enough crops to make or break a harvest. If it was that important I'm sure the expense to move the bodies and the headstones in a proper manner could have been justified. Nobody even had the decency to inventory the information on the headstones so that these people would not be forgotten. It is my hope that the community will do everything possible to rectify this wrong initially by working to uncover the remaining headstones and setting aside a small plot of land with a granite marker listing the names of those who are buried there."

"David and Margaret Woldridge are my great great grandparents," said Nene (Woldridge) Humphreys, of Fay, OK. "We didn't know what had happened to them. It meant a lot to me to find out where they are buried but I had mixed emotions as it broke my heart to know that someone would do this (bulldoze the cemetery). I just kept saying 'ain't that a shame' as I watched the video tape of the find. It made me cry." Mrs. Harlena "Nene" Humphreys and her husband Oscar have searched for their ancestors for more than 35 years.

David Woldridge was born in Green County, KY on 10 Aug 1801. He married Margaret G. Hawthorn in Green County, KY on 13 Oct. 1830. They came from Kentucky to Illinois to live, work and raise their family. David and Margaret had at least seven children.

The cemetery find becomes more noteworthy because in 1836 James P. Hawthorne sued his brother-in-law David Woldridge. David, a relatively new arrival looking for an attorney, engaged a lawyer who had never handled a case because he had only been admitted to the bar the previous month on Sept 9, 1836. The neophyte was Abraham Lincoln and David was his first client. Author Carl Sandburg tells the story in his book *The Prairie Years*, below:

Referring to Abe Lincoln - *"His first case was one he had helped work on during the previous year, defending David Wooldridge, in a suit brought by James P. Hawthorn. Hawthorn claimed Wooldridge was to furnish him two yoke of oxen to break up twenty acres of prairie sod-ground; also he claimed Wooldridge was to allow him to raise a crop of corn or wheat on a certain piece of ground; and Wooldridge had failed him in both cases. Furthermore, Hawthorn claimed damages because Wooldridge struck, beat, bruised, and knocked him (Hawthorn) down; plucked, pulled, and tore large quantities of hair from his head. Also because of with a stick and his fists he struck Hawthorn many violent blows and strokes on or about the face, head, breast, back, shoulders, hips, legs, and divers other parts of the body, and because he had with violence forced, pushed, thrust, and gouged his fingers into Hawthorn's eyes.*

*Such were the allegations on assumpsit and trespass vi et armis, including also replevin actions demanding return of a black and white yoke of steers, one black cow and calf, and one prairie plow. Lincoln's first move was to bring up a board bill for eight months which Hawthorn owed Wooldridge, amounting to \$1.50 a week to \$45.75. Also, for the same eight months, he had used a wagon and team for which he should pay \$90.00 besides a cash loan of \$100.00. The case never came to trial. Peacemakers settled it out of court. The plaintiff and defendant divided the court costs. In the record Lincoln spelled wagon "waggon" and prairie "prairy." (Source: The Prairie Years by Carl Sandburg,)*

After David and Margaret died and were buried on their own farm, the land stayed in the family for decades and likely, more than a century. However, according to a local man, the cemetery was bulldozed and leveled off in the late 1960's and is now farm ground. Every year crops are planted over the tops of graves that are believed to still be where they were originally interred. The stones were bulldozed, broken and pushed off into a wooded ravine.

A group of local researchers (Stan and Jeanie Lowe and Duane and Betty Albert all of Petersburg, IL) have been identifying and recording cemeteries for the past several years. Their work can be found on the Morgan Area Association web site at <[www.rootsweb.com/~ilmaga/index\\_men-cass.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilmaga/index_men-cass.html)>.

The group had identified years ago that Woldridge cemetery had been bulldozed but they weren't sure exactly where the stones had been bulldozed to as the area is very large. It wasn't until October of 2006 when a local hunter took Stan and Jeanie Lowe to the site and showed them where he had found three bulldozed stones, 20 years prior, that they were able to narrow the search to a specific area. A search was done at that time but no stones were found.

On Sunday, April 22, 2007, Stan and Jeanie Lowe returned to the site, and Stan located the stones of Margaret G. Woldridge and Nancy Batterton. Later in the day, he found the stone of David Woldridge and then the following evening he and Duane Albert returned and found broken pieces which was the stone of Melissa Ann Vaughn, wife of Thomas Vaughn. While the find was significant in and of itself, the fact that David Woldridge was the first client of Abe Lincoln and has descendents looking for him made it a more rewarding find.

