

2026



Annual Report





Our Team

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Robert Frenz, President
Ed Urban, Vice-President
Molly Walsh, Treasurer
Nancy Baker, Secretary
Arlyn Booth
Chris Johnson
Jim Julison
Pamela Kampwerth
Dawn Milarski
Lonni Oldham
Dan Ring
Deb Silker
Caroline Sobolak
Jeff Varda
Danny Fitte, Youth Liaison

STAFF

Jolie Diepenhorst, Executive Director
Patrick McDonald, Director of Operations
Kris Kenney, Librarian
Russell O'Brien, Research Librarian
Cindy Simmons, Bookkeeper



Vision And Mission

Mission

We engage and educate current and future generations by preserving and sharing McHenry County history.

Vision

The McHenry County Historical Society & Museum endeavors to be a hub for collection, preservation, and educational outreach reflecting McHenry County's History.

2025

Annual Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: President Bob Frenz called the Annual Meeting of the McHenry County Historical Society to order at 5:30 p.m. at the Museum. President Frenz welcomed the members and led the membership in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes: Doug Noe moved to approve the minutes from the 2024 Annual Meeting. Dawn Milarski seconded. All voted aye and the minutes were approved.

Annual Report: Copies of the 2024-25 Annual Report were distributed at the front desk.

Introductions: Bob Frenz introduced the Board Members who were present for the meeting and Executive Director Jolie Diepenhorst.

Executive Director Remarks: Jolie Diepenhorst gave a brief overview of the nine months since she was hired. She introduced staff members Patrick McDonald, Siobhan Heraty, Kris Kenney, and Russell O'Brien. She noted that staff all hold master's degrees in public history or library science. Jolie called attention to ceiling and wall painting improvements, the new floor map, and the weaver's exhibit. Over 800 visitors have visited the museum for a variety of programs. She credited board member Caroline Sobolak whose grant writing expertise resulted in four grants since January including a \$20,000 grant from the Community Foundation for the Main Street Memories project.

Education Advisory Team Report: Gail Perkins recognized the members of the Education Advisory Team and explained what they do. Highlights included participation in Earth Day, Career Festival at MCC, hosting field trips, providing an in-school "pack your wagon" program, conducting teacher round tables, and organizing Tuesday for Tots. The Team welcomes new volunteers.

2025 Scholarship Nancy Fike Scholarship Winner: Bob Frenz explained that the Nancy Fike Scholarship was established to honor longtime MCHS Administrator Nancy Fike. The scholarship competition is open to any high school senior or college freshman who resides in McHenry County. This year, seven applications were received. The winner was Lindsay Simons of Prairie Ridge High School. Her essay was printed in the most recent Tracer. Lindsay was unable to attend the annual meeting.

Amendments to the Bylaws: Bob Frenz reported that the membership voted to approve the amendments to the Bylaws which were recommended by the Board of Directors.

Annual Meeting Minutes



Board of Director Election Results: Molly Walsh, filling in for Governance Committee Chairman Lonni Oldham, announced that votes were tallied and the membership has elected returning Board Members Arlyn Booth of Marengo, Caroline Sobolak of Cary, and Lonni Oldham of Huntley, and new Board Members Dawn Milarski of Hebron and Jeff Varda of McHenry to serve 3-year terms.

In Memoriam: A list of members and friends of the McHenry County Historical Society who passed away during the past year was included in the Annual Report and Bob Frenz read the following names: Don Hildebrand, Jan Knight, Orrin Kinney, Gene Limbaugh, Jean Nigbor, George Parlo, Emile Peters, Richard Schwebke, Linda Stengel, and Thomas Thennes.

Recognition of Outgoing Board Members: Molly Walsh recognized outgoing Board Member Karen Parks who led the Board through four difficult years and helped position the Society to be on a positive trajectory. She presented Karen with a certificate of appreciation and a plant.

Adjournment: Ed Urban moved to adjourn the annual meeting. Dwayne Dahlman seconded. All voted aye and the meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Nancy Baker, Secretary

Director's Report



As I look around the room, I am reminded that museums aren't built by buildings or collections, they're built by people. Every artifact we've preserved, every child we've inspired, every volunteer hour, every membership renewed, every donation made, and every story shared has brought us to this moment. Tonight, we celebrate not only another successful year, but the remarkable community that makes the McHenry County Historical Society & Museum thrive.

This fiscal year has been one of growth, transformation, and purpose. It has also been my first full fiscal year serving as your Executive Director, and I continue to be inspired by the passion this community has for preserving and sharing the history of McHenry County.

A Year of Growth

When we began this fiscal year, our goal was simple: create more opportunities for people to connect with history. We wanted to make the museum a place where families gathered, lifelong learners discovered something new, children explored their county's history, and neighbors found common ground through shared stories. Together, we accomplished exactly that.

Over the past year, we presented **more than 55 educational and public programs**, welcoming 4600 visitors of every age through lectures, book discussions, workshops, family programs, museum yoga, Fridays for Tots, summer camps, Heritage Fair, and a farm-to-table experience.

Our exhibitions explored both local and national stories. Visitors experienced *Main Street Memories*, reflected on agriculture through *George Washington: A Nation of Farmers*, and celebrated the contributions of women through *Her Land, Her Legacy*. Each exhibition reminded us that history isn't simply about dates and artifacts, it's about people whose lives continue to shape our communities today.

Our Community Continues to Grow

Growth wasn't limited to our programming.

This year we experienced remarkable increases across nearly every area of the organization with an overall organizational revenue increase of **20%**.

