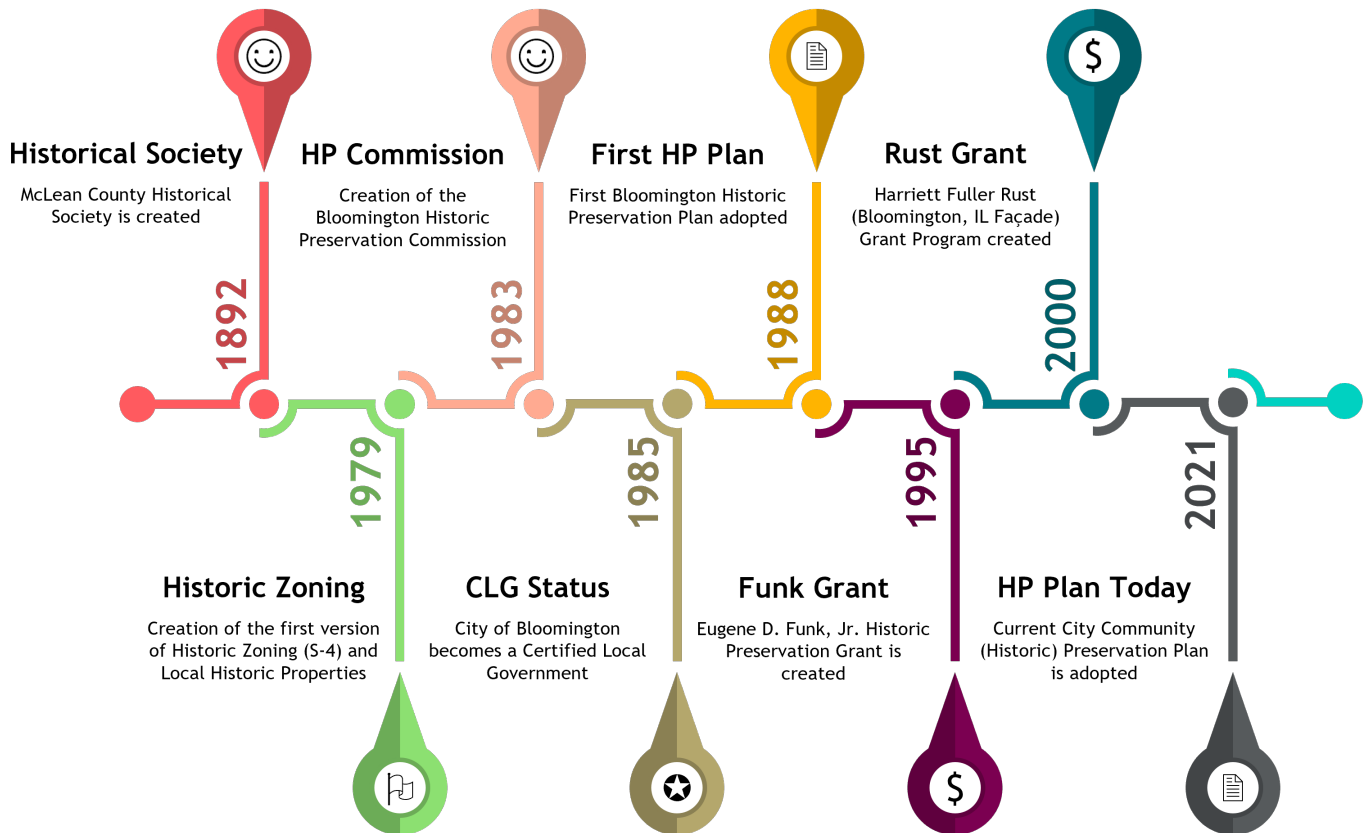


## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CITY OF BLOOMINGTON HISTORIC PRESERVATION REGULATIONS AND THE CREATION OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION



### MARCH 19, 1892 - MCLEAN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS CREATED

The McLean County Historical Society was founded as a nonprofit by residents whose names may still be heard in conversation today, including John M. Scott, Ezra M. Prince, and George P. Davis.<sup>1,2</sup> From the time of the Society's creation—until close to a century later—documentation and preservation of the City's history and historic places was conducted with volunteers and donations.

