

About the Holt House

Welcome to the historic Holt House, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 as nationally significant for architecture and association with President Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. The main block of the house to the west was most likely constructed in the 1850s while the east block was added in the 1870s. Notable features of this Italianate structure include decorative cast iron detailing, six fireplaces and free-standing staircases with walnut hand railing.

Joseph Holt was a famous Kentuckian who had a long career in the national spotlight. He was born on this site in 1807 to John and Eleanor (Stephens) Holt, who owned many acres of land in this vicinity. Judge Holt's maternal grandfather, Captain Richard Stephens, received a 10,000-acre land grant for his service during the Revolutionary War. The original house they built on this site burned, and this one took its place.

Joseph Holt was given the opportunity to obtain a good education because of his grandfather, attending St. Joseph's College in Bardstown and Centre College in Danville. He became a practicing attorney in Elizabethtown 1828-1832 then moved to Louisville where he was the assistant editor of the *Louisville Advertiser* and commonwealth's attorney. Later he moved to Mississippi where he practiced law in Port Gibson and Vicksburg and was very successful. In 1842, Holt contracted tuberculosis, retired and returned to Louisville and became involved in government.

Judge Holt became a prominent lawyer and reached national eminence serving as Commissioner of Patents, Postmaster General and Secretary of War under our 15th President, James Buchanan. He was a believer and supporter of the Union and played a key role in keeping Kentucky from leaving the Union during the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln appointed him to the newly created office of Judge Advocate General in 1862, with the rank of Colonel. Two years later he was promoted to brigadier general and named to lead the new Bureau of Military Justice.

His most memorable role as Judge Advocate General came following the assassination of President Lincoln in 1865, when he presided over the trial of the assassination conspirators. He remained Judge Advocate General until his retirement in 1875.

During Judge Holt's lifetime he returned frequently to visit his Breckinridge County family home. He was married twice, his first wife Mary L. Harrison in 1839 and following her death to Margaret Wickliffe in 1850. Both wives are buried with their respective families in Bardstown. Following Judge Holt's death in 1894, his body was returned to Breckinridge County and he is buried along with his parents and other relatives in the cemetery to the east.

The house remained in the Holt family until 1911 and has been vacant for 40 years. Last year Breckinridge County Fiscal Court purchased the home and 19.5 acres for \$158,000 through a preservation grant from the Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office made possible by the Kentucky Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, which has named the home's rehabilitation an official Legacy Project of the Kentucky Lincoln Bicentennial Celebration.



Welcome
to the Judge Joseph Holt House
Kentucky Lincoln Heritage Trail
Community Day and Open House

Saturday,
August 15, 2009



★ 1809 - 2009 ★



KENTUCKY
abraham
LINCOLN
★ BICENTENNIAL ★

Schedule

9 a.m. – 5 p.m. [C.D.T.] Holt House tours (limited to groups of 10)

Be sure to sign the guest book and get your **Kentucky Lincoln Heritage Trail Passport** stamped! Beginning at 9 a.m., the first 16 visitors to the Kentucky Lincoln Heritage Trail display will receive a free prize – a Kentucky Lincoln Bicentennial Celebration ornament

For more information about Judge Holt and the history of this site, visit the informational display presented by author Susan Dyer and the Breckinridge County Historical Society

10 a.m. Period music featuring vocalists **Alison O'Donoghue Chaney** and Breckinridge County High School music teacher **Kathy Tabor**. They will be accompanied by retired music teacher **Paul Joseph O'Donoghue**, who will also present period music in the house throughout the day

Cookies and lemonade served courtesy of Breckinridge County Homemakers

11 to 11:30 a.m. Wreath-Laying Ceremony

[Please begin gathering at the presentation stand at 10:45 a.m. House tours will be suspended during the ceremony and resume immediately following.]

Presentation of Colors by Hardinsburg Local VFW Post 5831

Singing of the *National Anthem* by Alison O'Donoghue Chaney

Guest speakers:

- **Breckinridge County Judge-Executive Ray Powers**
- LaRue County Judge-Executive **Tommy Turner**, Co-Chair, Kentucky Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and National Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commissioner
- **State Senator Carroll Gibson**
- **Susan Dyer**, Local Volunteer and Author
- **Marcheta Sparrow**, Secretary, and **Lindy Casebier**, Deputy Secretary, Kentucky Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet
- **Mark Dennen**, Kentucky Heritage Council Executive Director and State Historic Preservation Officer
- **U.S. Representative Brett Guthrie**

Laying of the wreath on Judge Joseph Holt's grave by **Colonel Robert J. Cotell**, Staff Judge Advocate U.S. Army Armor Center & Fort Knox, and **Master Sergeant Michael Bostic**, Chief Paralegal NCO, U.S. Army Armor Center & Fort Knox

Playing of *Taps* by Hardinsburg Local VFW Post 5831

12:30 p.m. Period music by violinist **Scott Moore**

1:00 p.m. Speech by Judge Holt, portrayed by Hardin County Circuit Judge **Kelly Mark Easton**

1:30 p.m. *Lincoln's Advocate: The Life of Judge Joseph Holt* book signing by local author **Susan Dyer**, published by Acclaim Press

4 p.m. Local Flute Ensemble

5 p.m. Tours and entertainment concludes



A message from Judge-Executive Ray Powers

Thank you for visiting the Holt House today. The Breckinridge County Fiscal Court is honored to host this event and welcome individuals from the community and region who want to learn more about the life of Judge Joseph Holt, a notable Breckinridge County native, and this historic house and its important architectural and historic legacy.

To assist the fiscal court in long-term rehabilitation plans, a Steering Committee has been formed including representatives of the Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office, Kentucky Historical Society, Preservation Kentucky and Kentucky Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. We would not be here today without the commitment of many local leaders and elected officials, volunteers and advocates.

Special thanks to Susan Dyer, without whom none of this would be possible, and to State Representative Dwight Butler, Senator Carroll Gibson and Congressman Brett Guthrie. Thanks also to all those who have worked very hard on the event today.

Restoration of this house will take many years and this is an important opportunity to be able to tell Judge Holt's story to the rest of the world. We could not do this without the tremendous support from our Breckinridge County community. We plan to engage the public in every step of this process – and we hope you will consider becoming a volunteer as well as donating financial support to this exciting project.

Thank you for joining us on this special day!