



McLean County
MUSEUM of HISTORY

ANNUAL REPORT



FISCAL YEAR 2023
APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023

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Alongside McLean County administrators and a board representative from the Illinois Historical Society, the Museum's Executive Director unveils a new historic marker sharing the story of the Kickapoo in McLean County in West Park.





Museum Mission

Our mission is to preserve, educate, and collaborate in sharing the diverse stories of the people of McLean County. This mission is achieved by:

Preservation: We are a steward of McLean County history—discovering, researching, and sharing the tangible evidence of the past

Education: We are a cornerstone for learning and civic engagement through programs, exhibitions, and enrichment

Collaboration: We are inclusive, seeking ideas and valuing multiple perspectives

The McLean County Museum of History traces its roots back to 1892, the year the McLean County Historical Society was founded. The Museum is nationally accredited, independent 501(c)3 nonprofit, featuring nine exhibit galleries, preserving more than 18,000 objects, 15,000 rare books, and over 2,000 linear feet of historical papers and images in the archives.

When we received reaccreditation from the American Alliance for Museums in November of 2022, the reviewers noted the following: “Overall, the McLean County Museum of History is an impressive museum. They are an asset to the community, take their job as keepers of community memory seriously, have big goals, a great team, a smart strategic plan, and community support to help them accomplish it all.”

AAM Accreditation recognizes museums for their commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement. Only 3.3% of museums in the country are accredited.



Statement from Executive Director

Doing history is detective work. At MCMH, one of our goals is to invite others to join in actively excavating and analyzing clues from the past. In researching a National Endowment for the Humanities grant proposal to preserve and make accessible our textiles collection, we noted not only the importance of preserving a piece of historic clothing, but also the invaluable opportunity to turn the fabric itself inside out to see how the stitches were made. This kind of shared inquiry—the foundation of what it means to do history—is evident in our programming. For example, a new cross-departmental initiative that we launched this past fiscal year, *Crafting History*, engages participants in learning about the rich history of crafting, the stories of people behind the artistry, its sustainability, and actual hands-on practice. Any historical endeavor can be investigated from all sides and created anew. Most importantly, this curated process is open to the public. We can all be detectives.

Historical inquiry is more important than ever. In 2023, the American Alliance of Museums dedicated an entire issue of its peer-reviewed journal, *Museum*, “Making the Case” for the import of museums in society. In this issue, AAM interim CEO Brooke Leonard writes, “Too often, we rely on secondhand stories to decide what other people are like, which can exaggerate our sense of how deep our differences really are...In a landscape of misinformation and hostility, museums can provide antidotes of truth and empathy.” In our last fiscal year, our antidotes consisted of launching an extensive historic marker project, designing an Illinois Council for the Humanities funded Spanish Language Tour, developing a new website that provides access to our exhibits and collections, creating an online Social Justice Walking Tour in partnership with Business Builders, and celebrating Executive Director Emeritus Greg Koos’s Lifetime Achievement Award from the Illinois State Historical Society for teaching us how diverse lives form the foundation of who we are today. If you are curious about Greg’s work, seek out a copy of *Freedom, Land & Community* at the Museum or listen to Charlie Schlenker’s melodic narration of the text, now available as an audiobook on Audible.

We are not the only ones who value historic inquiry. The importance of history was emphatically communicated in a national, 2023 museum-goers survey (Wilkening & American Alliance of Museums) in which respondents claimed “how important history is for all of us... history is necessary for helping humans understand the current moment, plan for the future, and feel grounded... Respondents were 50% more likely to talk about history in 2023 than in 2018, when we last asked this question.” Given that MCMH’s recovery from the pandemic outpaces other museums, we know that history is important to you, too. We are Your Museum – Your History.

Photo from the recently reopened and reimagined Merwin Gallery which features over 300 rarely seen objects from the collection.



