

Dear Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society members and friends,

First Membership Meeting of 2025 is March 13 at 7 pm

Our first membership meeting of the year will be this upcoming Thursday March 13 at 7 pm via Zoom. The Zoom meeting link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88416377494?pwd=mSbwJwzFzxbPGAWPIYaMncFKXQQPh6.1>. The Zoom meeting ID is 88416377494 and Passcode is 237253.

Restoration Works in Bradley Open House on March 12

Restoration Works President Gail Wallace invites us to an Open House at the facility for this Wednesday March 12. Her invitation states: “Greetings Friend of Historic Restoration! Restoration Works, Inc. will be hosting an Historic Get-together/Open House on Wednesday March 12th from 2:30 to 5:00. We are currently in the process of restoring the original windows for the Ellis Island Main Immigration Building. If you would like to come visit us and get a glimpse into our restoration process, please register by either calling or emailing us. We look forward to seeing you! Thanks,

Gail Wallace, President Restoration Works, Inc., 320 S. Forest Ave., Bradley IL 60915, (815) 937-0556 office, (815) 378-8991 mobile”

In memorium: Mary Ann Kirsch (1936-2025)



Mary Ann Kirsch (at right) with her sister Celeste Regnier, greeted visitors to the June 17, 2011, Kankakee Cultivator's Garden Walk at the Letourneau Home/Museum.

We have lost a dear friend of not only the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society but also local historical preservation. Mary Ann died on January 25. Her obituary stated “. . . as a feature editor of the BB Herald . . . her award-winning writing in the 80's raised public awareness about the sale of the Perry Farm to a developer, and the Letourneau Home being slated for demolition. As a result, the Perry Farm was preserved and made into the beautiful park it is today, and the Letourneau Home was saved, relocated, and made into a local museum. . . She was chairman of the Hooray Bourbonnais Pageant held in 1975; those festivities led to the formation of the Bourbonnais Friendship Festival, and Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society.”

We will be eternally indebted to you, Mary Ann. After her funeral, the Kirsch family wrote this thank you note to the BGHS: “Thank you so much for the beautiful flowers in honor of our Mom, Mary Ann Kirsch. Your dedication to historic preservation was near and dear to her heart.”

Special guests visited our museum campus and French Heritage Museum



On March 3, BGHS members gave a tour of the log schoolhouse and Letourneau Home/Museum to three special guests: Lisa Kahn (Chicago-Midwest Chapter Chair of the French Heritage Society and Director of the French Heritage Corridor Initiative), Jeanne Lamy-Belzil (Delegation of Quebec Delegation to Chicago/Public & Government Affairs Officer), and Sylvain Lavoie (President and CEO of the *Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques*). In the photograph from left to right are: BGHS member Cindy McBarnes, Jeanne Lamy-Belzil, BGHS Member and Assistant Administrator in Village of Bourbonnais Laurie Cyr, Sylvain Lavoie, BGHS members Frank and Jean Koehler, and Lisa Kahn.

While I was vacationing in Texas, Frank Koehler volunteered to lead the tour of our museum campus on March 3 for our special guests identified in the photograph caption above: Lisa Kahn, Jeanne Lamy-Belzil, and Sylvain Lavoie. In addition to showing off the log schoolhouse and its connection to the Letourneau Home/Museum, our members explained the BGHS's role in the French Heritage Corridor, educating the community about our French-Canadian heritage, plans for the 2025 sesquicentennial, and creating a sister city in Bourcherville, Quebec.

Our guests also visited the French Heritage Museum where they met Kankakee Mayor Chris Curtis, Illinois State Representative Jackie Haas, and co-curators of the museum Charles Balesi and Vic Johnson. BGHS members Ken Ponton and Ken Lewellen served as hosts and refreshments were served by the Kankakee County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

After the event, the following letters of gratitude were received:

- Lisa Kahn wrote: “Many thanks for so warmly welcoming us yesterday in Bourbonnais and at the French Heritage Museum in Kankakee. It was truly my pleasure to introduce such valued FHC partners to Sylvain Lavoie, CEO of the *Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques*, and to help foster the important connection between the American Midwest and French-speaking Canada.”
- Jeanne Lamy-Belzil wrote: “My turn to thank you all for your time, your warm welcome and your dedication for making this visit possible. It is highly appreciated. Sylvain and I really enjoyed our time in Bourbonnais and Kankakee, and our time with Lisa. You’ve always all been generous with us and you can count on our support and consider us as

friends. Many people were present yesterday and I want to extend our thanks to every person who was part of this visit. One of the things we discussed is adding a “Francophone/Quebec” touch in the school such as books. We’ll do our homework and get back to you on this specific point and see what we can do on our end. Let’s keep in touch and I wish you a wonderful celebration for the 150th anniversary.”

