



## KANKAKEE COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

# *The Preservationist*

Volume II, Issue II

Spring 2016

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### Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commissioners

Mardene Hinton, chair

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Dr. James Paul,  
secretary

Shari Ebert

Jane Johnson

Terry Johnston

Neeley Provost-Regas

Ron Shank

Pat Wagner

Staff:  
Michelle Sadler

## Four Walking Tours of Historic Bourbonnais

Dr. James Paul and the Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission has produced a publication on Historic Bourbonnais in partnership with the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society. The publication was created to coordinate with the Kankakee County Preservation Plan that is being developed by the Commission. The printing of the publication was made possible through a grant provided by the Community Foun-

dation of Kankakee River Valley.

With this publication, Dr. Paul has fashioned four self-guided walking tours that will lead you through the historic neighborhoods of what was once known as Bourbonnais Grove. He high-

lights structures and sites that have historic significance to the village, which was first settled by Noel LeVasseur in 1832. Mr. LeVasseur, who was born in Canada, returned to his home country to inform other French-Canadians of the opportunities that awaited them in the Kankakee River Valley. Families soon came and the little village grew. Maternity BVM Church became their church while St. Viator College later became the core of the community.

To download the walking tours visit: [www.bourbonnaishistory.org](http://www.bourbonnaishistory.org)

### FOUR WALKING TOURS OF HISTORIC BOURBONNAIS, ILLINOIS

By

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society and Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission



For website access, click "Four Walking Tours" on the <http://www.bourbonnaishistory.org> home page.

## French-Canadians in Kankakee River Valley

French-Canadian fur trappers were among the first settlers in Kankakee County. In 1821 fur traders Gurdon Hubbard and Noel LeVasseur, both employed by the Jacob Astor's American Fur Company in Mackinac, came to the Kankakee Valley area. Hubbard had been assigned to a post at Bunkum on the Iroquois

River, and Noel LeVasseur was among the Frenchmen he chose to man his trading post. With the help of Indians they portaged from the St. Joseph River, across swampy marsh lands in Indiana, to the Kankakee River.

In 1822 Hubbard established a trail that led from his post at Bunkum (now Iroquois) south to Dan-

ville, Illinois, and north to Chicago, Illinois. At the time he traded with the Pottawatomi Indians. The Hubbard Trail was about a mile above the present bridge at Momence, Illinois, and became known as the Upper Crossing. Another ford about a mile downstream was called the Lower Crossing. All travelers going north and

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## French-Canadians in Kankakee River Valley

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south used one of these two crossings.

Noel LeVasseur became the first white settler in what would become Kankakee County. After marrying Watch-e-kee, the daughter of an Indian chief, they moved in 1832 to a location that became known as Bourbonnais Grove. They had three children, but their marriage was short lived. She soon became lonesome for her family and left LeVasseur to join her people in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Sometime after 1837 LeVasseur returned to Canada to encourage emigration to Illinois. Several families came between 1844 and 1849. The new arrivals formed a settlement which for years was known as "Petite Canada." The primitive settlement disappeared after about 70 years, however many of their descendants still remain in the Kankakee River Valley. Names like Bray, Boucher, Flageole, Marcotte, Boisvert, and Bergeron are some of those early immigrants.

The first mass in the village of Bourbonnais was performed in June 1827, being held at Noel LeVasseur's home. It was 1841 when a small log chapel was built at the site of the present day Maternity BVM rectory. By 1846 the property became part of the Chicago diocese, and in May 1847 a priest arrived to serve the French-Canadians. At that time there were 59 French-Canadian families. By the 1850 census 248 families were counted in the Bourbonnais Grove area, of which 201 were French-Canadian.

Due to the increasing population, the Bishop purchased 14 acres of land from LeVasseur to build a new church. Completed in January 1850, Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church became the center of the entire colony. Today it is the oldest parish in Kankakee County and one of the oldest in the State of Illinois.

Sometime in 1850 a French Canadian, Michel Allain, who had come to Bourbonnais in 1848, moved from Bourbonnais with his family to Beaver Mission or St. Anne as we know it today. That same year, Bishop Vendevelde of Chicago recognized how rich and fertile the land in Illinois was and requested that Rev. Father Chiniquy of Montreal travel to Illinois to aid in the growth of the little French-Canadian community located in Bourbonnais. After arriving Father Chiniquy searched for the best site for his future settlement. He chose the land around Beaver Mission (St. Anne), where the Allain family had already settled. Excited about the land, he returned to Canada to persuade immigrants from Canada and the French-speaking countries of Europe to come to Illinois.

The families traveled from Canada to Chicago, and then continued south over trails. There were many good craftsmen among them, and soon 40 small houses were built. In the spring of 1851, Chiniquy planned a church at Beaver Creek. A small chapel was completed the following year and dedicated to St. Anne, the patron

saint of the Province of Quebec. That same year Rev. Chiniquy also became the priest at Maternity, serving both churches until September 1853, when the Maternity church burnt to the ground.

By the end of 1852 there was an increasing flood of immigrants to St. Anne. To alleviate the growing pains, new mission centers were established at St. Mary (now Beaverville), L'Eramble, and to the north St. George. It was estimated that within three years between 900 and 1,000 families left Quebec and the New England states to settle on 40 square miles of land in central Illinois.

