



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

telling the story of Plainfield, Illinois

Volume 20, Number 1

November 2025

President's Message

Keep Moving Forward

The 2007 animated, science fiction comedy, *Meet the Robinsons*, portrayed an energetic, 12-year-old, aspiring scientist and inventor, who relentlessly pursued a seemingly unattainable goal in spite of misadventures and malfunctioning inventions.

One of the memorable quotes from the movie is: "*Around here, however, we don't look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things, because we're curious. . . and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.*" Perhaps that is the persistent challenge and enduring reality for any historical society.

Certainly, our shared curiosity about our past brings us together. In fact, our Society's mission underscores our desire to explore the unfolding stories of our collective heritage.

However, our Society's vision is that we keep moving forward and exploring new opportunities to engage a broader audience while connecting present and future Plainfield residents to relatable stories and artifacts of the past.

Like the central figure of the movie, our Society continues to experiment with new opportunities to reach those interested in Plainfield's history. We continue to tackle seemingly unattainable goals despite occasional setbacks: our own "misadventures and malfunctions." But, in those instances, we "don't look backwards for very long" as we "keep moving forward" to fulfill our mission and realize our vision for our organization.

This issue of *The Messenger* is filled with news about our Society and our projects. We hope that you will share the information with your friends and neighbors so that our organization will continue to plan, grow, and prosper.

--Michael Lambert

Website is Live

After many, many months of development (and more than a few setbacks), the Plainfield Historical Society website went "live" this past July. If you haven't checked it out, please log on to www.plainfieldhistoricalsociety.org and provide us with your feedback.

Our website is still being fine-tuned. As we work out any glitches, the website will be your online resource for Society news, project updates, membership renewals, event registration, meeting announcements, research requests, history features, and much more.

The Messenger Is Moving Online

With this issue, the Society's quarterly newsletter will be available online through our website. You may read *The Messenger* online as well as download each issue to save or print. We encourage you to share the newsletter link with your friends and family.

We heard from a number of our members that you were not receiving *The Messenger* when distributed via email. We heard, also, that some of you were unable to open the newsletter as an email attachment. Some of you missed newsletters when the email went to your "junk" box or were blocked by your email provider as potential spam or phishing attempts. We apologize for the delivery issues.

For those members who do not use a computer, we will continue to mail a paper copy upon written request.

**History never looks like history when
you are living through it.**

--John W. Gardner

Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson

Eddie Gardner Mural is “Back Home”

Restored Mural Unveiled at Annual Meeting

On Sunday, July 27, 2025, approximately 50 members and friends gathered to witness the unveiling of the restored Edward “Eddie” V. Gardner Mural. The mural was revealed just 1 month shy of 5 years from the date that the deteriorating mural was removed from the United States Post Office at Plainfield. But the story of the mural and its restoration began decades prior.

Born on a farm east of the village, “Eddie” V. Gardner was 1 of a pair of early aviators who,



in 1918 was instrumental in the establishment of the United States Postal Department’s air mail delivery between New York City and Chicago. More than a century ago, air mail delivery revolutionized postal service by significantly reducing the travel time between the two points.

In 1957, local business owners and individual residents contributed the funds to develop a mural honoring Plainfield’s most famous aviator. Plainfield artist Harold S. Hewlett, Sr., who served as the Art Director for the Gerlach-Barklow Art Calendar Company of Joliet, painted the 22-foot-long mural. The original artwork was hung in the public lobby of the newly-constructed Plainfield Post Office on DesPlaines Street when the facility was dedicated; the mural was unveiled by Nellie Spangler, sister of the deceased pilot.

The historic mural was moved twice in the 1990s. During that time, the mural suffered from accumulated dirt as well as smoke and water damage. From 1998 until 2020, the mural was hidden from public view.

Between 2010 and 2018, Society volunteers made several attempts to secure the mural before it deteriorated further. Local elected officials attempted, unsuccessfully, to secure the mural for restoration and public display. After many months of tense negotiating with the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the National Postal Archives representatives, Plainfield Historical Society volunteers secured ownership of the mural with the intent of returning the community artwork to public display and interpretation.

