



The **M** **PLAINFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY** **ESSENGER**

telling the story of Plainfield, Illinois

Volume 20, Number 2

June-July 2026

President's Message

Looking Backward and Looking Forward

Research suggests that the celebration of anniversaries play a vital role in our individual lives and collective experiences. Anniversaries provide us a time to remember those people and events that have shaped our memories.

Anniversaries are a time for celebration and a time to encourage reflection. Anniversaries are a time to recall shared journeys and reaffirm commitment. Anniversaries celebrate milestone achievements.

On a cold February evening in 1977, approximately 60 people—basking in the afterglow of our country's Bicentennial—gathered in the Media Center of the former Plainfield High School building. The meeting's purpose was to discuss the need for a local organization that would document our community's history and collect artifacts that represented events, people, and historic events.

In April 1977, the Plainfield Historical Society was officially established. In spite of both triumph and setback, our Society has not only survived but has continued to evolve. We have accomplished projects that our early members could not have envisioned in a community that has changed beyond their wildest imagination.

As we begin another year, plans to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our organization's founding next Spring are underway. And—in just 3 short years (2029), Plainfield will be celebrating the 200th Anniversary of our community's founding.

For those of us who have lived in Plainfield all or much of the past half century, we continue to *explore* and learn about unfamiliar people, events, and places. Many of our newer

Annual Meeting: Sunday July 26

The Annual Meeting of the Plainfield Historical Society will be held at 2:00 pm on Sunday, July 26, 2026. The annual meeting will be held at the Museum Gallery, located within the Plainfield Plaza (15412 S. Route 59 — Unit 120). The business meeting will include both a review of the past year as well as a look into the year ahead. Afterward, members and guests are invited to enjoy light refreshments and conversation.

Any interested member or friend of the Society is welcome. Because seating space is limited, please indicate your intention to attend so that we can plan appropriately. Please RSVP by calling 815-436-4073 or by email (plainfieldhistoricalsociety.il@gmail.com) or by sending a message to us through Facebook Messenger. **RSVP by noon Saturday, July 25.**

Parking is available in the front and back parking lots of the south plaza building.

residents seek to *discover* the history of the community they, now, call home. Those of us with deep roots fondly *remember* people and stories from decades ago that remind us of a simpler time in Plainfield.

More than ever before, our Society has a renewed purpose and responsibility to collect, document, illuminate, and share the history of the Plainfield area for future generations...generations that will have less personal connection to those stories familiar to us and our founders.

So, as we embark on our anniversary year, please consider how you can share your time, talents, artifacts, and resources to support our vision and ensure the future of our organization for generations to come.

-- continued in next column

--Michael Lambert

Senator Loughran-Cappel Secures Funding

Funding and Donations Benefit UGRR Station Rehab

Following the lowering of the Turner-Mottinger House at Quality Hill on to a new and rehabilitated foundation last fall, the Plainfield Historical Society continues work at the Underground Railroad station property.

State Senator Meg Loughran Cappel has secured funding that is expected to be received by 2028 and be utilized to complete exterior renovation projects.



Wylie Properties, Inc. has begun to address first floor structural repairs and the most significant deterioration at the east and north sides of the historic house.

As a result of the current work, an interested neighbor generously donated \$500 towards the continuing rehabilitation work.

Earlier this summer, several Society members made specific donations towards the project: grass seed to assist in the re-establishment of the lawn; \$3,000 earmarked for future landscape improvements; and funds to cover monthly, professional lawn care expenses at the property. Additionally, Mike Bortel continues to mow the lawn with assistance from Gary Countryman and Sue Hasenyager. Michael Lambert continues efforts to secure Illinois and National Network to Freedom recognition for the significant property with the hope of accessing additional grant funding. Each donation of time and resources is much appreciated.

Summer Heat Halts Caboose Paint Project

Exterior Restoration Will Resume Once Weather Cools

One area of our E J & E caboose received a coat of fresh and bright orange paint before the temperatures rose to unacceptable levels for application. We look forward to the completion of the authentic paint scheme, undertaken by Society members Mike Bortel, George Rapp, and Ed Armstrong. A generous donation funded the purchase of the specialized paint coating. George and Mike continue to provide lawn care.

Grants & Donations Fund Station Project

Work Continues But Additional Funds Still Needed

The Plainfield Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial contributions of several organizations and individuals that have allowed us to continue with our Phillips Service Station Renovation.

Significant funding has been provided through a special Route 66 grant program offered through the Illinois Department of Economic Opportunity (DECO) and administered thru Heritage Corridor Destinations (the region's tourism bureau). The Village of Plainfield generously donated towards site improvement and related expenses. Former State Representative Harry Benton secured a grant for the Society. Several individuals, who wish to remain anonymous, have donated significant sums towards the renovation project. Memorial gifts have benefitted the project as well.

In spite of these funds, a projected shortfall of approximately \$200,000 must be raised to assure opening of the museum facility in early 2027.

Donation Advances Conservation Goal

Wagner & Son Miniature Train Drawings

The last of the known surviving engineering drawings, produced by Albert Wagner for the fabrication of his miniature steam and diesel locomotives, were donated to the Society in 2025. The drawings—in ink and pencil on a variety of paper, film, and linen—are highly valued by owners of historic Wagner trains around the world.

Unfortunately, the drawings—which were stored for more than 70 years in less-than-ideal conditions—have deteriorated and are permeated with oil residue, coal dust, and other contaminants. Some of the scale drawings are estimated to be 8'-0" long or longer.

