

ON THE SQUARE



The Magazine of the McLean County Museum of History

Volume 58 | Issue 2 | May - August 2026



Cover Photo

An unidentified worker installs “automatic stop and go lights” at “the intersection of Routes 66 and 9 on the belt line east of Bloomington.” *The Pantagraph* reported on the installation as a part of a \$16 million road improvement program in Illinois.

This photo from the Museum’s Pantagraph Negatives Collection and thousands more like it are available to anyone, anywhere, at anytime via the Illinois Digital Archives at bit.ly/McIDA.

Museum Staff

Bailey Babbitt	<i>Collections Technician</i>
Jackie Cain	<i>Curator of Collections</i>
Kathi Davis	<i>Visitors Experience Assistant</i>
Julie Emig	<i>Executive Director</i>
Rochelle Gridley	<i>Assistant Archivist</i>
Eric Hansen	<i>Director of Volunteers</i>
Micaela Harris	<i>Director of Communications</i>
Bill Kemp	<i>Librarian</i>
Jana Kiefer	<i>Assistant Archivist</i>
Brandy Maloney	<i>Development Assistant</i>
Emily McCusker	<i>Director of Youth & Family Education</i>
Maria Mears	<i>Curator of Historical Interpretation</i>
Torii Moré	<i>Curator of Digital Humanities</i>
Lisa Novak	<i>Director of Visitor Experience</i>
Norris Porter	<i>Assistant Executive Director & Development Director</i>
Candace Summers	<i>Senior Director of Education</i>
Katie Sutrina-Haney	<i>Archivist</i>
Jeff Woodard	<i>Director of Marketing & Community Relations</i>

Museum Board

Craig Alexander	Elizabeth Johnston	Robert Porter – <i>Secretary</i>
Keith Cornille	John J. Killian	Karen Schmidt – <i>Treasurer</i>
Zach Dietmeier	Mike Matejka – <i>2nd Vice President</i>	Ann Sullivan
Bob Dobski	R.C. McBride	Aondover Tarhule
Tom Eder	Pamela Muirhead	Carl Teichman
Russel Francois	Mike O’Grady	Paul B. Van Ness
Duncan Funk	Shelli Opsal	Carolyn P. Yockey – <i>Past President</i>
Vasudha P. Gadhiraaju	Michelle Pazar – <i>President</i>	Sheahon Zenger
Arlene Hosea	José Manuel Peréz	
	Allison Petty – <i>1st Vice President</i>	

In This Issue

Sponsors & New Members
page 4

Notes from Norris
page 5

Upcoming Events
pages 6 – 7

100 Years of Route 66
pages 8 – 9

Celebrating Jeff
page 10

History Makers
pages 11 – 15

New to Collections
pages 16 – 18

Announcements
page 19

Mystery History Quiz
back cover

From the Desk of Executive Director Emig

Over thirty community members chose to convene at the YMCA on April 11 to discuss what it means to pursue happiness. This marked the third event of our Democracy Dialogues series as part of our America 250 commemoration. Erik Rankin, a professor of politics and government at Illinois State University and Illinois Prairie Community Foundation's President & CEO, provided historical context about the remarkable phrase in the Declaration of Independence. He cited political scientist Robert Putnam: "To revitalize our democracy we shall need to begin by rebuilding social capital in our communities, by renewing our civic connections." Pursuing happiness in this context, Professor Rankin reminded us, is not about producing greater material wealth. Rather, it is about collective participation—coming together to be better versions of ourselves for the greater good.

County history museums are many things, but above all, we strive to be a source of civic and cultural education, bringing people and ideas together in the following ways:

- ♦ We preserve thousands of documents and objects of McLean County history so people will be able to remember the past.
- ♦ We co-curate, with our community, outstanding exhibits, displays, and programs.
- ♦ We inspire dozens of interns each semester, many of whom repeat their internships and advance into fields of public history, library sciences, research, teaching, legal services, social services, and museum studies.
- ♦ We engage young learners and their teachers in doing history, sharing how to interpret primary sources, acting as detectives by exploring how events happen and why.
- ♦ We go offsite to bring our programming to senior centers, schools, non-profits, and corporations.
- ♦ We are a gathering place for the community, providing a space for cultural celebrations, commemorative programs, and free speech.

The power and impact of our work has been recognized through accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums, multiple national and state awards, and the daily feedback we receive from local, national, and international visitors. We have procured thousands of grant dollars for our projects, most notably for the preservation of and free access to prints from the Pantagraph Negatives. Yet, our operating revenue has remained flat while expenses have skyrocketed. Just in the last three years, personnel costs have risen 38%. Technology costs have risen by over 50%.

We are a private 501(c)3 nonprofit organization; contrary to popular belief, we are not McLean County employees and actually rent the Old Courthouse from the County. Over 70% of our funding is from individual and business sponsors, and we are tremendously grateful for their support. Still, it is becoming increasingly challenging for us to provide a high quality of service to the community that we love.

Robert Putnam is right. The pursuit of happiness is dependent on the connections we have with one another, on the opportunity to show up and participate in making a better place for the future. History tells us how. And no one can do it alone. We are your museum – your history.

SPONSORS

We are grateful for our 2026 Presenting Sponsors, whose support empowers us to continue preserving, educating, and collaborating in sharing the diverse stories of the people of McLean County. Contact Norris Porter if you, or your organization, wants to partner with the Museum.