This number represents much more than financial success. It represents people choosing to invest in local history. They represent new families discovering the museum, longtime members renewing their commitment, volunteers sharing

Director's Report



their talents, and donors believing in our mission. These investments allow us to do what we do best: preserve the past while creating meaningful experiences for today's community.

Preserving Stories That Matter

Behind every exhibit and program is the work of preserving history. This year our staff and volunteers continued caring for more than **71,500 artifacts**, responded to more than **100 research requests**, expanded our oral history collection, and continued documenting the rich and diverse stories that define McHenry County.

Through our Raíces Latinas initiative, we continued collecting and sharing stories that broaden our understanding of our county's history. Projects like *Nuestras Historias* remind us that history is strongest when every voice has the opportunity to be heard.

Partnerships Make Us Stronger

Museums do not succeed alone. This year we strengthened relationships with schools, libraries, park districts, businesses, historical organizations, Illinois Humanities, the National Museum of the American Sailor, the McHenry County Conservation District, Woodstock Opera House, Prairie Community Bank, the Village of Union, and many others. These partnerships expanded our reach and reminded us that preserving history is truly a community effort.

Heritage Fair: Forty Years Strong

One of the highlights of the year was the **40th Annual Heritage Fair**. From the Classic Car Show and Pie Baking Contest to Garden Glitz, the book sale, quilt raffle, and children's activities, Heritage Fair once again brought hundreds of visitors to our campus. It was a celebration of tradition, volunteerism, and community, a reminder that some of our most meaningful history is still being made.

Director's Report



This year marks our **50th Anniversary as a museum**, an extraordinary milestone for the McHenry County Historical Society & Museum. Fifty years ago, a dedicated group of community members believed McHenry County's history deserved to be preserved. Their vision created the institution we steward today. As we celebrate that legacy, we also have the opportunity to shape the next fifty years.

We have developed a new strategic plan that will guide the Society into its next chapter. We will continue strengthening our governance as our Board completes its transition from a managing board to a governing board, allowing staff and board members to focus on the work each does best.

We will continue expanding educational programming, preserving our collections, strengthening community partnerships, growing membership, and finding new ways to connect people with history. Most importantly, we will continue preparing for America's 250th anniversary through exhibitions, conversations, and programs that encourage thoughtful dialogue about our shared past and our shared future.

Thank You

None of this would be possible without you.

To our Board of Directors -thank you for your leadership and vision.

To our volunteers - you are the heartbeat of this organization.

To our members and donors - your generosity allows this museum to flourish.

To our staff - thank you for your creativity, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to our mission.

And to our community - thank you for believing that local history matters.

As we celebrate fifty years of preserving McHenry County's stories, I am reminded that history is never finished. Every day, each of us contributes another chapter.

Thank you for allowing me to help write this chapter with you.

President's Report



It is again my pleasure to report to you tonight that the condition of our Society is strong. Treasurer Molly Walsh writes that our finances are sound and our investments ably managed by the Northern Trust Company of Chicago. Visitor Services Coordinator, Kris Kenney, reports that our membership and museum attendance is up. Our Education Committee, led by Gail Perkins, has introduced many new programs for young people this past year. Historic Sites has recently plaqued another site – the English Prairie Cemetery – and is actively seeking more places to recognize.

Beyond question, our progress results from the leadership of Executive Director, Jolie Diepenhorst, and the fine staff that she has assembled. Jolie came to MCHS in October of 2024, saw needs to address, and working with the Board of Directors, has made significant strides toward achieving her goals. Tonight, I also want to single out Director of Operations, Patrick McDonald, for the outstanding work that he has accomplished in the year and half that he has been with us. Patrick, with a friendly smile, has managed the office, greeted guests, ordered the supplies that keep our organization running, dealt with a myriad of technology issues, and, without complaint has pitched in to set up for programs and events.

However, as with all non-profits, our success also depends on a great group of volunteers. These individuals set up tables and chairs for events, erect tents for Heritage Fair, transcribe (sometimes illegible) handwritten diaries, work in our fine research library, serve on the Board of Directors, help out with the annual car show, and even, at times, keep the plumbing functioning. Tonight I would like to recognize two volunteers who have truly made a difference – Jim Julison and Rob Cisneros. The results of their labors can be seen throughout our museum whether it be the bay window in Eckert Hall or even trying to remedy the ills of a flat roof.

President's Report



Tonight I also want to call your attention to the work of the Strategic Planning Committee which, under the leadership of Chairman Lonni Oldham, has produced a plan for 2026-29. The Committee drafted a plan to define direction, align resources, and establish priorities for the next three years. Data on attendance, membership, funding, and public survey responses was reviewed to develop a roadmap that supports our mission and enhances our services. The Board of Directors approved the 2026-29 MCHS Strategic Plan in May. The Plan is available on the MCHS website.

Whether you are present tonight or reading this later, I want to invite everyone to tour our newly reimagined 50-year-old museum. From the popular county map on the floor of McEachren to the footpath, interactive exhibits, and new ceiling lights in Eckert Hall, I'm sure that you will agree that our building provides a fresh, new, and welcoming feeling. Programs as varied as book clubs and kayak trips now welcome members and visitors year around.

Lastly, I want to recognize three new Board members – Chris Johnson, Jim Julison, and Pamela Kampwerth. All were appointed to fill out terms and will be up for election by the Annual Meeting in 2026. Each brings a fresh perspective and different skills to our work. I also want to thank Don Rose, who will be leaving the Board, for his many years of service to our Society. Over the last decade and a half, Don was instrumental in starting our technology programs, edited the Tracer, and served on numerous committees including Governance, Library, Search, and Strategic Planning.

