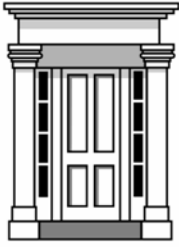
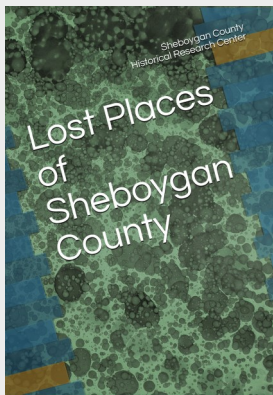


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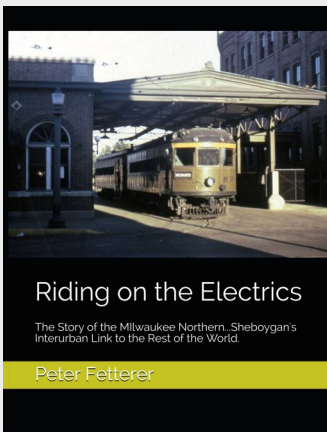


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The Researcher

**The Newsletter of the Sheboygan County
Historical Research Center**

Volume XXIV Number 3 February 2019

The Researcher is sponsored by Jay Christopher of Christopher Farm & Gardens.

Earl Kneevers: Atomic Veteran

By Richard A. Stoelb



The Korean War is an example of when the “Cold War” turned “Hot”. And, nothing advances technology faster than a war. A nuclear arms race was growing between the United States and the Soviet Union with each side developing, building, and stockpiling, bigger and more destructive nuclear weapons. Both parties justified this continual buildup and development to be a first strike deterrent based upon mutual mass destruction.

In 1953, after three years of development, the U.S. Army had a tactical nuclear weapon for use on the battlefield. However, with development comes testing and many of these nuclear tests involved human participation.

Upshot-Knothole, part of Exercise Desert Rock V, was a series of nuclear tests conducted from March 17, 1953 to June 4, 1953 at the Nevada Test Site approximately 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada. At 8:30 on the morning of May 25, 1953, Operation Grable took place on a dry lakebed called Frenchman Flat. A nuclear artillery projectile fired from a 280mm artillery gun, dubbed Amazon Annie by her crew, detonated in the air above the target area. This atomic test, like many held before and after, exposed many of the participants, later called Atomic Veterans, to dangerously high levels of radiation. The majority would suffer from a host of radiation induced health issues i.e. various cancers, and some an early death as a result of their exposure to the radiation. The following is the experience of one such

Continued on page 4

The Sheboygan County Historical Research Center is located at 518 Water Street in Sheboygan Falls.

Open Tuesday through Friday, 9:00am – 4:00pm and Saturdays from 9:00am to 12:00 noon.

Closed Monday, February 18, 2019 through Saturday, March 2, 2019 for archiving.

Phone: 920-467-4667

E-mail: research@schrc.org

Website: schrc.org

The Researcher is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin 53085.

It is published six times per year in August, October, December, February, April and June.

The Research Center is the local history archive for Sheboygan County and areas surrounding the county. It is a repository for paper records of all kinds.

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Interurban car number 153 at the Plymouth power plant.

RIDING ON THE ELECTRICS

The Milwaukee Northern interurban line was once Sheboygan's link to the rest of the world. Early in the 20th century, it offered travel adventures and trade advantages the city and its neighbors had never known. It provided frequent, timely service that was relatively inexpensive and comfortable. It opened up new vistas for travelers and new markets for area manufacturers, merchants and farmers. And it put Sheboygan on the map as a modern, progressive, up-with-the-times city.

There was a time when you could board an interurban car early on a Sunday morning in Sheboygan, transfer to another car in Milwaukee, enjoy a Cubs or White Socks game in Chicago, and be home again by sundown. Or, if you were really adventurous, you could ride connecting interurban lines to Indianapolis, Detroit, or almost all the way to New York City.

The Milwaukee Northern was incorporated in 1905. One of its founders was from Sheboygan, another from Elkhart Lake. The first of the big Northern cars arrived in Sheboygan on September 21, 1908. Over the years, the Northern offered services that ranged from speedy limited-stop cars to comfortable parlor chair cars to local cars that stopped at any crossing where passengers were waiting or farmers had milk they wanted to ship to Milwaukee.

