

THE STEPHENSON HOUSE NEWS



— For Friends, Volunteers, & History Lovers —

A Garden Tribute to Jim Zupanci



The Stephenson House is honored to receive a new memorial bench for the gardens in memory of Jim Zupanci, whose steady care and warm presence shaped these grounds for many years. The bench was generously donated by The Dinner Group, a circle of Jims’s friends who meet weekly and wished to honor Jim in a lasting way. It was assembled and installed by Tom Faylott and Roger Roderick, whose work ensures that visitors can rest and enjoy the gardens Jim helped nurture.

A Slice of History: Dine & Donate at Peel

Get your appetite ready for a night where every slice counts toward preserving local history! On May 27, 2026, Peel Wood Fired Pizza is hosting a Dine & Donate event to support the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House. This fundraiser runs from the moment they open until they close their doors for the night, giving you plenty of time to fit a delicious wood-fired meal (or two) into your schedule. Whether you’re grabbing a table for indoor or outdoor seating to enjoy the atmosphere or simply picking up a carryout order for a cozy night at home, your meal directly helps the House continue its mission of education and preservation.

The best part is that the fundraiser extends well beyond just the pizza.

Your purchases of gift cards, those addictive packaged sauces, and even growlers of beer all contribute to the donation total. It is the perfect opportunity to stock up on your favorite Peel staples or grab a gift for a fellow history lover while giving back to the museum at the same time. Every little bit helps us maintain the site and fund our ongoing historical programs, from school tours to our specialized workshops.

To ensure your order is counted and 20% of your proceeds are donated, it is vital that you show the event flyer on your phone or explicitly mention the fundraiser to your server when ordering in person. If you prefer the convenience of ordering online, be sure to enter Code 2026 at checkout so your contribution is recorded. With 20%



of net proceeds (sales before tax and tip) going directly to the House, it is the perfect excuse to skip the cooking and help keep our local history alive. Grab a growler, enjoy a feast, and support the site—metaphorically keeping the hearth fires burning while you eat!



Step Into the Sparkle: The Whole Look Workshop

Whether you're preparing for the Jewels Ball on June 20 or simply want to channel your inner Regency diamond, join us on Saturday, May 30, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, for *The Whole Look: A Jewels Ball & Regency Workshop*. This hands-on session focuses on transforming everyday pieces, whether thrifted, store-bought, or already in your closet, into a head-turning historical ensemble.

Throughout the day, you'll learn easy techniques to elevate a simple gown and discover expert secrets for sourcing the best accessories. We encourage you to bring

inspiration photos, color swatches, or even a dress you're unsure about so we can help you build a cohesive look. Select Regency items will also be available for purchase during the event.

Space is strictly limited to 12 participants, so we recommend registering early through our online shop. The cost is \$45 per person and is open to adults and teens aged 16 and up. Please note there will be a midday break for lunch.

To register visit, our online shop at www.stephenhouse.org.

Rhubarb: A Heritage Crop in the Stephenson House Gardens

By Donna Bardon

Rhubarb was one of the first crops planted at Stephenson House when the garden was established more than 20 years ago.

Rhubarb is a beautiful perennial vegetable that blooms from May until September. The tiny white flowers are removed by the gardeners as soon as they appear so that energy can be used to produce the juicy stalks instead of producing seeds. Cutting off the flower stalk keeps the energy focused on leaf and stem growth.

The plant has large showy, heart-shaped leaves that are poisonous due to their high oxalic acid; however, the deep red to pink to

green leaf stalks are edible. Even though the plant is a vegetable, the tart leaf stalks are used as a fruit for sauces, jams, and pies.

It is possible to "force" rhubarb in late winter (January – March) by covering well-established plants with a terracotta pot to exclude all light. The resulting stalks are a beautiful bright pink color and are much more tender than traditionally grown rhubarb. When forced in this manner, the stalks can grow up to an inch per day, so an earlier, tastier crop is achieved.

Thomas Jefferson lists rhubarb in his garden at Monticello in 1811. Among the other plants included in Jefferson's garden that year were peas, celery, kale, lettuce,

cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, carrots, lima beans, radishes, okra, melons, endive, and spinach.



Kings, Queens, and Tavern Tabs: The Regions Social Season

In the early decades of the 19th century, the Edwardsville–St. Louis corridor had a lively appetite for organized sociability. Surviving accounts from the Edwardsville Spectator and contemporary St. Louis newspapers reveal a community that embraced winter gatherings, subscription balls, and elaborate social rituals that blended refinement, frontier practicality, and a healthy dose of satire.

