

BELLEVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

“Everything we do is for the betterment of the City of Belleville.”

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THE MISSION OF THE BELLEVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION OF THE HISTORY, CUSTOMS, ARTIFACTS, ARCHITECTURE, AND PEOPLE OF THE CITY OF BELLEVILLE, ILLINOIS. IT STRIVES TO ACQUIRE, MANAGE, AND PRESERVE ARTIFACTS, DOCUMENTS AND REAL PROPERTY SIGNIFICANT TO BELLEVILLE AND TO ENCOURAGE PRESERVATION OF THE CITY'S CULTURE, HISTORY, AND ARCHITECTURE.



BHS Participation in the Santa Claus Parade, 2025

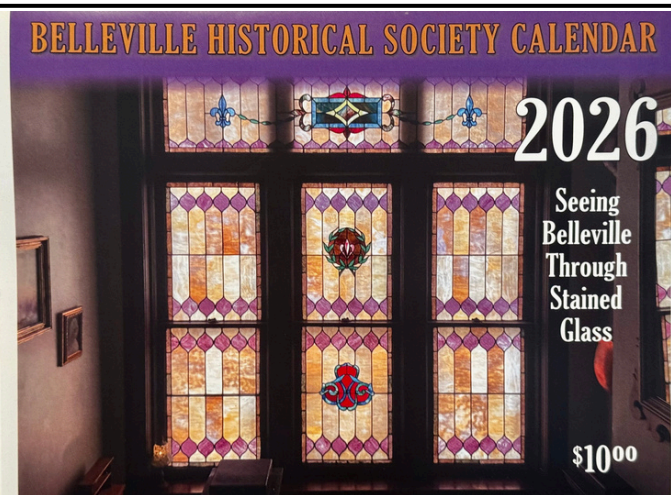
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

At a recent Belleville City Council meeting a couple from Fairview Heights presented a request for a zoning variance to renovate a historic house in the Old Belleville Historic District into five apartment rental units. The City Council voted unanimously to deny the request. The house had been divided into five apartments in the 1920s, which was legal then, but, per a 1999 ordinance, could only stay a multi-apartment unit if it was grandfathered in before 1999. However, if the house remained vacant for over a year, it lost its “grandfather” status and would have to be converted back into a single-family residence. The property in question has been vacant for at least several years and has thus lost its “grandfather” status.

The Belleville Historical Society praises the City Council on adhering to the 1999 ordinance and denying the request. One of the great “positives” that Belleville has is its inventory of beautiful old homes. In the recent past, there has been a movement of younger couples buying these homes and renovating them to live in. This is what Belleville desperately needs, as a great number of our young citizens move out of our city upon graduation from high school or college.

Thank you to the City Council for “sticking to your guns.”

2026 CALENDARS



2026 Calendars are now available for purchase! This year’s theme is “Seeing Belleville Through Stained Glass” and features beautiful windows from homes, businesses, and public spaces all over the city.

The calendar costs \$10. There are a couple of ways you can get your hands on one of these beautiful calendars:

1) Purchase in person at one of our upcoming holiday events: The 50s Retro Holiday Party will be held at 7 p.m. on Saturday, December 6, at the Museum of Mid-Century Modern Architecture (6 Oak Knoll Place). The Old Belleville Historic District Luminary Walk will be held at 5 p.m. on Saturday, December 13, at the Historic Garfield Street Saloon (633 East Garfield Street).

2) Purchase at local vendors during your holiday shopping:

- Artisans off Main
- Belleville Books
- Blanquart's Rusty Gem Vintage Market
- Circa Boutique and Gifts
- Eckert's Country Store & Farms
- Eckert Florist
- Local Lucy's
- Peace By Piece

UPCOMING & RECENT EVENTS

1950'S RETRO HOLIDAY PARTY

The most wonderful time of year is once again here: our 1950s Retro Holiday Party!

Join us on **Saturday, December 6 at 7 p.m. at the Museum of Mid-Century Modern Architecture (6 Oak Knoll Place)** for a night of celebration and nostalgia. Tickets are \$30 per person and are available for purchase at the door, at Local Lucy's, Fletcher's Kitchen and Tap (Belleville), or on our facebook page.

Enjoy food, drink, live music, and great company decked out in their best mid-century attire. There will be a costume contest with a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place, as well as other door prizes and ornaments for sale!



OLD BELLEVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT LUMINARY WALK

The holiday fun doesn't end with our 50s party; keep the spirit alive by joining us for the Old Belleville Historic District Luminary Walk on Saturday, December 13 at 5 p.m. on Garfield and Abend Streets in downtown Belleville. This event is free and open to the public.

Be sure to stop by the Historic Garfield Street Saloon Museum (633 E Garfield Street) for snacks and the chance to buy our 2026 calendars!

THANK YOU AND CONGRATULATIONS TO GARY KARASEK

BHS recently concluded the display of Gary Karasek's Art Show at the Museum of Mid-Century Modern Architecture. The show featured Karasek's St. Louis Arch Exhibit, where he interpreted how famous artists would have depicted the Arch. Karasek's show attracted many visitors to the museum each Sunday, and we thank him for choosing us as the hosts of his art!



THANK YOU TO ARTIST GEORGE GASPARICH FOR HIS DONATION



Artist George Gasparich recently donated a clay model of the Historic Garfield Street Saloon Museum that is now on display!

To see the museum and George's work, call Bob Brunkow at 618-236-7481 and leave him a message to schedule a private tour!

For nearly as long as Americans have been flying, Bellevilleans have been fascinated by air transportation and have sought to become part of the air transportation network. Belleville leaders were largely responsible in 1917 for the establishment of nearby Scott Field, with anticipation that commercial aviation might result from that military base to the economic benefit of the city. Due to advocacy 80 years later, the opening of the Mid-America St. Louis Airport at Scott in 1997 brought commercial aviation to the area.