Ace World Wide Moving
Livingston Santas' Reindeer

Anonymous
Speakers Bureau, Fieldtrips, Onsite Tours

Avanti's
Volunteers

**BEER NUTS Branded Snacks
& the Shirk Family**
*More Than a Game: A Community
History of Baseball & Softball*

Cumulus Radio Bloomington
Christmas Under the Dome

Illinois Farm Bureau
Museum at the Farmer's Market

Jeffrey Alans & the Wandell Family
Livingston Santas

MCK CPAs & Advisors
College Intern Program

R. Gingerich Crane
Santa's Installation

The Pantagraph
Third Floor Photo Displays

*Special thanks to Bloomington Township
and Normal Township for supporting our
Senior Reminiscence Program!*

NEW MEMBERS

as of April 14, 2026

Greg Beneze
Kathleen Bowen
David and Lori Cawood
Richalyn Dixon
Catherine & William Flaherty
Jennifer Gentes
Seth Jacob
Kathy Parrish
Elizabeth Parrish
Tripper Phipps
Nadine Sneidar
Nancy Steele Brokaw
Don and Phyllis Stein

Museum membership is an act of philanthropy that supports local history, preservation, and education for the entire community. Membership also offers direct benefits to you and your family with free admission to the Museum, Library & Archives, plus discounts in the Visitors Center & Gift Shop, special member pricing for events, this magazine, and a Time Travelers reciprocal membership that grants you free and discounted admission to hundreds of sites across the country.



Undated Hearts Softball Game at O'Neil Park

Notes from Norris

Membership Updates

Thank you for being a member of the Museum. Membership is our lifeblood, sustaining the programs, exhibits, and community impact that bring our shared history to life.

For many years, the Museum has offered Free Admission Tuesdays and free admission for youth and students so that cost is never a barrier to exploring local history. However, providing free access comes with real costs—from staffing and building operations to exhibit maintenance and educational programming. As operating costs continue to rise, sustaining these programs presents an increasing challenge.

We are grateful to all of our members who choose to invest in local history. In FY 2026, membership increased by 2%. Since 2021, membership has grown by 32%, and membership revenue surpassed \$200,000 for the first time in FY 2026 (\$217,210) — an increase of 30% over FY 2025. As we move through FY 2027, you can help sustain the Museum's impact in our community by inviting your friends to join you as members.

2026 History Makers Gala

Join us on the evening of Wednesday, June 17, 2026 for our annual History Makers Gala. This year's honorees are Melinda Fischer, John McIntyre, Feli Sebastian, and Camille & Art Taylor. Tickets and table sponsorships will be available through June 1. See page 11 for more details.

Legacy

What will your LEGACY be? Planned giving is an ideal way to support the Museum and cement your legacy, creating a lasting impact. Please visit mchistory.org/legacy for more information.

More Than a Game

The Museum will open its next temporary exhibit on July 18. *More Than a Game: A Community History of Baseball & Softball* will provide an opportunity for visitors to embark on a journey through time, exploring 150 years of history through the lens of sport. Thank you to everyone that has made a contribution to support this five-year exhibit! To date we have received contributions and pledges totaling \$160,530.41. If you haven't yet contributed and would like to, please contact Norris Porter or make a gift online at bit.ly/sponsor-mtag.



Adrian Alvarez (7) teaches his brother Daniel (4) how to play during a 1988 game at Miller Park.

Upcoming Events

May

Illinois Symphony Orchestra Fabulous “Finnish”

Saturday, May 2 at 7:30 p.m. at ISU’s Center for the Performing Arts

Red Carpet Corridor

Saturday, May 2, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. & Sunday, May 3, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

History Reads Book Club: *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair

Tuesday, May 5 at 7 p.m. at Bloomington Public Library

Knit In at Bloomington Public Library

Saturday, May 9 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

NCHS Experimental Ensemble presented by pt.fwd

Saturday, May 9 at 6:30 p.m.

Celebrating Jeff’s Career in the Courtroom

Friday, May 15 from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Artists, Advocates, Acrobats & More: Women Who Made McLean County History with Candace Summers

Tuesday, May 19 at 6 p.m. at Heartland Community College (\$25 fee)

Downtown Bloomington Architecture Tour with Candace Summers

Thursday, May 21 at 5:30 p.m. (*Sold out*)

Museum Closed for Memorial Day

Monday, May 25

Heartland Theater 10–Minute Play Festival: Route 66

May 28,29,30,31 & June 4,5,6,7, 11, 12, 13 | Panel Discussion June 7 at 2 p.m.

June

The Cruisin’ Through the Century: County–Wide Decades Party

Saturday, June 6 & Sunday, June 7

History Makers Gala

Wednesday, June 17, doors open at 5:30 p.m. *Tickets available online.*

Free Admission in Honor of Juneteenth

Friday, June 19

***A More Perfect Union* Opening at the McLean County Arts Center**

Friday, June 19 from 5 to 7 p.m.

Social Justice Walking Tour

Thursday, June 25, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. *Tickets available online.*

Lincoln and the Declaration of Independence with Guy Fraker

Tuesday, June 30 at 2 p.m. at Normal ARC (Activity & Recreation Center)

July

Looking for Lincoln – Lincoln & Douglas Marker Dedication
Friday, July 3 at 2 p.m. on the North-side of the Museum Square

Museum Closed for Independence Day
Friday, July 4

First Friday: Get Your Route 66 Kicks in Downtown Bloomington
Friday, July 10 from 5 to 8 p.m.

Lincoln in Downtown Bloomington – A Walking Tour with Norris Porter
Thursday, July 16, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. *Tickets available online.*

More Than a Game Exhibit Opening
Saturday, July 18

Pride Fest in Downtown Bloomington
Saturday, July 25 from 4 to 8 p.m.

August

The ISU Quad: Gateway to America 250 and the Wider World
Saturday, August 1, 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. *Tickets available online.*

History Reads Book Club: *The Promise of the Grand Canyon: John Wesley Powell's Perilous Journey and His Vision for the American West*
Tuesday, August 4, 7 p.m. at Bloomington Public Library

Knit In at Normal Public Library
Saturday, August 15 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Get Your Farm Kicks Along Route 66 Bus Trip
Saturday, August 15 from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. *Tickets available online.*

A History of Bicycling in Illinois: 160 Years of Booms & Busts with Author Christopher Sweet
Thursday, August 13 at 6:30 p.m. at Bloomington Public Library

John Wesley Powell: Bloomington–Normal to the Arid Lands with Bill Kemp
Tuesday, August 18 at 6:30 p.m.