Financial



We are pleased to report that revenue for fiscal year 2025–2026 increased by \$68,533 over last year. This growth reflects the generosity of our members and the support of our business sponsors. Programs and fundraisers accounted for the largest increase of revenue gains this fiscal year, keeping our staff very busy throughout the year.

The pie chart is an overview of the Society’s expenses and revenue. for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. The Board of Directors has approved a 2026-2027 budget of total revenue at \$513,226 and expenses at \$515,00.

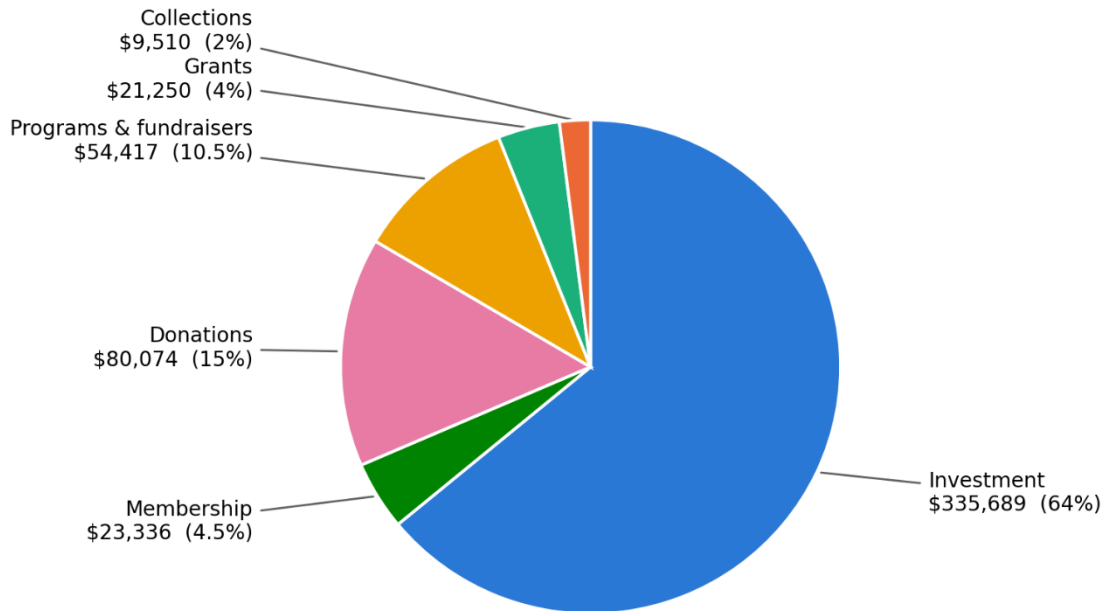
Listed is the market value of our investments as of June 30th, 2026:

McEachren Charitable Trust	\$4,799,186.94
McHenry County Historical Society Endowment	\$2,310,871.13
Glenn and Norma Anderson Fund	\$1,119,042.40

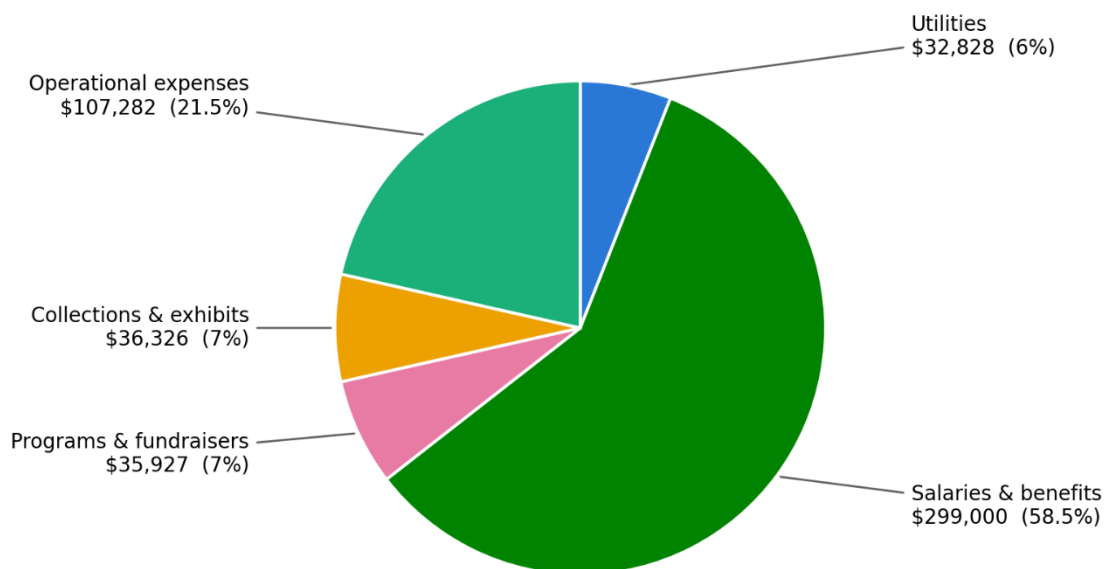
Financial



Revenue — total \$524,628



Expenses — total \$511,367



Education



The Education Team has been very busy over the past fiscal year. We had sixteen field trips to the museum, which included hundreds of students and staff and chaperones with them. We have three more scheduled for August and October. (Since May 1, we have had over 250 students, and more than twenty-five adults participate in field trips to the museum!) When we have a field trip the usual format is that we divide the students into four groups and with an Education Team member at each area, they rotate through the four areas of the museum: The Schoolhouse, The Cabin and Garden, McEachren Hall (with Deicke Hall), and Eckert Hall. When the Anderson Gallery is open, we try to include that as well. As an example of how we try to personalize the field trip to the group that is coming, when a group of third graders who had just finished reading The Farmer Boy, by Laura Ingalls Wilder, were scheduled to come, we had a neighbor farmer, Mr. Duane Dahlman, there to help explain the farm equipment in Deicke Hall. The students and teachers really appreciated the connections between the museum and their book!

