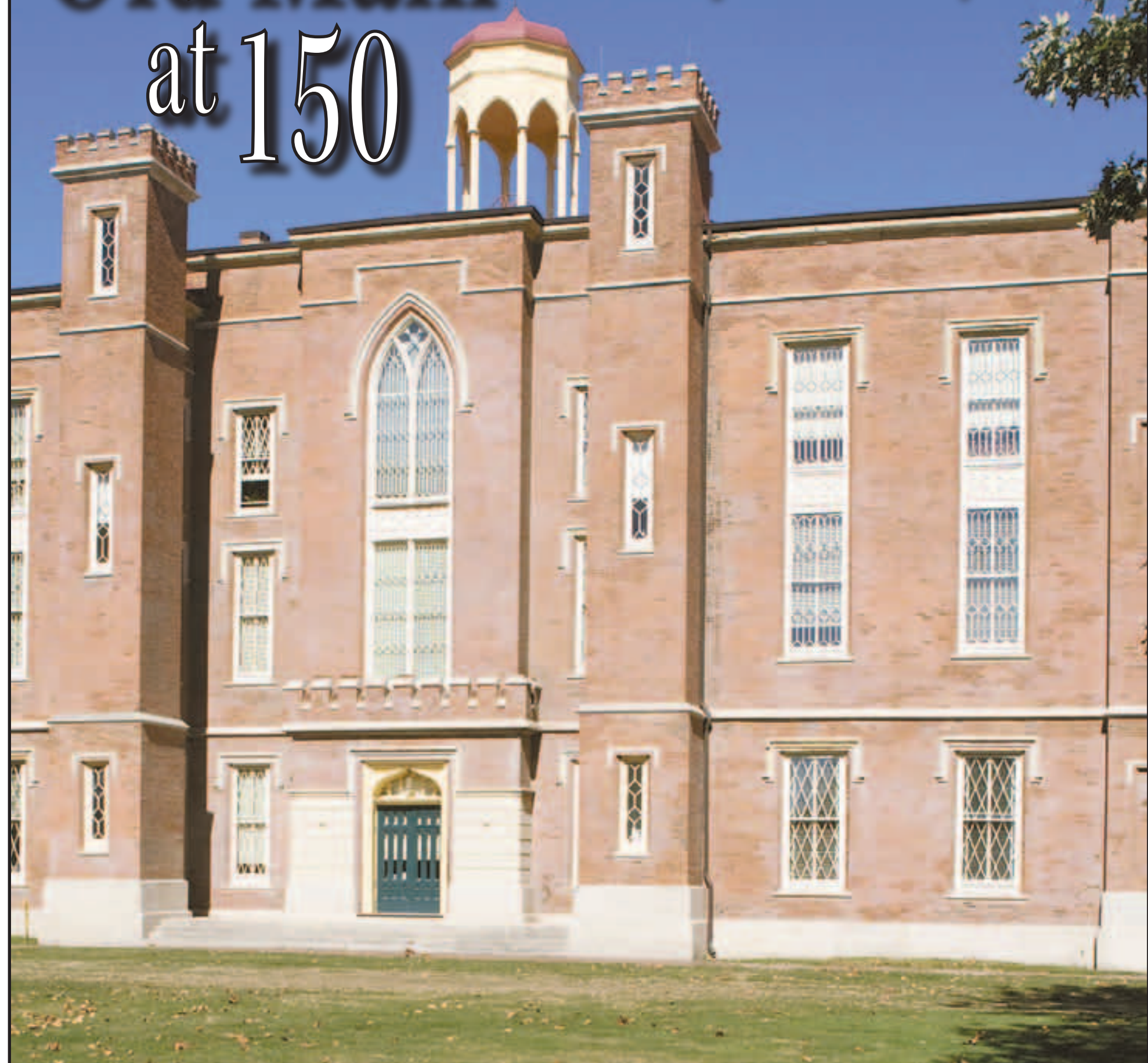


Old Main at 150

Knox College landmark
celebrates special anniversary



Strength, resilience and endurance: Old Main at 150

Old Main is 150 years old! Like any building, or anything else that has survived a century-and-a-half, it has undergone alteration and change, occasional crises, even threats to its very existence, yet it remains a vital and central presence on the Knox College campus.