Downtown Bloomington Architecture Tour
Thursday, August 20 at 5:30 p.m. *Tickets available online.*

Lincoln in Downtown Bloomington – A Walking Tour with Norris Porter
Saturday, August 29 at 1:30 p.m. *Tickets available online.*

Museum Closed for Labor Day
Monday, September 7

Upcoming Events

Celebrating 100 Years of Route 66

On November 11, 1926, the U.S. Highway System was formed, uniting stretches of road across eight states from Chicago, Illinois, to Santa Monica, California. In its early years, Route 66 facilitated easier travel during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Moving between states was simpler than ever, opening new opportunities to those seeking a better life.

After World War II, Route 66 experienced a golden era of tourism. Between the country's postwar prosperity and rising car ownership, everyone from truckers to travelers found themselves cruising along the infamous motorway. Motels, diners, gas stations, and roadside attractions across the country flourished, opening the door for small towns across the western half of the U.S. to share in the highway's success.

This success was crystallized by the creation of new media — songs, books, and TV shows lauded the "Mother Road" as a true American icon. However, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 funded newer, faster roads through the Interstate Highway System, leaving Route 66 in the dust as travelers chose more direct interstate routes, slowing traffic on America's Main Street. Locally, traffic on Main Street had already shifted. In 1940, Veteran's Parkway was opened and Route 66 was rerouted to the new "beltline." Instead of going through the heart of downtown Bloomington, the route wrapped around town on stretches of road that could accommodate more cars at faster speeds.

Route 66 was officially decommissioned by the federal government in 1985, but the pavement remained. What was once a life-changing innovation faded into the background of an ever-evolving landscape as the wheels of time continued to turn. Small towns and businesses that relied on Route 66 travelers struggled to get by, but the people of these places persevered. Their efforts saved stories from all over Route 66 and shared them with whoever would listen, ushering in a new wave of tourism for the route — one that draws travelers from around the world eager to experience this unique slice of Americana.

So join us this year in celebrating a century of Route 66 and the way its footprint has shaped the place we call home! We've spent countless hours planning, creating, and collaborating to meet this moment with meaning, and are excited to share this slate of activities with you! It all starts the first weekend in May with the Red Carpet Corridor, a festival spanning 15 communities along Route 66 from Joliet to Bloomington. Each community has their own activities planned — more information about ours is listed on the next page.

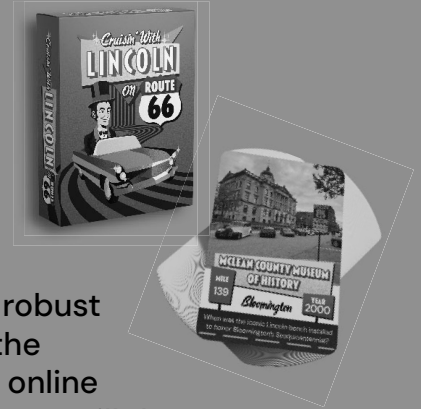


Red Carpet Corridor Festival

Saturday, May 2 — Start your day with the first Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market of the year from 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. We'll have free admission for all from 8:30 a.m. to Noon, just like we do every Saturday from May to October, thanks to our Museum at the Market sponsor, the Illinois Farm Bureau.

On this extra special Saturday, we'll also have local artist Brian Simpson on site drawing portraits, an Abraham Lincoln impersonator milling about, and an opportunity to play our brand new card game with the game's designer from 9 a.m. to Noon!

Our NEW limited-edition card-based game aptly titled "*Cruisin' with Lincoln on 66*" is fun for everyone age seven and up. It takes you through time from 1776 to 2026 and from Chicago to St. Louis. We designed it in collaboration with Museum volunteer and award winning game designer and developer, Ben Rosset, and local graphic designers, including our intern Malia Bermijo. The game is only available for purchase in our Cruisin' with Lincoln on 66 Visitors Center & Gift Shop. Please visit cruisinwithlincolnon66.org for more information.



End your day with the Illinois Symphony Orchestra at 7:30 p.m. at ISU's Center for the Performing Arts. The Fabulous "Finnish" features a robust ensemble of music, including the recently commissioned "Reverie on the Mother Road" by Illinois composer Michelle Isaac. Tickets are available online at ilsymphony.org/bnfabulous or by phone at 309-438-2535. Plus, the ISO will donate 50% of full-price adult ticket sales (sans facility fees) back to the Museum if you use the code MCMH at checkout.

Sunday, May 3 — This is the one time a year that the Museum is open on a Sunday! Stop by between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to visit, pick up Route 66 goodies, and explore all that Illinois Route 66 has to offer. Visit ilroute66redcarpetcorridor.com for more information.

Cruisin' through the Century Decades Party on June 6 & 7

Travel through time on Route 66 in McLean County! You'll experience Chenoa in the 1920s, Lexington in the 1930s, Towanda in the 1940s, Normal in the 1950s, Bloomington in the 1960s, Funks Grove in the 1970s, and McLean in the 1980s. This two day, once-a-century celebration is being coordinated by our friends at VisitBN, the Bloomington-Normal Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, in collaboration with local municipalities and community members.

In Bloomington, we'll be groovin' with a free *Saturdays on the Square* concert featuring Motown Nation, a 60s costume contest judged by our very own Centennial Marshall Jeff Woodard, kids activities, food trucks, and a spectacular light show. More details at visitbn.org/centennial.