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Parma Conservation, a professional art restoration firm based in Chicago, Illinois, was selected to complete the mural’s renewal. The \$29,000 mural restoration was completed by June 2025, and the artwork was mounted days ahead of the Society’s 48th Annual Meeting.

The restoration of the beloved mural was funded through contributions from many Society members and friends. The initial “seed money” was provided by former postal worker, Don Kinley, and his wife, Sharon, a Former Society Board member and longtime advocate for the mural’s restoration. However, an anonymous benefactor generously donated significant funds to assure the restoration could be completed.

Prior to leaving on a summer vacation, Mayor Argoudelis, who portrayed Eddie Gardner at the Society’s CemeteryWalk in 2013, stopped by to view the mural and commend the Society’s determined efforts.



The restored mural was unveiled at our Annual Meeting by Linda Hewlett, the original muralist’s grand-daughter. On behalf of the Hewlett family, Linda shared

Her memories, expressed her deep gratitude to the Society and conveyed how meaningful the mural project was to her, her family, and the Plainfield community. Village Trustee Margie Bonuchi also congratulated the Society on its persistent and successful preservation efforts.

Generous Donors Appreciated

Over the past 12 months, the Plainfield Historical Society has been the recipient of more than \$20,000 from 2 generous—but anonymous—donors.

The gifts have allowed our Society to complete and pursue several projects, including completion of the Eddie Gardner Mural Restoration; additional foundation replacement expenses at the Turner-Mottinger House at Quality Hill; additional engineering expenses for our 1940 Phillips Gas Station; and the digitization of our microfilm collection of *The Enterprise* newspaper.

Generous financial support of our many initiatives—whether from individual or corporate donors—is always appreciated. For those individuals who prefer that their contributions remain anonymous, the Society's Governing Board gratefully acknowledges the donations and respectfully protects the privacy of those gifting individuals.

First Baptist Church Dome Relocated

Lennar Homes Generously Moves Artifact to Depot Site

Easily one of our largest artifacts ever donated to the Society, the dome of the former First Baptist Church building was stored for 2 decades at the former Keller Farm property (northwest corner of Lockport Street & Wallin Drive). When the Keller Farmstead was razed for commercial development earlier this year, the dome had to be relocated. Lennar Homes, project developer, donated the move and all costs.

Installed in 1915 above the church's entry porch & belfry, the dome was designed by Plainfield architect Herbert Cowell, who intended the building to be a "beacon of salvation" for Lincoln Highway travelers. The historic dome was gifted to the Society in September 2004, when the building was razed.



Although no specific plans for the re-purposing of the historic artifact exist at the present time, the goal is to incorporate the restored dome into an interpretive feature at the Depot site.

Membership Renewals Now Online

Several of our members have asked when their membership renewals are due, noting that they have not received a renewal notice for a year or more. We are not certain what has happened and apologize for our failure to provide timely renewal notices. However, we sincerely appreciate the support of each individual, business, and agency that sustains our Society's goals and projects through membership.

Twelve-month memberships can be established or renewed easily and securely online through our website's membership portal:

www.plainfieldhistoricalsociety.org/join-support/membership.php

For those members who prefer to pay by paper check, membership dues along with each member's name, mailing address, phone number, and email may be mailed to:

Plainfield Historical Society
15204 S. Route 59
Plainfield, IL 60544

Alternatively, membership dues may be paid, in person, at our Museum Gallery & Research Room, 15412 S. Route 59, Unit 120 (Plainfield Plaza) during our posted hours. Annual Membership Dues (new or renewing) are:

Individual Under 18 years old: \$15.00

Individuals Over 18 years old: \$25.00

Businesses/Government with 1-25 employees: \$50.00

Businesses/Government with 26 or more employees: \$75.00

With the activation of our website and membership portal, members will receive an automated renewal notice each year, by email, as their anniversary date approaches.

