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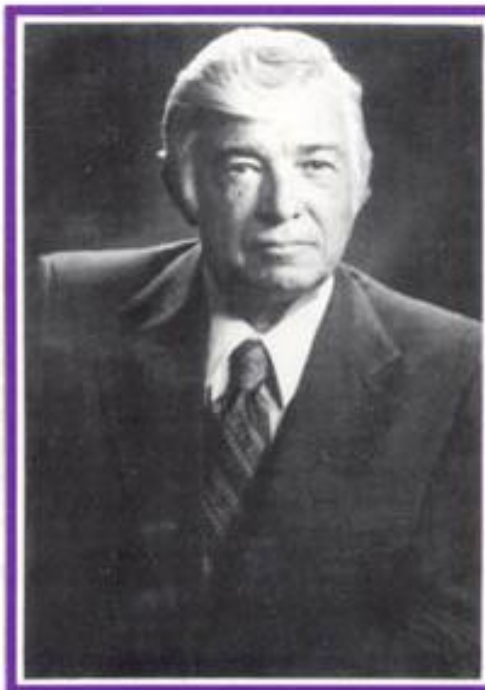
James Thomas Hickey (1922-1996)

by Barbara Hughett

JAMES T. HICKEY, often called "the historian's historian," died this past May 13 following a long and valiant battle with cancer. The worlds of Lincoln scholarship and Illinois history lost a great and good friend.

A native of Logan County, Jim became interested in history as a boy; he spent many hours on weekends talking with Judge Lawrence Stringer, author of the two-volume *History of Logan County, Illinois* (1911), about Illinois and Logan County history. It was the bequest of Judge Stringer in 1942 that formed the nucleus of what has become the Lincoln College Museum. Jim's sister Joanne told me that their father once asked the judge if his son was imposing on his time. Judge Stringer told Jim's father that his son was not imposing at all, that he enjoyed sharing his knowledge with the boy. "That's a boy who is going to remember what I tell him," he said. "I grew up hearing about Abraham Lincoln and Logan County history constantly from my brother," Joanne recalls. "I used to go up, as a kid, on Elkhart Hill with Jim, looking for cemetery markers, Indian arrow heads, and anything else pertaining to local history."

During World War II, Jim served with the United States Army Air Force's 20th Division Photographic Squadron, which later photographed atomic bomb attacks on the Japanese mainland. Upon his return, he continued his college studies, which had been interrupted by the war, and was graduated from Lincoln College. After a decade of farming in Elkhart, Illinois, he assisted Dr. Raymond N. Dooley, then president of Lincoln College, in the reorganization of the Lincoln College Museum. While



Illinois State Historical Library

serving as the museum's curator, he also taught a "Life of Lincoln" course at the college.

In 1958, the Illinois State Historical Library in Springfield was reorganized, with the Lincoln collection established as a separate department and Jim as its curator, a position he retained until his retirement in November 1985. In 1959, he was named historical consultant for the restoration of the Old State Capitol building; Jim selected and arranged for the purchase of most of the 3000 items with which the restored building is now furnished. He was also the primary historical consultant for the restorations of the Lincoln-Herndon Law Offices, the Great Western Railway Station where

Lincoln gave his farewell speech to Springfield in 1861, the Illinois Governor's Mansion, and the childhood home of former President Ronald Reagan in Dixon, Illinois.

Jim established himself as a great historical detective through his discoveries of Abraham Lincoln's bank and grocery ledgers from the 1840s and 1850s, and was featured in a *Life* magazine article in the 1950s. It was Jim Hickey who made the very exciting discovery, in 1975, of Robert Todd Lincoln's letter books and his "MTL Insanity File" in a double-locked closet in Robert Todd Lincoln's home in Manchester, Vermont.

Because of his friendship with Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, the last living direct descendant of Abraham Lincoln, Jim was able to persuade him to give many important Lincoln family items to the Illinois State Historical Library, the Lincoln College Museum, and other historical institutions. (Beckwith died on Christmas Eve, 1985.)

Jim Hickey wrote many articles for historical journals and *The Collected Works of James T. Hickey* (1990). He served for over twenty-four years on the Lincoln College Board of Trustees, four years as its chairman. He also served as chair of the Heritage Committee of the Board, and was awarded an honorary doctorate from Lincoln College in May 1994.

He received the 1987 Nevins-Freeman Award of The Civil War Round Table of Chicago, for his considerable contributions to Lincoln scholarship and Civil War-era history. Round Table founder and Lincoln College Board member Ralph G. Newman called Jim "the unnamed co-author of many of the important books about Lincoln" because

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