Statement from Board President Carolyn Yockey

What have you contributed to the McLean County Historical Society? The Museum uses the phrase Your Museum - Your History. We indicate that our Museum is not a storage place for other history, but the history that relates to each one of us who live in McLean County. Some of us have connections that go way back; my great-great-great-grandfather came here in 1823. Even though I did not live here my first 18 years, this area has always been important to me. The Museum does hold my personal history. Other people are more recent arrivals with stronger roots in other places. Our Museum also holds history that is important to each of us simply because the people who came before us have led this community to being the wonderful place it is to live. Spend some time in our Museum to explore the many stories of our history. You will be pleasantly surprised at the many connections! Perhaps you have something that relates to the history of our County. We would love to have you share it with us.

Our History Makers each year are honored because of the roles they have played in our County's History. They set an example! We want to learn from them. In preserving their stories, we are adding to the history of our County.

Our Museum is an outstanding one. In 2022 we were reaccredited by the American Alliance of Museums. This places us in the top 3.3% of all museums in the country. Share your history with us; learn about our history. Visit the McLean County Museum of History often.

Financial Snapshot

Fiscal Year ended March 31, 2023

Operating Revenue

\$ 427,597 Private Gifts, Contributions, & Bequests
\$ 410,661 Grants/Public Support
\$ 296,690 Investment Revenue**
\$ 23,576 Net Profit on Gift Shop Sales
\$ 59,308 Other Income
\$ 1,217,832 Total Revenue

Expenses

\$ 1,277,151 Programs
\$ 205,888 General & Administrative
\$ 190,001 Fundraising
\$ 1,673,040 Total Expenses

**Much of the fluctuation in operating revenue from year to year is driven by investment revenue, which includes changes in the market value of our endowment assets. The last fifteen months have been one of the most difficult investment environments since the Global Financial Crisis.

Moving forward, private support, including estate gifts, will continue to be critical to the Museum's financial stability.

Board of Directors

Officers

Carolyn Perry Yockey - *President*
Michelle Pazar - *1st Vice President*
Robert Porter - *Secretary*
John J. Killian - *Treasurer*
Tom Eder - *Immediate Past President*

County Board Rep. - Catherine Metsker

Directors

Craig Alexander*
Keith Cornille
Zach Dietmeier
Larry Dietz
Bob Dobski
Russel Francois
Vasudha Gadhiraaju
Arlene Hosea
Mike Matejka*
R.C. McBride
Marcos Mendez

Pam Muirhead
Georgia Nugent
Shelli Opsal
Allison Petty
Karen Schmidt
Ann Sullivan
Aonover Tarhule
Carl Teichman
Paul B. Van Ness
Robert Watkins*
Bill Wetzel, Jr.

**denotes past president*

Museum Staff



Jamie Arthur | Visitors Center Manager

Manages the Cruisin' with Lincoln on 66 Visitors Center & Gift Shop. After volunteering at the Museum reception desk for many years, Jamie became the Visitors Center Assistant in 2019, and accepted the position of Visitors Center Manager in 2022. She brings several years of customer service and retail sales leadership experience to the Visitors Center Manager position. Jamie is also a proud Illinois State University alum.



Morgan Bueza | Collections Technician

Processes incoming donations to the Museum's object collection, maintains the collection database, and works with the Curator of Collections on research and related department projects. Morgan has a B.A. from Illinois State University in History and Spanish. She completed a year-long internship in historic preservation research at the Museum prior to joining the staff.



Jackie Cain | Curator of Collections

Manages the donation, processing, and preservation/conservation of the Museum's collection of 18,000+ objects; along with managing the development and implementation of the Museum's Online Collections Database. She has a Master's from IUPUI in Museum Studies, and 5+ years of collections care experience.



Kathi Davis | Visitors Center Assistant

Assists in managing the operations of the Cruisin' with Lincoln on 66 Visitors Center & Gift Shop. Kathi was a flight attendant with Delta Airlines for nearly 35 years, based for most of that time in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. When she retired, she bucked the usual trend and moved north to be closer to family. She was the manager of BroMenn Thrift Shop for three years and Program and Grants Director at Illinois Prairie Community Foundation for eight years.



Julie Emig | Executive Director

Manages and directs Museum operations. She has worked for the last 28 years as a teacher, leader, and staff developer for schools and public institutions across the country. Julie has a doctorate in literacy education and was associate director for a 20 million grant funded by the Institute of Education Sciences based at the University of Illinois in Chicago. She is in her fourth year of leadership at the Museum.