Schools: Then and Now, one of our traveling units, was invited to a third grade in Hebron for about fifty students, and to Westwood Elementary School's Wide World of Wonder (Woodstock) where we worked with about eighty students. Education Team Member Karen Parks was our schoolteacher, dressed appropriately, and sharing how things were in the one room schoolhouse back in the late 1800s and leading the groups in discussions to compare and contrast the old and the new.

We decorated the McHenry County Historical Society and Museum's Christmas tree at the Opera House. The theme for 2025 was the Golden Age of Christmas. The tree turned out beautifully. The ornaments were mostly handmade by the committee. The whole tree was planned, organized and completed by Education Team Member Kathy Betke.



Education

This year we continued our monthly Tots program, changing it to Friday 4 Tots. In March, we did four weekly programs, each week of Museum Month. Beginning in April we have done one a month. We choose a theme and then provide the children and their parents with a story, some songs and/or poems, and a craft by our own craft queen, Pam Dean. If there is any extra time, we direct them to the Farm Area, which they love! In July our theme was Native Americans, and we had a guest come and lead us in Native American dance. It was fantastic – and the parents and children loved it!

The Education Team did a training this year with Nancy Fike. She shared some of her vast knowledge on the Gannon Cabin and the Harmony Schoolhouse. It was great to have a chance to learn from Nancy and improve and increase what we offer the students on field trips.

An exciting addition was our History Mini Camps this summer. We ended up having three. A different team member led each camp, and each camp included a history lesson, a story, and a craft they could take home, which was designed and led by our member Pam Dean. For the first camp on Native Americans, we used a lot of the hands-on artifacts that have been collected for the Education Team - which the kids loved. Each of the participants made a Dreamcatcher as their craft. The second camp was on the One Room Schoolhouse. The children got to experience time as a student in 1895 – with our schoolteacher Karen Parks. During their recess, they made a tic tac toe game. As an additional craft, they also learned how to make cornhusk dolls with Judy Beth Hervert. The third camp was The Cabin and Garden, presented to the children by Laurie Cisneros (our cabin expert) and members of the Master Gardener organization. For that camp they made seed bombs. As a special treat, they also made pickles with our pickle lady, Kathy Betke. Both were a big hit!

The Education Team is a committed group of retired educators who work hard to share the history of McHenry County with students and teachers alike - both in the museum and when we visit the schools.

- Gail Perkins, Education Team Chair

Education



Membership



2024-2025 Membership Goals

1) Develop a plan to increase the value of MCHS membership

Result: Completed. Implemented "Bring a friend for free" to select programs for members. Re-implemented 10% discount on store items for members

2) Review, analyze and report membership data

Result: Completed. Regularly reviewed, analyzed and reported membership data.

3) Increase membership to 650 members

Result: Completed. As of the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2026, there were 708 active members.

2025-2026 Membership Goal

1) Increase membership to 750 members via an online social media membership drive and other means.

The McHenry County Historical Society is excited to report the achievement of its 2024-2025 Membership Goals and a significant increase in membership to a high-water mark of 708 active members.

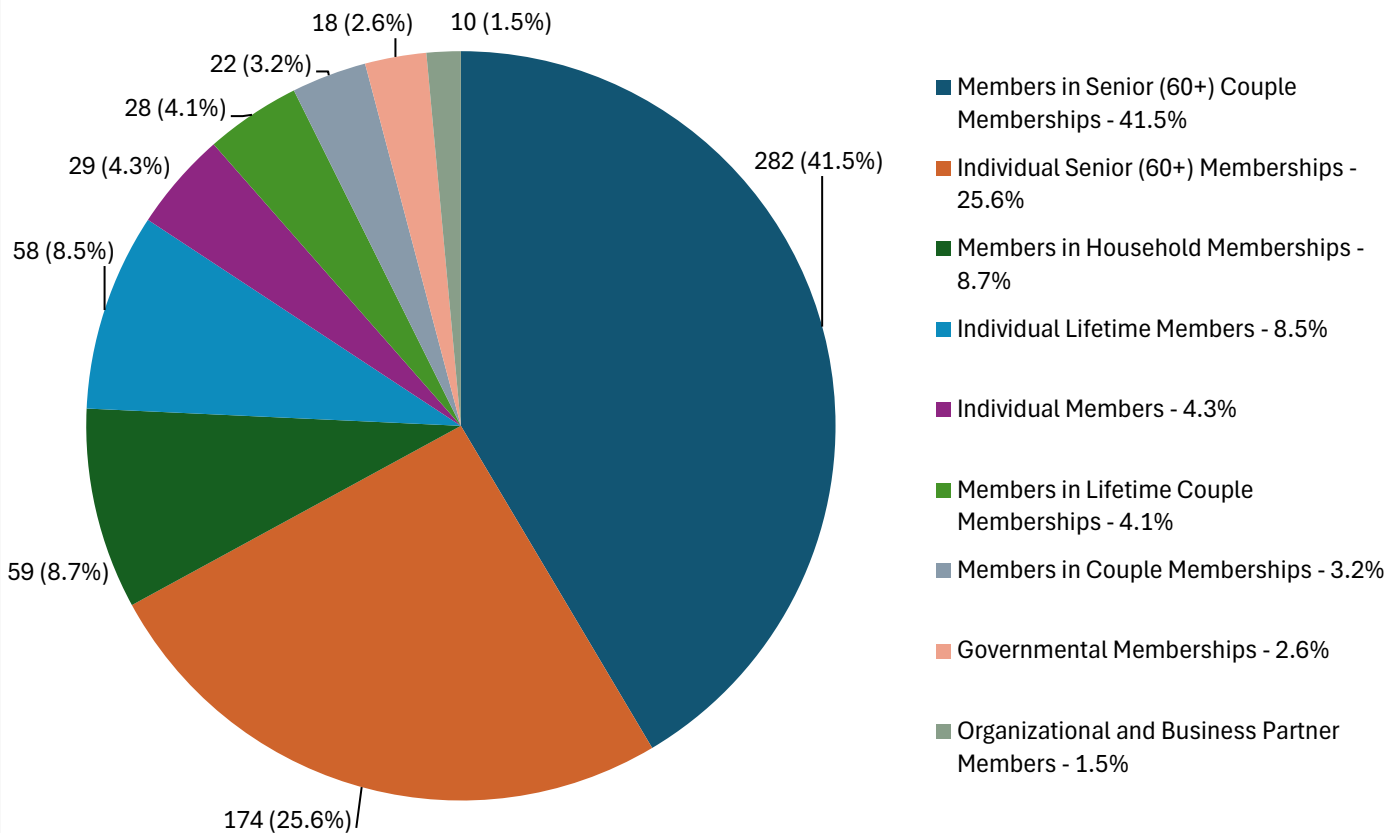
Our goal is to continue to increase our membership by providing frequent, new, creative, and engaging programs to reach all age groups. Please bring a friend and encourage others to join us in sharing local history. Remember to take advantage of your membership benefits by submitting a research request, reading the Tracer, enjoying free admission to the museum and reduced program fees. Let us know if you have any suggestions or comments. And thank YOU for being a valued member of the McHenry County Historical Society.