Today, the Historical Society is known as the McLean County Museum of History, but their focus remains on preservation, education, and collaboration to share the diverse stories of the people of McLean County.

### OCTOBER 18, 1972 - CLOVER LAWN/DAVID DAVIS MANSION BECOMES NATIONALLY PROTECTED

According to the National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, this property was first included in scholarly works related to the history of McLean County as early as 1879.<sup>3</sup> The Register states, "Clover Lawn is a two story Italianate brick mansion designed by the St. Louis architect Alfred H. Piquenard in 1870...The primary significance of Clover Lawn lies in the fields of

architecture and the decorative arts.” However, the contribution to local history as the home of David Davis—an associated Supreme Court Justice, and mentor and campaign manager to Abraham Lincoln—also plays prominently in the description of the nominated property and has become a focus of the heritage tourism that helps finance ongoing preservation of the property today.<sup>4</sup>

When the David Davis Mansion opened as a public museum in 1961 it had been in the Davis family since the time of its construction. It is one of the most expansive and unaltered historic grounds and properties in the region and was recognized in 2018 as one of the “Illinois 200 Great Places” by the American Institute of Architects Illinois. Today, the David Davis Mansion receives between 25,000-30,000 visitors per year and remains an active part of recounting the history of Bloomington, Illinois, and of Abraham Lincoln.<sup>5</sup>

## Historic

### David Davis Mansion makes park service national register

Clover Lawn, the David Davis Mansion at 1000 East Monroe Drive, has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service.

William K. Alderfer, Illinois state historian and executive director of the Illinois State Historical Society which administers the state-owned mansion, announced placement of the home on the national register Friday.

Built between 1870 and 1872, the home has been a state museum since 1960.

The Davis Mansion architect, Alfred H. Piquenard, also designed the present Illinois and Iowa state capitols.

The mansion is recorded in the national register as a significant site of historical or archaeological interest to the United States.

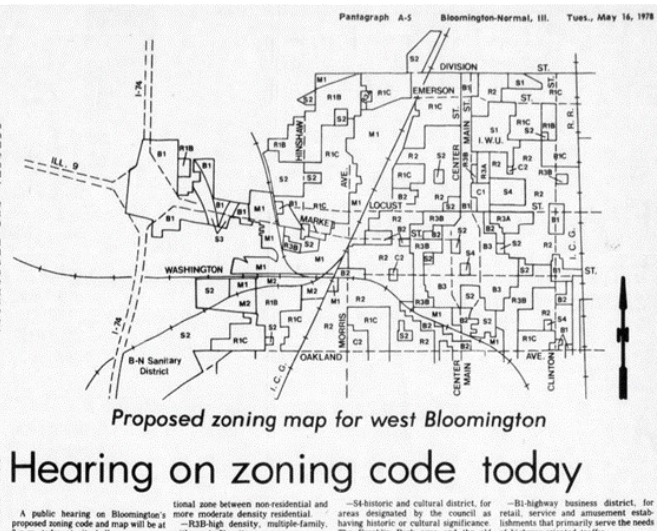
Use of federal money to destroy or depreciate its value as a historic site is prohibited without an elaborate appeal procedure.



Two other prominent locations were added to the National Register of Historic Places in subsequent years, the McLean County Courthouse and Square in 1973 and the Stevenson House in 1974. Formal recognition of local historic preservation efforts was on the upswing.

## FEBRUARY 12, 1979 - THE CITY'S HISTORIC ZONING CLASSIFICATION AND THE FIRST LOCAL "HISTORIC" PROPERTIES ARE CREATED

In 1976, Franklin Square was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The same year, the City of Bloomington began actively working on a comprehensive rewrite of the Zoning Code.