More Happening Throughout the Year

- ◇ Heartland Theater 10 Minute Play Festival, May 28 – June 13 (Panel discussion June 7 at 2 p.m.)
- ◇ Route 66 Hallway and Archival Display Cases on the 1st and 2nd Floor
- ◇ Get Your Farm Kicks Along Route 66 Bus Trip on August 15
- ◇ NEW Route 66 Tour through McLean County on Tourient. Scan the QR Code or visit mchistory.tourient.app to get started!



Celebrating Jeff's Legacy



We're hitting several milestones this year: the Declaration of Independence's semiquincentennial, the Route 66 centennial, and the retirement of the one and only Jeff Woodard.

Jeff joined the staff in 2005 as the Museum's Director of Marketing & Community Relations. Prior to becoming a full-timer, Jeff volunteered in our Library & Archives for several years and also wrote for the UAW Local 2488's newsletter, *Union Spirit*, at Mitsubishi Motors.

Jeff's work over the last two decades has brought thousands of visitors to the Museum and our Cruisin' with Lincoln on 66 Visitors Center & Gift Shop, created lasting partnerships, and helped collect and preserve stories that might've otherwise been lost to history. He has been instrumental in marking the Museum's spot on the Route 66 map, promoting the Museum Square, and in continuing to foster the Museum's relationship with the Bloomington-Normal Black History Project. Jeff has given countless dome tours, conducted dozens of oral history interviews, and spread innumerable smiles across town. He is truly one of a kind and will be missed in the office — although he reassures us he'll be around. Retirement just means getting to do more tai chi, gardening, and spending quality time with his family!

Help us celebrate his career and wish him well on Friday, May 15, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the courtroom. We'll be hosting an open-house style reception before heading out to Jazz Upfront for the after-party.

Jeff will also be honored later this summer as Bloomington's Grand Marshall during the Cruisin' Through the Century celebration on June 6 & 7. He was nominated and selected for this role because of the work he's done over the last two decades to make Bloomington a Route 66 destination. You can read more about the June festivities on page 9 of this magazine, or head over to visitbn.org/centennial for more information.

Questions? Email mharris@mchistory.org or call us at 309-827-0428.

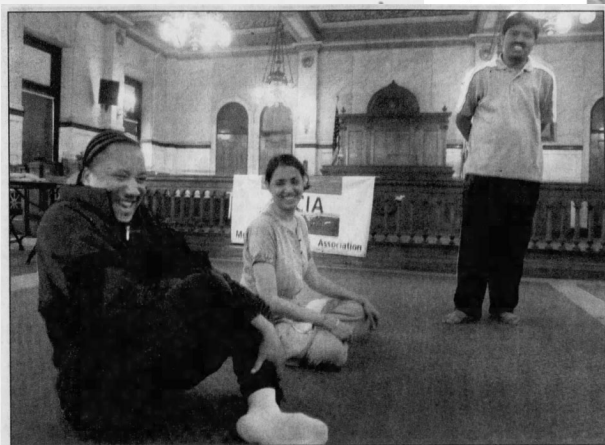
ue to "lend my voice" to the importance of all libraries.

Jeff Woodard
Bloomington

Dome

From AT

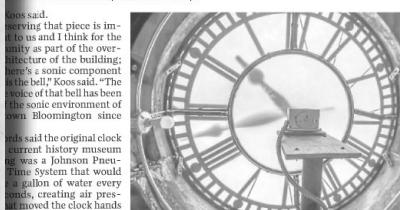
"Maybe 10 or 20 years from now, when they might even have their own kids, people will look from a distance and see this dome and they'll never look at this building the same again," he said.



Jeff Woodard, left, attempts a yoga pose as Sharmi Shah, center, and instructor Anil Domkale look on Saturday as part of a demonstration at the McLean County Museum of History in downtown Bloomington.



Woodard, director of marketing and community relations, walks around a narrow way to get to the interior of the McLean County Museum of History.



A view from inside the dome of the McLean County Museum of History. The clock face is part of the building's historic architecture.



The McLean County Museum of History discovered a young bat above the netting in the upper dome of the building Tuesday morning. It took about 20 minutes for Jeff Woodard, director of marketing, left, and custodian Joel Wall to catch the bat with a net and release it from the roof of the building. This is the first time the museum had discovered a bat in the building since the renovations.

Woodard is director of marketing and community relations, McLean

The 2026 History Makers Gala, including the Annual Meeting of the McLean County Historical Society, will take place Wednesday, June 17th, at the Brown Ballroom in the Bone Student Center on the campus of Illinois State University. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., and the program begins at 6:15 p.m.

Each year, the History Makers Gala recognizes residents whose outstanding contributions of time and talents have helped to make McLean County a better place to live. The honorees were nominated by community members and selected by a volunteer committee.

"The 2026 Class of History Makers highlights five fabulous local leaders," says Director of Development Norris Porter. "We look forward to gathering with our community to celebrate their legacies with an evening of camaraderie, storytelling, and a delicious meal." There's a small taste of the stories we'll share in the following pages, but you'll have to attend the gala to get the full shebang!

The deadline to register for the event is Monday, June 1st. Individual member tickets are \$75 each, and non-member tickets are \$100. Half-table sponsorships are \$750 and include four seats. Full table sponsorships are \$1,500 and include eight seats.

Please visit
bit.ly/hmgala26
to get your tickets!



HISTORY *Makers* GALA 2026



John McIntyre, Camille & Art Taylor, Feli Sebastian, Melinda Fischer.



Melinda Fischer

Melinda Fischer is the all-time winningest coach in ISU and Missouri Valley Conference history. She has mentored countless female athletes, both on and off the field.

Born and raised in Pekin, Illinois, she quickly discovered a passion for athletics. After graduating from Pekin Community High School in 1968, she followed the advice of two teachers: "If you want to go into teaching and be competitive in sports, you have to go to Illinois State. There's no choice about it."

