

LA GRANGE AREA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL
REPORT 2025



LAGRANGEHISTORY.ORG



PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT

As we conclude another fabulous year, my terms as President of The La Grange Area Historical Society have also concluded. I am amazed at how fast time has flown while I was having fun! We are fortunate that we can reflect on so many wonderful things this past year. In addition to the fun-filled events and educational programs, one of our most exciting opportunities was creating The La Grange Area Historical Society Mary Mavor Forester Scholarship. This was made possible because the LGAHS has had the good fortune of being named as one of the beneficiaries of the Mary Mavor Forester Trust. Her gift to the organization provides both financial security for many years to come as well as the opportunity to engage in additional endeavors that will strengthen our bond with those we serve.

I want to take this time to recognize the knowledgeable and talented LGAHS staff, Sarah Parkes our Executive Director, & Laurie Gibbons our Museum Concierge. They have a tough job and meet the challenges with grace and fortitude. Their presence provides visitors with the knowledgeable professionals they deserve while allowing for increased accessibility to the museum. This addresses the only complaint (accessibility) I had ever heard conveyed by our members and community. It's easy to see how splendidly they bond with visitors as well as community leaders, being ever so helpful and gracious while treating everyone with kindness, dignity, and respect.

Although I depart, I remain steadfast in my belief that the commitment to protect and maintain our precious historic home and the organization's mission and legacy of excellence set forth by the LGAHS founders and past leadership remains of paramount importance to our ongoing success. As a new board takes shape, I recognize that the leaders have a lot of work ahead of them and people to please. We all know that is not easy. But we didn't settle for average. After all, what shape would the world be in if the LGAHS settled for being average? They are anything but average.

Full steam ahead! You don't have to go far to have fun!

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
KATHERINE PADGETT

Executive Board Members -2025

President Katherine Padgett
Vice President Dan Malloy
Treasurer Abbey Helmetag
Secretary Mara Devitt

Emeritus Board Members

Ellie Carroll
Jeannine McLaughlin
Mary Ann Sward
Ed Thoele
Cynthia Urbain

Staff

Sarah Parkes Executive Director
Laurie Gibbons Museum Concierge

Board of Directors - 2025

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Beth Augustine
Stephanie Boggess
Judy Burns
Amy Current
Mike Henderson
Dave Knecht
Jim Peterson
Lynne Schaefer
Tom Veaser
Kait VanCleave
Julie Workman

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS



La Grange

...bears the impression of having been carved from a forest rather than built on a prairie.

In 1870 F.D. Cossitt purchased 600 acres of land in the area known as Fensington Heights. 440 of which were previously owned by early settler, Robert Leitch. Cossitt then set out to establish what he hoped would be an ideal community.

Franklin D. Cossitt

A Life of Perseverance

Franklin Dwight Cossitt was born in Granby, Connecticut in 1821. When his father Rene died, Franklin was only 14, and he was sent to live with his uncle in La Grange, Tennessee. He learned the mercantile business from his uncle and by age 24, he was a successful businessman with a cotton plantation and a stately home known as Tiana. When his cotton farm was ravaged in the Civil War, he moved his family to Chicago, established a wholesale grocery business, and prospered once again.

Summer

In 2025 we created a permanent installation that explains and celebrates the history of the La Grange area. From the earliest settlers to the founding of our communities of La Grange and La Grange Park, there are many stories to be told and images to enjoy!

Thank you
La Grange Art League
(located at 122 Calendar Avenue)
for making the Vial House dining room extra beautiful this Holiday season.

Christmas

The Vial House is renowned for its extravagant holiday decorations representing different eras and styles.. This year we were excited to introduce a new addition to our holiday décor. We partnered with three local businesses & the La Grange Art League to bring fresh creativity and beautifully curated displays throughout our lovely historic home.

Visit the La Grange Historical Society and enjoy the beautifully decorated Christmas trees, many thoughtfully designed by talented local businesses.

This week's featured tree was created by **Bloom 3** (located at 104 W. Burlington Ave.) It's full of charm—featuring butterflies, baubles, and of course, beautiful blooms.

Come see all the trees and soak in the holiday spirit!

Hours this week:
Wed: 9:30-12:00
Thurs-Sat: 11:00-2:00

Thank you to **Phillips Florist** for beautifully decorating the Vial House front porch and adding an elegant touch to the foyer banister—creating a truly grand and welcoming entrance.

Vial House Holiday Hours
WEDNESDAY DEC 26 CLOSED
THURSDAY DEC 28 CLOSED
FRIDAY DEC 29 CLOSED
SATURDAY DEC 27 11:00 - 2:00
WEDNESDAY DEC 31 CLOSED
THURSDAY - FRIDAY
JAN 1-2 CLOSED
JANUARY 3 11:00 - 2:00

There's still time to see the sweet tree created by **Tate's Ice Cream Shop**—a pink, whimsical, joy-filled creation bursting with fun!