- Patrick McDonald, Director of Operations

Membership



Current Membership By Categories
(As of 07/15/26)



Lifetime Members



Libbie Aavang
Melodie Archer
Nancy Baker
Steve Baker
Janet Beck
Barbara Bennett
Kathleen Bergan-Schmidt
Judy Beth-Hervert
Arlyn Booth
Ann Bormett
Rick Bormett
Laurie Cisneros
Rob Cisneros
Edwin Colton
Pam Dean
Trudie Dreyer
John Eickstadt
Mike Evans
Nancy Fike
Avis Fisher
Jeff Fisher
Sean Foley
David Gervais
Lori Geske
Carol Halma
Peggy Hart
Chehalis Hegner
Jan Hervert
Nellie Hohnsen
Bill Howenstine
Nancy Hudson
Genevieve Hughes
Nancy Irwin
Jim Keenan
Marlene Keenan
Stanley Korwin
John Krenger
Chuck Liebman
Bob Lueders
Mary E Maurer

Arden Miller
Sherry Mueller
Doug Noe
Mary Noe
Lonni Oldham
Molly Oldham
Marlene Olson
Peggy Palmquist
Karen Parks
James Peard
Peter Perkins
Geannene Piper
Judy Porter
Cindy Powers
Dan Powers
Jim Prindiville
Mary Ellen Prindiville
Donald Purn
Laura Rice
Judy Rogers
Don Rose
Tracie Rose
Chuck Ruth
Brian Sager
Jude Schmidt
Lawrence Schmidt
Marti Schmidt
Dale Shriver
Deb Silker
John Silker
Megan Sommer
Robert Stranges
Susan Tauck
Theodore Thayer
Mary Thennes
Richard Thennes
Cindy Thompson
Jeff Varda
Ilene Wiedemann

In Memoriam



Aastri Cunat
David Dreyer
Steve Fike
Bill Kenney
Judith Lovaas
Bob Lueders
Mary Manning
Janice Perkins
Carl Stengele
James Tonyan
Van Vogel

If you know of any other member who passed away this fiscal year omitted from the list, please phone or email the office.

Historic Sites



This past year, the committee has been quite busy working on plaque opportunities. The committee currently contains 6 members.

The Committee has sent out 5 “Hello” letters as well as still dutifully following up on past “Hello” letters and fielding emails regarding plaques. We received 5 completed applications. We have had 2 site evaluations: The Stoffel House and English Prairie Cemetery. The Stoffel House evaluation is waiting on an exterior siding project to be completed so the committee can complete its final scoring and present to the Board. The English Prairie Cemetery has passed both the Committee and the Board and is scheduled for a public ceremony.

1) Plaque #95, The English Prairie Cemetery, 1860, scheduled for June 27, 2026.



In June 2025, the Committee initiated a “fresh start” with the MCCD in hopes of facilitating a better relationship and acquiring visitation to the Kennedy Way Station after several failed attempts in the past. This resulted in a largely attended

Historic Sites



site visit in August 2025, including MCHS members, MCCD members and newspaper reporters from the Woodstock Independent. Productive conversations were held regarding ideas on how to achieve new life and purpose for the site and building. After this visit, Jolie Diepenhorst of MCHS outlined a very impressive 20-year plan for the Kennedy Way Station and shared it with MCCD. MCCD has seemingly turned some its focus back onto the historical buildings in their possession, including them in future budgets and Comprehensive plans. The committee has agreed to work with Jolie and MCCD on a National Register application when MCCD is ready for that next step. We are hopeful that this new collaboration will keep the Kennedy Way Station as a part of McHenry County's history.