With its signature bell tower, Old Main is a familiar Galesburg icon. Its representation signifies Knox College both to the thousands who have merely seen it or passed through its doors and to those who have become members of the Knox community. The bell has called generations of students to class, and, after a more than 20-year silence, now rings again.

The building was saved from what would have been inevitable fiery destruction by the restoration and fire-proofing in the 1930s that did away with its dangerously



RODNEY O. DAVIS
KNOX COLLEGE

oil-soaked wooden floors and lethally chimney-like central stairway. It has survived a wind and rain storm that peeled its roof back from east to west like the top of a tin can, leaving the bell tower on the ground just short of Alumni Hall.

Over the years, Old Main has housed a chapel, scientific laboratories and the college library, in addition to its current complement of faculty and administrative offices and classrooms. In celebrating the sesquicentennial of the oldest building on the Knox College campus, we

also celebrate the strength, resilience and endurance of the college itself.

Old Main was commissioned by the college trustees in the 1850s to serve as the permanent center of what they were confident would be a permanent institution. And those trustees also concluded that they could afford a building signifying not merely permanence, but which would also be a thing of beauty rather than one of mere utility, however scarce architectural beauty was elsewhere in the rough, false-fronted, jerry-built Galesburg of 1857.

At the time it was constructed, the building was not "Old Main," of course; it was called the "Main College" building. After the construction of Alumni Hall, it became the "Old College" building. The current usage probably dates from the turn

See 150, Page D3



Knox College

An early lithograph of Old Main. Old Main was commissioned by Knox College trustees in the 1850s.

ABOUT THIS SECTION

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150

From Page D2

of the 20th century, and one wonders whether "Old Main" is now called "old" out of affection or merely as a reflection of its venerability.

From its earliest conception, Old Main was construed to be central to the campus, located as it was between utterly unadorned, utilitarian and now, thankfully, long-vanished East and West Bricks which had preceded it. And though Old Main remains what John Huston Finley called the physical heart of Knox College, it is certainly not the gateway to Knox; we have no gateway for our campus really has no bounds; it is open on all sides and as Pericles said of his beloved Athens, it is open to all.

Yet Old Main so dominates other campus and nearby structures that architectural features originally peculiar to it are repeated on George Davis and Seymour Halls, the

Auxiliary Gym and Galesburg's Public Safety Building across Standish Park to the northwest. Old Main is the campus building most frequented by visitors from outside the community, from the likes of sightseers and the vendors of goods, services and advice, to such worthies as Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas and Carl Sandburg, and more recently Barack Obama, Stephen Colbert and William Jefferson Clinton.

Undoubtedly the most remarkable single event to have occurred at Old Main was the fifth Lincoln-Douglas Debate on Oct. 7, 1858, when the building was scarcely a year old. We continue to take pride in the fact that Old Main is the only structure now standing that is associated with that series of political meetings, and we commemorate the Galesburg debate with the bas-reliefs of Lincoln and Douglas at the east entrance of the building, the plaques at the north entrance, the Seymour painting, and McClure's Magazine illus-

tration inside on the first floor, and the window in the President's office, through which Abraham Lincoln passed through college.

But to commemorate that event is not our purpose in 2007; we'll hear enough about that next year when we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Galesburg debate. What we now commemorate instead is the endurance of Old Main over the past 150 years, and we assert our confidence in its future existence as a symbol of the permanence of Knox College. In that regard, of far greater significance than even a Lincoln-Douglas Debate, is the role of this handsome building in the interaction among thousands and thousands of learners that has taken place within it over that time.

Rodney O. Davis is Knox College's Szold Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of History.

This article was reprinted with permission from the Fall 2007 issue of Knox Magazine.





Knox College


Aside from tuck pointing in the 1990s, Old Main has changed very little since its re-dedication in 1937.