Members are entitled to free admission to our Museum Gallery; 2 hours of assisted access to our research files at no charge; discounted rates for Society-sponsored programs and events; and general satisfaction that you have supported the mission and vision of your Society. Unpaid prior years' dues and additional donations—above and beyond current membership dues—are always appreciated.



Are you following us on Facebook? Join our nearly 3,000 followers...

Museum Gallery Features New Exhibits

Additional Exhibits Coming

With the opening of our new Museum Gallery in the Plainfield Plaza (15412 S. Route 59, Unit 120), new exhibits have been created and favorite exhibits have been updated.



One of the new exhibits features Eddie “Turk Bird” Gardner, the impact of Air Mail service, and the creation and restoration of the 1957 Gardner Mural. The informative exhibit includes historic photos, narratives, period posters, and a sample of air mail stationery, which was a recent gift to the Society.

An updated exhibit of a few of Plainfield’s gas stations provides a glimpse of the “Pumped Up On Plainfield” exhibit that will be installed in the Society’s 1940 Phillips Station, set to open to the public in early 2026...the centennial celebration year for Historic Route 66. The exhibit incorporates recent donations of items from “Al” Morel’s Mobiloil Service Station (1939-1957) along with vintage oil and gas ephemera.

Our Plainfield Schools exhibit features the Classes of 1904 and 1924 along with a variety of school activities, including sports, music, and the Girls Athletic Association (GAA).

Highlighting World War II veterans, the Military and Veterans’ Exhibit—a patriotic and perennial favorite—has been updated.

The Miles V. Hartong exhibit explores the Hartong family of Plainfield, particularly the many interests of “Mickey” Hartong: historian, woodworker, and inventor.

Other exhibits, including On The Street Where You Live, are currently undergoing modifications.

Since opening our relocated Museum Gallery, we have had visitors every day (and also on days when we weren’t “officially” open!). The Museum Gallery is open Tuesday thru Thursday (9:00 am to Noon) and Saturdays (1:00 pm to 4:00 pm) thru Saturday, December 13, 2025. The gallery will re-open to members and the public on Saturday, February 7, 2026.

Major Donation Leads To New Exhibit

Lincolnway Barber Shop closes after 144 Years

For many Plainfield men and boys, the closing of the Lincolnway Barber Shop is like losing an old friend. One of the last of the “old-time” barber shops in the Plainfield area, 4 generations of the Worst-Kinley men have cut hair in the shop.

In 2021, when celebrating 140 years in business, the history and significance of one of Illinois’ longest operating, family-run businesses was featured on several Chicago television stations, including Fox32: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKn7lovb-EE>.



Albert “Al” Worst (Don Kinley’s great grandfather) apprenticed in his brother’s Lockport, Illinois barber shop before moving to Plainfield in 1881, when Al. Worst acquired the Dishman Brothers’ barber shop.

David Dishman and his brother, Clinton Elijah Dishman, were Plainfield’s first, documented African-American businessmen. They established a “tonorial parlor” along Lockport Street sometime between 1875 and 1878. By 1880, Clinton had set up his own shop on Exchange Street (Jefferson Street) at Joliet, Illinois. By 1881, David Dishman was engaged to Ida Foster, and prepared to work in the Morris, Illinois barber shop of his future father-in-law, George Washington “Wash” Foster.

Don and Sharon Kinley have donated a large collection of barbering equipment, photos, and other items, including Al. Worst’s brass cash register, the shop’s electric barber pole, and the iconic Lincolnway neon window sign.

Floyd Worst, a “true man about town” if there ever was one, took over the shop, followed by his son, Robert “Bob” Worst, and, finally, Don Kinley.

As this staple of the Plainfield community vanishes, the Society gratefully acknowledges this significant donation and wishes Don Kinley a happy retirement!

Turner-Mottinger House at Quality Hill

Foundation Stabilization Phase Nears Completion

Foundation stabilization work at the Historic Turner-Mottinger House has been underway since late August. Funded, in part, by a T-Mobile Hometown Grant, the initial stabilization project is nearing completion.



On August 27, 2025, Naperville Excavating crews removed the earthen embankment surrounding the house in preparation for the lifting of the structure.