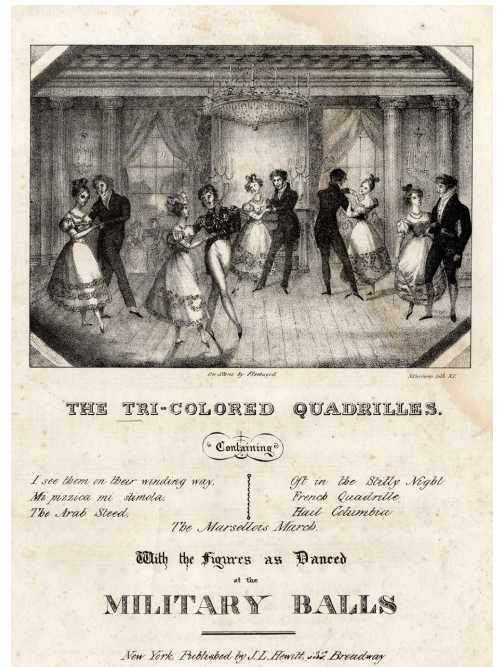
A Frontier Region That Loved Its Balls

The most vivid documented description comes from an 1821 letter published under the heading “Balls in Missouri.” Written from St. Louis on April 14, 1821, it outlines a structured and surprisingly theatrical system for launching the winter ball season. According to the account, the first ball of the year was a subscription

event held soon after cold weather set in. At this gathering, a select group of women—“generally the handsomest in the company”—chose “kings” by pinning bouquets to the coats of chosen gentlemen and sealing the selection with a kiss.

The ritual continued beyond the ballroom. The next day, each gentleman visited his “queen,” inquired what adornments she desired, and provided her with a “complete set of fineries.” When the queens were fully outfitted, the kings hosted a second ball in their honor. Afterward, the roles dissolved, and the cycle began again with new queens and kings. The writer noted wryly that several women had acquired enough apparel through this system “to last them the whole year.”

This description is one of the clearest documented glimpses into



This lithograph shows the cover of “The Tri-colored Quadrilles,” a collection of sheet music for dances performed at 19th-century military balls. The illustration depicts couples in formal attire dancing in an elegant New York ballroom around 1830.

early Missouri ball culture—formalized, flirtatious, and economically significant.

(Continued on page 9)



Philip Weissman & Stephen Weissman

A Special Visit from the House’s Recent Past

We were honored to welcome Stephen Weissman back to the Colonel Benjamin Stephenson House recently! Stephen, who owned and lived in the House from 1975 to 1982, stopped by for a visit with his nephew, Philip Weissman. It was a rare treat to hear his firsthand stories of daily life within these historic walls during the late 20th century—a fascinating contrast to the 1820s era we interpret today. These personal connections remind us that while we preserve the distant past, the House has continued to be a cherished “home” for generations of local families.

Stephenson House Bench Fundraiser



Help Us Replace Our Worn-Out Benches **Goal: \$3,000**

\$100

Goal: \$3,000

Building new Benches for Tours, Camps, and Community Events!

Have a Seat—Help Us Replace Our Benches

Our benches have been part of daily life at the Stephenson House for more than twenty years. They line the patio next to the house, offering a place to rest during school tours, summer camps, and special event, and for visitors who simply want to pause and enjoy the ambience of the site. After years of use and exposure to the elements, many of these benches are worn beyond repair, and it's time to replace them with sturdy new seating that will serve guests for decades to come.

We've launched a fundraiser to help make that happen, with a goal of \$3,000 to build eight

new wooden benches. Thanks to early support, \$100 has already been donated, and we're excited to see the progress grow. Every contribution helps preserve the welcoming atmosphere that makes the Stephenson House a favorite stop for families, students, and history lovers alike.

We're also looking for a local craftsman or builder who would like to partner with us on this project. The new benches will be built using durable materials suited to the historic setting. If you or someone you know would be interested in helping construct them, please reach out. Your help would directly

support the comfort and experience of every guest who visits the Stephenson House.

To contribute, visit <https://square.link/u/yYcFysCa> or scan the QR code below to donate directly.



A Night of Regency Splendor: This Is Your Invitation to The Jewels Ball!