As part of the rewrite of the Zoning Code a “S-4 Historic and Cultural District” was proposed, not as an overlay, but as a unique District for “general areas or for individual structures and premises... [that have] special historic or cultural significance requiring special zoning regulations”.<sup>6</sup> The City of Springfield had recently created a similar classification to protect sites commemorating Abraham Lincoln, setting a precedent for historic preservation Central Illinois.<sup>7</sup>

The S-4 District was initially assigned a separate list of (very few) permitted uses. When the District was created, all building permits required site plan review through public hearings and the approval of the City Council. The Council could seek advice





national historic preservation standards, and to coordinating with State and Federal partners.

In 1982, the City had authorized the Mayor to request certification of the City's S-4 Historic and Cultural District Zoning Regulations from the National Park Service via the Secretary of the Interior) in order to take advantage of the potential tax incentives created by the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981.<sup>16</sup> That initial request for certification was denied because an appropriate review commission, design guidelines, and designation criteria were not included in the existing City Code. With follow-up permissions from Resolution 1984-4 the Mayor again sought certification from the National Park Service; this time it was granted. The City of Bloomington became a Certified Local Government in October of 1985.<sup>17</sup>

## FALL 1987 - THE FIRST BLOOMINGTON HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN IS ADOPTED

Since the creation of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), a number of formal Preservation Plans have been adopted, starting with the first in 1987, a 2004 Edition update, and a major rewrite in 2021 that included new research and visioning.

### Twin City historians planning five-year strategy

By JOHN O'CONNOR  
Pantagraph staff

Bloomington's historic cup runneth over, a study shows.

A Historic Preservation Commission five-year plan glorifies the city's four historically important areas and earmarks 10 others.

The first-ever preservation plan in the Twin Cities wistfully scans neighborhoods from the Chicago & Alton Railroad Shops-inspired "Forty Acres" to Berenz Place on the south side.

The areas boast architecture that teaches about the past and should be saved, the report said.

The \$1700 plan also outlines goals for the Historic Preservation Commission to seek Federal funds paid for half of the study, which took a year to complete.

The report was researched and written by architectural historian Susan Minks-Copley, a former Bloomington resident.

The commission will look at the plan in deciding what its priorities should be in the next five years, according to William Givens, the commission's staff advisor.

"It's not 100 percent chipped in stone," Giv-

ens said. "The commission will make interpretations and change things as they go along. But it's a good foundation a basis for future work."

The commission is charged with safeguarding historic districts in downtown Bloomington, at Franklin Square, East Jefferson Street and the Davis Mansion, East Grove Street and scattered sites.

Other significant areas, according to the report, are:

— Ewing Manor: Once a designated local district, the City Council in Sept. 1989 decided its owner, the Illinois State University Foundation, had not been properly told when it was declared historic. The city withdrew its designation.

— East Washington Street and Country Club Avenue

— East Grove Street, from Denver Street to Mercer Avenue

— White's Place, North Peil Avenue and North Clinton Boulevard

— Illinois Wesleyan University area

— Berenz Place

— Evergreen Cemetery

— Miller Park: The park's pavilion, the report

says, is "one of the most beautiful buildings in Bloomington."

— South Hill neighborhood: One of the city's oldest. It housed German immigrants on the southwest side.

— Forty Acres neighborhood

The Historic Preservation Commission will not automatically take control of the potential sites, Givens said. The commission oversees districts where residents have asked for historic designation.

But nothing stops the commission from trying to get the suggested neighborhoods excited about preservation. In the meantime, sites in the districts could be named to the National Register of Historic Places, Givens said.

The commission has no power over National Register sites. But their owners can receive federal tax credits that reduce rehabilitation costs.

The report encourages the commission to find a permanent location for its records, maps, surveys of historic sites and photographs. Records currently are scattered, Givens said.

Commissioners also should seek a bigger budget from the city so they can hire a full-time staff advisor.