On September 7, 2025, the Historic Sites Committee attended the 43rd Annual Historic Elgin House Tour in Elgin, IL. The walking tour included seven historic homes of various architectural styles. To keep with our historic theme of the day, we added a lunch break at the Walnut Speakeasy, which embraces the 1920's with vintage décor and atmosphere.

Our new formal email address has become a very active aspect of the committee, since its creation in January 2025 by Jolie Diepenhorst. Plaque applications, inquiries on landmarked properties, general plaquing questions and potential plaque ideas have been filling the inbox throughout the year. This has been an amazing upgrade in communication between the committee and MCHS employees as well as with the general public.

The committee hosted a booth at the 2025 Fall Fest to help raise awareness of our committee and create more interest in historic site preservation. We received an exciting visit to our booth from the current owner of the Washington School house in Richmond, IL. This site was evaluated by the committee back in 2012 at which time the property did not pass the criteria. The current owner is very interested in restoring many aspects of the school and keeping its history alive. The committee has shared with the owner its research, the reasons for not previously qualifying and has extended an offer to do a re-evaluation of the school upon completion of the restoration project in the future.

To ensure our plaque recipients are receiving the best price for their plaques, the

Historic Sites



committee has chosen a second option for our plaques. Our current supplier suggested this option, which is very close in design to our current plaque but comes with approximately a 10% savings.

The Committee has been actively updating and maintaining their Attempted Plaque listing (listing past Hello letter sites). This has helped the Committee revisit properties which have changed owners as well as prevent excessive Hello letter attempts.

In the coming year, we look forward to educating the general public and raising their consciousness of historic preservation while continuing to plaque new sites.

- Mimi Bierman, Historic Sites Chairperson & Secretary



Governance



In 2025-2026, the Governance Committee oversaw the final phase of the board's transition from managing to governing. Over the last few years, the board has studied management styles and determined that to successfully move the Society forward, the board should concentrate on the strategic focus of governing. The transition required the restructuring of the Standing Board Committees. The Standing Committees which remain within the definition of governing are Executive, Strategic Planning, Finance, Governance, and Historic Sites. The former Standing Committees of Membership, Collections, Education, Building and Grounds, Development, Research Library, and Scholarship now function as Executive Director Advisory Teams under the direction of the Executive Director. Board members and volunteers serve on the Advisories, and the Executive Director reports the Advisories' activities to the board. In support of the transition, the MCHS Bylaws were reviewed, and the Governance Committee recommended several revisions for a membership vote at the Annual Meeting.

The Governance Committee was pleased to nominate current Board Directors Robert Frenz, Deb Silker, Ed Urban, and Molly Walsh for renewed three-year terms, 2026-2029, plus to nominate new Board Director candidates Chris Johnson, Jim Julison, and Pamela Kampwerth for one-year terms, 2026-2027.

Chris Johnson calls the northeast corner of McHenry County—Richmond Township—home. He has a deep appreciation for his community and values the balance between the open spaces preserved throughout Richmond, Spring Grove, and Solon Mills, and the steady march of progress that continues to shape the area.

Trained in the sciences and engineering, Chris enjoys exploring history through a curious and analytical lens, always asking the essential "why?" to better understand the past. He is often found working to preserve his one-room schoolhouse home, uncovering long-forgotten foundations hidden off the beaten path in the woods, or marveling at the care and craftsmanship evident in the preserved homes of Richmond's "Village of Yesteryear."

A lifelong learner, Chris delights in hearing what others have uncovered through their own historical explorations and is always eager for that next moment of discovery—"I've never thought about that; can you tell me more?" A strong

Governance



advocate for public outreach, he hopes you will visit and enjoy the Museum Campus in Union and continue to support both your local history and the broader story of McHenry County as a whole.

Jim Julison returned to the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago where he had grown up after 6 years in the Air Force. Jim was married to Deb Percy in 1982. They moved to McHenry County in 1983 and built a home in Cary. After the birth of their son Steven and daughter Danielle, they moved to Marengo in 1998, building a new home where he and Deb live today.

Jim worked in several management roles in the computer, manufacturing, and automotive industries during which he developed and ran new manufacturing facilities and taught “Lean Manufacturing” tools and processes internationally. Jim retired as Director of Business Services for McHenry County College in 2024. He is an active member of Crystal Lake’s American Legion Post 171.

Jim was a volunteer with the Coast Guard Auxiliary for 17 years, holding the staff rank of Publications Officer. He is also an author and has written a travel memoir from his early years. Jim has also been a contributor to manufacturing industry publications as well as MCHS’s own “Tracer” magazine.

Jim has always been interested in history and has enjoyed researching his family’s genealogy. Jim enjoys restoring classic Jeep vehicles and woodworking. Jim has found it very rewarding to interact with the Historical Society staff and to help preserve the displays and collections for education and for future generations. He currently serves on the Building Committee.

Pamela Kampwerth moved to McHenry County from Iowa 40 years ago and lives on a farm in Huntley where she and her husband raised two children. Pamela has a Bachelor of Arts in Consumer Economics, Central University of Iowa, Pella, Iowa, and a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership, Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois. Pamela retired after 23 years at the Huntley Area Public Library where she held several roles including Head of Programming, Local History Department Manager and Friends Foundation Liaison. Her work at the

Governance



library fostered a lasting interest in preserving and sharing local history.

Pamela remains active in the community, volunteering for the McHenry County Emergency Management Agency Search and Rescue Team, the Huntley Historical Society, and the Huntley Library Friends Foundation. She is also a member of the Kishwaukee Trail National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). In her free time, Pamela enjoys a variety of outdoor activities, including gardening, biking, and kayaking.