Based on consultation with professional paper conservators, the preservation of the Wagner & Son Engineering Drawings was estimated to be \$70,000. A Virginia-based steam engine enthusiast has generously donated \$5,000 to the Wagner & Son Drawings Conservation Fund, representing more than 7% of the needed funds.

1940 Phillips Service Station Renovation

Much Progress in past 60 days

Work continues towards the completion of the initial phase of our new museum home in the former Phillips Service Station along the only shared alignment of the Lincoln Highway and US Route 66. Baish Excavating, Master Piece Masonry, Elliott Electric, Corsetti Structural Steel, and Aurora Sign have been



undertaking essential repairs and new construction, including site work (Baish Excavating) for our new parking lot and the replacement of underground gas, water, and sewer service lines that had been installed in 1939.

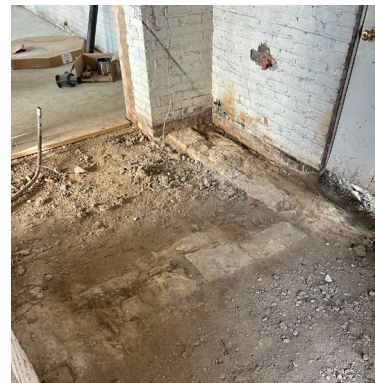


Ongoing work includes the replacement of the deteriorated 87-year-old steel lintels above the historic storefront windows (Corsetti Structural Steel) and reconstruction of the masonry at the northeast corner of the building (Master Piece Masonry). A new monument sign (Aurora Sign) is scheduled to be installed by the end of July and electrical work (Elliott Electric) will be completed in late August (or early September) while additional masonry work is finished. New windows and doors will be installed in the early fall along with the completion of a period-appropriate, exterior paint scheme and initial landscaping...pending funding.

Over the winter months, interior framing and finishes; plumbing fixtures; painting; and exhibit installation are scheduled for completion. Next spring, landscaping and exterior painting will be completed.

Earlier this summer, Heritage Corridor Destinations (the region's tourism bureau) coordinated filming at our historic station project for a segment of *Travels With Darley*, a PBS travel show hosted by Darley Newman. The episode is scheduled to air later this year.

One of the curious discoveries was the unearthing of a portion of the historic limestone foundation of the Frey-Van Dyke-Selfridge House that stood on the site (1888-1939). The house—designed by Joliet architect John Barnes—now stands along Illinois Street.



Volunteers are needed the next few weeks to assist with removal of abandoned electrical conduits and general site cleanup. Fall, winter, and next spring projects offer more opportunities.



Indigenous Peoples Acknowledgment

Adopted by Governing Board in September 2025

The Plainfield Historical Society acknowledges that we gather on the ancestral lands of the Council of Three Fires—the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa Nations as well as many other tribes, including the Illinois, Miami, Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, and Ho-Chunk.

During the early 1800s, opportunity-seeking European-American settlers entered northern Illinois, leading to years of both peaceful coexistence and aggressive conflict, culminating in the Black Hawk War of 1832.

The Treaty of Chicago of 1833 required both the removal of most Potawatomi people living in Illinois and the ceding of the lands where the Potawatomi had gathered, resided, traded, hunted, and harvested for generations and where other indigenous tribes had traveled and sought seasonal shelter.

The Plainfield Historical Society commits to building relationships with descendants of these tribal nations who continue to call this area home and pledges to sharing the history and contributions of native peoples with the Plainfield community.

Our Collections Continue To Grow

Organization and Inventory Work Prioritized

Several donations of historical items related to Plainfield's past have been donated to our Society in recent months, including Fellows family items and gas station artifacts (Donald C. Fistler Collection).

Volunteers continue to organize our collections after our move a year ago. On Monday mornings, Shari Cecchi, Hope McSteen and Michael Lambert continue the inventory and organization of our large artifacts. Tuesday and Thursday workdays are devoted to paper and photo file cataloging under the capable hands of June Ferguson, Carolyn Baitinger, Mary Yahnke, Caron Stillmunkes, Becky Zintak, Sue Hasenyager, Hope McSteen, and Laura Mitrison. Wednesday mornings, Linda Ozbolt and Michael Lambert organize administrative and related files.



Our Mission

The Plainfield Historical Society is dedicated to preserving, interpreting, and sharing artifacts that represent the unfolding story of the Plainfield, Illinois community through the conservation of its archival collections; implementation of educational programs; fostering of community partnerships; and stewardship of historic sites so that our collective heritage continues to be relevant to and embraced by present and future generations.

Our Vision

The Plainfield Historical Society seeks to engage the Plainfield, Illinois community and other interested persons in our pursuit to discover, document, collect, interpret, and honor our past with integrity and professionalism while inspiring and educating the broadest possible audience through engaging exhibits, dynamic storytelling, inspiring preservation efforts, and state-of-the-art facilities.

Our Core Values

Honesty, Integrity, Life-long Learning, and Stewardship.

Volunteer Opportunities

Museum, Gas Station, and UGRR Properties Need More Hands

A workday is scheduled at the Turner-Mottinger House at Quality Hill on Thursday, August 13th, 9:00 am - noon. Contact us if available to help or to learn how you can assist with other Society projects. All ages and skillsets welcome!

How to Reach Us

Volunteer Donate Join

Museum Gallery & Research Room:

15412 S. Route 59 — Unit 120, Plainfield, IL 60544

Tues-Wed-Thurs 9 am — noon and Sat 1 pm — 4 pm

Mailing Address:

15402 S. Route 59, Plainfield, IL 60544

Phone: 815/436-4073

Email: plainfieldhistoricalsociety.il@gmail.com

Website: www.plainfieldhistoricalsociety.org