But it didn't last ... it couldn't last. The same people who rode the interurban lines gradually fell in love with the freedoms that automobiles offered. The same businesses that shipped products, produce, milk and beer on the interurban found trucks more convenient. Cities, states and the federal government built thousands of miles of new streets and highway for cars, buses and trucks. Interurban companies simply could not compete with them. Ridership declined. Schedules were reduced. Freight shipments decreased. Revenues fell. Maintenance was deferred. Stations closed.

And finally, on Sunday night, Sept. 22, 1940, 32 years and one day after the first Milwaukee Northern car arrived in Sheboygan, the last of the big interurbans pulled out of its depot, turned south on 8th St. and disappeared forever into the night.

The Researcher is sponsored by Jay Christopher of Christopher Farm & Gardens



February 2019

LET'S DEVELOP OUR CENTER

Steven K. Rogstad
Director of Development

The beginning of a new year brings with it opportunities to try new things, develop new strategies, launch new initiatives, and bring forth new programs. This will be an exciting year at

the Center and here are a few reasons why:

The Center is launching its new Taproom History programs. We will be bringing stimulating and edgy historical programs into area taverns and pubs across Sheboygan County. These will be held on weeknights periodically throughout 2019, beginning in March. One of the establishments will be the Fat Cow Eatery Pub in Sheboygan Falls. A full schedule will be forthcoming. What could be a better way of learning history than while eating good food and enjoying a Brandy Old Fashion?

A Second Lincoln Bus Trip is planned for October 14-17, 2019. The bus trip to Springfield, Illinois, this past September was so popular that we have been asked to host another bus trip this year. The people are screaming for more Lincoln, so we will be traveling to see the sites of Lincoln's youth in Kentucky and Indiana. A couple of added sites will be Louisville Slugger Museum, Mrs. Lincoln's childhood home in Lexington, and a dinner show at the Derby Dinner Playhouse (the Play will be Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery. Reservations are already being accepted. Seating will go fast! Contact Personalized @920-528-7600 to make reservations.

The Center has set a goal of raising \$50,000 for the 2019 Annual Campaign. As the Center continues to be given new sizable collections of written records and photographs for its archive, it is faced with the costs associated with processing and storing them. Last year we received 6 large collections, one of which was the entire photographic collection from the Sheboygan Press. As the Center continues to enlarge, costs continue to increase.

I am excited about making this year's Annual Campaign the best yet, so we can continue to amass collections, provide community awareness, publish local history, and offer continuing adult education - like

Taproom History, Second Saturdays, The Lincoln Seminar, and genealogy classes.

Please start thinking about what gift you would like to make to support the Center.

The Center has established a goal of increasing its membership base by 10% this year. Have you renewed your membership for 2019? If not, please renew today. The Center is also asking current members to sponsor a new member for 2019. It is a great opportunity for you to share with others what the Center does and expand our visibility in the area. We are looking for 80 new members. So far, nearly 30 individuals have joined or been sponsored. Won't you help today by giving a neighbor, friend, relative, or co-worker a membership?

The Center will be launching its own Book Club! Imagine being able to read good non-fiction history books and sharing that interest with others!

The first book will be The Hidden White House: Harry Truman and the Reconstruction of America's Most Famous Residence, by Robert Klara. More details will be forthcoming.

Yes, it promises to be an exciting, fun-filled year! I hope you are as excited as I am.

Please feel free to contact me with your ideas, suggestions, and recommendations for enhancing our fundraising efforts. You can contact me at 920-467-4667, or email me at steverogstad@schrc.org.

Thank you for all you do to support the Research Center!

Sincerely,
Steven K. Rogstad
Director of Development

NEW MEMBERS FOR THIS PAST QUARTER

Robert Bollmann - Sheboygan
Barbara Hengst, Sheboygan
Historic Race Circuit of Elkhart Lake
(new Legacy Member)
Lawrence Kairys, Sheboygan
Chris Kuehnel, Sheboygan, (sponsored by Rick Dodgson)
Charlene Lulloff, Kiel
James & Mary Van Treeck, Sheboygan

Atomic Veteran, Earl Kneevers, who on the morning of May 25, 1953, would find himself in a trench about a mile from a that nuclear explosion.