At ISU, Melinda excelled as an athlete, competing in field hockey, basketball, and softball. She was a starter in every sport she played. One of the highlights of her collegiate career came in 1969, when ISU advanced to the first Women's College World Series in softball, which was held in Omaha, Nebraska. The team carpooled in station wagons across Iowa to reach the tournament, where ISU finished as national runner-up.

Melinda vividly remembers the years before Title IX and the inequality in women's athletics. "When we got to ISU, the gratitude was simply being able to put on a uniform – even though in many cases, the uniforms were handmade – and competing as a member of something that represented ISU," she recalled.

In 1972, Melinda graduated from Illinois State University with a degree in physical education and a minor in psychology. She began her career at Eastern Illinois University, but Illinois State continued to beckon. In 1980, Melinda returned to Normal to serve as co-head women's basketball coach with Jill Hutchison and as an assistant softball coach with Margie Wright. From there, her efforts helped grow women's athletics at ISU into what it is today.

Over a 39-year coaching career at Eastern Illinois University and ISU, she recorded 1,159 victories – 1,118 of them with the Redbirds. That ranks her as the 18th-winningest coach in NCAA Division I softball history. Under her leadership, ISU won ten Missouri Valley Conference titles, five MVC Tournament crowns, and competed in numerous regional and national tournaments.

Melinda Fischer's career as a nationally renowned softball coach mirrors the broader trajectory of Title IX and the long pursuit of equity in women's sports.



Coach Fischer in Action



Melinda & Jill Hutchison in 1979

John McIntyre has worn many hats in his lifetime — gas station attendant, drummer, athlete, newspaper salesman, coach, counselor, Illinois Army National Guardsman, educator, insurance agent, principal, and even County Board Chair.

John McIntyre

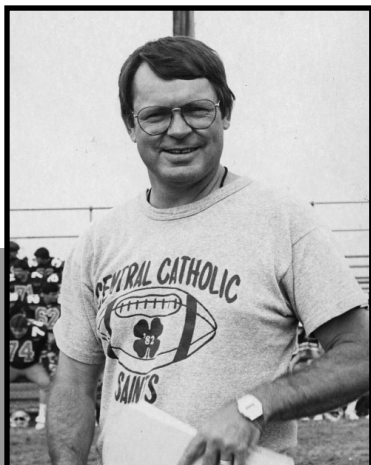
Most people just know him as “Coach Mac,” though.

He was born in Bloomington and raised in Farmer City, Illinois. After graduating from high school in 1961, John studied at Illinois Wesleyan University and continued his education at Illinois State University. His early career was filled with several interesting roles, perhaps most notably as a Twin City Trojans player — Bloomington’s semi-professional football team in the 1970s. During this time, he also refereed high school and college sports.

Public service is the constant thread interwoven throughout John’s life. In 1980, Democrat Dale Dean persuaded Republican John McIntyre to run for the McLean County Board. He served from 1980 to 1988, chairing the Health, Human Services, and Recreation Committees. After retiring, he returned to the board in 2008 and served through 2023, including several terms as chair.

Among John’s proudest accomplishments on the county board were preserving the McLean County Nursing Home and leading the county’s Mental Health Action Plan. He attended the White House Data-Driven Justice Workshops, during which he presented the McLean County Mental Health Action Plan to two Congressional Bureaus. This led to federal grant funding for many mental health and social service projects. John was also among the community leaders who helped bring Rivian Automotive and Brandt Industries to McLean County. McIntyre was praised by both major parties for his ability to lead “in a bipartisan, collaborative spirit.” He encouraged members to put party loyalties “on the bench” and eye the “goal line.”

Beyond the county board, John has served on numerous boards and committees, including McLean County Community Action, Mid-Illini Credit Union, Westminster Village, the Bloomington–Normal Economic Development Council, Behavioral Health Coordinating Council, Bloomington–Normal Convention and Visitors Bureau, McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington–Normal Lake Run Club, and Friends of the Constitution Trail.



'82 County Board in the Courtroom



Throwing the first pitch at Wrigley 13

Feli Sebastian

Feli Sebastian's journey across oceans inspired her contributions as an author, counselor, and advocate for women in our community.

Feli was born and raised in the Philippines. After graduating from high school and university in Manila, Feli earned a bachelor's in history and a master's in guidance and counseling. In 1975, she began teaching at a grade school on Mindanao. She moved to the United States with her sister Tessie in 1981. Feli began teaching at a Montessori school in Toledo, and eventually joined the Franciscan Sisters' convent in Sylvania, Ohio, seeking to explore her Catholic faith and discern whether religious life was her calling.

By 1984, Feli decided to leave the convent, completing a second bachelor of arts degree in religious studies at Lourdes College and enrolling at the University of Toledo to earn a doctorate in guidance and counseling, ensuring that her Philippine credentials were recognized in the U.S. Feli completed her dissertation in 1989. After graduation, she was offered two jobs, one in Boston and one in Bloomington. Lucky for us, she chose Illinois and began working in counseling services at BroMenn Hospital (now Carle BroMenn). After several years at the hospital, Feli opened a private counseling practice in 1997, where she helped countless individuals navigate life's challenges.

In 2011, Feli's vision for a recovery-transition house became Labyrinth House — a supportive space and community for formerly incarcerated women. Building on this work, Feli and Mary Campbell created Dreams Are Possible, a program that helps equip women with the skills and confidence they need to secure higher-paying employment.

In 2020, she published her first book, *Broken and Beloved: A Memoir of Grit, Perseverance, and an Unstoppable Faith*. The following year, she co-created the ExtraOrdinary Women Project BN, which honors unsung local women each quarter and is now developing an activity book to share their stories with youth.

In addition to the organizations she's founded, Feli has served on the boards of For a Better Tomorrow, YWCA McLean County, the Immanuel Bible Foundation, the John M. Scott Health Care Commission, and Recycling Furniture for Families.