On Sunday, May 13, 2007, the grave site had its first visit by a descendant of Melissa Ann (Wright) Vaughn. Tiffany (Price) Lowe, the 4<sup>th</sup> great granddaughter of Melissa Vaughn, was accompanied by her husband Matt Lowe, father-in-law Stan Lowe and uncle-in-law Rick Hale to the burial site. There, for the first time, a descendant saw, in person, the devastation of the bulldozed graveyard. The area had already become overgrown with briars, grass and wild flowers since the original find. As the group found their way through the woods to the location, Tiffany felt the joy and the sadness all at once.

"It was neat that the stones were finally found," said Tiffany. "But, it's terrible that they still plant crops out here where my great great great grandma is buried. It's good to find more about my family history."

Margaret (Hawthorn) Woldridge and Melissa (Wright) Vaughn were both from Green County, KY and had migrated to Illinois where they were neighbors. More importantly is that two of each of their children married into the others' family. Those children were: Jackson Heath Woldridge and Mary Elizabeth Vaughn married in Menard County, IL on 13 Dec 1863. John Woldridge married Eliza C. (Lizzie) Vaughn in Menard County, IL on 13 Dec 1860. Melissa Vaughn died in 1862.



David Woldridge stone and footstone. (Photo courtesy of Jeanie (Hale) Lowe.)



Matt and Tiffany (Price) Lowe visit the location of the bulldozed stones from Woldridge Cemetery on 12 May 2007. Tiffany, for the first time, sees her 4<sup>th</sup> great grandmother's stone Melissa Ann Vaughn, bulldozed off into a ravine. (Photo courtesy of Jeanie (Hale) Lowe.)

The Nancy Batterton gravestone that was found is the wife of David Batterton. While this line is being researched now, it is thought that Nancy was perhaps the mother-in-law to William R. Woldridge who married Sumantha Batterton.

#### History of Cemetery

Woldridge cemetery was not just a burial plot for one or two people. It was prominently identified on the 1874, 1899 and 1920 Menard County Atlas. After the death of David and Margaret (Hawthorn) Woldridge in 1857, the property was passed down to their children. The Menard county census of 1860 shows that Jackson Heath Woldridge is living in Township 18 Range 8 where the cemetery is located. The 1874 Menard County Atlas shows the property in the possession of their son Richard Woldridge.



The cemetery is marked. By 1899, the property was in the possession of David and Margaret's daughter and son-in-law Samuel and Mary (Woldridge) Watkins. The cemetery was still marked on the published map. By 1920 the Atlas shows the property in the hands of David and Margaret Woldridge's granddaughter Hattie Juhl. Hattie was the daughter of Samuel & Mary (Woldridge) Watkins and married Christian C. Juhl on 17 May 1899 in Menard County, IL.

James P. Hawthorn, along with many other Hawthorns, is buried just down the road from the Woldridge cemetery, in Newmansville Cemetery, just inside the Cass county border. Newmansville cemetery is online at: [www.rootsweb.com/~ilmaga/cass/cemetery/newmansville.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilmaga/cass/cemetery/newmansville.html)

**Woldridge Family History**

The Woldridge Family goes back to the original Wooldridge, John, with two oo's, who came to this country (Virginia) as an indentured blacksmith to pay for his passage. John was born about 1678 and died in 1757.

Some of the Wooldridge line dropped the second "o" later, including David, who came to Illinois as Wooldridge and later dropped the second "o."

David was the first of ten children born to Richard Woldridge, Jr born about 1775 and died before 1839. Vaughn b.VA abt. 1779 d. 1866.

1920 Atlas featuring Menard County, Illinois. (Courtesy of Jeanie (Hale) Lowe.

He was married in Green Co. KY Oct 13, 1800 to Sarah (later called Mary or Molly) Vaughn born in VA about 1779 and died 1866.

David and Margaret's seven children.