Eric Hansen | Director of Volunteers

Recruits, trains, and supports volunteers in their many roles within the Museum. He has a background in volunteer management and received his bachelor's degree in Political Science from Illinois State University. Eric is a proud Central-Illinois native, having grown up right across the McLean County/Tazewell County border in Minier.

Museum Staff



Micaela Harris | Director of Communications

Creates various visual and written communications, as well as digital and print marketing materials. Micaela collaborates with staff members throughout the Museum to share our story with the community. She grew up in the area and returned after graduating with her B.A. in Journalism & Mass Communication from Drake University in May 2020.



Susan Hartzold | Curator of Exhibits

Develops, designs, and builds the Museum's award-winning exhibits and helps edit the Museum's Tri-Annual Magazine. Hartzold celebrated 32 years with the Museum in September, and is the creative force behind over 50 of the Museum's exhibits.



Bill Kemp | Librarian

Heads the Museum's Library & Archives, and has done so for the last 20 years. He has graduate degrees from the University of Illinois Springfield and Illinois State University. Kemp is known for his in-depth knowledge of McLean County history and informative presentations to the community.



Brandy Maloney | Development Assistant

Supports the Director of Development with membership, sponsorship, fundraising, and special events. Maloney has a graduate degree in History from ISU and over thirteen years of experience in development. She joined the Museum in 2017 and has been in her current position since 2019.



Emily McCusker | Director of Youth & Family Education

Oversees programs like the Futures in History Day Camp that engage children and families in history, both locally and globally. She has worked with multiple museums in the Chicagoland area. Emily graduated from Lake Forest College in May of 2022 and began working for the McLean County Museum of History in July of 2022.



Maria Mears | Director of Adult Education & Interns

Works with audiences made up of young adults through seniors in engaging history programming. Maria has a PhD in American Studies and brings extensive knowledge in historical research and interpretation. She also has experience working in museums and taught Interdisciplinary Studies at the college level for over 4 years.

Museum Staff



Torii Moré | Curator of Digital Humanities

Advances the Museum's digital footprint most notably by incorporating technology in our exhibits and managing the web presence. Torii started as an intern in 2010 and worked in multiple departments before becoming the Museum's first Curator of Digital Humanities.



George Perkins | Archivist

Oversees the Museum's archival collection. Before he joined the staff in 2005, George was a Museum volunteer—in one capacity or another—for three decades. The recipient of the Illinois State Genealogical Society's Volkel Medal of Honor in 2021, George was recognized for his significant contributions to the field. He has a B.S. degree from Illinois State University.



Norris Porter | Director of Development

Manages membership, fundraising, sponsorships, and grant work for the Museum. He has over 35 years of experience, 16 in development & fundraising in the higher education and nonprofit sectors. Norris is in his fourth year at the Museum after retiring from a 30-year career in higher education.



Candace Summers | Senior Director of Education

Helps to educate over 20,000 people in Central Illinois through educational programs like the Evergreen Cemetery Walk and Senior Reminiscence program. Summers has over twenty years of experience working in the field of history and museum education. She has worked at the McLean County Museum of History for over 18 years.



Jeff Woodard | Director of Marketing & Community Relations

Represents a public presence for the Museum, develops marketing goals and objectives with an emphasis on promotion of educational programs, permanent and rotating exhibits, and community outreach initiatives including providing marketing support for the Visitors Center. Jeff has been on staff for over 18 years, and was a volunteer for many years prior to that.



Greg Koos | Executive Director Emeritus

Retired in 2016 after a 39-year career at the Museum. He oversaw three major historic site development projects and led the transition and move into the Museum's current home. Koos continues to help the Museum in retirement. Most recently he has authored a new book on 19th Century History of McLean County.

Collections Department Report

Encompassing 18,000+ objects, our collection is significant in its documentation of all facets of life during the growth and development of McLean County, Illinois.

Over the last year the Museum accepted 46 object donations resulting in an astounding 97 objects being added to the collection. The additions came in a variety of object types including costumes from the American Passion Play and a wooden sewer line pipe from the City of Bloomington. Our objects range in date from as far back as the 1860s and are as modern as 2023.