- Sylvain Lavoie wrote: “I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for the generosity you have shown in our exchanges and meetings, as well as for the remarkable work each of you has accomplished. I leave with a wealth of ideas, new perspectives, and a strong desire to continue strengthening our connections and fostering even closer collaborations.”
- Frank Koehler wrote: “On behalf of the Village of Bourbonnais, and the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society, I too want to thank everyone who was involved in yesterday's gathering. I would also like to thank the Kankakee County Historical Museum for hosting our gathering at the Stone Barn, and to the Kankakee County Visitors Bureau for the refreshments. We are truly fortunate to have an on-going and collaborative relationship with the French Heritage Society - Midwest Chapter, and with our friends at the Delegation du Quebec a Chicago. And we welcome and look forward to working with the *Centre de la Francophonie des Ameriques*. We will keep you informed as to events associated with the Village's 150th Birthday Celebration, and welcome the donation of French school books we can add to the Log School House.”

Kudos to all our volunteers

In addition to those mentioned above who helped with the March 3 special event, I would like to thank Mayor Paul Schore, Daron Kinzinger, and Gary Seiner for also assisting. More kudos go to: Daron Kinzinger for picking up our mail, chairing our Board of Directors, organizing publicity and upcoming Culver’s fund raiser on May 6, drafting the bylaw restructuring of the BGHS, and creating the Landing Page for our website; Cindy McBarnes for chairing the log schoolhouse Education Committee; Steve Monts for his ongoing detailed treasurer’s work; Gary Seiner for his expert and detailed work as curator and chaperoning the Saturday March 8 museum campus open house; Mary Ann Lambert for serving as assistant curator; Ken Ponton for helping plan the March 3 event; Ellen Stringer for organizing the craft show fundraisers; Log Schoolhouse Advisory Committee members Mayor Paul Schore, Laurie Cyr, Ken Ponton, Gary Seiner, Charles Balesi, Frank Koehler, Cindy McBarnes, Norm Strasma, Daron Kinzinger, Tyler Goodrich, and myself; Perry Farm Living History Advisory Committee members: Mack Brza, Daron Kinzinger, Ken Lewellen, Max Michels, Rodney Miller, Doris O’Connor, Gary Seiner, Jorie Walters, and myself; and Doris O’Connor for chairing the Membership Committee.

Volunteering is as easy as clicking the links below

As spring approaches, the BGHS has a new schedule for the open houses of the Letourneau Home/Museum and log schoolhouse. These two historic landmarks will be open only once a month, the second Saturday of every month from March to December from 1-4 pm. The BGHS needs two volunteer chaperones for each site. Chaperons greet visitors, hand out self-guided tour information at the door, and oversee artifacts. **If you have not volunteered before as an open house chaperon, no worries, a mentor will be present to train you—as well as open and close the sites—on the date you sign up for.** The sign-up process is rather easy. **Just click one or more of the links below for an opportunity to chaperon at your preference site and then click “Sign Up” for the date(s) you prefer. If both slots are filled**

for your site and date choice, just send me an email, and you can still come on your preferred date.

Craft Shows on July 4 and December 6, 2025 sign up link

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C48ADAE2BABFCC43-chaperoning1>

Letourneau Home/Museum open house, second Saturday of every month March-December from 1-4 pm (2 chaperones needed) sign up link

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C48ADAE2BABFCC43-chaperoning>

Log schoolhouse open house, second Saturday of every month March-December from 1-4 pm (2 chaperones needed) sign up link

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C48ADAE2BABFCC43-chaperoning2>

If passed, HB2361 will designate March as French Heritage Month in Illinois

Illinois State Representative Jackie Haas has sponsored a joint resolution bill HB2361 which designates the month of March of each year as French Heritage Month to be observed throughout the State as a month set apart to promote the study of French language and the culture of French-speaking people. The State Government Administration Committee was scheduled to hear the resolution on Wednesday March 5 at 2 pm. You may follow the progress of the bill at ILGA.GOV. Director of the French Heritage Corridor Initiative Lisa Kahn on March 2 posed the question “Imagine if each year Illinois recognized and celebrated our state's long and enduring connection to French speakers and places all around our great state as French Heritage Month and made it easier to market our rich history which continues to be an underutilized asset? **There is a bill currently in the Illinois House proposing to do just that!**”

Alexia Brown, the Deputy District Director for Representative Jackie Haas, has stated, “If HB2361 passes/is approved by the committee, then it will be placed on the floor calendar for a hearing and vote, if it passes in the house then it will be sent to the senate to follow the same process. If passed in both chambers, it will be sent to the governor for final approval, at that point the Governor will have 60 Business days to either sign it or veto it. If he does not take any action in those 60 days it will automatically become law. There is unfortunately no timetable for bills or Resolution, it is fully up to the committee chair to deduce when they would like it to be brought up/discussed and voted on.”