With regret but with much gratitude for years of dedicated service, the Governance Committee recognized the stepping down of long-time board member, Don Rose. Don was always ready to volunteer and over the years was highly involved in the Society's technology progress, the research library, strategic planning, and governance. Even though Don is leaving the board, he will not be a stranger. Don plans to volunteer and to continue working on some Society projects.

On behalf of the Society, the Governance Committee extends a huge thank you and much appreciation to Kathy Bergan Schmidt for her time and dedication to MCHS. Kathy was a longtime volunteer and former board member. Most recently she stepped down from her years as a volunteer member of the Research Library committee.

- Lonni Oldham, Governance Committee



Building & Grounds



FY 25/26 was another year of building challenges but also a year of accomplishments. The Building Committee conducted detailed site visits and thoroughly documented conditions of the three off-campus buildings. This documentation is necessary for budgeting, of course, but it will also be beneficial for preparation of grant applications and future plans.

In early December, less than a year and a half after the new roof projects were completed, the heavy wet snow and the freezing and thawing that followed resulted in a leak in Eckert Hall (over the drug store) due to a failed seal around a roof scupper. Shortly after that, the new furnace that serves Eckert Hall and the storage room above McEachren Hall went out again—one of several issues that have plagued our new HVAC system following the electrical power surge in February of 2025. Both contractors were responsive and hopefully the problems have been resolved.

In October, the boardwalks that connected the Gannon log cabin and the West Harmony School to the museum's main entrance were replaced due to continuous warping and cracking which created a trip hazard and ongoing maintenance issue. The walkways were also too narrow to be handicapped accessible. The sidewalk contractor also leveled out the concrete pad for the windmill which had developed quite a lean.

Visitors will notice that the outhouse which had been stored behind the scenes in Deicke Hall has been relocated to a new concrete pad at the rear of the West Harmony School. Building Committee member Jim Julison coordinated the relocation and then reconstructed the roof along and made other repairs. Thanks to Lonni Oldham for donating the cost of the relocation and concrete work.

Visitors to Eckert Hall and the Main Street Memories exhibit will notice the much-improved lighting which was made possible by a grant from the Community Foundation for McHenry County.

The McHenry County Historical Society has a strong tradition of buildings and grounds projects being accomplished by individual volunteers and organizations. The McHenry County Master Gardeners keep the heritage garden in front of the log cabin looking good year-round and generously share their expertise. Twice in the past two years, equipment for building related projects tore up parts of the garden and the Master Gardeners took it in stride. Be sure to say thank you next time you see someone working in the garden.

Building & Grounds



Perkins Hall in Seneca Township is getting a much-needed facelift, thanks to the family of Don Perkins, and spearheaded by Deb Perkins Silker. The threadbare carpeting and underlayment (quite likely installed over 75 years ago) have been removed revealing the original plank floors which are in relatively good condition and the entire building has been cleaned. Among other things, the family plans to repair the floors and repaint the entire interior during the coming year.

In September, Trudie and Dave Dreyer generously donated and coordinated tree and shrub maintenance and cleanup projects at Pringle School and Riley Church. Not only do the sites look much better, but some potential tree limb hazards were eliminated.

Of course, the list of building projects is still long, and project sponsors are needed. Pringle School still needs major drainage and tuckpointing improvements. The Perkins Hall foundation needs to be tuckpointed, windows and doors on most buildings need to be painted, and the Gannon log cabin also needs major repairs. Building priorities for the museum over the next few years must include upgrading safety and security systems, improving handicapped accessibility, improving aesthetics to enhance the museum image and experience, and improving drainage and developing a master plan for future improvements.

Staff have become well acquainted with our sites and buildings and Building Committee members will continue to serve in an advisory capacity as staff take on the oversight of buildings and grounds. Thank you to Building Committee members Tom Behles, Rob Cisneros, Jim Julison, Dan Ring, Pete Scholl, and new member Russ Shafer who have been so willing to share their time and expertise.

- Nancy Baker, Building and Grounds Committee Chair

Library



Personnel:

- 1) Kris Kenney has been working in the library for over a year, splitting her 28-hour work week between her roles as Visitor Services Coordinator and Research Librarian.
- 2) Russ O'Brien continues with the library at 20 hours a week. He also staffs the front desk.
- 3) Volunteer Ginny Boss resigned. Betsy Iversen has returned, and new volunteer Sarah Edwards has joined us.
- 4) Eleven volunteers reported working over 700 hours between July 2025 and May 2026.

Accessions:

- 1) We now have a digital collections and preservation policy.
- 2) Although there are no new accessions to report at this time, the library has received several small donations that will be added to the collection.

Research:

- 1) As of June 1, Kris has responded to 171 research requests during this fiscal year. Research-related income totaled \$2,268.12.
- 2) Kris hosted two programs in March. The first was a virtual program on property research and the second was an in-house intro to the library.
- 3) This year, several requests came from the dedicated volunteers working on the museum's "50 Years / 50 Places" exhibit.

Digital Projects:

- 1) We have begun using Internet Archive to supplement the digitized collections available through our website via ResCarta.
- 2) A book scanner was purchased and the first item scanned and uploaded was the *Fox River Grove-Cary News* metal plates.
- 3) The *Tracer* magazine is being scanned and uploaded to Internet Archive. An Index to the *Tracer* is complete and available on the MCHS website.
- 4) A project to digitize the card catalog is in its very initial stages.
- 5) Our digital scrapbook collection numbers 340 and our digital organizational records collection numbers 127. Volunteer Gail Hayes scans and our vendor John Stanley puts the ResCarta files on our website.
- 6) Under the supervision of volunteer Maggie Crane, 37 oral history interviews and transcripts are currently available on our website. An additional 33 interviews

Library



have been digitized and are awaiting transcription before being added to ResCarta.