Collections work this year focused on launching the Museum's Online Object Database which allows visitors to access information related to the permanent object collection, including photos, descriptions, historical context and biographical information. Moving forward, we aim to add 1,000 more objects each year.

Along with launching our Museum Online Database, Collections has been working to complete several inventories of our object storage spaces. The goal of the collection's inventory is to check and update all locations of objects while also reviewing object condition, storage needs, and selecting potential objects for the Museum Online Database. During this process we have begun updating our object tracking system to utilize barcoded labels, allowing us to better preserve and manage our wonderful Collection.



Scan the QR code above, visit mchistory.pastperfectonline.com, or stop by the Merwin Gallery on the Museum's third floor to explore the database and our collection.

Development Department Report

Membership increased 6.3% with a total of 714 active members as of the end of the fiscal year. Our goal is to increase membership to 800 by 2026.

The Historic Marker initiative began in earnest with six projects completed including the revitalization of the WWII Memorial on the Museum Square, installation of new Korea & Vietnam markers on the Museum Square, refurbishment of the Kickapoo Stockade marker east of LeRoy, relocation of the Kickapoo Memorial Boulder to West Park, and installation of a new Looking for Lincoln Jesse Fell marker in Normal due to vandalism. Total dollars raised through our Historic Marker Matching gift initiative was just over \$74,000.

A \$30,000 gift was received from Midwest-Region LIUNA! as the "Presented By" sponsor for our upcoming Asbestos exhibit that is scheduled to open in the fall of 2024. An additional \$50,000 gift was received to support the reopening of the Merwin Gallery. Funding from the Illinois Digital History Imaging Grant concluded with a review of the Pantagraph Negatives Collection revealing that over 3 million negatives remain to be digitized at a projected cost of over \$8 million. Appeals at the State and Federal level totaling over \$800,000 are pending, with \$550,000 included in a spending bill by the U.S. Senate Appropriation Committee for the Pantagraph Negatives Collection. To date we are still waiting for the bill to be approved.

Goals moving forward include:

- growing our endowment through planned gifts, an initial appeal is planned for FY 24
- a change in basic membership rates & enhanced member benefits for all levels of support
- reinvigorating discount partnerships with local business and growing our annual grant dollars.



Refurbished WWII Memorial on the eastside of the Museum Square

Digital Humanities Department Report

Many changes to our mchistory.org website were made this year, including re-designs of some of our most popular pages: Cemetery Walk, Research, Visit, Membership, and more. We continue to add resources to the site, including over 100 Pages from our Past articles by Bill Kemp, and over 600 archival finding aids. We also transitioned Content Management Systems, which was a major undertaking that added new features and increased stability to our website.

In FY 23 we streamed and recorded 15 different programs. We are proud to provide greater access for anyone who couldn't attend the in-person event, and are grateful for support from our new live stream sponsor, WGLT – apart of the NPR network, Bloomington-Normal's public media.

The technology in our permanent exhibits always requires maintenance, and this year we were glad to transition many of our custom iPad applications to a new updating regimen that will be more reliable for the future. Our digital interactives continue to great use by visitors, the Employ your Avatar touch screen in the Working for a Living exhibit has been used 8,000 times.

One of the department's most notable accomplishments was launching the Social Justice Walking Tour website at blono-social-justice-tour.org. After receiving a grant from Business Builders, staff and Museum Board Member Mike Matejka worked hard to make this content more accessible to all.

Exhibits Department Report

The Curator of Exhibits helped coordinate with the county to ensure the repair, repainting, and installation of new carpet in the exhibit spaces damaged due a roof leak in 2020. Installation of much needed new carpet in second floor offices and the library also occurred. Unfortunately, we were unable to complete this work in the library stacks, the classroom, and one of the education offices, due to the discovery of asbestos tiles beneath the existing carpet.

The reconfiguration of the Merwin Gallery as a non-static display space to showcase nearly 300 artifacts from the Museum's object collection was completed in 2023. This included preparing narrative labels for each of the objects to be displayed. Concurrently, the Curator of Exhibits worked on planning for two new temporary exhibits: Asbestos (set to open in September 2024) and Baseball & Softball (set to open in the Spring of 2026).