While site work progressed, Society Vice President John Dixon and President Michael Lambert removed more than 1/2 ton of abandoned, iron piping from the basement over several days. All scrap metal was taken off-site by recyclers.



Wolfe House & Building Movers of North Manchester, Indiana arrived on site and began the process of lifting the historic house: building cribbing and inserting steel beams below the frame structure. Once the house was lifted several feet in the air, the crumbling foundation was removed below the northwest wing and a new basement was excavated below the east wing. Virgin dirt was moved carefully to preserve an early cistern and a limestone well.



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The failing concrete block foundation was removed by hand by Society Board members Madison Basso, Jerry Pennington, and Michael Lambert. Then, they moved the block to a stockpile. Board member Sue Hasenyager assisted clearing rubble stone from the foundation so that Masterpiece Masonry could rebuild and level the 1866 limestone foundation.

Pinnacle Construction Co. formed and poured new concrete footings, foundation walls, and basement floor slab, completing their work in the waning days of a beautifully warm October.



Throughout construction, many neighbors and passersby—young and old—stopped to watch the progress and ask questions about the project and history of the house. Neighbor Keith Bollinger and his grandsons enjoyed a warm fall day as they watched intently as the crews worked.

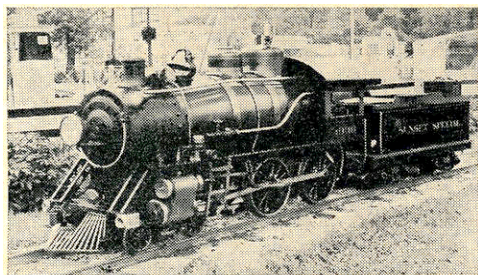


Although the project is slightly behind schedule, one more clean-up day will be scheduled after the house is lowered; the foundation is backfilled; and before snow flies! Fundraising continues for the next phases of stabilization work and exterior restoration.

Wagner & Son Drawings Conservation

Fragile Documents Require Careful Preservation

When the Wagner & Son Shop in downtown Plainfield was liquidated at auction in 1976, most of the items went to amusement parks and out-of-town collectors who valued the miniature steam engines produced at Plainfield.



In 2024, a large collection of the original, ink-and-pencil-drawn documents, produced by Albert Wagner and his son, Tony,

were donated to the Society. The rare drawings are fragile but were donated in the exact condition in which they were purchased nearly 50 years ago.

The Society has received several inquiries about the Wagner & Son shop from individuals and organizations across the U.S. Many collectors, writers, parks, museums, and other organizations have expressed interest in viewing the drawings, once preserved.

Based on the interest in the Wagner Drawings, the Society's Governing Board explored the conservation of the documents. Graphic Conservation, an Oak Park, Illinois-based, professional paper conservator was engaged to evaluate the collection.

The professional assessment identified more than 50 drawings—some at least 8 feet in length—were more fragile than originally believed. The quality of the original paper varies; some drawing inks are unstable; pencil drawings are faded; tightly-rolled drawings require gentle flattening; and many drawings are soiled with dust, oil, and other fluids. However, the assessment identified that the drawings—valued by local residents as well as collectors, and scholars from across the nation and around the world—are suitable for preservation. The drawings were sorted, tagged, and returned to the Society following the evaluation process.

However, the preservation of these rare documents is costly. The conservation estimate is nearly \$70,000 which is beyond the Society's means. Consequently, the Society welcomes tax-deductible contributions, designated for the "Wagner Conservation Project." Once most of the funds have been collected, the conservation project will proceed.

Speaking of Trains...

Caboose Restoration Makes Great Progress

If you didn't attempt to cross west of the DuPage River while the Lockport Street bridge was reconstructed this past summer, then you missed seeing all of the progress at our Depot / Sennitt Barn site.

Society members and volunteers Mike Bortel, George Rapp, and Ed Armstrong have been working to restore our 1956 caboose. Interior work included painting, flooring, bunk mattresses, lighting, and a security system.

