



NOVEMBER 2025

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A Newsletter for the volunteers & friends of the Stephenson House



What's Happening This November at Stephenson House

November brings a full calendar of ways to connect with the past and support the future of the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House.

First, the **Fall 2025 Sid Denny Memorial Antiques & Collectibles Auction** is officially underway. Bidding runs through November 12 and takes place entirely online, hosted by Legacy Auctions. This fundraiser honors Sid Denny's love for history and historic preservation, with all proceeds going toward the museum's restoration and educational programs. The catalog is full of unique finds. Every winning bid helps keep the house thriving.

On Saturday, November 8, the museum will host a **Guided Paranormal Ghost Hunt** from 6 p.m. to midnight. This event is *SOLD OUT*. Guests will join the Midwest Paranormal Investigators Consortium for an after-hours exploration of the house and grounds, including the 1820 section, detached kitchen, upper quarters, and servants' cabin. With a long history of reported hauntings, disembodied footsteps, doors that open on their own, and sightings of a woman in white, Stephenson House offers a compelling setting for both seasoned investigators

and curious newcomers. Equipment is provided, though participants are welcome to bring their own. Hunts are limited to 10 people (ages 13+), and anyone under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Tickets were \$40 and are nonrefundable.

On Sunday, November 12, from 6 to 7:30 p.m., guests will step into the past with **Desserts of the Early 19th Century**. This event is also *SOLD OUT*. Attendees will enjoy a curated selection of authentic seasonal desserts from the 1820s, learn about the ingredients and customs of the time, and take home recipes to recreate the experience. Space was limited to 10 adults (16+), and we encouraged guests to arrive hungry, these historic treats are as rich in flavor as they are in history.

Then, on Saturday, November 15, from 1 to 3 p.m., we invite you to join us for **An Afternoon of Shape Note Singing**. The St. Louis Shape Note Singers will lead a special community sing at the museum, celebrating an early American a cappella tradition that was especially popular in this region during the 1820s. Participants will sing from

(November Events, Continued on page 6)

Harvests and Heritage

Tracing Thanksgiving's Roots in Early Illinois



In the 1820s, Thanksgiving was not yet a recognized holiday in Illinois. The state had only recently joined the Union in 1818, and its cultural landscape was still forming. While New England states had long observed Thanksgiving as a religious and civic occasion, often proclaimed by governors and tied to harvest and gratitude, Illinois had no such formal observance during this decade.

The earliest documented gubernatorial Thanksgiving proclamation in Illinois occurred under Governor Thomas Carlin, likely between 1838 and 1842. This is supported by records from the Illinois State Archives and corroborated by Illinois Public Media's *Illinois History Minute*, which notes that the tradition of state-issued Thanksgiving proclamations began in the late 1830s.

Despite the absence of official recognition, settlers in Illinois, particularly those with New England roots, may have held informal harvest gatherings or religious services of thanks. These events were not standardized and varied widely by

community. Historian Diana Karter Appelbaum, in her book *Thanksgiving: An American Holiday, An American History*, emphasizes that prior to Lincoln's national proclamation in 1863, Thanksgiving was a patchwork of local traditions, often shaped by regional religious practices and agricultural cycles.

The turning point came in 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln issued a national proclamation declaring the last Thursday of November a day of "Thanksgiving and Praise." This act, influenced by decades of advocacy by writer Sarah Josepha Hale, marked the beginning of Thanksgiving as a national tradition.

In summary, while Illinoisans in the 1820s may have participated in seasonal or religious gatherings that resembled Thanksgiving, the holiday had not yet taken root in the state's civic calendar. Its formal adoption came later, shaped by migration, cultural exchange, and national unification efforts during the Civil War.

Sources:

- Illinois Public Media, *Illinois History Minute: Thanksgiving*
- Library of Congress, *Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation* (1863)
- National Park Service, *Lincoln Home National Historic Site: Harvest Celebrations in Illinois*
- Internet Archive, *The First Official Thanksgiving in Illinois* by L.P. Kimball (1918)
- Diana Karter Appelbaum, *Thanksgiving: An American Holiday, An American History* (Harry N. Abrams, 1984)

Psst... The Season's Most Dazzling Event Is Coming!

Whispers are spreading across the region... and it's true! A most extraordinary evening of dancing, music, and Regency charm is coming to Edwardsville in 2026.