Education Department Report

The Education Department provided numerous educational opportunities to community members of all ages in this past fiscal year, including our annual Futures in History Camp and 29th annual Evergreen Cemetery Walk, and new programming series such as Crafting History and Seeds of History.

Our Futures in History Camp, teaches students about career paths in the humanities. This year, we focused on Archaeology, Architecture, Civics, Preservation, and Museum Studies. We also again offered the annual Evergreen Cemetery Walk in-person and virtually, to expand the reach of this award winning program.

Crafting History is a series of accessible, interactive programming that allows adult learners a hands-on history experience, led by the Museum's Director of Adult Education, Dr. Maria Mears, and a local expert, taking crafts from the past and recreating them for use today.

All the crafts we focus on have some historical context and an element of sustainability. Thus far we've made rag rugs, woven coasters, pinch pots, and embroidered ornaments. We hope to combat hyperconsumerism with a historical understanding of crafts that take great skill and artistry but were often relegated to "women's home-keeping tasks". We offer new Crafting History programming every other month, in person and online via the Museum's YouTube channel, on the third Tuesday of the month.

Seeds of History is an ongoing series of interdisciplinary initiatives working to educate the community about the history of ecology and the land of McLean County. From our native plants on the Museum Square to our garden plot at the Westside Community Garden, we are working to bring history and environmentalism together to rediscover old lessons on sustainability.

Looking to the future, the Museum received a grant from Illinois Humanities to fund our Spanish language audio tour of the Making a Home Gallery. The Education Department is collaborating with other Museum staff and a committee of community members to bring the tour to life in November 2024.



2023 Cemetery Walk Cast

Library & Archives Department Report

The Museum's ambitious project to digitize its Pantagraph Negatives and Photographic Print collections continues apace. Archivist George Perkins and grant-supported Assistant Archivists Rochelle Gridley and Jana Kiefer have uploaded tens of thousands of Pantagraph Print Collection images onto the Illinois Digital Archives (IDA) website. From there, the public can view, search, print, and download Museum images at no cost.

The Museum and Bloomington Public Library completed the city directory digitization project. This project entailed scanning Bloomington and Bloomington-Normal directories from 1855 to 1902—24 volumes in all—and uploading them onto Internet Archives. Visitors to this free online library can then view, search, and even download specific years of this local history resource.

The Museum and Illinois Wesleyan University worked together to coordinate the transfer of three collections from IWU's Tate Archives to the Museum Archives. The three collections—the organizational papers and records of Parklands Foundation, the Ecology Action Center, and the John Wesley Powell chapter of the Audubon Society—are an important addition to the Museum's collections relating to local environmental history.

Librarian Bill Kemp and volunteer Carol Straka undertook a sweeping reorganization of the Archive's vertical files. By doing so, the Museum began migrating from 3" x 5" catalog cards to a keyword searchable spreadsheet available on the Museum's website.

In addition to the catalog conversion, this project included merging folders; combining folders into standalone collections; and weeding duplicative items and folders. Apart from the ongoing photo digitization projects, this vertical file conversation and cleanup project represents one of the most significant undertakings by Library/Archives staff during the past half-decade or more.



Illinois Secretary of State, Alexi Giannoulias and U.S. Senator Dick Durbin both visited the Museum this year to learn about our digital preservation efforts and funding challenges.



Marketing Department Report

This year's most significant update to the Marketing Department was adding Director of Communications Micaela Harris.

Since then, we have made significant progress in branding and have taken a more strategic look at how we engage with the media, diversifying how, when, and where we focus our marketing efforts across various platforms. We have consistently had radio, TV, print, and social media coverage for every major event or story at the Museum in the last year. Collaboratively working with other staff we've coordinated events and created new branding packages for ongoing programming.

Our community partnerships remain integral to everything we do at the Museum. We have emphasized nurturing our existing relationships and expanding our outreach to form additional connections across the county and state.

Working with the Illinois Scenic Byways, we now have a permanent presence for the Museum and Visitors Center in Springfield, with the Illinois State Fairgrounds Route 66 Gate 2 Experience – an educational exhibit that is open to the public 365 days a year, providing an attraction for travelers and local visitors alike.

