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ELECTION 2008

Obama and family visit ancestral home in Kempton

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KEMPTON — Cold, powerful winds, gusting at what seemed near-hurricane speed, blew into Kempton Saturday evening. But neither the spring chill nor the strong winds deterred presidential candidate, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama and his family from making a stop at an historically significant house located just east of the line dividing Tipton and Clinton counties.

Obama, his wife, Michelle, and their daughters, Malia and Sasha, were there to visit the home of Shawn Clements, who not long ago discovered that his house had been built in the late 1800s on land once occupied by Obama's second, third and fourth maternal great-grandfathers.

Following a political rally in Noblesville's Forest Park, the Obamas were en route to a family roller-skating outing at Lafayette's Great Skates, when they stopped to visit the old

homestead. They were greeted by a small congregation of about 25 that included members of the Clements family and board members of the Tipton County Heritage Center.

Carolyn Etchison, director of the heritage center, which is owned by the Tipton Historical Society, was part of the group. A genealogist, she had helped Clements confirm the historical significance of his property.

She had been given just a day's notice of the impending Obama stop, she told *The Times* Sunday. The caller from the Obama-camp asked her to bring a couple of the heritage center's board members.

Others who joined the welcoming party were craftsmen who helped on the historic home's restoration, she said, their wives, Clements' wife and parents, and a few of Obama's local supporters who had worked especially hard for him.

Etchison said she was

pleased to find the Obamas so sociable.

"I have never met a couple who seemed so down to earth and seemed to fit in so well," Etchison said. "They were delightful people to talk with."

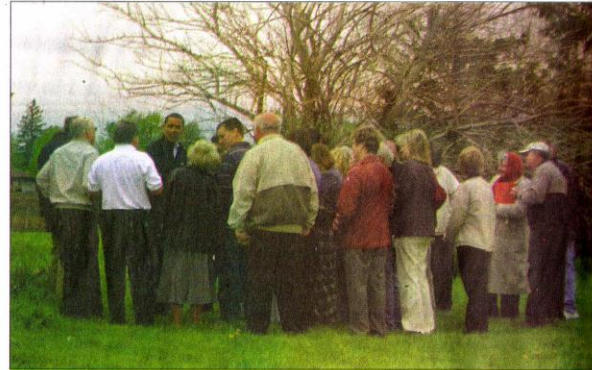
Etchison said she and the senator talked about some of the genealogy she had done on the house, as well as his lineage. She told him that his family, including him, his wife and daughters are now part of the Tipton County Heritage Center.

"He seemed very pleased," she said, "and thanked me."

After visiting for about 20 minutes, the Obamas said their good-byes and headed back to their massive tour bus.

Before he left, Etchison said, "He told us thanks for being there and asked us to encourage our family and friends to vote."

Watching from a distance of around 50 feet was swarm of local, state, national and international media, which in-



Times photo by Janis Thornton

Presidential hopeful, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), fourth from left, talks with a group of people Saturday evening in Kempton, where he and his family stopped to visit the ancestral house built in the late 1800s by his great-great uncle on his mother's side. He was greeted by the home's current owner and members of the Tipton County Heritage Center.

cluded *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd and *Newsweek* political columnist and senior editor Jonathan Alter.

According to Etchison, the last U.S. president candidate

to campaign in Tipton County was Harry S. Truman, who made a whistle stop speech from the back of a train in the heart of Tipton back in 1948.

The Obamas' trip into Kempton was escorted by a

motorcade, including Indiana State Police and Tipton County Sheriff's Deputies and Tipton police. From Kempton, the motorcade headed west toward Lafayette, slicing through Clinton County