In between the opening of Scott and the completion of the joint use airport there, civic leaders dreamed about developing Belleville's own municipal airport. In the 1940s, investors establish two Belleville Airports, but they never took off.

By the late 1920s, city leaders observed that Scott was "near Belleville but not quite near enough" and mainly a military installation. Belleville still needed a municipal airport. Ironically the Great Depression seemed to offer an opportunity to build that airport. The federal Civilian Works Administration (CWA) allocated money for airport construction, which would provide employment and promote aviation. The Illinois State Aeronautics Commission lobbied city leaders in 1934 to apply for CWA funds to start the project, but the city government claimed to lack the money to complete the airport. So the city was left with a small airfield in the county on Millstadt Road, a mile or two from Belleville. This Harnist (later Welsch) Airport was capable of small-plane recreation flying, sightseeing flights, and aviation shows. In 1940, however, a labor leader suggested that the airfield could become a municipal airport and even a replacement for Lambert Field, since it was near downtown St. Louis. The city did not act on this suggestion, but the rationale for the airport would reemerge.

In May 1944, local investors saw the commercial value of an airport in Belleville. They incorporated Belleville Airport, Inc., and bought 77 acres near today's intersection of North Illinois Street and Frank Scott Parkway—3.9 miles north of the Public Square—for an airport. They graded two sod runways 2,200 feet long, and they constructed a hanger and an administration building.

Opening day was October 7, 1944. Projections called for at least two airlines to use the airport after World War II. In the meantime the airport was ready for emergency flights and equipped to train pilots, repair aircraft, and rent planes. These functions continued after the war. Belleville Airport also became a venue for the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), the civilian auxiliary of the Army Air Corps. In 1946, Belleville Airport Inc., sold its property and disbanded, one of the partners observing that this airport was not suitable for flying because of the "proximity of utility wires."

It did not take long for a new group of flying enthusiasts to establish a new Belleville Airport about a half mile south of the old airport on the west side of Illinois Street. In 1947, they organized the Belleville Aviation Corporation and developed plans to establish what they advertised to be a \$100,000 airport to handle private airplanes and commercial aircraft. They purchased and leased a total of 250 acres for the airport. They built two sod runways, one 2,300 feet long, the other 3,300 feet in length; an administration building; one large and two smaller hangers to house planes; and a repair hanger. Construction began in July 1947, while the dedication of the finished airport occurred in 1949. The airport offered flight training, facilities for private aircraft flying, facilities for the CAP now affiliated with the US Air Force, and charter flights "anywhere in the Western Hemisphere." The airport did not establish a relationship with scheduled commercial airlines. Nevertheless, Belleville leaders continued to seek a major role for Belleville Airport.

After learning in 1949 that St. Louis was considering opening a passenger airport on the east side of the Mississippi River to be closer to downtown St. Louis, Belleville officials offered to buy Belleville Airport and lease it to St. Louis. There was not an immediate response from St. Louis, but the St. Louis mayor's statement foretold the decision: "We are trying to find a location as near downtown St. Louis as possible, and the Belleville field, after all, is 14 miles away."

Belleville leaders continued to consider Belleville Airport's possibilities. The city's airport advisory commission in 1950 suggested that Belleville Airport could be converted into a municipal facility—with paved runways and control tower—for about \$625,000. The city would be responsible for a quarter of this amount. After months of deliberation, city officials decided not to create the airport authority with tax-levying authority necessary to build and operate the municipal airport.

In 1952, Belleville Airport came to an end. Hugh and Katherine Edwards bought 177 acres of the airport to farm. They rented the hanger to the Moose for the Moose Recreation Center, which had its grand opening in 1953. Traces of the airport disappeared entirely in 1958 when the Edwardses sold the land for a subdivision.

The physical presence of Belleville Airport was gone, but the spirit behind it lingered. In 1960, the Belleville Chamber of Commerce lobbied for a special election to establish a Belleville Airport Authority with taxing authority to establish a municipal airport. The airport authority would build and operate a \$500,000 airport for light aircraft, backers believing that an airport for private and executive aircraft would bring more industry to the area. So certain were they of success that they took out options on a 240-acre tract of land southwest of Belleville. Voters defeated the measure by a margin of 23 to 1, demonstrating the "tax angry" sentiment of the people. Once again a lofty idea was grounded by economic reality.

Membership:

Membership forms for the BHS can be downloaded from our website, www.bellevillehistoricalsociety.org, by contacting us at bellevillehistoricalsociety@gmail.com, or at 633 East Garfield Street, Belleville, IL 62220.

Recent donations to the BHS have been received from:

Gary Karasek	Peggy Rasp	George Gasparich	Neil Middendorff	Dan & Kris Crockett
Azizat Danmole	Tom Dailey	Robert Brunkow	Anne Koleson	Ruth Heinemann Hertko
Anne Fischer Weygandt	Lana Shepek	Gus Werner	Vernon & Gloria Broderick	Gary Karasek
Greg Downey	Ellen Becker-Law	Pamela Bauer	Sue Henderson	Mardy Eisloeffel
Floyd & Bonnie Gessford	David Braswell			

Supporting the Belleville Historical Society:

As a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization, the BHS is authorized to receive gifts and donations that can bring tax benefits to the donor. Gifts to the BHS demonstrate support for the preservation of Belleville history. If you would like more information, please contact us at bellevillehistoricalsociety@gmail.com, or by mail: President, Belleville Historical Society at 633 East Garfield Street, Belleville, IL 62220. We welcome the opportunity to serve you.

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