We also continue to be mindful of destination marketing, partnering with tour operators to increase our regional exposure and advancing the idea of the Museum Square being the cultural center of the vibrant downtown arts scene. This has included forming a partnership with the BN Artists group and participating in Slow Art Day and several First Friday events.

In addition to BN Artists and Route 66 Scenic Byways, some of our most robust partnerships are with WGLT, The Pantagraph, Cumulus Media, ISU, NAACP, League of Women Voters of McLean County, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Latinos En Blono, Illinois Association of Museums, Young Men's Club, various Rotary Clubs, Not In Our Town, and Illinois Art Station.

Looking to the future, we will add new print materials and signage around the Museum, including a new welcome video for the Visitors Center. We will also continue to collaborate with other staff to create impactful, educational, and visually interesting Rotunda Installations which have garnered great attention from the public and the media alike.

Photo Captions

Left: Route 66 Gate 2 Experience

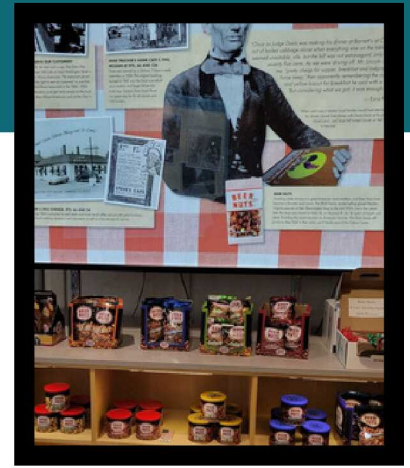
Right: Museum staff pose for a photo following the "Sembrando Raíces: Oral Histories of Latinos in Central Illinois" conference hosted in partnership with ISU. Pictured left to right is Jeff Woodard, Dr. Maura Toro-Morn, Dr. Ricia Chansky, Micaela Harris, Dr. Maria Mears.



Visitors Center Report

The Cruisin' with Lincoln on 66 Visitors Center & Gift Shop interacted with **20,794 visitors**, earned proceeds of **\$8,130** in admissions fees, and grossed **\$38,752** in gift shop sales during this fiscal year.

Members receive a 10% discount in the Gift Shop everyday and 20% during Member Appreciation Month in November.



Volunteer Department Report

The Volunteer Department saw quite the transition this year. We are thankful for Mary Anne Schierman's return as Interim Director of Volunteers and her instrumental aid in preparing the department for and training of our new Director of Volunteers Eric Hansen. We are also very thankful for the twenty-years of service Betty Turchirollo gave to the Museum as Assistant Volunteer Coordinator prior to her retirement in April.

In the last decade, we've seen significant shifts away from volunteerism that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. We are keenly aware that volunteers are critical to all that we do here at the Museum and with such a period of transition as we have seen over the past fiscal year, our focus as a department has been on maintenance. Maintaining the number of volunteers we have and trying to recruit when and where possible. As we move forward, growing our volunteer base will prove to be a challenge – a challenge we look forward to facing. In the meantime, we will continue to appreciate and nurture our current volunteers who make what we do at the Museum possible.



Eric Hansen



Volunteer Denise Fries-Romack leads a tour group at the 2022 Evergreen Cemetery Walk



McLean County
MUSEUM of HISTORY

In this past fiscal year, we have accomplished many goals aligned with our strategic plan and mission. Namely, we significantly **expanded digital access** via the **Annual Evergreen Cemetery Walk**, the **Social Justice Walking Tour**, a **newly launched object collections database**, **digitization of archival files**, and a **revamped website** that includes readily accessible links to our exhibits and content, such as past stories from our *"Pieces from Our Past"* Pantagraph column. This is in addition to implementing a **fully funded historic marker project** throughout McLean County, and **adding two interdepartmental programming series**, *Crafting History* and *Seeds of History*, with many participants in attendance both in person and online. With continued community support **in the next fiscal year we look forward to advancing our mission, meeting our strategic goals, and serving our community.**





McLean County
MUSEUM *of* **HISTORY**

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