

Charles “Chic” Sale was a very famous comedian from Urbana, Illinois. Why haven’t you heard of him? Chic was famous long before your birth, in the early 1900’s. Chic was born in 1885 and died in 1936 of pneumonia. His family lived in Urbana during this time period, except for a short time living in South Dakota, where the family sought land through the Homestead Act. Tired of life out west, they returned home, where they stayed.

Chic was very close to his family, and when he started the Vaudeville circuit (think old sketch comedy, or the variety shows you see today) in his early 20’s, he maintained close contact with his family through letters. One family member he was very close to was his little sister, Virginia. Virginia was 20 years younger than her actor brother, and from the letters of communication, looked up to him. This may be very well why Virginia decided to enter the world of entertainment as well. Both Chic and Virginia had very successful careers, were very famous and were great at characterization-observing how a person acts, dresses, talks and thinks and then mimicking that person. To see the wide range of films and actors they worked with, simply go to www.imdb.com and search for Charles “Chic” or Virginia Sale or pay a visit to the Champaign County Historical Museum where you can see lots of pictures, scripts, letters and other artifacts that belonged to Chic and Virginia Sale.

Perhaps someone Chic loved and respected almost as much as family was Abraham Lincoln. Chic spent a portion of his career making sure that people saw Lincoln as *he* saw him-a compassionate, funny and thoughtful man. Later on, documents collected and stored at the Champaign County Historical Museum (you may know it as “The Cattle Bank” in downtown Champaign) show that Virginia thought Lincoln was pretty important as well. Both Chic and Virginia had a definite **historical perspective** about Lincoln.

Historical perspectives are viewpoints that individuals have about an event, place or person in history. If you were in the lunchroom at school, for example, you might have something very different to say about an argument that involved one of your friends than what a teacher may say, or a younger student might say. In other words, every time a person views an event, he or she brings her past experiences and knowledge to help them understand the event, place or person. Since you know your friend well, you may know more about why the fight started. A teacher may only know part of the picture

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behind the fight, and a younger student may know little to nothing about what is going on with the older students.

So what does historical perspective have to do with Chic and Virginia? Why did they feel it so important to share stories of Lincoln, and that people know who the *real* Lincoln was? Did they know the *real* Lincoln? What does that mean, anyway?

In this unit, you will find out.

We will first do an experiment that helps us understand the difference between primary sources and secondary sources. If you don't know what this means, you will soon find out! We will then try to understand what motivates people to have opinions about historical events. We will do this by examining some pictures, writings and scripts that are connected to Chic and Virginia Sale, locally famous comedians and now, historic figures themselves. We will look at two books of special interest to Chic and Virginia Sale, both children's books of their time period. After examining some local connections, we will look at the words of people who did know Lincoln, and the words of Lincoln himself.

Why do all this? Well, first it is important to understand that history is everywhere. It affects everyone. Even comedians care about history! Secondly, it is important to remember that when someone retells history, it is impossible not to put some of their own opinion about the person, place or event into the story. After all, why tell the story unless you care about it, and if you care about the story, you're very likely to tell the story how you wish it to be told. When you learn history, to get to the real story, you often have to look at many different viewpoints before you can understand the whole picture. Third, looking at historical perspective, especially as time goes on, shows us that history is really complex and constantly changing! We'll see for example, if we see Lincoln differently today than people who actually had family members who remember the man alive. Finally, it helps you become a better thinker when you look at a problem from other people's viewpoints (it just makes your viewpoint bigger!).

How will you show you understand historical perspective at the end of this unit? You will be writing your own historical perspective on Lincoln! But we'll get more into that later.

First, let's look at why and how Lincoln was important to our local celebrities, the Sales.