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Old Main's Notable Visitors



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POLITICIANS TO POETS

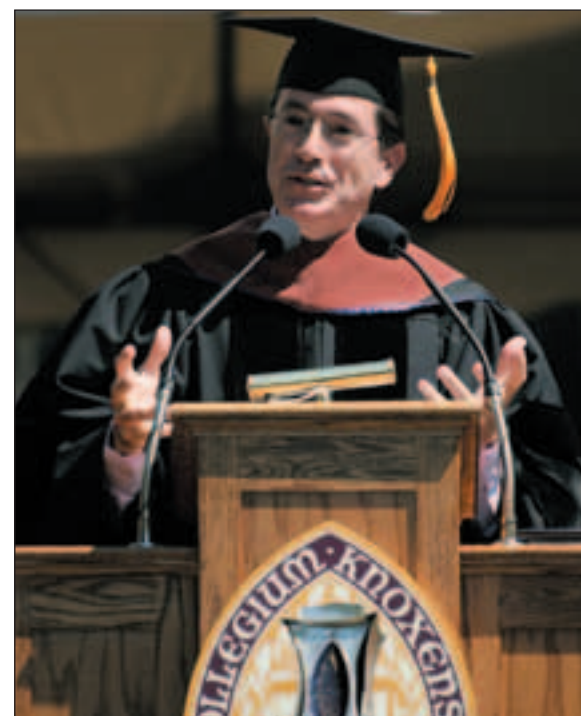
One year after its opening, Old Main hosted Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas at their fifth debate for a U.S. Senate seat. Since that time, numerous politicians, academics, artists and dignitaries have graced the halls, classrooms and lawns of Old Main since it opened its doors in 1857. Some have celebrated anniversaries; some have lectured students on contemporary issues; others have given commencement addresses. All have left their mark on the Knox community.

Here are just a few of Old Main's notable visitors:

- 1858, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, U.S. Senate candidates
- 1894, Jane Addams, social worker and founder of Hull House
- 1902, Theodore Roosevelt, vice president-elect
- 1929, Ida Tarbell, social worker and journalist
- 1938, Carl Sandburg, poet and Pulitzer Prize-winning Lincoln biographer
- 1964, Betty Friedan, co-founder of the National Organization of Women
- 1976, Studs Terkel, Pulitzer Prize-winning author
- 1988, Robert Dole, U.S. Senator from Kansas and presidential candidate
- 1992, Kathryn Fuller, president of the World Wildlife Fund
- 2000, Brian Lamb, founder of C-SPAN
- 2005, Barack Obama, U.S. Senator from Illinois
- 2006, Stephen Colbert, political humorist, host of "The Colbert Report"
- 2007, Bill Clinton, former U.S. president

Source: Knox College

ABOVE: Former President Bill Clinton appears at Knox College commencement ceremonies June 2.
BELOW: Stephen Colbert, host of Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report," speaks to Knox College's Class of 2006 on June 3, 2006.



KEN EXUM/The Register-Mail

Cake bake-off to celebrate anniversary

Lecture on building's 'Masonic elements' featured

BY CIGI ROSS
The Register-Mail

GALESBURG — Buildings don't usually have birthday cakes baked for them on the anniversary of their construction.

But Knox College's Old Main is going to get several cakes when the college celebrates the 150th anniversary of its construction today. Old Main's alumni birthday party is one of many events planned for Knox's homecoming weekend to honor the college's most celebrated architectural landmark.

President Roger Taylor has said, "Probably nothing symbolizes the durability and legacy of Knox College better than Old Main."

The birthday will feature an Old Main-shaped cake bake-off, with student organizations, faculty and

OLD MAIN EVENT

TODAY — Old Main Birthday Party for Knox College alumni, students, faculty and staff, 4 p.m., south lawn of Old Main

staff competing to win best look-a-like cake honors. Throughout homecoming weekend, Oct. 18 to 21, a student-created homage to the building's history will be on display, along with pictures and memorabilia sent in from alumni.

The featured activity was professor of philosophy Lance Factor's lecture, "The Da Vinci Code in Knox's Old Main," Friday on the south side of Old Main.