Although their good work suffered a setback when the caboose interior was vandalized, the team was undeterred and repaired the damages as quickly as possible. At the exterior, windows were repaired or replaced and the roof of the caboose was painted with special paint. Next season, the volunteers plan to have the caboose exterior repainted in appropriate E J & E colors.

Mike Bortel generously donates significant funds towards the restoration of the caboose and maintenance of the Depot / Sennitt Barn property. Between Mike Bortel and George Rapp, the grounds are well-maintained and tidy.

Where Have All The Monuments Gone?

Wheatland Plowing Match Memorial Site Impacted

If—in recent months—you have passed by the Wheatland Plowing Match Memorial Site on 119th Street just east of Route 59, you may have noticed something is missing.



The large, granite memorial markers that commemorate the site of the first Wheatland Plowing Match have been removed and safely stored while the new

Woodman's Market and roadway improvements are constructed adjacent to the memorial site. The road widening project required a substantial portion of our site for which the Society was compensated. The monuments were relocated by the Pontiac Granite Co. Once the road work is completed, the site will be reconfigured and the monuments reinstalled.

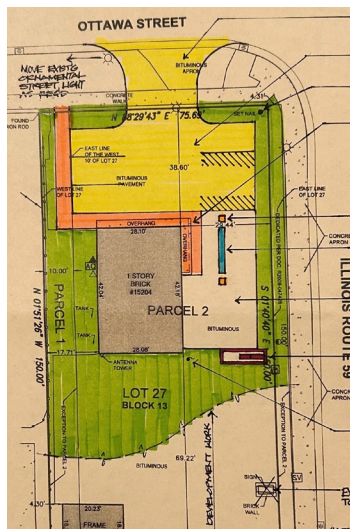
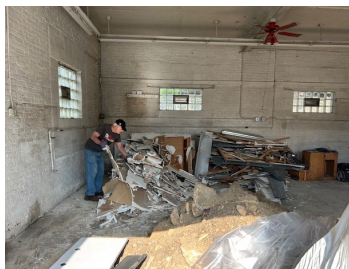
What's Going On With The Gas Station?

Village Staff Delays Progress for 16 Months

While other Illinois communities are working fervently and cooperatively to create visitor attractions along Historic Route 66 ahead of the roadway's centennial celebration in 2026, the Society's Phillips gas station museum project remains stymied by Village staff.

Although Mayor John Argoudelis and Trustee Tom Ruane—on behalf of the Society—attempted to resolve the impasse with Village staff, no building permits have been issued. Early in the 2025 building season (which is quickly drawing to a close), Village staff indicated that a partial permit would be issued for limited, grant-funded projects while other project details were resolved, particularly site access and parking. The Society is not seeking occupancy of the historic building under its request to complete initial phases of the gas station project. In spite of its prior commitment, Village staff maintains its position that no partial permit will be issued.

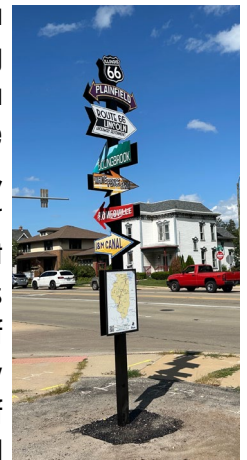
Volunteers have continued cleaning the property and have removed non-structural finishes as part of its ongoing, interior “investigative demo” work. Architectural Drawings for the initial phase of renovations were completed in March. In early September, the Village's Community Development and Public Works departments finally accepted a parking and site access concept plan for the gas station property; civil engineering drawings are now underway. Installation of the proposed parking area in 2026 will be partially-funded by a grant if the application is approved and Village staff will issue a permit.



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So, we wait...hoping that work at the historic Phillips gas station can move forward during the approaching winter months.

Although Village staff has not been helpful in advancing our gas station project, the Society has continued its efforts to promote heritage tourism in the Village. When the Village Plainfield was selected to receive a Historic Route 66 Centennial Wayfinding Signpost, Village staff could not locate a suitable Village-owned property for the sign. Apparently, the recently-acquired, Village property at Routes 30 and 59 or the former Veterans Memorial Site at Route 59, Oak and Arnold streets “was not available.” So, when Village staff desperately approached the Society seeking assistance with placement of the signpost, the Society accepted it and had it installed on our Phillips gas station property.