On Saturday, June 20, 2026, the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House joins with the St. Louis Historical Sewing Society to present *The Jewels Ball*, a dazzling evening where elegance, and community come together in support of the museum.

Held in the beautiful Leclaire Room at Lewis & Clark College in Edwardsville, *The Jewels Ball* will transport guests to the world of *Bridgerton* and early 19th-century society. There will be live music and dancing led by Dance Mistress Deborah Hyland, and appearances by none other than Queen Charlotte herself.

Guests will enjoy period-inspired fare, refined drinks, and an evening filled with charm, laughter, and perhaps a touch of magic. And while the night will sparkle with elegance, it will also shine with purpose. Proceeds from the event support the continued preservation and educational programs of the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House, ensuring our history continues to inspire generations to come.

So, dear friends, prepare your attire and gloves, polish your footwear and jewels, and save the date: June 20, 2026.

Tickets are available now at givebutter.com/TheJewelsBall. Early Bird pricing of \$130 runs through November 30, 2025. For full event details, visit www.stephensonhouse.org/jewels-ball, and if

you're traveling from out of town, be sure to book your stay at the Official Hotel for *The Jewels Ball*, the Holiday Inn Express & Suites of Edwardsville.

And if you simply can't wait to join the conversation, visit our Jewels Ball Facebook Group for costume inspiration, sneak peeks, and delightful pre-ball gossip.

The whispers are true, *The Jewels Ball* will be the social event of the 2026 season. Will you be among society's most dazzling guests?



From the Hearth: Potato Pumpkin with forcemeat

FORCEMEAT BALLS.

TAKE half a pound of veal, and half a pound of suet cut fine, and beat in a marble mortar or wooden bowl; add a few sweet herbs shred fine, a little mace pounded fine, a small nutmeg grated, a little lemon peel, some pepper and salt, and the yolks of two eggs; mix them well together, and make them into balls and long pieces—then roll them in flour, and fry them brown. If they are for the use of white sauce, do not fry them, but put them in a sauce-pan of hot water and let them boil a few minutes.

As the weather cools and ovens warm up, we're reaching for recipes that feel both comforting and a little bit special. This month, we're spotlighting two dishes from *The Virginia House-Wife*, an 1824 cookbook by Mary Randolph that's full of early American flavor—literally and figuratively. Her “Potato Pumpkin” is a savory showstopper: a whole squash stuffed with spiced forcemeat and baked until tender. It's simple and surprisingly modern once you translate the instructions.

But here's the twist: the “potato pumpkin” isn't actually a pumpkin at all.

Historically, the term referred to calabaza, a starchy winter squash with sweet, potato-like flesh. Thomas Jefferson himself used the name “potatoe-pumpkin” to describe it. Calabaza belongs to the Cucurbita moschata species, the same family as butternut squash, and goes by many names across Latin America and the Caribbean, including West Indian pumpkin, Cuban squash, Seminole pumpkin, auyama, ayote, and zapallo.

If you're making this dish today, good substitutes include butternut, kabocha, buttercup, or acorn squash, all of which share that creamy texture and subtle sweetness. For a 1:1 swap, butternut, or kabocha will give you the closest match to the original flavor and feel.

We've adapted both recipes below for modern kitchens, keeping the spirit of Randolph's work while

POTATO PUMPKIN.

GET one of a good colour, and seven or eight inches in diameter; cut a piece off the top, take out all the seeds, wash and wipe the cavity, pare the rind off, and fill the hollow with good forcemeat—put the top on, and set it in a deep pan, to protect the sides; bake it in a moderate oven, put it carefully in the dish without breaking, and it will look like a handsome mould. Another way of cooking potato pumpkin is to cut it in slices, pare off the rind, and make a puree as directed for turnips.

making it easy to recreate at home. Whether you're planning a harvest table or just want something cozy and historic, this dish delivers.

Forcemeat Filling for Baked Potato Pumpkin (Modern Interpretation)

Ingredients:

- ½ lb veal (or substitute with ground pork, beef, chicken or turkey for a lighter option. For a non-meat option, finely chopped mushrooms provide a meaty texture, while textured vegetable protein (TVP) is another plant-based choice)
- ½ lb beef suet (or use cold unsalted butter or beef fat if suet is unavailable)
- 1 tsp finely chopped fresh sweet herbs (e.g., parsley, thyme, marjoram)
- ¼ tsp ground mace
- 1 small whole nutmeg, grated (or about ½ tsp ground nutmeg)
- 1 tsp finely grated lemon peel
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 2 egg yolks

Instructions:

1. Mix the Filling:

(Recipes, Continued on page 6)

Five Books That Help Tell the Story

At the museum, we care about how history is shared. It's not just about dates or artifacts, it's about helping people feel something when they walk through the door. Whether it's a third grader learning about weather or a longtime visitor asking about daily life in 1820, we want the stories to stick. That's where good research comes in.

