

Let us give thanks to the preservationists

by Dr. James Paul

In 1985, the 10-year-old Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society learned of the disturbing plans for the house at 261 N. Main St., Bourbonnais, where the first mayor of Bourbonnais, George R. Letourneau (1831-1906), had once lived. The property was owned by David Reedy in 1985. The plans included demolition of the house—actually the Bourbonnais Fire Department was going to burn it down as part of a training exercise. A 16-month struggle ensued which culminated in a deciding vote from the village board president Ernest Mooney. The house was saved as an historic landmark and relocated on June 20, 1986 to the two-acre Adrien M. Richard Heritage Preserve on Stratford Dr. East, property which was donated to the village of Bourbonnais by David Reedy (and probably was part of the Letourneau farm's 200 acres). In his 2006 book, "Images of America: Bourbonnais", Vic Johnson wrote about the move: "Ray Odel pulled the house off its foundation and began the three-quarter mile trip to a lot on Stratford Dr. East, where it would take up permanent residence as the headquarters of, and a museum for, the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society. By noon, the Letourneau House sat on wood cribbing that would hold it until a new foundation was built" (114).

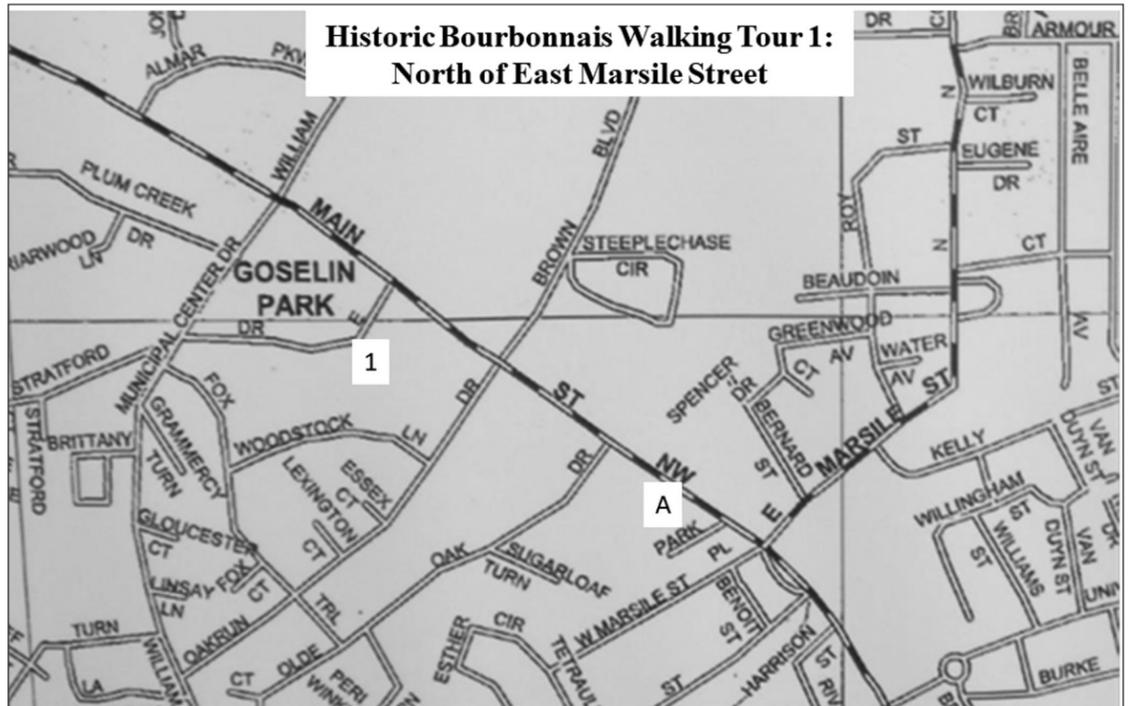
After receiving \$100,000 from Governor James Thompson's Build Illinois Fund—requested by State Representative Ray Christenson—restoration of the Letourneau Home was completed late summer 1988. Today, the George Letourneau Home/Museum contains artifacts related to Bourbonnais' French-Canadian history and serves as the meeting place for the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society. The home is maintained by funds raised by the society. On Nov. 4, 1985, several months before the Letourneau Home was moved from its original location, the village of Bourbonnais board of trustees enacted the Bourbonnais Village Historic Preservation Ordinance No. 85-562 in order "to provide a mechanism whereby landmarks and districts in the Village of Bourbonnais identified as having historical and/or architectural significance may be preserved and enjoyed in a suitable harmonious environment." At the first meeting of the Landmark Commission of Bourbonnais on April 17, 1986, chairperson Mary Ann Kirsch entertained a motion "to recommend the Letourneau house for landmark status." Vice-chairperson Ken Ponton made the motion and it passed. Landmark Commission acting secretary Vic Johnson stated in the minutes of that meeting, "It was agreed the public meeting on the Letourneau house would be held at 9 a.m., 26 April 1986...The village board will take final action on the Letourneau house at its regular meeting on May 5." This original effort to establish historic landmark status for the Letourneau Home failed either