The most anticipated evening on the calendar is nearly upon us, and you are cordially invited to an experience of unparalleled elegance and historical charm. On Saturday, June 20, 2026, the historic Leclair Room will be transformed into a glittering ballroom for The Jewels Ball.

Whether you are a devoted fan of *Bridgerton* or a lover of early 19th-century history, this immersive extravaganza promises a night of magic, music, and memories.

What to Expect at the Ton's Event of the Year

This isn't just a party; it's a living history experience. Every detail has been curated to ensure you feel like royalty from the moment you arrive.

- **Dance the Night Away:** Under the expert guidance of Dance Mistress Deborah Hyland, you'll learn the graceful steps of the era. No experience is necessary—just a willing spirit!
- **Exquisite Flavors:** Indulge in culinary creations by Chef Andrew Fornof of Bella Milano and period-appropriate confections, accompanied by an open bar and our signature specialty drink.
- **Royal Appearances:** Keep your wits about you, as Her Majesty Queen Charlotte will be in attendance. Will you be

the one she chooses to crown as a "Jewel of the Ball"?

- **Theatrical Flair:** For those wishing to make a truly grand entrance, you can opt for a formal Ballroom Announcement or even a Royal Presentation to the Queen herself.

Dress to Impress

The dress code is Formal Evening Wear or Regency/*Bridgerton*-style costume to fully inhabit the spirit of the early 19th century. Whether you choose the high-waisted silhouette of a Federal-era debutante or the dashing layers of a gentleman of the "ton," your attire will set the stage for a truly cinematic evening.

Pro Tip: Need costume inspiration or sewing advice? Join The Jewels Ball Facebook Page to connect with fellow guests and historical experts!

Ticket Information & Planning

Secure your place in society soon, as interest is high and space in the ballroom is limited. Admission is \$150 and is all-inclusive, covering your entry, entertainment, dancing, food, and unlimited drinks.

Location: Leclair Room, N.O. Nelson Campus (Edwardsville, IL)

Time: 6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Stay the Night: We've partnered with the Holiday Inn Express & Suites – Edwardsville to offer exclusive rates for our guests. Make it a weekend retreat and explore the historic charm of the local area!

Don't miss your chance to claim your place among the glittering elite. Gather your friends, prepare your finery, and get ready for a night that would make Lady Whistledown herself blush with excitement.

Tickets:

<https://www.givebutter.com/TheJewelsBall>



From the Hearth: Rhubarb and the Early 19th-Century Table

At the Col. Benjamin Stephenson House, the story of food is often one of careful interpretation.

Unlike larger estates with extensive written records, we do not always know exactly what was grown in the garden or prepared in the kitchen. Rhubarb offers a useful example of how historians bridge those gaps.

By the early 19th century, rhubarb was an emerging culinary trend in American households. While there is no direct evidence confirming that it was cultivated or used at the Stephenson House, its growing presence in regional markets suggests it would have been familiar to households of similar status and means.

An Emerging Culinary Trend

Across the United States and Britain, rhubarb appeared most often in simple, practical dishes. Because of its intense, sour flavor, rhubarb required heavy sweetening to be palatable. For a wealthy household like that of Benjamin Stephenson, purchasing the large quantities of processed sugar needed for such a dish was a sign of high status and means.

Recipes from the period, such as those found in Hannah Glasse's famous *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, show rhubarb used in tarts and pies, straightforward dishes that required few ingredients and made use of seasonal produce. For the Stephenson House, such dishes would have been consistent with the broader

foodways of the time, even if we cannot document rhubarb specifically on the table.

Later in the 1830s and 1840s, as processing became cheaper, rhubarb's rampant popularity earned it the famous nickname "pie plant."

Interpreting the Kitchen

Cooking in the early 1800s relied on experience. Recipes were rarely followed with exact measurements, and ingredients varied depending on what was available locally.

At the Stephenson House, meals would have been shaped by:

- Seasonal harvests
- Regional availability of crops
- The knowledge and skill of those preparing the food

Because rhubarb was hardy and relatively easy to grow in Midwestern climates, it is plausible, though not confirmed, that it could have been part of a kitchen garden in the region.

A Period Preparation: Rhubarb Tart

If rhubarb were used in a high-status household like the Stephenson House, it would most likely have been prepared in a simple tart:

- Rhubarb stalks peeled and cut into pieces
- Placed into a pastry-lined dish
- Heavily sweetened with sugar, sometimes with a touch of spice
- Baked until tender

This preparation reflects widely documented cooking practices of the early 19th century rather than a specific recipe tied to this site.