Earl Kneevers was born in Sheboygan on August 10, 1929. He graduated from Sheboygan North High School in 1947. And yes, for those of us old enough to remember the Kneevers Hotel in Sheboygan, Earl is one of those Kneevers. The hotel was in the family for over 55 years. The Sheboygan landmark was destroyed by fire in 1978. Earl played saxophone and clarinet in a jazz band and oboe in a concert orchestra. He earned a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree in Music Education from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee (UWM).

After graduation from college Earl needed a job, but no one would hire him because he had not yet fulfilled his military obligation. He could wait to be drafted or he could enlist. So, Earl enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and due to his education and musical abilities was assigned to the U.S. 5th Army Band at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. He also did duty working with the Army Military Police and carried a .45 pistol doing prisoner recovery and transport.



Kneevers making music.



Kneevers in uniform.

In May 1953, Earl and 21 other members of the 5th Army Band were informed they had been assigned to take part in an operation. They boarded a troop train and left Fort Sheridan. The best way to tell Earl's story is to let Earl tell you himself. The following, in *italics*, is a first hand account from a letter Earl wrote in November 1993.

At our last two reunions, I had the opportunity to visit with Wayne Richards. We talked a lot about our experience with atomic testing. Wayne Richards, Willie Schafer and I, along with others from the 5AB [5th Army Band], were sent on a troop train to Camp Desert Rock, Nevada in 1953. The Department of Defense scheduled a series of nine atomic tests called Operation Upshot-Knothole at the Nevada Proving Grounds from March to June 1953. The exercise we participated in was called Shot Grable. This shot was detonated with a yield of 15 kilotons at 0830 hours Pacific Daylight Time on May 25, 1953. A 280mm cannon fired the atomic artillery projectile, which detonated 524 feet above Area 5 (Frenchman Flat). This artillery piece, nicknamed Amazon Annie [aka Atomic Annie], could throw a shell, atomic or conventional, 20 miles.

We attended several days of classes and lectures explaining what the shot consisted of and our role in it. I remember at Camp Desert Rock we slept in tents and were issued carbines to carry. There was a constant wind at the camp, and it blew fine powder-like sand everywhere. Even the G.I. chow had sand in every bit of it. After a few days attempting to keep our rifles clean, we were given permission to stop cleaning our carbines because the fine powder-like sand immediately blew into every part of our rifles after cleaning them.

We were told that our backgrounds had been checked and cleared before we were assigned to the shot project. Our families were not permitted to know where we were going, and we were warned not to tell anybody anything about the shot at any time during, and after it took place. Some of us were even told not to discuss it with each other.

The troop train we traveled on was supposedly detoured several times to confuse and mislead anyone who wanted to know where the train was going. When the train pulled off the main track to a side rail a number of times nobody was permitted to get off.

The morning of the shot, we were taken out to Frenchman Flat in trucks and given our assigned location by officers. A last minute briefing via a booming PA system blasted across the desert. All participants in the "shot" were ordered to huddle in slit trenches. We were told to put gas masks on, close our eyes, and hug the side of the trench facing the shot. Our mission was to attack ground "0" after the shot.

My own feelings and emotions during the time just before the shot seemed to be very relaxed. I don't recall having any feelings of fear. At no time during our information sessions were we told there was anything to fear. We were just following orders. The way I look at it now is, we were, in fact, just guinea pigs.

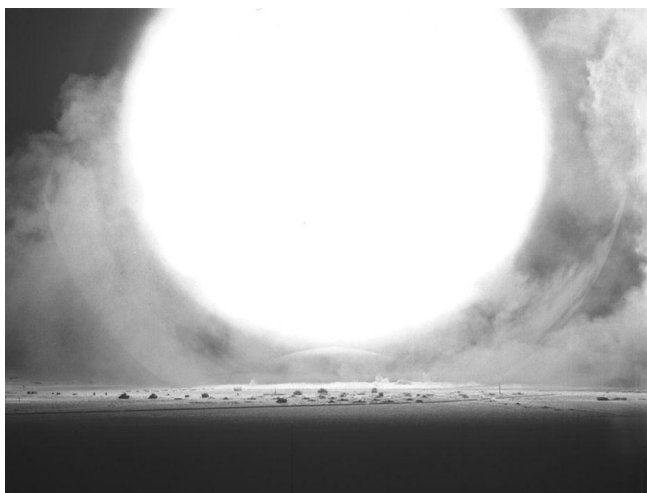


Soldiers, on a training run, huddled in trenches.