The first five-year plan was 123 pages long, and focused primarily on identifying the structures and support mechanisms for preservation as well as inventorying existing Historic Resources in the community.<sup>18</sup> Only four pages were dedicated to Goals and Recommendations, whereas the rest were primarily related to improving and organizing property surveys and processes for operation. Perhaps the most important goal, "Integrate the Bloomington Historic Preservation Planning Process into the Comprehensive Planning Process for the City for Bloomington..." has been accomplished, and set the stage for many future efforts across the City.<sup>19</sup>

## 1995 - LOCAL FUNDING FOR PRESERVATION TAKES OFF

In 1995, the Eugene D. Funk, Jr. Historic Preservation Grant Program was created to provide owners of the historic properties with financial assistance in the preservation, restoration or rehabilitation of exterior architectural features. The original level of funding was only \$10,000 per fiscal year, with a maximum award of \$2,500. Only owner-occupied residential properties were eligible for funding.

Today, the Funk Grant program is allocated \$55,000 per fiscal year and property owners are eligible for up to \$5,000 per grant. While the grants are still frequently awarded to owner-occupied properties, grants can now also support rental income properties and help to provide and retain quality rental housing stock, in addition to protecting our historic resources. Properties must hold the S-4 Zoning to be eligible for these city-funded grants.<sup>20</sup>



**Historic homes get new lease on life**  
Bloomington to offer grants for preservation

By KAREN HANSEN  
Pantagraph staff

There is a variety of building assistance available to people who want to restore historically designated properties.

Bloomington will soon begin a similar program for owners of historic homes.

which will review any applications and make recommendations to the City Council, which must approve all building projects.

The interior renovations will be eligible for funding, but will not be commercial properties.

"It's kind of a little month longer for the district," Bloomington Mayor James Street said.

Franklin hopes the program will improve aesthetic appearance efforts, as well as interest from other neighborhoods that might need to be listed later before the district.

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## JANUARY 4, 2000 - FUNDING LINKS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Bloomington, Illinois Façade Grant Program was created to honor Harriett Fuller Rust. Rust won multiple awards for her work in preservation as well as raising funds for rehabilitation when the McLean County Historical Society caught fire in 1972. The City of Bloomington allocates

money in the General Fund each fiscal year in recognition of the positive impact that individual façade renovations can have on the overall appearance and quality of storefronts. The target area for the Rust Grant aligns closely with the Historic Bloomington Central Business District on the National Register.<sup>21</sup>



Both grant programs are currently administered by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and require that work be completed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation when technically and financially feasible. While the Rust Grant program was initially administered jointly by the “Uniquely Bloomington! Downtown Commission” and the Historic Preservation Commission, when the Downtown Commission was defunded in 2005 the work fell entirely to the HPC.

**SEPTEMBER 27, 2021 - PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

The current Preservation Plan was adopted in 2021. The change in title from “Historic Preservation Plan” to “Community Preservation Plan” is an important recognition of the vital role that historic preservation plays in providing “a path for a more sustainable future for Bloomington,” by providing “a new preservation vision and framework for action.”<sup>22</sup>

The current plan is 256 pages, consisting of 12 goals, each with associated opportunities planned for the next five years and occasionally beyond. These goals are heavily focused on the community-identified values and on translating those values into action. They directly interact with economic imperatives and revitalization of the urban core, speaking to the growing need to consider sustainability and adaptive reuse. They also consider the sense of place and pride that care for historic structures and stories can bring to the community.

*“Being off Route 66 we have opportunities, but the stories need to be easy to find ...This requires marketing.”*

Nearly 40 years ago the City Council decided “the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the residents of the City of Bloomington will be promoted by the protection of [this] historic character of the City...”<sup>13</sup> The work of the current *Community* (Historic) Preservation Plan has just begun, and there is more work ahead. With a solid foundation of local documentation and preservation efforts the City is well positioned to be the unique, cohesive, and vibrant community, created through successful integration of the downtown core, established neighborhoods, and future developments, surrounded by rich history, arts and culture, lifelong learning opportunities, a healthy environment, and an active lifestyle.<sup>23</sup>



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