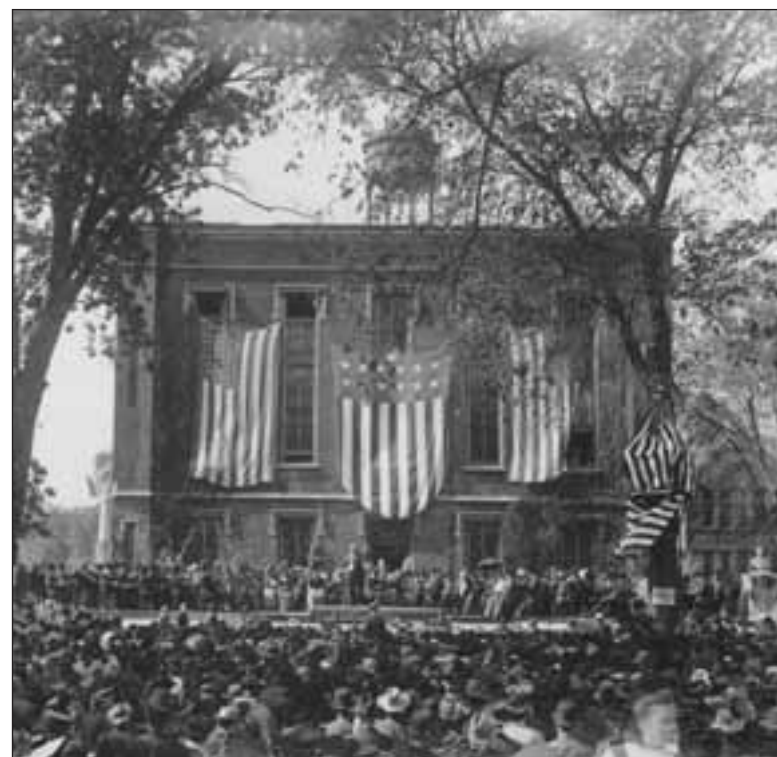
Factor has been researching Old Main's architect, Charles Ulrickson, as part of a book he is writing about the building. Factor believes Ulrickson, a Swedish immigrant who lived in Peoria, incorporated a number of Masonic elements into Old Main's design and materials.

According to Factor, Knox's then-President Jonathan Blanchard and other college officials were anti-Masonic, so Ulrickson didn't reveal the Masonic elements in the architecture of the building or leave any records of what he'd done. Ulrickson also designed the first Masonic lodge in Peoria.

Knox College also is planning for next year's celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Old Main.

Karrie Heartlein, Knox College's director of public relations, said the school is collaborating with the City of Galesburg to commemorate Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday — which is in 2009 — along with the anniversary of the debates. Mayor Gary Smith appointed a bicentennial commission in July to start planning events.

Heartlein said the debate celebration will begin around the time of the 2008 com-



Knox College

The 50th anniversary celebration of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Oct. 7, 1908, included soon-to-be president William H. Taft.

mencement and last until the 2009 commencement.

"The hope is that the commission will be able to tap into the vast resources of Galesburg's community

organizations and clubs to create events and activities based on the Lincoln theme, to really create a year-long celebration," Heartlein said.

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Return of the Ring

Bell tower stands tall atop Old Main

BY PETER BAILEY
Knox College

Like Old Main, the Knox bell is one of a kind. Through the 1840s, Knox's first bell was a modest hand bell that signaled the class schedule at the Academy building at Main and Cherry streets, just north of the current campus. Knox Bells, an undated document in the College Archives, telegraphs the bell's first holiday: "Borrowed Dec. 24, 1851. Returned Jan. 5, 1852." Atop Old Main, the bell was up three long flights of stairs, and pranks became more pragmatic — "bell clapper removed several times, but always reappeared several days later ... sometimes rope was cut [or] clapper was tied down," recalls the Knox Bells document. On Oct. 26, 1864, the Troy