We huddled down in our trenches, hugging the side facing the shot, with our eyes closed as the final count-down boomed over the PA set. The cannon was firing the shot from several miles away. The shell was supposed to explode over ground "0" at a pre-determined height. We didn't hear the cannon fire, but when the count-down reached "5-4-3-2-1-0", even though we had our eyes closed, with our gas masks on and were huddled in the trench facing the shot, we experienced a brilliant flash of light that shocked us.

We were told to stand up immediately after seeing this flash of light and face the shot. We stood up as ordered, and we saw what looked like a tremendous wind storm rushing toward us. We watched this evil wind in awe while learning against the front of our trenches. Suddenly, this terrifying blast of wind hit us with a rumbling roar, and it threw us against the back of our trench (I remember having a fleeting thought about how effective this sound would be in Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture). After this blast, our officers called us out of our slit trenches and formed us into a combat position to begin our attack on ground "0". We gathered our carbines and combat equipment and proceeded forward. All this time we looked with wonder at the hideous, boiling mushroom cloud rushing up into the stratosphere. We had been told that the wind would blow this radioactive cloud away from us, and this appeared to be happening.

Prior to this shot, the military had set up many different ways to evaluate the effects of this atomic blast. We came upon a tank, not very far ahead of our trenches, that had all the paint sand-blasted off. The parts facing the blast were like shiny, fresh new metal. As far as I can recall, none of us was wearing any badges or dosimeters that would have measured the level of radiation. The officer leading us did have a Geiger counter that he held against the metal of the tank. As he did this, we heard the device change to a frantic buzzing sound. I remember, he looked at us and reassured us that we had nothing to worry about. As we continued forward to attack ground "0", we came across caged domestic animals located at various distances from ground "0". When we got closer still, we examined two school buses where the blast side of the busses had been forced in almost to the other side. Continuing further, we observed several railroad cars, partially melted and still steaming, blown off the trestle. From this point on forward, there wasn't anything more to be seen except a large and deep depression in the desert floor where the sand looked like glass. We walked until we were within spitting distance of ground "0", about a mile or less from our slit trenches, under the leadership of our assigned officer. This concluded our mission, and all of us were sent back to our regular outfits.



At 8:30a.m. "Annie", located 6 1/4 miles from ground zero, was fired electrically by scientists at the Atomic Energy Commission control point 10 miles away. The 803 pound projectile reached the target area and detonated 524 feet above the ground. The gigantic fireball, as bright as the sun, lit up the sky. The explosion had a yield of 15 Kilotons (3 million pounds of TNT). It equaled the destructive force of the "Little Boy" atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, but in a much smaller package.



...we experienced a brilliant flash of light that shocked us.

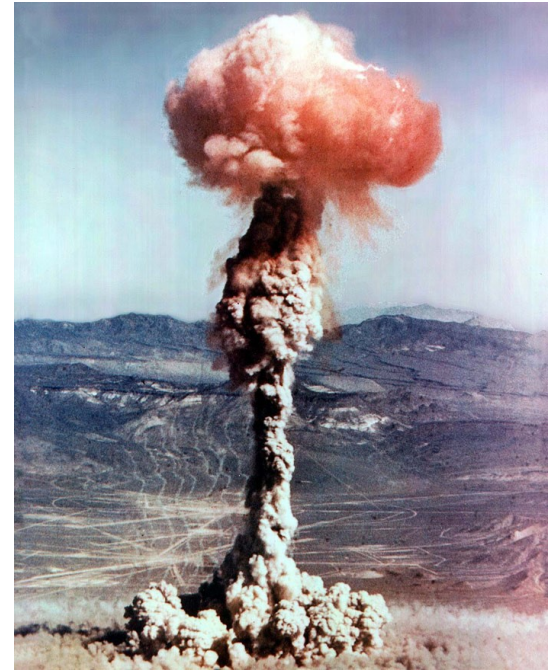


The fireball lasted for eight seconds, and in little over a minute a pink and white bloom had risen to 10,000 feet. At 30,000 feet the mushroom cloud was rapidly dispersed by brisk northeasterly winds.



ARMY'S ATOMIC CANNON IN ACTION—The mushroom cloud formation from history's first atomic artillery shell rises in the background seven miles away from the 280-mm rifle which fired

the shot on Frenchman Flat Monday. The Department of Defense said the atomic shell burst with precision accuracy directly over the target.