Who am I?

On September 20, 1860, I accompanied on the Illinois Central train three nuns of the Congregation of Notre Dame. We arrived at the Kankakee train station--just a little over a year since it opened. As the pastor of Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary parish, I had invited the nuns to open a school for the community girls. Who am I?

Special BGHS 2025 activities, some with links—save the dates:

- Thursday March 13 at 7 pm--BGHS Zoom membership meeting;
- Thursday March 20 at 7:30 pm--Perry Farm Living History Advisory Committee meeting via Zoom; Zoom link is below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81115735634?pwd=r53WJLQ1gjT3fHlbSluWngGeaQ1sHm.1>

and the meeting ID is 81115735634 with Passcode of 416670;

- Saturday April 19 from 9am-12pm--Daughters of the American Revolution meeting at the Letourneau Home/Museum;
- April 23-26--Fifth Annual French Heritage Corridor Conference at Washington University, St. Louis, MO [https://us8.campaign-archive.com/?e=test_email &u=5d49c2a770212a80ceddc94d4&id=b6705d20dc](https://us8.campaign-archive.com/?e=test_email&u=5d49c2a770212a80ceddc94d4&id=b6705d20dc)
- Tuesday May 6 from 5-8 pm--BGHS fundraiser at Bourbonnais Culver's;
- Friday July 4 *Les Artisans* Arts and Craft Show from 9 am to 3 pm, <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/les-artisans-fair>
- August 1--nomination deadline for 2025 *Fleur-de-Lis* Award of Excellence, <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/fleur-de-lis-celebration>
- Saturday September 27 from 7-9 pm at the Grove--Bourbonnais sesquicentennial history pageant Hooray Bourbonnais II/*Deux*, <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/french-heritage-weekend>
- Saturday-Sunday September 27-28, 2025--Bourbonnais sesquicentennial French Heritage Weekend, <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/french-heritage-weekend>
- Thursday November 13, 2025--Eight Annual *Fleur-de-Lis* Celebration Dinner, <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/fleur-de-lis-celebration>
- Saturday December 6 *Les Artisans* Arts and Craft Show from 9 am to 3 pm, <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/les-artisans-fair> and
- Saturday December 13--BGHS Christmas Open House from 1-4 pm.

Thursday March 13 at 7 pm Zoom meeting agenda

- 7pm—Pledge of allegiance;
- Presentation based on January-March 2025 news eletter item “Who am I?”
- Approval of December 5, 2024 membership minutes (*attached*);
- Treasurer's report;
- Corresponding Secretary report;
- Curator report
 - Letourneau photo book
- Membership report--thank you notes and/or certificates;
- Ways and Means:
 - Website update
 - Craft show update;
 - Remnant log pieces;
 - INaturalist app and purpose; and
 - Chaperones for open houses.
- Building and Grounds:
 - Current and future trees and shrubs work—Pete Gryzlak of B & S Yards Plus;
 - Florescent light replacement;
 - Electrician?
 - Pest control
 - HVAC
 - Chinking estimate approval
- Old Business

- Restructuring of BGHS update and process--how shall we proceed?; and
- Marker at Clancy Gernon Funeral Home parking lot
- New Business
 - **Next meeting April 3, 2025 at 7 pm**—Zoom only--if agreeable;
 - Election of corresponding secretary;
 - New possible slogan for BGHS: *Your History Starts Here*
 - Friday May 30 tour;
 - Assistance needed for Hooray Bourbonnais II *Deux*
 - Jim requested a videographer for the September 27, 2025 production of “Hooray Bourbonnais II/*Deux*--no one has volunteered to videotape the show, although an ONU person may be available--Daron will check;
 - Jim requested volunteers to present an onstage pro and con debate with rebuttal during the September 27, 2025 production of “Hooray Bourbonnais II/*Deux*”:
 - “Was Noel LeVasseur’s legacy positive or negative?” Jim will portray LeVasseur and present the positive view. Rodney Miller is thinking about presenting the negative view. Jim will send Rod the primary arguments for that view;
 - “Was the Excommunication of Fr. Charles Chiniquy justified?” Ken L. has volunteered to present the pro “yes” view and Josué has volunteered to present the con “no” view. Jim sent each of them the primary arguments and resource book;
 - “In the 1980s, should Durham-Perry Farmstead/Perry Farm Park be commercially developed or left in its natural state?” Volunteers to debate each view are needed.
 - Special BGHS 2025 dates, some with links—**save the dates--see latest BGHS News Eletters.**

Have a great end of winter! Best wishes,

Jim Paul, President of the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society