



LOMBARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY REPORT
LOMBARD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

April 10, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairperson, Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: George "Ed" Seagraves, LHS Board President and Alison Costanzo, LHS Executive Director

SUBJECT: Actives of Lombard Historical Society which include a review of programs and events.

Action Requested: For information only, no action requested

Lilac Emporium Gift Shop

The gift shop has continued to perform well in early 2025, with sales showing steady growth compared to last year. Inventory management and merchandising have played a key role in this success. Staff conducted a full inventory in January and refreshed the displays, adding several new products including Ellen Martin-themed shirts and books, candles, and a selection of baby items like a deer-print bib and a receiving blanket.

With Lilac Time quickly approaching, preparations are in full swing. Merchandise is being reorganized and replenished to meet expected demand. New magnets are on order, and popular items like the Lombard and Lilacia hats have been restocked. Additionally, the Coach House will be open during Lilac Time this year, and select merchandise will be available there to enhance the shopping experience for visitors attending events in the area.

Grants and Awards

LHS has been active in pursuing external funding opportunities to support programming and operations. A grant request was submitted to the DuPage Foundation for \$2,500 to continue funding the Music on Maple Street concert series. This grant has typically covered the entire cost of the program in past years. Another grant application was submitted to the Illinois Arts Council, also for \$2,500, with the hope of replicating last year's support. In addition, the Lombard Hotel/Motel Tourism Grant Committee awarded LHS \$4,000 to support entertainment costs for the upcoming Food Truck Social.

LHS has also received exciting news from the Illinois Association of Museums (IAM). The Society was notified that it has won a Best Practices Award, for *Leapin' Lizard: A Hundred Years of Little Orphan Annie*. This recognition highlights the continued quality and impact of LHS's exhibitions and programming. Staff and board members are invited to attend the virtual awards announcement.



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Partnerships and Meetings

The Lombard Historical Society continues to deepen its relationships with key community and educational partners. Staff met with District 44 administrators as part of efforts to support the Pep Squad program at Manor Hill Elementary. In addition to discussing school programs, LHS will participate in the school's World Expo event in March, reinforcing its role as a community educational resource. The Society also convened with community partners to evaluate the Jingle Bell Jubilee event, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback and suggestions for future improvements.

Lilac Time planning has been well underway, with tours posted and bookings actively coming in. Two large motorcoach groups, along with several garden clubs and nursing homes, have already made reservations. A highlight from the planning meeting included the Chamber's plan to develop a map of local restaurants to help guide visitors, which LHS will help distribute.

LHS also participated in the America 250 Educators Round Table at Naper Settlement, where museum professionals shared ideas and discussed partnerships in anticipation of the upcoming semiquincentennial. Inspired by this gathering, staff is considering a group read of *The End of the Myth* by Greg Grandin as part of ongoing professional development.

Further meetings have focused on upcoming events and collaborations. The Society is preparing to co-host a Wedding Expo on June 7 in partnership with Thomkat, and vendors are already being secured.

- A meeting with the Lombard Historic Commission explored the possibility of conducting a detailed headstone survey of the Lombard Cemetery.
- LHS is also working with the Lombard Juniors Club to host a Princess and Queen Reunion on May 2.

Exhibits and Museum Maintenance

Several important updates to exhibits and gallery spaces have taken place over the past two months. After the successful run of *Leapin' Lizard: A Hundred Years of Little Orphan Annie*, staff relocated and redesigned the temporary exhibition space. This new setup allows for better storytelling and integration of technology, including monitors that will help expand content related to Lombard's business history and railroad development.

A major highlight for March is the launch of *Pioneering Women: The Peck Women and Their Legacy*, a new exhibition at the Sheldon Peck Homestead opened on March 29 and will be open until November 29, 2025. While the Homestead is named for Sheldon Peck, this exhibit shifts focus to the influential women in his family whose impact on the home and broader community was significant.



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Programs and Events

The Society's calendar has remained full with a range of well-attended and mission-aligned events. February programming included a record-setting Peck Homestead evening tour led by Frank Orto, with 18 attendees. Other February programs included a screening of the York Center documentary and a Roads Scholar presentation on the Black Codes by Caroline Kisiel, which explored African American legal history in 19th-century Illinois. A candle-making workshop, held as part of the *Feel Good February* initiative, attracted 12 participants, many of whom were new to the museum.

In March, the Society presented a historical theatrical performance on Mary Kingsley, a Victorian-era explorer, which had modest attendance but offered an engaging and educational experience. The month also featured a well-received visit from Congressman Sean Casten, who met with members of the League of Women Voters and learned about Ellen Martin's role as the first woman to vote in Illinois.

Upcoming April events include a railroad-themed public lecture sponsored by the Illinois Humanities Council, and a spring-themed Paint & Sip night. The Lilac Time Tour Guide Training session will prepare volunteers for spring tours, and the Society's Annual Meeting will feature a keynote talk on Elizebeth Smith-Friedman, a pioneering female codebreaker whose early work took place at Riverbank Laboratories in Geneva, Illinois.

Marketing and Outreach

Marketing efforts have continued to raise awareness of LHS programs and exhibitions. Website traffic increased from 3,100 visits in January to 4,200 in February. Social media engagement also rose modestly, with Facebook followers increasing from 6,524 to 6,585 and Instagram followers growing from 1,471 to 1,485. Targeted ads promoting Lilac Time tours and museum sites have been successful, with the Lilac Time ad generating over 400 link clicks and being shared more than 30 times.

Public relations initiatives will include the creation of outdoor banners for the Victorian Cottage and Peck Homestead, as well as the distribution of promotional flyers to local spots like Paradise Bay and the neighborhood ice cream shop.

Volunteer Updates

The Society has welcomed a number of new volunteers and continues to prioritize volunteer engagement and training. In February, eight docents participated in updated Victorian Cottage tour training. Two of these docents were brand new, and the group provided valuable feedback for improving the tour experience. This training coincides with physical and interpretive updates to the Cottage, making it an opportune time to refresh the approach to guided tours. Volunteers remain essential to LHS operations, and the positive response from both new and returning docents is encouraging as the Society gears up for a busy spring season.