Vial House Holiday Hours
SATURDAY DEC 27 11:00 - 2:00
WEDNESDAY DEC 31 CLOSED
THURSDAY - FRIDAY
JAN 1-2 CLOSED
JANUARY 3 11:00 - 2:00

OUR COLLECTION GROWS!

Highlights of the Artifacts That Were
Donated and Accessioned in 2025



We were the fortunate recipients of an extraordinary collection of counted cross stitch replica samplers and other pieces of beautiful needlework donated by La Grange resident Susan Stahr.



Vintage metal toys including Bo Peep aluminum coffee set and rocket ride, donated by local residents.

VIAL HOUSE PROJECTS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Having accomplished significant and necessary improvements to the Vial House in the prior year, for 2025, we added some important details to enhance security and protect the collection including new locks with non-reproducible keys, camera enabled doorbells and UV film on the second floor windows.

Our thanks to Mike Henderson for his comprehensive presentation and architectural drawings shared with the Board of Directors in November 2025. He outlined the potential to restore the Vial House to its original Italianate style or add additional functional space to improve museum operations.

Serving the community and preserving history is always the top priority!

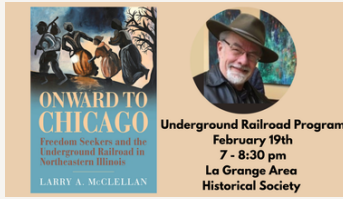


MARY MAVOR FORESTER SCHOLARSHIP



We are thrilled to announce that the La Grange Area Historical Society is one of the beneficiaries of the Mary Mavor Forester Trust. Mary was a third-generation resident of La Grange and a 1951 LT graduate. Her generous gift will be instrumental in supporting our mission and advancing our vision to make ongoing improvements, grow, thrive, and continue to preserve local history for generations to come. A scholarship for LTHS students has been created in her name and the first one will be awarded in the Spring of 2026. We extend our deepest gratitude to Mary for recognizing the value of our organization's work.

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS



Professor Larry A. McClellan reframed the local story of the Underground Railroad in our surrounding communities, introducing guests to early freedom seekers, and illustrating those who bravely aided them.



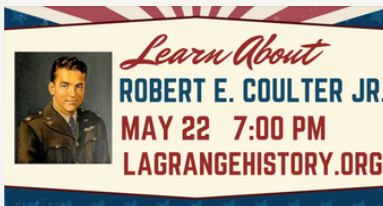
Bernadine Sims Family Memorabilia and Art Collection
Bernadine Sims and family have graciously loaned the family archives and art to share with the community in celebration of Black History Month. Please visit this special exhibition during the month of February anytime during our normal open hours: Wednesdays 9:30 - 12 and Thursday - Saturday 11 - 2.

February 1 - March 1

Bernadine Sims and her family graciously loaned their family archives and art to share with the community in celebration of Black History Month. Visitors were able to enjoy this special exhibition throughout the month of February.



Guests learned the history of how chocolate became a part of our desserts and sweets culture. And also how it pairs with its perfect partner - wine! Karen Gula of Lillet Candies and Sommelier Nancy Sabatini of the Educated Glass guided the group through a tasting journey. Special musical entertainment provided by Ken LaBahn.



The American Legion Post 1941 shared the story of local war hero, Robert E. Coulter Jr., for whom the Post is named. We all see his name on the side of the building, but at this program, guests learned more about his exceptional service to our country. Ticket proceeds were donated to Post 1941 for their veteran and community support.



We hopped on the School Bus and traveled to local museums, The Robert Vial House ~ Flagg Creek Historical Museum, the Old Lace School House, Downers Grove Historical Society, Gregg House in Westmont, and then returning to our very special Samuel Vial House. Guests learned interesting local historical facts as they explored,, sipping adult beverages, and having snacks along the way



The community joined us at the Vial House for our annual Ice Cream Social! There were fun and games for the whole family, thank you to our sponsor Mattingly Paint! The museum was open to enjoy, and of course there was free Tate's ice cream for all! Thank you Tate's!



Guests brought their own picnic baskets and chairs or blankets to enjoy live music by different bands throughout the summer. These popular free concerts are fun for the whole family! All of the bands generously donate their time, talent, and tips, which is so appreciated!

Guests came to sip, shop and support the LGAHS at local favorite, Vintage Charm! Tasty food and refreshments were served, and plenty of spring fashion inspired the shoppers! What a fun way to support a local business and your local museum and archive!