Mary & Feli at Labyrinth House



Frances, Feli, & Jerome volunteering

Camille & Art Taylor



Camille and Art Taylor first met at St. Anselm's Catholic School in Chicago. The pair would eventually become a powerful force for good in our community, but life would first take them on their own journeys.

Always ready to lend her voice, Camille Taylor is a long-standing human rights activist, educator, and advocate for justice. She grew up surrounded by family in Chicago and Gary, Indiana. Camille graduated from ISU in 1978 with a degree in special education, after which she joined the Unit 5 School District in Normal, where she would remain for 34 years. For the majority of her career, Camille was a special education teacher, CARES specialist, and positive life-skills teacher. She also spent 12 years as a counselor, becoming a steady and compassionate presence for generations of students.

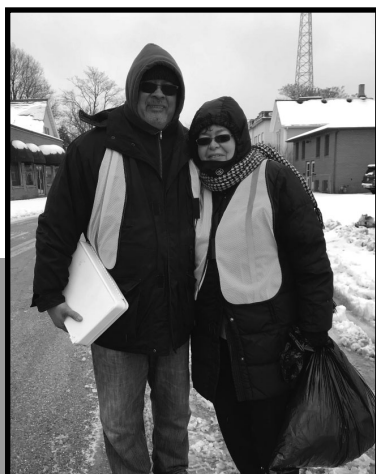


Art Taylor is a college basketball scholar who never played a game, a student activist once arrested and released, and a steady voice for fairness and thoughtful listening. Art grew up in Chicago, but moved to Jackson, Tennessee in 1970. He attended Lambuth College, where he served as student body president and as a leader of the Black Student Union. Art graduated with his degree in political science in 1976. He then began a two-decade career in retail sales, which eventually led him to Bloomington and back to Camille. They married in 1994, and Art continued his retail career until he joined State Farm in 1999 as a Claims Representative. He worked there for 18 years before retiring. As a Senior Business Analyst, State Farm drew on Art's insight and leadership to help develop its internal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training.

When Camille joined the staff at Normal Community High School in 2000, she was the only Black counselor in the district. She developed district-wide diversity awareness programs for staff and student, in addition to also sponsoring numerous student organizations. Camille and Art's civic engagement extends far beyond their workplaces.

When the City of Bloomington established its Public Safety and

Community Review Board to oversee police activity, Art was appointed its first chair. Camille has chaired many organizations and is currently the co-chair of the Documentation Project, which tracks and reports federal budget cuts' local impact. Together, they are elders at First Christian Church, serve Not in Our Town/Not in Our School, and were named IPCF's 2020 Philanthropists of the Year.



NEW TO COLLECTIONS

ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

- ◇ Collection of papers from the Julia Scott Vrooman estate related to the McLean County Coal Co., including receipts for workplace injuries compensation, 1888–1918. *Donated by David Wilson.*
- ◇ “Grounds Improvement Plans & Details,” McLean County Courthouse Square by J.J. Waltmann, consulting engineer, 1951. *Donated by Tyler Pessler.*
- ◇ Typed manuscript, 10 pages, Arnold O. Beckman (Class of 1918 University High School) remarks, University of Illinois commencement 1987. *Donated by Duncan Funk.*
- ◇ Postcard, reward for recovery of stolen auto; sentence of thief, sent by the Illinois Automobile Insurance Exchange, Bloomington, 1921. *Donated by David Doss.*
- ◇ Additions to the existing Larry Carius Collection, including Illinois Department of Public Health, Food Inspection Officer certificates, 1980s to 1991. *Donated by Kay Carius.*
- ◇ Janet Hayslip Dance Studio programs, 1966, 1968, 1975; and more. *Donated by Jan Outlaw.*
- ◇ Items formerly part of a McLean County Sesquicentennial (1980) framed collage, including a program on the history of McLean County’s fourth courthouse. *Donated by Ed and Susie Newby on behalf of Dan Newby.*
- ◇ DVD containing scenes from District 87’s Stevenson School in 1989; ParkLands Foundation Nature Trail Guides, 1987 and 1999; and much more. *Donated by Jack Muirhead.*
- ◇ Two sets of plans for Chiddix Junior High School, 1959–60; full-color architectural rendering, Stevenson Hall, Illinois State University, circa 1966. *Donated by Middleton Associates of Normal, care of Randall Middleton.*
- ◇ Various collections relating to Danvers Township, including 1980s issues of the Danvers *Community News*; financial and farm papers of Levi Johnston (1855–1923); several one-room school record books; additions to the existing Dement School Collection, and more! *Donated by the Danvers Historical Society, care of Sharon Wolfe.*
- ◇ Full-length vinyl record, Union Avenue’s “Moonlight Madness,” recorded at Boonville Studios, Danvers, 2025. *Donated by Christopher Myers (member of local rockabilly band).*
- ◇ Letters to Helen Littleton in Normal, from Sarah Brown, 1917 and 1918, sent from China (Brown’s father was a Chinese university president); and more. *Donated by Charleen Burns, care of Dan Clark.*
- ◇ Collection of correspondence, mostly 1892 to 1899, to William W. Arrowsmith; typed manuscript, “A Short Sketch of the Arrowsmith Family.” *Donated by Rodney Scott.*
- ◇ Various items relating to the 2nd annual LeRoy Historical Day, 1982; two-map set of the Village of McLean, 1972; reprint, full page from January 3, 1915, Chicago Tribune, “Talented Men and Women Who Helped Put the Bloom in Bloomington,” and more. *Donated by Nancy Saul.*
- ◇ Scrapbook, compiled by Mabel Ropp (1906–1998), donor’s mother, regarding Eugene Field School in Normal, and related activities of the Parent–Teacher Association and Illinois Congress of Parents and Teachers. *Donated by Ray Ropp.*
- ◇ Autograph album, Della “Dell” Bowen, entries mostly late 1880s, many from Chenoa. *Donated by Mary Ann Nye.*
- ◇ Flyers and other materials from the local chapter of the ACLU, 2025–26; and three Veronika Strotzka poetry cards. *Donated by Carol and Greg Koos.*
- ◇ Philomathean Reading Circle scrapbook, including member booklets, 1893–1970. *Donated by John Woods and the estate of Evelyn Woods.*
- ◇ George Champion (1840–1928) biographical sketch; items relating to Evergreen Memorial Cemetery and the Cemetery Walk. *Donated by Amy Miller.*
- ◇ Additions to the exiting Whelan Irish Correspondence Collection; small collection of materials relating to donor’s uncle, golf professional Frank Grimm; undated menus from the Grand Hotel restaurant; edition of *The Stars and Stripes* newspaper announcing the end of WWII, May 8, 1945; and more. *Donated by Mike Whelan.*
- ◇ Papers relating to Danvers’ Zion Lutheran Church, including annual reports, 1919 to 2017, and more. *Donated by Zion Lutheran Church, Danvers, care of Rev. Frank Zimmerman.*