Some books give us facts. Others give us voices. The ones below do both. They've helped our docents answer tricky questions and challenge old assumptions. If you're looking for something to deepen your understanding or spark new ideas for your tours, these titles are definitely worth reading.

Tristan Gooley's *The Lost Art of Reading Nature's Signs* is especially helpful for school tours, particularly when we talk about weather. Gooley shows how people once read nature to make decisions about their day. In the early 1800s, families didn't have forecasts. They watched the clouds and knew what a shift in wind might mean. That kind of awareness shaped everything from when to travel to when to wash clothes. For our third-grade sessions, this book offers simple ways to connect nature to daily life at the house.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* takes us into the world of Martha Ballard, a woman whose diary became a window into early American life. Ulrich doesn't just tell us what Martha did, she shows us how her work as a healer held a community together. The book reminds us that homes weren't just places to rest. People faced hard choices. They cared for the sick, often without help. And every day, they found ways to keep going, even when the odds were against them. For docents, it's a chance to talk about the emotional and practical labor that shaped households like the Stephenson's.

Christiana Holmes Tillson wrote her memoir, *A Woman's Story of Pioneer Illinois*, in 1870, but the years she describes, mostly the 1820s and 1830s, line up closely with the time the Stephensons lived in Edwardsville. Tillson herself lived right here in town.

Her writing is vivid and personal, full of details about travel, settlement, and the challenges of building a life in a place that was still finding its footing. When we quote her on tours, it helps visitors imagine what Edwardsville felt like back then, not just the buildings, but the emotions behind them.

Mary Theobald's *Death by Petticoat* is a small book with a big purpose. It clears up some of the most common myths about early American life. Visitors often arrive with ideas shaped by movies or old textbooks, like the belief that ladies had ribs removed to achieve a smaller waist or that people rarely bathed. We work hard to correct those historic lies, and this book gives us the tools to do it with confidence. It's no longer being printed, but copies are still floating around online. If you find one, hang onto it.

Darrel Dexter's *Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois* is a powerful reminder that our region's history is more complicated than many people realize. Illinois was officially a free state, but slavery persisted here through legal loopholes and cultural resistance. Dexter's research helps us talk about those contradictions with honesty. His work opens the door to conversations about labor, law, and the moral struggles that shaped early Illinois. For docents, it's a resource that supports thoughtful and respectful interpretation, especially when visitors ask hard questions.

These books aren't just for background reading. They help us tell better stories. They offer voices we might not otherwise hear, and they challenge us to think more deeply about the lives lived inside these walls.



(November Events, Continued from page 1)

The Missouri Harmony, a songbook first published in St. Louis in 1820, the same year construction began on the Stephenson House. This is a participation-based sing, not a performance, and observers are welcome. The event is free and open to the public, but space is limited to 12 guests and reservations are required. Loaner music books will be available. No physical tickets will be issued; your online receipt will serve as your ticket. If your plans change, please contact the site so we can make your spot available to others.

Later in the month, the house will glow with candlelight for one of our most beloved annual traditions. On Saturday, November 29, guests are invited to experience an 1820s Christmas during our

annual **Candlelight Tours**. The rooms will be dressed for the season, and costumed interpreters will share stories of holiday life in the Stephenson household. There'll be music in the parlor, dancing in the dining room, and speculaas baking in the hearth. It's a gentle, joyful way to step into the spirit of the season.

Tours begin every twenty minutes from 5:00 to 7:40 p.m. Tickets are \$15 and must be purchased online in advance. The house will be closed for daily tours November 27–30 to allow for preparations and Thanksgiving observance.

To bid in the auction or reserve your spot for the Shape Note Sing or Candlelight Tour, visit www.stephensonhouse.org. We hope to see you soon, whether you're browsing antiques or singing carols by candlelight.

(Recipes, Continued from page 4)

In a large bowl, combine the veal and suet until evenly blended.

Add herbs, mace, nutmeg, lemon peel, salt, pepper, and egg yolks.