We were told to stand up immediately after seeing this flash of light and face the "shot". We stood up as ordered, and we saw what looked like a tremendous wind storm rushing toward us. We watched this evil wind in awe while learning against the front of our trenches.



..... our officers called us out of our slit trenches and formed us into a combat position to begin our attack on ground "0".

.....how ridiculous this so-called security connected with the "shot" really was. The day after the shot, the Las Vegas newspaper had front page articles and pictures about the "shot". The articles presented much more information, and in much more detail, than anything we were told in our classes. After I returned to Ft. Sheridan, I told all my friends and family about the shot, using information I had read in the Las Vegas newspaper.



Original "Amazon Annie" - Artillery Museum, Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Upshot-Knothole Grable was the first and only firing of Annie. After the test at least 20 of the guns were manufactured. They were deployed across Europe and Korea. They were frequently moved to avoid detection and targeting by opposing forces. Due to the size of the system, its limited range, the development of nuclear shells compatible with existing artillery, and the development of rocket and missile based weapons the atomic cannon was effectively obsolete soon after it was deployed. It however remained a prestige weapon and was retired in 1963.

Troop observations were conducted at what was thought to be the minimum safe distance of separation. However, these nuclear tests exposed the participating personnel to higher levels of radiation than the previous tests had. Overall, 18,000 Department of Defense (DOD) personnel took part in observer programs, tactical maneuvers, scientific studies, and support activities. Members of all four armed forces participated in Exercise Desert Rock V, and many personnel were exposed to more than one test. Earl, a number of his buddies, and other participants in the atomic testing operations suffered from an increased lifetime risk of cancer from the effects of the radiation they were exposed to that day, and sadly some of them died from their exposure to the radiation. Ironically, Earl received radiation therapy for successful treatment of prostate cancer. He has also had numerous procedures and surgeries for skin cancer on his legs and for the removal of basal cell and squamous carcinomas.



Shortly after his discharge from the service Earl married Charmaine Chopp on August 14, 1954. Charmaine was a graduate of Kohler High School and she earned her Bachelor's Degree from the University of Wisconsin - Stout and her Master's Degree from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. The couple met in high school when Earl played saxophone and clarinet in the *Music Makers* dance band and Charmaine was a singer with the band. They settled in South Milwaukee where Earl was the band director, orchestra director and K-12 music supervisor. Charmaine was a full time homemaker during the early years of their marriage. Later, she worked as an Associate Dean in the Consumer Hospitality Services and Liberal Arts Divisions at the Milwaukee Area Technical College for 20 years. Earl and Charmaine retired in 1989 and moved back Sheboygan in 1992. They have a son, a daughter and two granddaughters.



Charmaine and Earl Kneevers

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Abraham Lincoln Heritage Trail...

THE EARLY YEARS

OCTOBER 14-17, 2019



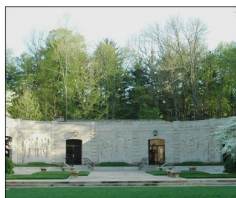
Join the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center and local Abraham Lincoln expert, Steve Rogstad, on this four-day excursion along the Abraham Lincoln Heritage Trail. Listen to Steve's captivating commentary as you explore the places in Indiana and Kentucky where our sixteenth president spent this youth. Visit Former President Lincoln's birthplace, early childhood home, and The Lincoln Museum. Tour Mrs. Lincoln's elegant family home and the Henry Clay Estate in Lexington. Just for fun... see how the famous Louisville Slugger baseball bats are made, enjoy a dinner show at Derby Dinner Playhouse and much more.

MONDAY OCTOBER 14

Our journey through Indiana and Kentucky begins as we board our deluxe motorcoach and meet our fellow travelers. The route takes us down Highway 41 along the Illinois/Indiana state line. After lunch in Carbondale, Indiana we continue on to Vincennes and the



Lincoln Memorial Bridge. The deck arch bridge carries U.S. Route 50 Business over the Wabash River. It is said to mark the point where Abraham Lincoln crossed on his way to Illinois in 1830. The Lincoln Trail State Memorial marks the western end of the bridge. We check into our hotel in Jasper, Indiana. An included dinner is planned at the Schnitzelbank Restaurant. (D)