St. Anne Township was created in 1857 from parts of Aroma and Momence Townships. In Bourbonnais plans were completed for a new stone church to replace the Maternity church lost in the fire. It took five years, but it was completed in 1858, and the beautiful impressive architecture still stands today.

In 1860, the total population in St. Anne, Beaverville, Papineau, and Ashkum townships was 3,561 and of those, 2,632 or 74 percent were of French-Canadian descent.

Kankakee County's history may portray Father Chiniquy in many ways, but it must be said that he had a great deal of influence toward the settlement of French-Canadians in the Kankakee River Valley area.

## Meet Kankakee County's Newest Historic Preservation Commissioner



Shari Ebert

The Kankakee County Board has re-

cently appointed Shari Ebert to fill the vacancy on the Kankakee County Historic Preservation Board left open by the resignation of Daron Kinzinger.

Shari, a resident of Kankakee, is a retired registered nurse and school teacher. Many in the community know her for her musical talent. She has been a member of the Kankakee Valley Symphony Orchestra (KVSO) for 29 years. She

also holds memberships at the Kankakee County Museum, the Southwest Symphony Orchestra and the Moraine Valley Community Orchestra.

Shari serves as chair for the Young Artists Piano Concerto competition, and is a non-voting member of the KVSO Board of Directors. As the orchestra representative she serves as a liaison from the orchestra to the KVSO board.

The Preservation

Commission consists of nine members, all of which must be residents of Kankakee County. The Commission is required to have at least one attorney, one historian or architectural historian, one architect/engineer, and one real estate professional knowledgeable in preservation. All other members are expected to be knowledgeable and have an interest in preservation.



It was 50 years ago that President Lyndon Johnson signed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

*"The historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people... the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans" – National Historic Preservation Act, 1966*

## 50th Anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act (Some text taken from: <http://preservation50>)

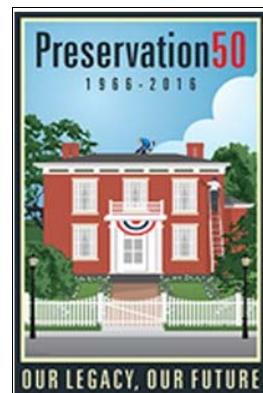
Following the signing of NHPA a framework was established to preserve historic structures, landscapes and archaeological sites. Preservationists throughout the country are now working to save places that matter. There are now more than 89,000 listings on the National Register of Historic Places.

Kankakee County structures such as Frank Lloyd Wright's B. Harley Bradley House & Stable and the Warren R. Hickox House are valuable additions to the National Register. Since the Bradley House was opened for tours, visitors from around the nation have

come to Kankakee just to see what most consider Mr. Wright's first Prairie Style Designs.

Historic Districts such as the Riverview Historic District, Downtown Monee District, and the Kankakee State Hospital District are valuable to the county's tourism industry. They show community pride, and their maintenance can only benefit the communities in which they are located.

Other individual structures and sites in Kankakee County included on the National Register are: Illinois Central Railroad Depot, Lemuel Milk Carriage House, Kankakee County Courthouse,



Point School, Durham-Perry Farmstead, Hunter-Hattenburg House, Charles E. Swannell House, and Windrose Site.

Moving forward, residents are encouraged to identify and preserve our county's Legacy.... our county's future.



**KANKAKEE  
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**The Preservationist**

**Kankakee County's Historic Preservation Plan**

In the past few months the Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission has been working toward the establishment of a Preservation Plan for Kankakee County.

Last year the commissioners began the process by writing the historic context of each township. This year public forums are being held in various locations throughout the county. To date there have been workshops held in Momence, Manteno, Aroma Park, Herscher and Bourbonnais. The last of six scheduled forums will be held on May 10 at the Kankakee Public Library. Focus at that event will be Kankakee and Limestone Townships.

The purpose of the public meetings is to listen to the residents, and learn what structures, farms or sites have historic value. The previous meetings have been well attended, very helpful and productive to the Commission. During each session historic structures and sites in each of the townships are identified and documented. In addition, goals for the future are discussed.

As we proceed, photos

of structures will be taken to match the places and addresses we have documented.

The public comments received at each session will help to prioritize the future activities of the Historic Preservation Commission. The information will be used to set the goals, policies, and implementation strategies for approximately ten years. Obviously there will be re-evaluations as time passes, but a Kankakee County Preservation Plan will help as we work to protect the heritage of our community.

The Commission is working with Kenneth Itle of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) out of Northbrook, Illinois. He specializes in architectural preservation and is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, with a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Studies and a Masters in Architecture Preservation.

We encourage you to join us at the Commission's final forum:

**Tuesday - May 10, 6:30 p.m., Kankakee Public Library, 4th Floor Gallery, 201 E. Merchant St., Kankakee, IL.**

**THANK YOU**  
to the  
Following:

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The work of preparing a Preservation Plan for Kankakee County, by the Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission, is made possible through a CLG grant received from the Illinois State Historic Preservation Agency and a grant from the Community Foundation of Kankakee River Valley.