Why It Matters

Even when the historical record is incomplete, ingredients like rhubarb help us understand the possibilities of daily life. By comparing surviving cookbooks, agricultural knowledge, and regional patterns, we can build a picture of what may have been grown, prepared, and enjoyed.

At the Stephenson House, rhubarb becomes less about certainty and more about context, a way to connect this site to the broader culinary traditions of its time while remaining honest about what we do and do not know.



A Note From the Director

As we move into spring at the Stephenson House, I wanted to reach out with a few specific needs that are pretty critical for our upcoming season.

First up: We need firewood. Our kitchen demonstrations are easily some of the most popular things we do here, but they'll come to a halt if we don't have more split wood soon. While we have plenty of seasoned logs on site, they need to be split into smaller pieces! If you're looking for a workout and enjoy being outdoors, we'd be incredibly grateful for some help at the woodpile. Without firewood, the hearth stays cold, and we really don't want to miss out on those cooking demos.

We are also in a tough spot with men's clothing. Our current supply is spread thin, and to be honest, most of our shoes are worn beyond repair. We are especially looking for larger sizes in trousers and coats. These pieces are

expensive and time-consuming to make, so if you have sewing skills or would be interested in sponsoring a specific garment, please let me know. We do have patterns and some fabric that could be used too. It's hard to tell the story of 1820s Illinois if we don't have the clothes to wear!

On a different note, a huge thank you to everyone who came out for Trivia Through the Decades. It was a total blast and a great boost for the museum. We've already picked the theme for next year, but I'm going to keep you guessing on that for just a little while longer.

It's also been wonderful seeing the house full of students again. We've had a great uptick in school tours from across the region lately. While we're still waiting for our local District 7 to return, seeing other districts



fill that gap is really encouraging.

Finally, a quick shout-out to our online community. Our Facebook page just hit 54,000 followers! It's amazing to see that growth, but it also means we need more hands on deck. If you've ever thought about volunteering—especially as an interpreter or for weekend tours—now is the perfect time to jump in.

Thank you all for keeping this place vibrant. We couldn't do it without you.

Warmly,

RexAnn

Garden Watch: A Sentinel Returns

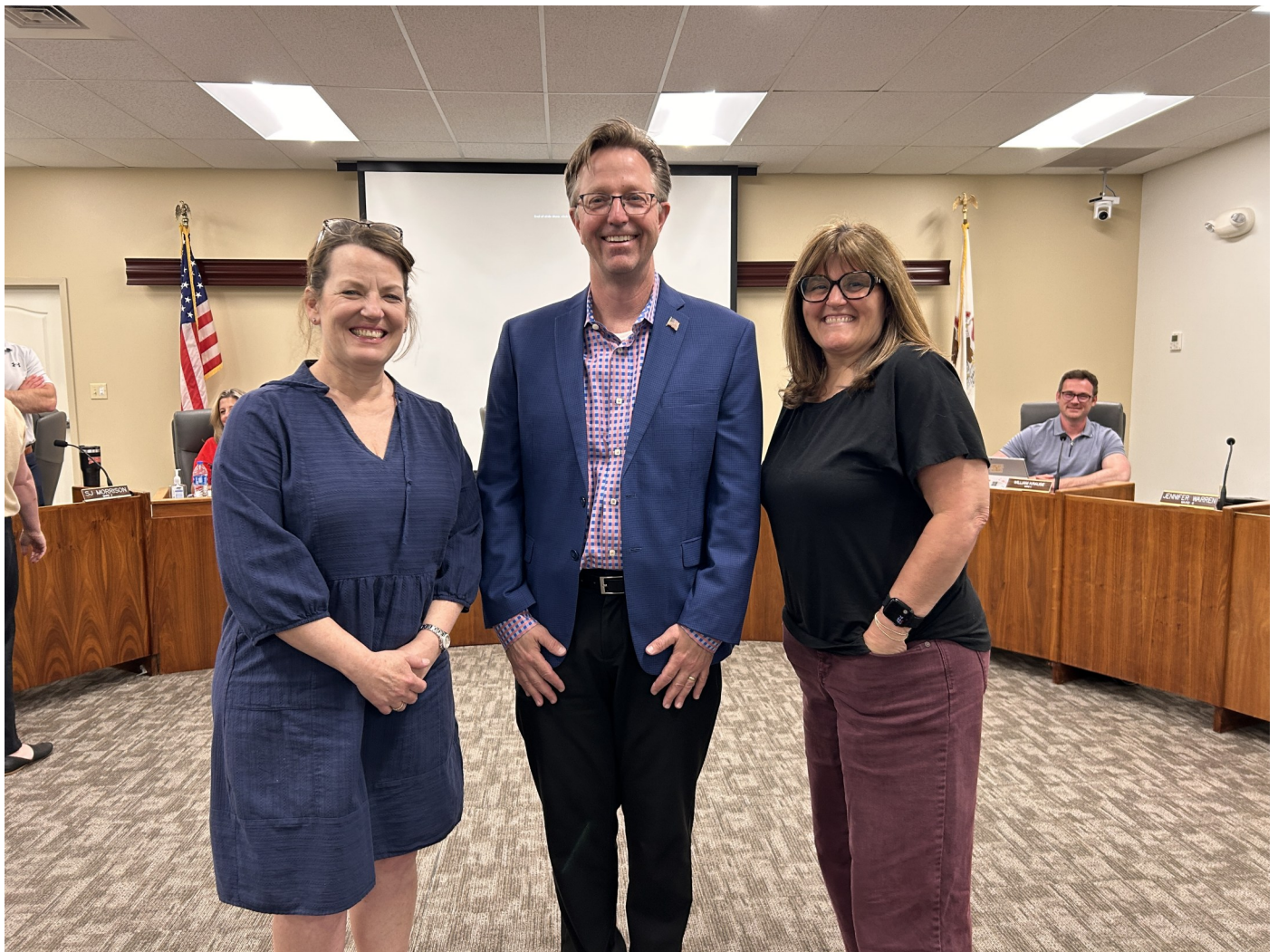
Our gardens are officially under watchful eyes again! The Master Gardeners reinstalled Gordy the Scarecrow last week. He's looking sharp and ready for the growing season. Next time you're wandering through the garden beds, give him a wave or stop and take a selfie then share it us!