due to no formal action by the village on the recommendation or no proper documentation with the Kankakee County Recorder's Office by the village.

On Aug. 17, 2000, BGHS president Janine Dunn formally requested the Landmark Commission of Bourbonnais "to consider the George Letourneau Home as a local landmark." At the Landmark Commission's meeting on Aug. 30, 2000, "it was moved by commission member [Bob] Bohlman and seconded by commission member [Daron] Kinzinger to recommend to the village board that pursuant to the application, and in accord with the acceptable statutes, landmark status be granted to the

Letourneau Home. On a voice vote, the motion carried 4-0." On Sept. 18, 2000, an ordinance designating the Letourneau Home as a village landmark was adopted by the board of trustees of the village of Bourbonnais—Ordinance No. 00-1229. A framed copy of this ordinance now hangs in the Letourneau Home meeting room. In 2011, another step was taken to recognize the significance of the Letourneau Home/Museum.

At the beginning of 2011, the 4-year-old Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission worked diligently on writing the nomination for the Letourneau Home/Museum to be considered a Kankakee County historic landmark. On June 4, 2012, the commission unanimously approved the nomination when an inter-governmental agreement with the village of Bourbonnais was approved. The Letourneau Home/Museum became Kankakee County's second historic landmark on July 10, 2012 by unanimous resolution of the Kankakee County Board. As we



give thanks this holiday, let us remember those who worked so hard from 1985 to the present to preserve this historical icon for our community.

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history.

Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month March to December.

Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m. on the first and third Sundays of each month, March through December or by appointment.

Contact BGHS at bourbonnaishistory.org, on Facebook at [facebook.com/bourbonnaishistory](https://www.facebook.com/bourbonnaishistory) or phone 1-815-933-6452.



Photos courtesy of BGHS
The Letourneau Home (above and letter A on map) was originally located at 261 N. Main St. in Bourbonnais (next to the lone pine tree that still stands in the Clancy-Gernon Funeral Home parking lot). On June 20, 1986, the home was moved to its present location at 698 Stratford Dr. East, (below and number 1 on map). For the complete Four Walking Tours of Historic Bourbonnais, visit bourbonnaishistory.org or villageofbourbonnais.com/explore-bourbonnais/bourbonnais-grove-historical-society.



Bourbonnais Continued from page 1

age system alternate revenue source. The ordinance directs the county clerk not to levy property taxes on the principal and interest on the bonds. The village has the funds to pay the bonds, so the county won't collect property taxes to make the bond payments.

In other news, trustees heard first reading of an economic incentive agreement with David Bruce Auto Center and Latham Drive Partners. The village will share or rebate a portion of the retailers' occupation taxes

received by the village and generated by the development of the subject property.

The project is expected to create job opportunities within the municipality.

It will serve to further the development of adjacent areas and strengthen the commercial sector of the municipality and it is in the best interest of the municipality. Without the agreement the project would not be possible. David Bruce plans on redeveloping the property.



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Holiday Magic Workshop planned

The Community Arts Council of Kankakee will present a Holiday Magic Workshop on Sunday, Dec. 10, 2017 from noon to 4 p.m. at the Community Arts Center inside Northfield Square Mall. The Arts Center will have Santa's North Pole workshop ready for children to explore.

Children can create a special snowman ornament for \$2. Participants can also have their picture taken in Santa's workshop with a Christmas tree frame cutout for \$5 each.

News Tip?

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