Hunting For History

Students explore the University's legacy through new event

On an overcast Saturday morning in April at the University of Illinois, senior Jim Wordelman waits outside Lincoln Hall as students approach and ask, "Is this the GeoHunt?"

The event has been promoted with fliers around campus, but the participants, much like me, aren't sure what to expect.

Once the Altgeld Hall chimes strike 10 a.m., Wordelman, a computer science major, gives instructions. Participants will get six clues and a map of 26 campus landmarks. The first group to find the correct six locations will receive a small prize, donated by Microsoft.

"The general idea is that you're going to interact with the location that you're at," Wordelman says.

Participants can use smartphones and the Internet, but such devices won't be required. If a group gets stuck, Wordelman will be there for guidance.

I join Daniel Weber and Amy Miller, two undergraduate engineering students. The first clue directs our attention to the building's friezes, which depict important events in Abraham Lincoln's life.

"At this point in your journey, you need to consider the differences you have made or will make at certain key ages. While we reflect on the differences Lincoln made, looking at our own differences at the ages of 25, 26, 44, 50, 51, 47, 49, and 48," the clue reads.

We're stumped.

The next clue mentions a building constructed in 1894 that underwent a $1,737.40 renovation soon after.

The class that graduated six years after this renovation left a mark of allegiance somewhere on campus. You shouldn't have to go far to look up the five main points about that.

Not much help there, either.

Miller heads to a computer lab in the Illini Union to do research. Meanwhile, Weber and I try to decipher the first lead. Studying the friezes, we subtract the year of each event from 1865, when Lincoln died. But the answers don't make sense.

Soon, Miller calls Weber to say Engineering Hall fits the second description. We decide to move ahead, still baffled by the initial clue.

Geography professor **Bruce Hannon** '56 ENG, MS '66 ENG, PHD '70 ENG, came up with the idea for the Geo-Hunt a decade ago, when his granddaughter, **Caitlin Deal Peterson** '06 ED, was beginning college at Illinois. He wanted to design an intricate scavenger hunt that would take four years for her to complete. "Since I'd been here so long, there was an obvious attraction to this place," he says. "To know a place well is to love it."

Hannon launched the effort early last decade with students in the Campus Honors Program, but it soon fizzled out. More recently, he got in touch with Wordelman, president of a student engineering group, who put together this, the first-ever GeoHunt at the U of I.

When we reach Engineering Hall, Miller is searching for an answer to the second clue.

"Did you find anything?" Weber inquires.
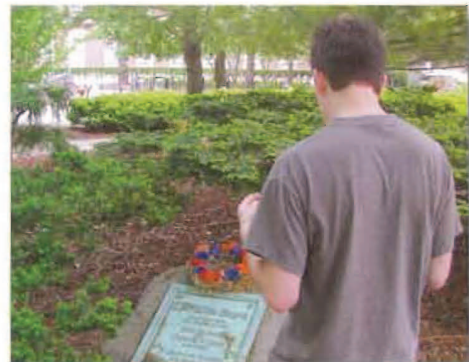
"I have no idea," she says.

We circle the building, reading all its plaques and markers. Nothing helps crack the code. We look back at the second clue and ahead to the third, which refers to an important figure in Champaign-Urbana's history.

He was born 48 years before the governor who lent his name to this hall … . Back then, he lived at 134 W. Church St., but you should go to the place he now calls home.

We consider the "five main points" mentioned in the second clue and pick up on hints about a burial site in the third.

"There is a guy buried near Altgeld," Miller says.

University of Illinois students, above left, receive instructions from Jim Wordelman (in blue and white shirt) about the rules of GeoHunt, a complex scavenger hunt involving campus landmarks. At far left, Amy Miller, Dan Weber, Kevin Larson and Murph Finnicum trek across the South Quad; to Memorial Stadium, above center; and to a false lead at a campus grave, above right.

"Yes, there is," Weber says.

The "guy" is John Milton Gregory, the first regent of the University.

"Well, Altgeld is a five-point structure," Weber says, referring to the turrets and spire of its Romanesque bell tower. "Let's go."

At the tower's base is a tablet, which reads, "The clock which strikes the hours and quarters commemorates the allegiance of the class of 1922."

Through Miller's research, we learn that Engineering Hall was first renovated in 1916. As the clue says, *"The class that graduated six years after this renovation"* – in 1922 – *"left a mark of allegiance somewhere on campus."* This confirms our answer.

At Gregory's grave, we meet engineering students Murph Finnicum and Kevin Larson. We decide to join forces.

But the information on Gregory's memorial doesn't fit the clue. He was born in 1822, 25 years – not 48 – before Gov. John Peter Altgeld. False lead.

"So, where is there another dead guy buried on this campus?" Weber asks.

It can only be one place, we realize: Mount Hope Cemetery.

As we cross the South Quad, we begin studying the fourth clue, which tells us to seek out Bob Zuppke '38 and George Huff '28 AHS.

If you continue along this path, you'll find where you need to go and where their memory lives on ad infinitum.

"'Where their memory lives on ad infinitum,'" Finnicum repeats. "'Memory lives on.' Memorial Stadium?"

"Libraries?" Weber suggests. "Libraries."

"Libraries for the founders of the football program?" Finnicum says, eliciting laughs from the group.

Next stop: Memorial Stadium.

On the stadium's east wall, we find a plaque with Zuppe's and Huff's names.

On to the next clue. It tells us to look for Zuppke and Huff again.

Now become a seeker for the right spot between them, where you will find a few lines from an American hero who fought in World War I. To find your next destination, you'll need to take his words pretty literally.

Also, it tells us to find a place where *"even the two-penny outdoor theatergoers"* can hear us recite the final lines.

Next to the plaque is an inscription, dedicating the stadium to the veterans of the war. The last lines, by World War I poet Alan Seeger, read, "We saw not clearly nor understood/ But yielding ourselves to the master hand/ Each in his part as best he could/ We played it through as the author planned."

"We got the 'not understanding' part pretty literally," Larson says.

The group concludes that the amphitheater at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts is the only spot for "outdoor theatergoers," so we head in that direction. Then we read the last clue.

Go inside in search of a sign of generosity held by the younger sister. Once you've found her, following her to her older, bleaker sibling should not be hard.

Miller finds what we're looking for outside Krannert's Foellinger Great Hall: a dedication to Loretta Foellinger Teeple, younger sister of Helene Foellinger '32 LAS, namesake of the domed Foellinger Auditorium.

We dash out the doors toward the Quad. But when we arrive, it's too late. Another group won the prize just three minutes ahead of us.

Because he was out of town, Hannon didn't see his idea become a reality, but he still wants to expand the hunt into a four-year-long puzzle.

The professor is trying to solve his own puzzle as well. "How do you keep it going in perpetuity?" he asks.

The answer may prove to be as enigmatic as the GeoHunt itself.

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