Greetings from the Co-Presidents

Spring has arrived at the Benjamin Stephenson House, and with it comes a season full of promise! We are so grateful for the members, volunteers, and friends who make this historic treasure a vibrant part of our community. As the gardens come to life and our calendar fills with exciting programs and events, we hope you'll join us in celebrating all that Stephenson House has to offer. Whether you're a longtime supporter or discovering the museum for the first time, there is always something here for you. We look forward to seeing you this season!

Peggy Emling & Stacey Lipe
Co-Presidents, Benjamin Stephenson House



Peggy Emling, Mayor Art Risavy, Stacey Lipe

Help Split Firewood for the Kitchen

The Stephenson House is looking for a willing volunteer to help split the stack of dried firewood waiting behind the kitchen—an essential task that keeps our hearth demonstrations alive and our 1820s kitchen functioning for visitors. If you enjoy hands-on work, fresh air, and supporting a small museum in a very real way, we would be grateful for your time and strength.



(Continued from page 3)

Moralists, Critics, and the Social Commentary of the Spectator

While St. Louis accounts emphasized ritual and festivity, the Edwardsville Spectator often published commentary that mixed humor, moral concern, and social critique. Several essays from the early 1820s describe the winter season as a time when farmers, lawyers, physicians, and politicians temporarily set aside their work for dances, sleigh rides, and convivial gatherings.

Yet the tone could shift sharply. One contributor, writing under the classical cry “O tempora! O mores!”, lamented what he saw as excessive revelry in the village. He claimed that balls were being held weekly or biweekly, with some attendees spending five to ten dollars in a single night—an extravagant sum for the period. The writer criticized young men who sought political respectability while indulging in “midnight revelry,” and even recounted a

farmer who, unable to pay in cash, settled his tavern bill in hay.

Another essayist, “Observer Negotiourum,” offered pointed advice to various professions, warning farmers not to “dance away their hay,” mechanics not to abandon their tools, and young men to avoid behavior they would be ashamed of “in noon-day light.” These pieces reveal that balls were not merely entertainment—they were a flashpoint in ongoing debates about morality, class, and community identity.