Who's Asking?

Many Research Inquiries Received in Recent Months

Society volunteers have fielded many requests for historical information in the past few months. Questions have been answered about Plainfield families and historic places as well as verification of artifact donations from decades ago. Recently, Dennis Doyle, a retired Joliet Junior College History Professor, came to the Society seeking information about Plainfield's Civil War veterans, which Caron George Stllmunkes was able to provide.

Our Facebook posts always draw lots of questions and comments, particularly a recent post about a donated—but yet-to-be-identified—photo of a first communion group from St. Mary Immaculate Catholic Church.

Upcoming Spring Programs

Several Programs In The Works

Watch our website (www.plainfieldhistoricalsociety.org) and our Facebook page for details about future programs. Beginning in January 2026, we are planning monthly “Lite Lunch Lectures” that will run thru March. In April, we will host a program on the Lincoln Highway in Illinois. Registration and space will be limited, so advanced registration will be required.

Our Collections Continue To Grow

Interesting Artifacts Among the Items Donated

Several substantial and small donations of historical items related to Plainfield's past have been donated to our Society in recent months.

Donated artifacts include: a large clothing collection linked with Ruth Brockway / the Plainfield (Halfway) House as well as other Plainfield items (Ralph & Shirley Rouse Estate); Plainfield / Wheatland Township Memorabilia (June Bronk Estate); Lions Club Memorabilia (Laura Lindberg Mitrising); "Al" Morel's Mobil Oil Cap and photos of the Morel/Taylor Mobil Service Station (Roy Taylor and Linda Taylor); Plainfield Memorabilia (Barb [George] and William Barnes Estate); School Items (Carolyn [Parks] Baitinger); Wheatland Township Families' Household Furniture (Daryl White); Road Maps & Atlas (Christine Johnson); Gas & Oil Equipment (Jeanne Annis); Plainfield Organization and Church Records, Clothing, and other Plainfield items (Mary Alice Lambert Estate); Historic Plainfield and Family items (Becky [Avery] Zintak); and Historic Road Maps (Michael Lambert).

We Couldn't Reach Our Goals Without You

Our Volunteers Make Things Happen

This has been a very busy year for the Plainfield Historical Society. In this month of gratitude, we are thankful for each person who has volunteered their time and talent to help us achieve our ambitious goals.

We recognize and thank the following individuals who have helped our Society pursue our Mission and Vision: Bob Anderson, Jeanne Annis, John Argoudelis, Ed Armstrong, Carolyn Baitinger, Madison Basso, Mike Bortel, Penny Bronk, Ken Carroll, Gary Countryman, John Dixon, Michelle Dixon, Jane Ferguson, Deb Fleming, Ed Fleming, Sue Hasenyager, Sharon Kinley, Emma Kleidon, Michael Lambert, Scott Monday, Bob Navarro, Arnie Ozbolt, Jerry Pennington, Kelley Pennington, Pat Pennington, Vicky Polito, Jim Pubentz, George Rapp, Lynn Reichert, Caron George Stillmunkes, Dave Stillmunkes, Mary Yahnke, and Becky Zintak.

If your name seems to be missing from the list above, consider volunteering for a small task or a large project!

Museum Gallery & Research Room Closed
December 14, 2025 – February 6, 2026



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.

Plainfield Neighbors Features Society

Magazine's Current Issue Highlights Volunteers & Projects

Our Society is the featured cover story in the November 2025 issue of *Plainfield Neighbors* magazine, delivered monthly and accessible through Facebook. We appreciate the recognition and hope you enjoy reading the article!

How to Reach Us

Volunteer Donate Join

Museum Gallery & Research Room:

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

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Phone: 815/436-4073

Email: plainfieldhistoricalsociety.il@gmail.com

Website: www.plainfieldhistoricalsociety.org