NEW TO COLLECTIONS

BOOKS

- ◇ *The Road to Home: Stories from a Shared Past on Route 66*, booklet created by donor for 2023 conference; revised in 2026 and printed by Copy Shop. **Donated by Ruth Cobb.**
- ◇ Collection of local cookbooks, including *Dog-Gone Good Recipes*, Town and Country Kennel Club, 2002. **Donated by Books to Benefit, care of Mary Ryder.**
- ◇ *When Woodstock Came to Town* by Kregg Argenta (Busterboy Press, 2016). **Donated by Terri Clemens.**
- ◇ Souvenir book, Bishop Schlarman Consecration, Peoria Diocese, 1930. **Donated by Dennis Fox.**
- ◇ Wabash Telephone Co., , Bloomington and Normal Telephone Directory, Summer 1942. **Donated by Glenn Schultz.**
- ◇ "Our Golden Anniversary" book marking the 50th wedding anniversary of Raymond R. and Mae Fairfield, May 25, 1947. **Donated by Mark Springer.**
- ◇ *From Camp Douglas to Vicksburg: The Civil War Letters of William J. Kennedy, 55th Illinois Infantry, 1861-1863*, (Savas Beatie, 2025), edited and annotated by donor and David A. Powell. **Donated by Rachael E. Mellen.**
- ◇ Six postcards addressed to Bloomington residents, including one to Thelma Van Ness, Withers Public Library, September 4, 1938. **Donated by Kimberly Rocco.**
- ◇ *Mural Guide* (publication devoted to Pontiac's "Murals on Main Street" project), no date. **Donated by Amy Miller.**
- ◇ *A History of Bicycling in Illinois: 160 Years of Booms and Busts* by Christopher Sweet (3 Fields Books, U of I Press, 2026). **Donated by Karen Schmidt and John Elterich.**
- ◇ *The Big Dig: The Illinois Central Railroad Track Depression Project in Mattoon, Illinois, 1915* (Mattoon Public Library, 2025) By Chris Sverdieck. **Donated by Greg and Carol Koos.**
- ◇ "Private Joe" Fifer (1936) by James O'Donnell Bennett, signed by Florence Fifer Bloomer; and several other books. **Donated by Rachel Wickart.**
- ◇ *Under the Eye of the Blazing Sun* (1981) by Bettie Wilson Story, inscribed by author to donor; and more. **Donated by Nancy Saul.**
- ◇ Church histories and directories, including Danvers' Zion Lutheran Church, 1873-1997. **Donated by Zion Lutheran Church, care of Rev. Frank Zimmerman.**
- ◇ *Avant* magazine, volume 6, 2025, devoted to Stifel brand denim workwear, with a chapter on C.W. Klemm's of Bloomington. **Donated by Patty Hume.**
- ◇ *Steele's Western Guide Book*, seventh edition, 1836 (held by the Harold Sage family); McLean County Fair books, 1982-2014; and *Home Bureau and Community Cook Book, Danvers Township Unit*, 1921 (once held by Ada Louise Voss). **Donated by the Danvers Historical Society, care of Sharon Wolfe.**

OBJECTS

- ◇ Watercolor painting by David Smith of Brandtville Service Stations, c. 1957. **Donated by Robert Porter.**
- ◇ Trapeze bar belonging to the "Queen of the Air" Gertrude "Mickey" King, c. 1940s. **Donated by Steve Gossard.**
- ◇ Bert Miller marching band uniform and Danvers Community Band Uniform, from 1949. **Donated by the Danvers Historical Society.**
- ◇ Sitka Spruce Ukelin, and a miniature croquet set purchased from Livingston's Department Store in 1965. **Donated by Dorris Harris.**



The ukelin is a hybrid of a ukulele and a violin. They were commonly sold door-to-door in the 1970s with a music book and bow for easy home learning. It is played by drawing a bow across the strings while pressing keys to change the pitch. Despite its distinctive design, it proved difficult to master and quickly fell out of popularity in the early 1980s.

