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Burlingame to encourage students to do Lincoln research

By **MATT HOPF**

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While continuing his own original research on Abraham Lincoln, Michael Burlingame, the new holder of the Naomi B. Lynn Distinguished Chair in Lincoln Studies at the University of Illinois Springfield, said he expects his students to do the same.

Burlingame, 68, whose investiture ceremony takes place at the Old State Capitol tonight, spoke with The State Journal-Register Wednesday about his plans for UIS and his time in Springfield.

"I've done an awful lot of editing of Lincoln primary source material," Burlingame said. "I've done 11 collections so far, and I have another eight I'd like to do."

At least one of those collections — examining Lincoln's role as a newspaper columnist — relies heavily on materials in Springfield. Burlingame believes he has uncovered more than 200 newspaper articles written by Lincoln, many pseudonymously or anonymously. They were published in such papers as the Sangamo Journal, a predecessor to The State Journal-Register.

Another project is to find third-hand recollections of Lincoln quotations and stories reported in the hometown newspapers of those who met Lincoln and then shared the experience with local reporters.

"One of the most important is to go through newspapers, because they are one of the great, neglected sources of new information about Lincoln," Burlingame said.

Some of this research made it into Burlingame's recent 2,000-page, two-volume biography, "Abraham Lincoln: A Life." But Burlingame said the material deserves more attention.

"I'm going to go back over those newspapers and accumulate these statements Lincoln made," he said. "I want those to be available to people."

Teaching plans

Burlingame's UIS salary will be \$100,000, including \$25,000 for the endowment. The chair also comes with a \$30,000 research fund, which he can use for his own work as well as to sponsor symposiums.

Burlingame said he intends to continue UIS's fall Lincoln Legacy Lecture Series, started by the previous chair holder, the late Phillip Paludan. The fund also will allow him to host Lincoln scholars in Springfield from time to time (he's currently working on bringing James Swanson, author of "Manhunt," about the pursuit of John Wilkes Booth, to Springfield this spring).

Both graduate and undergraduate students are enrolled in the two courses Burlingame is teaching this semester, on Lincoln and on the Civil War. After this term, he plans to offer one course per semester.

Burlingame said he hopes to enlist his students to help on his own research projects. But he also wants them to do their own research.

The late Lincoln scholar James Randall once wrote about the large number of people in Lincoln's life who hadn't been studied, Burlingame said.

"A surprising number of those are still awaiting biographers," Burlingame said. "In (my) Lincoln course, what I'm particularly eager to get them to do, and this is part of the assignment, is original research on unpublished sources. Because they're here, right down the street."

A student's perspective

Gene Puschel, a graduate student taking both courses, said studying under Burlingame is a main reason for him continuing his studies at UIS.

"He is a brilliant lecturer, with an incredible depth of knowledge about Lincoln, his life and the time period in which he lived," said Puschel, 52, a ranger at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site. "He's very, very good at both lecturing and interspersing his lecture with Socratic dialogue. He elicits responses and discussion from class and takes that information and uses it for good effect."

Burlingame, who lives downtown near the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and holds classes at places such as the historic Iles House, spent months at a time in Springfield over the past 20 years doing research.

But he's getting into his resident status, with occasional jaunts to Chicago for an opera fix.

"I'm living across from the library, in an 1856 building Lincoln himself may have spent time in," Burlingame said. "I bank at Lincoln's bank, which is catty-corner to where I live. I have a coffee and bagel across the street from the Lincoln-Herndon law offices every morning. It's very energizing to be surrounded by these sites."

Pete Sherman can be reached at 788-1539.

*Read unedited chapters of Michael Burlingame's "Abraham Lincoln: A Life" at www.knox.edu/Academics/Distinctive-

Programs/Lincoln-Studies-Center/Burlingame-Abraham-Lincoln-A-Life.html

*For more information about Burlingame, visit www.michaelburlingame.com.

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