Bell Foundry of Jones & Co., Troy, New York, billed the College 68-cents per pound for a new bell weighing 518 pounds — \$352.24, more than \$5,500 today. The College was assured that "the bell and mounting are warranted not to break in one year from date and tone warranted satisfactory to the purchaser." By the late 1800s, the bell was also used to alert the college and community to Knox victories in intercollegiate oratorical contests, which were an important part of student life at that time. Unfortunately, one student's fine voice tolled doom for that of the bell. "When John Huston Finley won the oratorical championship in 1887, the college bell was rung so vigorously that it cracked," recalled a 1963 article in the Galesburg Post. The bell, however, would have its revenge on Finley. In the winter of 1896, and again in 1901, the bell was

turned upside down and filled with water, which froze and cracked the metal. The Class of 1902, having endured "the dismal tone of the old cracked bell, decided to have the bell recast," later wrote the 1902 class president, Charles E. Swanson. Containing both new metal and fragments from older Knox bells, and inscribed "Not to live, but to live well," the recast bell was stored in the library in Alumni Hall, awaiting the formal dedication ceremony on Feb. 27, 1902. The dedicatory speaker was Finley, a distinguished academic figure who had served as Knox president, 1892-1899. "The exercises were a complete success in every detail, except ..." — The Knox Student ominously noted — except that the bell had been stolen from the library by some students several weeks before and had to be dedicated in absentia.



Knox College

The Old Main bell tower remains a signature piece of the Knox College campus.

See RING, Page D7

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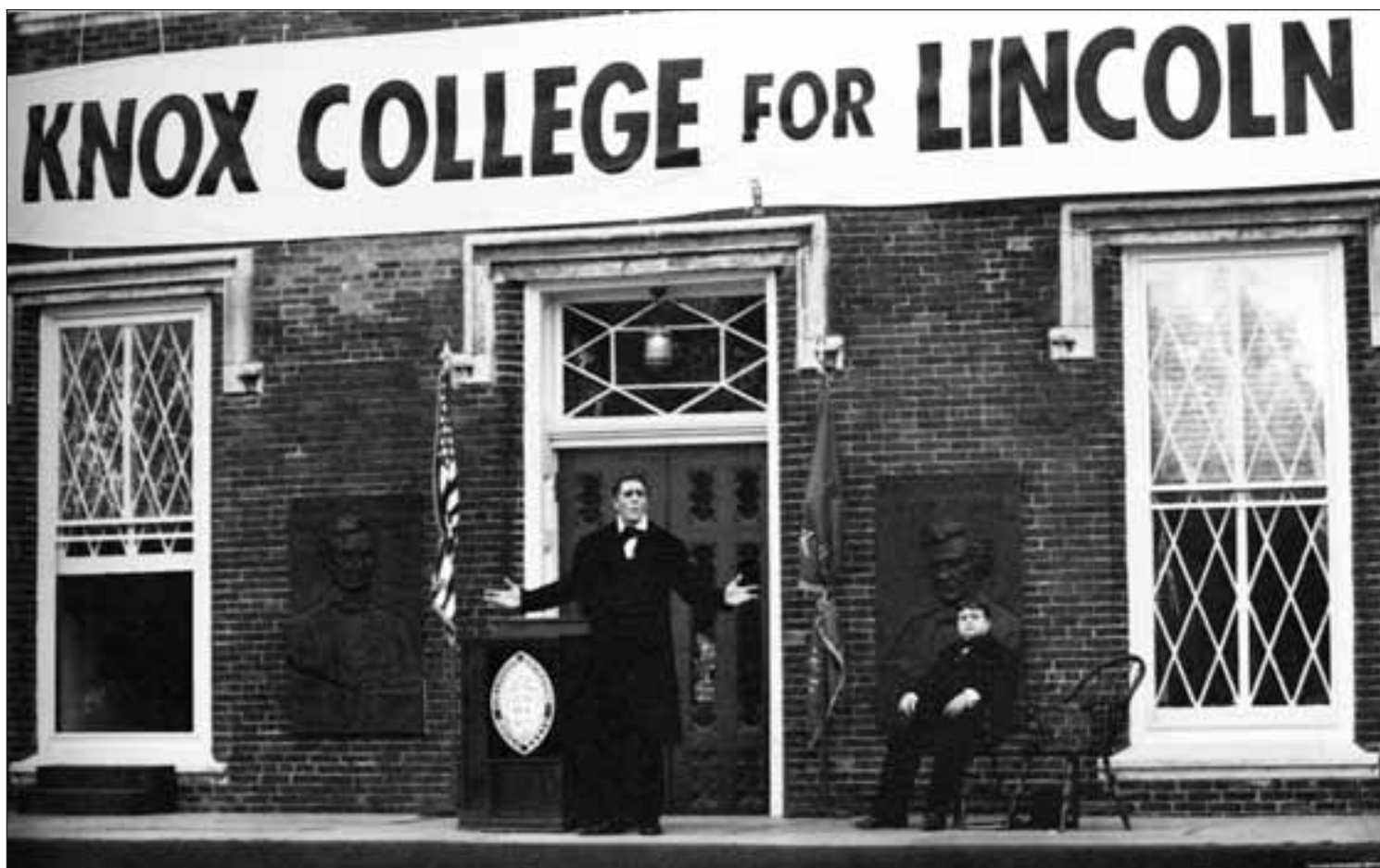
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Knox College