A Region Defined by Both Refinement and Frontier Realities

Taken together, these documented

sources show that the Edwardsville–St. Louis region in the 1820s was socially vibrant and culturally complex. Balls served as:

- Seasonal markers, especially during winter months
- Opportunities for courtship and display, sometimes governed by elaborate customs
- Community gatherings that crossed professions and social ranks
- Subjects of satire and moral scrutiny, reflecting tensions in a rapidly developing frontier society



“Barroom Dancing” by John Lewis Krimmel, c. 1820

What emerges is a portrait of a community negotiating refinement and rusticity, aspiration and practicality. Whether celebrated or criticized, balls were undeniably central to the social fabric of the region—events that brought people together, stirred commentary, and left a lively documentary trail in the newspapers of the day.

News & Needs

Thank you...

- A warm thank-you to Pam Gregan of *Hold Fast Artworks Azores* for the wonderful package of fabric, lace, and vintage goodies sent from the Azores. We are grateful for your generosity and for being part of our Facebook community.
- Our thanks go to Stephen Weissman for his generous donation of an 18th-century pewter plate to the museum's collection. This beautiful piece will help us share the material culture of the early 19th century with visitors for years to come.

Needs...

- We're looking for men's period trousers, coats,

and shoes/boots. Our wardrobe is getting thin, and larger sizes are desperately needed — though we'll gladly accept any size.

- We're looking for volunteers to help during weekend hours and during group tours.

Wanted...

- A volunteer who knows how to weld an ax to help chop and stack firewood so our hearth demonstrations can keep burning strong

Fall 2026 & Spring 2027 Internship Available!

Make history come alive at the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House! We have three internships available:

1. Videographer – Film stories & events
2. Social Media – Share history with style
3. Admin – Learn museum & nonprofit ops

Apply now: <https://stephensonhouse.org/internships-%26-volunteers-1>

Upcoming Events, Tours & Activities

- May 3, Jewels Ball Planning Committee Meeting, 3 pm. The meeting for committee members will be held at the museum with a Zoom option.
- May 7, School Tour, 9:30-11:30 am, 25+/- 5th graders
- May 8, Lewis & Clark State Historic Site Education Day. We have been asked to participate.
- May 17, Silent Book Club @ Stephenson House, 2 pm. This club meeting will take place outside on the brick patio. Members should bring their own lawn chair. In the event of bad weather, the meeting will move inside to the parlor.
- May 20, Historic Daniel Boone Home Homeschool Day. We have been asked to do laundry demonstrations. Volunteers needed. More details coming soon.
- May 27, PEEL Dine & Donate, All Day
- May 30, The Whole Look Workshop, \$45 a person. Limited to 12 adults (16+ years). Tickets available at www.stephensonhouse.org



Sun

Mon

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3 Jewels Ball Planning Committee Meeting 3 pm	4	5	6	7 School Tour 9:30 am	8 Lewis & Clark State Historic Site Education Day	9
10 Mother's Day	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 Silent Book Club 2 pm	18	19	20 Historic Daniel Boone Home Homeschool Day	21	22	23
24	25	26	27 PEEL Dine & Donate All Day	28	29	30 The Whole Look Workshop 9 am
31						

Be Our Friend...

*Renew your membership or become a new Friend.
Fill out and mail the following information to us.*

YES! I want to help. Enclosed is my contribution:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State & ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____ Membership Level: _____

Please send me information about volunteering at Stephenson House.

Checks should be made payable to the:

Friends of the Col. Benjamin Stephenson House

Payments may also be made in our online store:

www.stephensonhouse.org

**Memberships are from January to December.* Benefits of membership are extended to an individual and his/her immediate family. We accept cash, check or credit card donations. Memberships are extended for monetary donations only. The Friends of Col. Benjamin Stephenson House is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization FIN 37-1395804



Send your membership to the

**Friends of the Col. Benjamin
Stephenson House**

P.O. Box 754

Edwardsville, IL 62025



Membership Levels

Friend of Ben & Lucy
\$30

Stephenson Family Friend
\$60

Landmark Friend
\$125

Heritage Friend
\$275

Living History Friend
\$600

Founding Friend
\$1,000 or more

Our Board of Directors & Staff

Peggy Emling, *Co- President*

Stacey Lipe, *Co-President*

Rachel Hill, *Treasurer*

Leslie Wood, *Secretary*

Elizabeth Edwards

Sean Goding

Andrea Miracle

Robert 'Buddy' Paulett

Jaclyn Wallace

Leslie Wood

RoxAnn Raisner, *Site Director*

Phil Stack, *Bookkeeper*



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