- 7) We are investigating Otter.ai for transcription purposes. We would like to bring this process in-house.
- 8) We have contracted with Chicago Transfer Services to digitize approximately 50 reel-to-reel audio tapes. Now that we have identified their contents, those recordings deemed appropriate for long-term preservation will be transcribed and added to the Internet Archive.
- 9) Our obituary project hit the 22,000 milestone and grows! Volunteers Trudie Dreyer, Dianne Brooks, Janet Mitchell, and Barb Sova are still plodding away.
- 10) The MCHS website has been updated and continues to undergo improvements. Non-relevant content has been removed, and the interface for submitting research requests and accessing digital collections has been streamlined.

Preservation:

- 1) Mary Osten is scanning the 3-volume Civil War Andruss diaries that she transcribed, and Sarah Edwards is transcribing and digitizing the Jayne diaries.
- 2) Scott Kellar, our preservation vendor, preserved the John Brink surveyor's notebook A (1854-1856) and the *Third Illinois Infantry U.S. Volunteers* for us this year for a total of \$3,735.
- 3) Volunteer Betsy Iversen is replacing vinyl binders in the shelved collection with acid-free binders.

Volunteer projects:

- 1) Volunteer Arlyn Booth has the flat files up to date and resumed working on the unique cutter project.
- 2) Volunteers Liz Kidera and Dave Sipple work on the vertical file.
- 3) Volunteer Deb Silker is making progress on the 13 boxes of the Elgin Courier-News negative processing project.
- 4) Barb Pfannkuche continues to do our cataloging.

Future Goals:

- 1) Evaluate opportunities to optimize workspace to better accommodate staff, volunteers, and library operations.
- 2) Continue the digitization of the collection to improve preservation and accessibility.
- 3) Identify additional preservation projects to ensure the long-term care of the

Library



collection.

- 4) As of FY26-27, the board library committee becomes an Executive Director Advisory Team of library volunteers led by Kris.
- 5) Partner with the McHenry County Treasurer's Office to expand access to township assessors' ledgers by contributing volumes from our collection that are
- 6) not currently represented in their digital database.
- 7) Approximately 33 additional reel-to-reel tapes remain to be digitized. Once that project is complete, our attention will turn to the VHS tape collection and a small number of film reels. We also have a box of Riley Church cassette tapes that will need to be reviewed and evaluated.

- Kris Kenney, Librarian



Collection & Exhibits



This year has been one of creativity, collaboration, and resilience for the Collections & Exhibits Department. Through new exhibitions, strategic partnerships, and the dedication of staff and volunteers, we continued to interpret McHenry County's history in engaging and meaningful ways while caring for the Society's growing collection.

Main Street Memories

One of the year's signature accomplishments was the completion of **Main Street Memories**, made possible through the generous support of the **Community Foundation for McHenry County**. The exhibition brings McHenry County's downtown streets to life through a series of motion-activated interactive videos. As visitors move through the gallery, they are greeted by familiar characters who share stories of the businesses, professions, and everyday life that shaped our communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This exhibit would not have been possible without the enthusiasm of our volunteer actors, who generously donated their time and talents. A special thank you goes to **Laurie Cisneros, Jim Julison, Gail Perkins, and Patrick McDonald** for helping transform historical research into engaging visitor experiences. Their performances add warmth, personality, and a touch of humor that encourages visitors of all ages to connect with local history.

George Washington: A Nation of Farmers

This spring we partnered with **George Washington's Mount Vernon** to present the traveling poster exhibition, **George Washington: A Nation of Farmers**. Installed on the museum stage, the exhibition explores Washington's innovative agricultural practices and his belief that farming was essential to the success of the young nation. The exhibition complements McHenry County's own rich agricultural heritage while providing visitors with a broader understanding of agriculture's role in shaping American history. We look forward to sharing this exhibition with even more members of our community through 2027.

Collection & Exhibits



Her Land, Her Legacy

Building upon the agricultural theme, staff researched and created the pop-up exhibition **Her Land, Her Legacy**, highlighting the history of McHenry County's women farmers. The exhibition explores the many ways women have shaped agriculture, sustained family farms, and strengthened rural communities throughout the county's history. Together, *Her Land, Her Legacy* and *George Washington: A Nation of Farmers* offer visitors complementary perspectives on the people whose work continues to influence our landscape and economy. Looking ahead, these exhibitions provide the foundation for an expanded agricultural exhibition planned for 2027. We are also excited to partner with the **Land Conservancy of McHenry County** to develop a **FarmHER** exhibition celebrating the women farmers who continue to shape agriculture in our region today.

Collections and Staff

Although we experienced a significant staff transition when our Curator departed in January, the work of the department never slowed.

Our team stepped forward to ensure projects continued without interruption. **Kris Kenney** has embraced new responsibilities and continues expanding her knowledge of archival practices and collections management. **Brandon Cipolla**, our long-term intern, has continued his outstanding work in the collections database while contributing significant research and writing for the *Her Land, Her Legacy* exhibition.

Their commitment, adaptability, and enthusiasm have ensured that the Society continues to provide meaningful exhibitions while responsible for our collections. As we look toward the coming year, we remain committed to preserving McHenry County's history, interpreting it in innovative ways, and creating exhibitions that connect our community with the people and stories that have shaped our past.

- Jolie Diepenhorst, Executive Director



Thank you for supporting the
McHenry County Historical
Society & Museum