TUESDAY OCTOBER 15

Our destination today is Bardstown, Kentucky, but on our way we make stops in Lincoln City, Indiana and Hodgenville, Kentucky. First, we visit the **Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial** in Lincoln City. We begin at the Memorial Visitor Center where we view an orientation film that tells the story of Abraham Lincoln's youth. Browse

through the park museum, containing artifacts and exhibits that portray the family and frontier life of Former President Lincoln. A tree-lined trail leads to Pioneer Cemetery and the gravesite of Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln. Then it is on to the **Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site** near Hodgenville. The Birthplace unit at Sinking Spring Farm features a visitor center containing a symbolic cabin. When Lincoln was two years old, his family moved to Knob Creek where he lived until the age of seven. At the Knob Creek unit we'll find a 19th-century log cabin and a 20th century tavern. Our final stop for the day is at **The Lincoln Museum** in downtown Hodgenville. Wander through the pivotal points in the life of Former President Lincoln with a series of life-size dioramas, period artifacts, and a superb collection of wax figures. From the "cabin years" to "Ford's Theatre" we enjoy this close-up experience. Overnight accommodations are in Bardstown, Kentucky. (B, D)

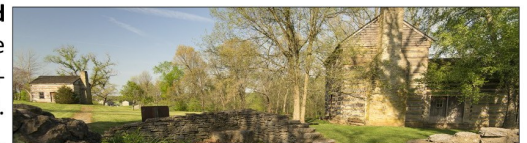


WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 16

This morning a short drive takes us to **Lincoln Homestead State Park**, located just north of Springfield, Kentucky. The park features both historic and reconstructed buildings associated with Thomas Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's father.



The Francis Berry House, the only original structure, is where Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, lived and worked as a seamstress while being courted by Thomas. We will also find replicas of Thomas' boyhood home and the blacksmith shop where he learned his trade. We head to Lexington, the center of thoroughbred horse country, for a visit to the **Mary Todd Lincoln House**. Sophisticated and educated, Mary Lincoln was versed in politics and dedicated to her husband.



Learn about the complex life of Mary while visiting the first historic site restored to honor a first lady. Located in the heart of downtown Lexington, the 14-room house contains family portraits and furnishings from the Todd and Lincoln families. Also in Lexington is **Ashland, Henry Clay Estate**, a plantation and mansion once belonging to famed Kentucky statesman Henry Clay. Clay was a U.S. Senator and served as the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. He began acquiring the 600-acre estate in 1811 and built the mansion the following year. Ashland has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Tonight we have the option of attending a dinner show at **Derby Dinner Playhouse (\$40pp)**. The production is *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*. Based on the classic Sherlock Holmes story, everyone's favorite detective must crack the case before a family curse dooms its newest heir. What a murderously funny adventure! Our hotel for the night is in suburban Louisville. **(B)**



**THURSDAY
OCTOBER 17**

First thing this morning we are off to the **Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory**. We view collections of baseball memorabilia before moving on to the Hillerich & Bradsby Co. manufacturing facility to see bats being produced. A short film, interactive exhibits and batting



cages are available. Next on our agenda is the **Lincoln Memorial at Waterfront Park** in Louisville. The memorial uses a sculpture and Lincoln's own words to convey his lifelong ties to Kentucky and the state's influence on his life. It offers glimpses of different stages in Lincoln's life, including his childhood in Kentucky, his political and social rise, the impact of the Civil War on Lincoln, his family, and the nation, and the roots of his abhorrence of slavery. Before we know it we will be back in Southeastern Wisconsin with new insights into the life of Former President Abraham Lincoln and memories of a fun-filled trip through Indiana and Kentucky. **(B)**

MEAL CODE: B-Breakfast D-Dinner

ACTIVITY LEVEL: Average-You should be able to climb stairs, tolerate periods of standing, and walk reasonable distances.



TOUR PRICE: \$799 Per Person Double Occupancy
\$999 Single Occupancy

TOUR INCLUDES:

- * Deluxe Motorcoach Transportation
- * Hotel Accommodations for 3 Nights
- * Sightseeing and Attractions Per Itinerary
- * Lincoln Expertise of Steve Rogstad
- * 3 Breakfasts
- * 2 Dinners
- * Luggage Handling for 1 Suitcase Per Person
- * Services of a Personalized Tour Director



Due to the nature of the attractions included in this tour, all children must be at least twelve years of age.

PAYMENT INFORMATION:

\$200 Deposit Due with Reservation
Balance Due August 14, 2019

TRAVEL INSURED TRAVEL PROTECTION:

\$44 Per Person Double \$52 Single

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