- 1) William Robert, b IL 27 Sept 1831 m Sumantha Batterton 1 Aug 1854 in Menard Co., IL. He was in Menard Co., IL in 1870 and Payne Co. OK in 1900.
- 2) John, b IL 21 Jan. 1834 m Menard Co., IL 13 Dec 1860 to Eliza C. Vaughn, b Green Co. KY 1 Jan 1842. They were in Clark Co. MO in 1880.
- 3) Richard, b Jul 30, 1836 d. Nov 10, 1923 m Cass Co., IL. 11 Nov 1861 to Amanda Dick, b. IL April 1845, d 1 Aug 1932 Menard Co, IL.
- 4) Jackson Heath b Menard Co. IL. 11 Dec 1838, d 1 Aug 1917 in Fay, OK., m 13 Dec 1863 in Menard Co., IL to Mary Elizabeth Vaughn b 9 Oct 1842 d 20 Sept 1934 in Fay, OK.
- 5) Mary b IL 6 Feb 1842, d. 15 July 1933 m 26 Feb 1863 in Menard Co., IL to Samuel Watkins b 26 Jan 1842 d 19 Feb 1911.
- 6) Martha b IL 16 Dec 1847, m Menard Co., IL 22 Oct 1865 to Willis M. Boulware.
- 7) Catherine H. b 8 Aug 1850, m Menard Co., IL 14 Dec 1865 to Saul Ott.

The story of the cemetery find is online at the Illinois Ancestors Menard County site at <[www.illinoisancestors.org](http://www.illinoisancestors.org)>.

**WITH A VARIETY OF EMOTIONS AROUND A SITUATION LIKE THIS ONE, YOU MIGHT ASK WHAT GOOD CAN BE DONE??**

Do you have a cemetery at risk of destruction in your area? Get involved.

With a variety of emotions around a situation like this one, what good can be done, you might ask. The Illinois State Genealogical Society is committed to document any and all cemeteries that are at risk of destruction, or that have been destroyed.

As a researcher or descendant, you can take part in this effort. Simply e-mail or write to ISGS with the identifying cemetery information. Include pictures, location and proof and we will put this information on our web site in an effort to draw attention to this situation.

ISGS is currently working with legislators on the subject of cemetery access and will expand their discussions to include cemetery destruction and restoration. We need input from every county in the State of Illinois. Send your information to our legislative chairman Jeanie Lowe at <[SWLowe1234@aol.com](mailto:SWLowe1234@aol.com)> or mail it to our office.

This sort of thing happens as long as it is kept in the dark and quiet. ISGS is prepared to shine a flood light on the situation and make all such cemetery locations known. Join us in being a part of this project.

Jeanie's interest in genealogy, in addition to ISGS Board Director and active on various committees, began about 8 years ago, when her husband started to research his family line and asked for her help. Since that time the couple has traveled to Kentucky twice a year to research both of their family lines and have been instrumental in making their home county, of Menard, information available online. They have been instrumental in making information of their home county, Menard available online at <[http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilmaga/index\\_men-cass.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilmaga/index_men-cass.html)>.

Jeanie, for the past 8 years, is the lobbyist/consultant for the Illinois Church Action on Alcohol and Addiction Problems (ILCAAAP). This position places her on the front lines against the highly paid lobbyists for the gambling industry, the alcohol industry and those who wish to legalize drugs - monitoring all legislation introduced in the Illinois General Assembly and the Illinois Administrative Code rules.

Jeanie's favorite past time is watching her granddaughter and goddaughters' love for genealogy grow as all of them have worked on their own family trees and assisted in the reading of cemeteries in Menard county.

## LEGISLATIVE FORUM

By Jeanie Lowe

The 95<sup>th</sup> Illinois General Assembly is fast approaching their May 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. There is talk that they won't finish the state's business by that date and may go into the summer months.



Representative  
Arthur Turner

ISGS is currently monitoring eight pieces of legislation. Of those, one has been passed, which is House Resolution 127, by Rep. Arthur Turner to create a State Historical Markers Week. One bill that we found objectionable, HB1732 sponsored by Rep. Sara Feigenholtz would have amended the Vital Records Act to allow a birth certificate to be changed if the person had a sex change procedure. Now the law allows for the same with a sex change operation. The bill failed with a vote of 32 yes votes to 78 no votes.



Jeanie Lowe  
Illinois Legislative  
Chairperson for  
ISGS

Two of the eight measures are still alive and moving. Following is the synopsis:

### Synopsis as introduced by Senator John Cullerton ~ 6th District



Representative  
John Cullerton

SB1006 - Provides that it is a Class 4 felony for a child sex offender to knowingly operate, manage, or own a cemetery. Provides that a child sex offender who owns a cemetery on the effective date of the amendatory Act shall have 6 months following the effective date of the amendatory Act to divest himself or herself of such ownership. Status: This bill passed the Senate with a vote of 45 yes to 4 no.