At our annual Home and History Tour, guests enjoyed touring through some of the La Grange area's finest private homes hosted by the homeowners themselves! Our thanks go out to our event sponsor, the Heraty Christensen Group, and our wonderful homeowners that opened up their homes to hundreds of visitors!



A fa-boo-lous return for the Witches Ride event in 2025! The witches dusted off their hats and broomcycles for our annual fundraiser. The coven enjoyed a witchy bike ride through the historic district of La Grange and wrapping up the fun with a magical afterparty at the event space Remi at the Wooden Paddle with dancing, photo ops, auction items, and delicious food, & drinks



Santa returned to the La Grange Historical Society for several weekends in December. He was once again listening to the children's wish lists and bringing the jolly fun of the season. Families enjoyed time for chatting and taking photos with Santa as well as enjoying photo ops all around the Vial House.!



A festive evening of hors d'oeuvres, drinks and scrumptious desserts in four historic homes in La Grange. Guests traveled to each home on the tour beginning with hors d'oeuvres and following with delicious desserts paired with festive holiday cocktails. This was a lovely glimpse into how families share their traditions and festive holiday decorations.

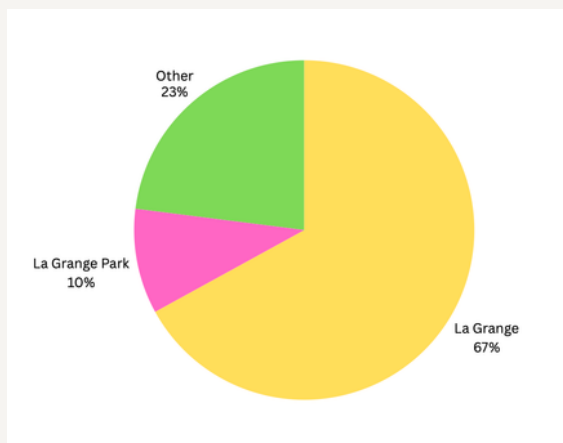
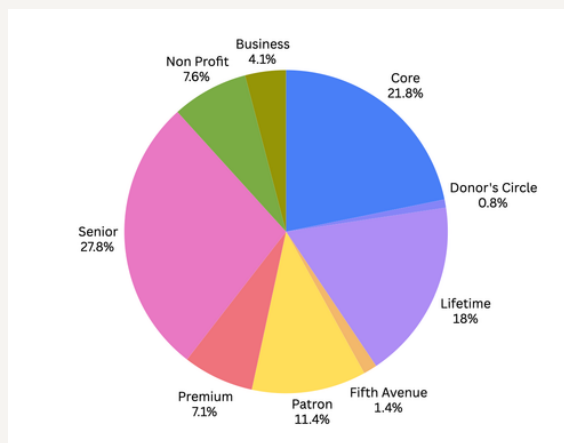


The community joined us for some old-fashioned cheer at the Holiday Open House. The Vial House was beautifully decorated for a Christmas through the decades, music was playing, refreshments were served, and everyone enjoyed the delicious bake sale and a magical holiday afternoon.



OUR MEMBERS & DONORS

Our members are vital to our success and growth! Thank you for supporting us through your membership! We hope you continue to enjoy the benefits your membership offers, and if you're local, we hope to see you at our events and programs in 2026.



This year we are proud that our membership remained strong at more than 380 members.

Many members chose to renew their membership at an upgraded level, which is truly appreciated! We do rely membership renewals as one means of supporting our operating expenses, so please consider renewing when the letters are sent out in June.

Thank you!

We are grateful to everyone that supports us at an advanced membership level.

Jeffery Baker and Beth Zeiter
David and Cathy Bier
Nicole Blanco Gallen
Stephanie Boggess
Martha Carr
John & Dawn Collins
Bryan Blue Cuevas
Victoria Cultra
Rebecca Dauparas
Catherine Dee
Paul and Mara Devitt
Barbara Fisher
Nancy Flanagan
Paul Fousek and Kristen Commito
Louis Gale
Patrick and Nicole Gallen
Chip Gibbons
Tim Hansen
Kim Hare
Michael Henderson
Kathryn Hoeksta
John and Ellen Kunkle
Glenn and Jess Landis
Mark and Eileen Langan

Elaine Layden
League of Womens Voters
Caroline Leban
Kathie Martin
Thomas and Jacquelyn Morsch
Paul and Shirley Mumford
Marcus and Katherine Padgett
James and Nancy Phillip
Mary Piette
Margaret Pokorny
Fred Riebel
Noreen Ryan
Sharon Sims
Arthur and Janis Smith
Dr. and Mrs. E. Spratford
Christopher and Mary Jo Studwell
Mary Tavegia and Tom Kokontis
Joe and Kathryn Thielmann
Thomas Veeseer
John and Lois Wagner
Joy Walke
Kelly Walker
David Whitcomb
Lauren Younce

Our sincere thanks to the following donors:

- Mary Mavor Forester
- Karen Iwanowski
Memorial Fund
- Thomas Gleitsman
- Mark Lambin
- Tom & Mary Veeseer

THE NUMBERS

Attendance and Visitors

Our programs and events were attended by more than 2000 people last year! And hundreds more visited the museum and research center.