There have been at least four re-enactments of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Knox College. On the 125th anniversary of the debates, Oct. 7, 1983, two actors — Stanley Wiklinski and Fred Torstrup — portrayed Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, respectively.



Knox College

Old Main, flanked by "East & West Bricks." Photo taken 1864-89.

Ring

From Page D6

Knox would "ring the new bell if circumstances permit," Finley intoned, "And if not this morning, then tomorrow morning, next week or the week after. Some time it will ring. ..."

A week later—on March 5, 1902 — it did ring, having been recovered by a local deputy, following tips, tracks though a muddy field and spadework in an abandoned barn.

Mechanical problems developed in the late 1980s, and a recording was used until five years ago. Alerted by a student to deterioration of the wooden tower, and long irked by the tinny recording, President Roger Taylor '63 initiated major repairs to the tower and bell in 2001-02.

"Let the Old Main bell ring again!" Taylor proclaimed in his bell tower dedication remarks on Founders Day 2002. Or, to paraphrase the inscription on the bell, "Not to ring, but to ring well."

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Lincoln and Douglas through the years

First re-enactment was in 1928

Knox College's interest in Abraham Lincoln inevitably focuses on his U.S. senatorial campaign debates with Stephen Douglas, the fifth of which was held at Old Main in October 1858. Histrionics trumped history when Knox held its first debate celebration in the fall of 1896. The speakers' platform was built outside Old Main's prominent north front, rather than on the wind-sheltered east side, as it had been in 1858. Speakers included Abraham Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln.

"In 1900 a still more noteworthy celebration occurred when President McKinley and his Cabinet honored the occasion with their presence," recorded Martha Farnham Webster in her 1912 history of Knox, "Seventy Five Significant Years." As in 1896, the photographic record of McKinley's remarks show the speakers' platform in front of



PETER BAILLEY
KNOX COLLEGE

Old Main.

Following yet another formal celebration in 1908, which featured remarks by William Howard Taft, at the time a candidate for the U.S.' presidency, the first re-enactment appears to have been in 1928.

"We do not seek to reproduce literally the events of that past day," stated Knox President Albert Britt on Oct. 5, 1928. "Lincoln and Douglas (were) two country lawyers wrangling on a rude platform for votes. ... But we turn to their speeches to find the greatest statement of the issues that burned in men's minds."

Today, the college's interest in Lincoln and the Lincoln-Douglas Debates focuses on critical examination of all the historical factors that were in play during the race, which returned the incumbent Douglas to office, but vaulted Lincoln to national prominence and eventually the presidency in 1860.

"The great generalizations that people remember tend to distort what actually went on," said Rodney Davis, co-director with Douglas Wilson of the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College. The first-ever critical edition of the debate texts, edited by Davis and Wilson, is scheduled for publication by the University of Illinois Press in 2008 — the 150th anniversary of the debates.

Davis can recall four additional re-enactments since he came to Knox in 1963, the most elaborate a massive spectacle recorded by C-SPAN in 1994. And, even after he and Wilson complete their authoritative version of the debate texts, Davis is not sure anybody needs another re-enactment.



BILL GAITHER/The Register-Mail

A plaque commemorating the October 1858 debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas is on the east wall of Old Main.

At three hours each, "the debates are way too long for contemporary audiences," Davis said. "Rather than re-enact the debates, let's seize on the nuggets, the sound bites" that accurately portray the politics, principles and personalities of 150 years ago.

Through their work at the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox, Davis and Wilson are enabling the people to have a better understanding of the debates and their place in history.

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