NEW TO COLLECTIONS

PHOTOGRAPHS

- ◇ Three picture postcards, including one featuring the old McLean County Courthouse (now Museum) with glitter trim, postmarked 1906. *Donated by Timothy and Janet Ervin.*
- ◇ Album detailing Thomas Benton Scott's (donor's father) service in the Marine Corps, circa 1957-58, in Japan and the Philippines; and two photo prints of the Arrowsmith family homestead. *Donated by Rodney Scott.*
- ◇ Large group standing in front of Ben Funk School for reunion / school closing farewell, circa 1993. *Donated by Kay Carius.*
- ◇ Two panoramic photographic negatives of the Funk Farm Picnic and dedication of a memorial to Isaac Funk, July 9, 1915. *Donated by the Illinois Department of Transportation, care of Gary Sims, Operations Engineer.*
- ◇ Collection of photos, including Daily Pantagraph printing operations; Normal Community High School's 1951 staging of "Jane Eyre;" and more. *Donated Charleen Burns, care of Dan Clark.*
- ◇ Members of the Owls Club (organized by Bloomington High School students in the 1920s), gathered later as adults, undated. *Donated by Sybil Stern Mervis.*
- ◇ Photos of the archaeological dig at the former site (Center Street) of Wayman A.M.E. Church, August 1997; two photos of Caribel Washington receiving the Studs Terkel Humanities Award at a Bloomington City Council meeting, 1999; and more. *Donated by Jack Muirhead.*
- ◇ Three photos of the traveling Black gospel group, Cotton Blossom Singers from the Piney Woods School, Mississippi, and their 1936 visit to Danvers; four panoramic photos of church events and organizations, including Walther League activities. *Donated by Zion Lutheran Church, Danvers, care of Rev. Frank Zimmerman.*
- ◇ "Dr. Jim Holbert ... This Is Your Life," a photographic souvenir honoring the Funk's G-Hybrid Research Director on his 60th birthday, at a national sales meeting, July 1950; and more. *Donated by Mark Springer.*
- ◇ Mystery photo, "Class of '99," featuring fifteen students of various ages, acquired in the Bloomington area. *Donated by Steve Goldberg.*
- ◇ Collection of family photographs including a set relating to Owen Whelan and his service in the 387th Infantry during WWII; undated aerial of Paul F. Beich candy factory; and more. *Donated by Mike Whelan.*
- ◇ Panoramic photo, 18th Annual Convention, Farmers Grain Dealers Association of Illinois (Bloomington-based organization), held in Champaign, February 1921. *Donated by Lisa Putnam Cole.*
- ◇ Five cabinet card portraits from Bloomington studios, late nineteenth century. *Donated by Sarah Krause.*
- ◇ Large collection of photos relating to the "Oxidized Iron Sculptures" of folk artist Robert D. "Bob" Cumpston (1930-2018). *Donated by Kelby Cumpston.*
- ◇ "Woodland Ave. 1919 Circus" (children's neighborhood circus in Bloomington), photo by the Bloomington's United Photo studio. *Donated by Nancy Navoy (her grandfather, Eldo Moore, owned United Photo).*
- ◇ Funk's Grove Grain Co., office and elevators, undated; photos of the Childers family home and Mary Childers, Village of McLean home; and much more. *Donated by Nancy Saul.*
- ◇ Old Bloomington City Hall, undated; Black veterans marching down the 100 block of South Main Street, Bloomington, also undated. *Donated by Betty L. Moudy.*
- ◇ Five photos of Brokaw Hospital, 1956, construction of a new wing; Stanford Community High School commencement, 1939; and more. *Donated by Jan Outlaw.*

Cumpston and his art on the Colfax farm!



If you haven't already, come see Cumpston's Llama on the Square! While you're here, make sure to check out more of his work on display on the Museum's first floor.

Volunteer Opportunities

Do you enjoy sharing stories?

Would you like to be a volunteer tour guide? We're looking to expand our tour offerings and anticipate needing extra help to do so. We're still in the early planning stages but if this peaks your interest, please let us know!

Senior Reminiscence Volunteers

We will train interested volunteers to visit senior living centers with objects and photos from our education collection to help spur conversation and memories. This program helps combat isolation, foster a greater sense of community, and take the Museum to those who can't access it in person.

Oral History Transcription Volunteers

One of the major ways that the Museum collects and preserves local history is through the use of Oral History interviews. Museum staff interview people for various reasons to capture their story. After the interview, software generates a transcript of the conversation. However, the transcripts need to be reviewed and edited by a real person to ensure accuracy. Volunteers in this category must have strong writing skills.

Box Making

Help us preserve history by building custom boxes for archival materials. We'll provide the materials and the training!

If you are interested in any of the above opportunities, or if there are other ways you would like to volunteer, please contact Director of Volunteers Eric Hansen at volunteers@mchistory.org or 309-827-0428.

Call for Artists



Explore one of four questions through art and submit your work to participate in this collaborative exhibition at the McLean County Arts Center. Learn more at mchistory.org/250!

Annual Report

Have you read our Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report?

Scan the QR code or visit mchistory.org/blog to see an overview of what we've done and where we're going!



On the Square is a tri-annual magazine for members of the McLean County Museum of History. New editions of the magazine are mailed the first week of the following months: January, May, and September. Questions? Concerns? Feedback? Please contact Micaela Harris, Director of Communications, at mharris@mchistory.org or 309-827-0428 ext. 114.

Please visit mchistory.org/events for more information on all of our upcoming events.



McLean County
MUSEUM of HISTORY

200 N. Main St. Bloomington, IL 61701

mchistory.org | 309-827-0428

Open Monday-Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

FREE & open late every Tuesday until 8 p.m.

Always FREE for students & members

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
BLOOMINGTON IL
PERMIT NO. 118

Mystery History Quiz

The previous Mystery History was no mystery at all to a dozen or so of our readers! Several of whom filled in some history about University Christian Church as well. Located at the corner of Fell Avenue and North Street in Uptown Normal, the church closed in 2009 and was razed later in the year to make way for new development.

Mystery History sleuths who identified the church included Thomas Cherry, Roger and Carol Elliott, Dennis and Jan Fries, Denise Fries-Romack, Ruth Nichols (who got married in the church), John Richmond, Dan Steadman, Ruth Stewart, and Michael Sublett. Dave Blunk, who also knew the answer, reminded us that the Blunk family played a major role in the church's history, with William Blunk even serving as an assistant minister.



This new Mystery History photo comes to us courtesy of Museum friend Dennis Fox, who donated it earlier this year. Where was this building located and what was it used for?

If you think you know the answers, reach out to Museum Librarian Bill Kemp at 309-827-0428 or bkemp@mchistory.org.

We appreciate your interest in local history and we don't take your support for granted.