Mix thoroughly. It should be moist but firm enough to hold its shape.

2. Use as Stuffing:

Spoon the forcemeat directly into the prepared cavity of the potato pumpkin.

Press gently to fill without compacting too tightly.

Replace the pumpkin top and bake as directed in the Potato Pumpkin recipe—at 350°F (175°C) for 60–75 minutes, until the pumpkin is tender and the filling is cooked through.

Potato Pumpkin (Modern Interpretation)

Ingredients:

- 1 small potato pumpkin (about 7–8 inches in diameter)
- Forcemeat (roughly 1 to 1½ cups)

Instructions:

1. Prepare the potato pumpkin:

Choose a firm, richly colored potato pumpkin about 7–8 inches across (roughly 2–3 pounds).

Slice off the top like a lid and set it aside.

Scoop out all seeds and stringy pulp.

Rinse the cavity and pat it dry.

Carefully pare off the outer rind, leaving the potato pumpkin intact.

2. Fill and Bake:

Fill the hollow with your forcemeat mixture, pressing gently to pack it without cracking the potato pumpkin.

Replace the top.

Place the filled potato pumpkin in a deep baking dish or Dutch oven to support its sides.

Bake at 350°F (175°C) for about 60–75 minutes, or until the potato pumpkin is tender but still holds its shape.

Use a wide spatula to transfer it carefully to a serving dish. It should resemble a molded centerpiece. Slice to serve.

News & Needs

Thank you...

- Members of Sigma Phi Epsilon (SIUE) for helping clean-up the gardens and grounds for winter.

Needs...

- Event supplies for the Christmas Candlelight Tours: 1 bag of apples, 1 bag of small oranges, 1-2 jugs of apple cider, candy canes, cinnamon sticks, holly, 12—2” pillar candles, flour, sugar, 1 ream of copy paper, period food for display and consumption: Speculaas, Gingerbread, pumpkin bread, short bread, plum pudding, Great cake,
- Volunteers to make candles for the house. The Christmas Candlelight Tours are fast approaching

and our candle supply is low. We have all the supplies needed in the kitchen, we just need help making them.

- Our next (and last) ghost hunt for the year is scheduled for November 8, 6 pm-12 am.. We could use 1-2 volunteers to help with security and guest support.
- Please return Volunteer Training binders and sewing pattern, if you have any.

Wanted...

- **Spring, Summer, Fall 2026 Internship Alert!** 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

- **November 1, 12 pm, Garden Clean-up.** Students from SIUE and our Master Gardeners will be readying the museum grounds for winter. Volunteers are invited to help.
- **November 5, 10 am, Master Gardner End of the Season Luncheon.**
- **November 8, 6 pm-12 am, Paranormal Ghost Hunt.** Sold Out!
- **November 12, 6 pm, Desserts of the Early 19th Century.** Sold Out!
- **November 15, 1-3 pm, An Afternoon of Shape Note Singing,** Free but reservations are required.
- **November 22 & 23, Decorating the House.** We'll be prepping for the Christmas Candlelight Tours. Volunteers are needed to help put up holly, decorate and hang the outside wreaths, set up vignettes, etc.
- **November 27-30. Museum Closed.** Due to the Thanksgiving holiday and prep for the Candlelight Tours, the museum will be closed during regular daytime hours.
- **November 29, 5-8 pm. Christmas Candlelight Tours.** Tickets must be purchased in advance at www.stephensonhouse.org.
- **December 4, 9:30 am-12 pm, School Tour (Eastwood Elementary),** 70+/- 4th graders
- **December 15-January 2, Museum Closed for the Holidays**

November



Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

						1 Garden Cleanup 12 pm
2	3	4	5 Master Gardner Luncheon 10 am	6	7	8 Paranormal Ghost Hunts 6 pm
9	10	11	12 Desserts of the Early 19th Century 6 pm	13	14	15 An Afternoon of Shape Note Singing 1-3 pm
16	17	18	19	20	21	22 Decorating for Christmas (volunteers needed)
23 Decorating for Christmas (volunteers needed) (Museum Closed) 30	24	25	26		28 (Museum Closed)	29 Christmas Candlelight Tours 5-8 pm

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: _____

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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
\$25

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\$50

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\$100

Heritage Friend
\$250

Living History Friend
\$500

Founding Friend
\$1,000 or more

**Corporate membership information
available upon request.**

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