In addition, we hosted the following groups for private and community events: LGNN Book Club, Rotary Club of La Grange, PEO x 2, Questers, and the La Grange Public Library. We also hosted private tours of the museum and private file viewing parties for many local residents!

Social Media

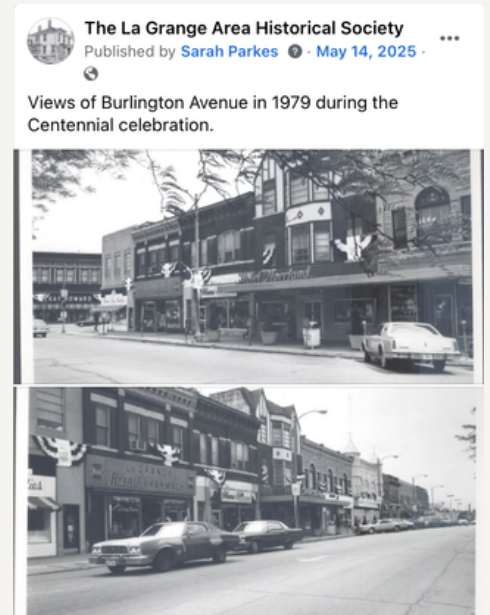
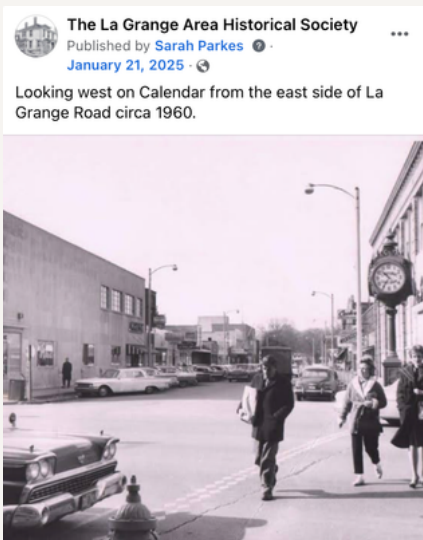


We have 4098 followers on Facebook and our posts had 371,512 views.



We have 1552 followers on Instagram - we continue to grow our exposure on this platform!

Some of our posts with the highest engagement:



Research Center

Our volunteers work hard to continually update the archives with information new and old. In addition, the files continue to be digitized:

Address files scanned - 95%

Community files scanned - 35%

Original photos scanned - 100%

Financials

Statement of Financial Position	
La Grange Historical Society	
As of December 31, 2025	
Distribution account	Total
Assets	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
Capital Campaign Account (9961)	4,273.31
Checking (7044)	24,256.72
Commercial Savings (1062)	250,734.70
ICS Investment Account (3929/0622)	1,156,689.26
Petty Cash	50.00
Total for Bank Accounts	\$1,436,003.99
Total for Current Assets	\$1,436,003.99
Total for Assets	\$1,436,003.99
Liabilities and Equity	
Liabilities	
Total for Liabilities	
Equity	
Retained Earnings	166,002.95
Net Income	1,270,001.04
Total for Equity	\$1,436,003.99
Total for Liabilities and Equity	\$1,436,003.99

Overall, we are in a very healthy financial position due to the generosity of members and donors and successful events and programs.

IN THE COMMUNITY

We are here to serve the community and we're committed to being involved! We partner with the LGBA and the LGP Chamber, and we are always looking for ways to connect and engage with our community!



Pet Parade



Farmer's Market

LGP Chamber Chili Cook-Off



Free Summer Concert Series

2026 IS OFF TO A GREAT START!



Featuring the collection of Susan Starr,
presentation by Katherine Padgett of
LGAHS & Mindy McMahon from
Hinsdale Embroidery Guild

Needlework Presentation at
Plymouth Place



Black History Month Exhibition
Featuring Doll Collection
of Linda Valentine



Pet Parade 80th Birthday
Celebration at the Vial House



La Grange Park Chamber of
Commerce Networking Event

Other initiatives, programs and events so far this year include - Church Women United presentation of local church history, LGAHS featured in Lemontown Films documentary, and the purchase of a new Burr Oak tree for the Vial House yard.



Our thanks to Dave Knecht for his generous donation of the cost and labor (\$2100) of a beautiful custom made storm door that includes a screen, providing the perfect final touch to our new side entrance!