
CHAPTER 7: HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

Cultural resources invite residents and visitors to learn more about their surroundings and the history of the area. Piatt County is home to several of these cultural and historic resources, some dating as far back as the founding of the county and settlement, others to when Lincoln traveled the state as a Circuit Court lawyer. Memorials, recreation sites, museums and an Illinois State Historic Site can all be found in the County.

Historic Sites

Piatt County Courthouse- The Piatt County Courthouse is situated in the center of the square in downtown Monticello. It has served Piatt County since its completion in 1903. It currently houses many of the County's governmental offices.

Bryant Cottage State Historic Site- This four-room cottage was built in Bement in 1856 by Bement businessman Francis Bryant. It is rumored to have been the site where Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas met to determine the format for the Lincoln-Douglas Debates.

Lincoln/Douglas Meeting Location Monument- This is an Historical Marker located on Illinois 105 South of Monticello.



Allerton Park and Retreat Center- Robert Allerton, son of Chicago Businessman Samuel Allerton, built the 1500-acre retreat and conference center with wooded trails, formal gardens, and a turn-of-the-century English-inspired mansion. There are several acres of formal sculpture gardens and greenhouses arranged next to the University of Illinois operated mansion, which now serves as a retreat and conference center. There are also several miles of interpretive and primitive hiking trails through the wooded and upland forested areas. Statuary, such as the Sun Singer, Fu Dogs, and Death of the Last Centaur are placed throughout the gardens and along the trails, serving as points of interest. The estate is also host to an Illinois 4-H Memorial Camp. Financial support for the Park and Center comes from the Farmland that Allerton also left to the University for this purpose. Allerton Park is located 3.5 miles west of Monticello at 515 Old Timber Road.



Bement Veterans Memorial- This Memorial is a tribute to veterans of all wars since the French and Indian War, focusing on those veterans from the Bement area. The memorial is comprised of six black granite stones inscribed with the names of veterans, grouped by conflict. A seventh, larger stone depicts the raising of the American Flag on Iwo Jima, as well as a Bald Eagle in defensive posture, referencing the defense of our nation by our military. The Memorial is located on the west side of Bement City Park and on the east side of Illinois 105.



Goose Creek Township Carnegie Library- This library was dedicated in 1912 after the Deland Women's club obtained an \$8,000 dollar grant from Andrew Carnegie. It is still a working library and part of the Lincoln Trail Libraries System.



Voorhies Castle - Located in the small village of Voorhies, approximately 5 miles south of Bement, Illinois. The castle was built by Nels Larson, a Swedish immigrant, who arrived with little more than pocket change in 1867; who earned enough money to buy the village of Voorhies in 1885; and who went on to build the magnificent castle between 1898 and 1902. Larson later also built a clock tower barn between 1910 and 1915. The clock tower stood 68 feet above the Illinois prairie, until a strong straight-line wind toppled the barn and tower in 1976.

Archaeological Resources

The Illinois State Agency Historic Resources Preservation Act (20 ILCS 4320, as amended, 17 IAC 4180) requires a review of all state funded, permitted or licensed undertakings for their effect on cultural resources. Archaeological resources range throughout the span of Illinois Prehistory providing information about the lifestyles of early inhabitants of the area, and what the landscape was like long before settlers ventured to the area. Historic archaeological resources are also present in Piatt County which inform about life during frontier times in Piatt County.

Regional Attractions

Monticello Railway Museum- This Museum is volunteer-run by and for enthusiasts of railway history, and gives visitors a unique look at railway life. Operational railcars offer train rides from May to November for a small fee, and the museum displays railcars and other pieces of railroad history. The Monticello Railway Museum is located at 992 Iron Horse Place in Monticello.



Piatt County Museum- Begun in 1965 as “The Piatt County Pioneers”, the Piatt County Museum seeks to preserve and display heritage of Piatt County. Currently, the Museum is in the process of relocating from three original buildings to a single building in order to consolidate and expand their collection. The Historic University of Illinois Beef Barn was dismantled and will be reconstructed to house the consolidated collection.

Harris Agricultural Museum, Atwood- Displays include antique tractors, engines and a 1919 Model "T" Ford-grain/dump truck. Soil, tillage, harvesting and planting equipment are also on exhibit and there are replicas of a 1920's farmstead kitchen, early grain elevator office and blacksmith shop.

Other Local Museums: The following is a list of museums that are not located in Piatt County, but are within driving distance and can be considered Cultural Resources.

Krannert Art Museum & Kinkead Pavilion, Champaign- This museum, located on the University of Illinois Campus, features rotating art exhibitions as well as permanent collections.

Champaign County Historical Museum, Champaign- This museum preserves and exhibits object relating to and depicting the history of Champaign County.

Orpheum Children’s Science Museum, Champaign- This science center located in downtown Champaign allows children to engage in and learn about science in an informal, interactive setting.

Parkland Art Gallery, Champaign- This teaching gallery exhibits a variety of work from regional and national contemporary artists.

Spurlock Museum, Urbana- This museum displays objects of cultural heritage from six continents, and features rotating exhibits.

Birks Museum, Decatur- This museum includes a collection of antiquities, with space available to display temporary exhibitions.

Children's Museum of Illinois, Decatur- Rotating interactive exhibits allow children to experience science and nature hands on.

Governor Oglesby Mansion, Decatur- This elaborate Italianate mansion was the home of Illinois Governor Richard Oglesby, friend and political ally of Abraham Lincoln.

Hieronymus Mueller Museum, Decatur- This museum exhibits artifacts and objects of the Mueller family, notable for patenting the water cooled radiator, spark plug, and variable speed transmission.

Macon County Historical Museum and Prairie Village, Decatur- Visitors are able to take a look into life in the mid 1800's. The museum includes an 1850's cabin, one-room school house, and Lincoln themed interpretive exhibits.

McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington – The museum is located in an old court house which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. One exhibit shows collections of pictures depicting farm life in Illinois.

Prairie Aviation Museum, Bloomington – This museum gives an up-close glimpse at air travel and technology. A flight simulator takes visitors on a “fly over” of Bloomington and actual aircraft including an F-4N Phantom and T-38A Talon are on display.

Ecology Action Center, Normal – This center offers visitors a chance to learn and understand more about nature, recycling, composting, and saving energy. The center provides classes, workshops and nature walks in the community.

Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington - Miller Park Zoo offers many exhibits and Zookeeper interaction opportunities in a family-friendly park setting.

Scovill Zoo, Decatur - Nestled along the shores of Lake Decatur, Scovill Zoo is home to more than 500 animals spanning six continents.

Libraries

Piatt County has seven public libraries. Table 7-1 shows how many books each of these libraries have on hold, according to the Illinois State Library's Illinois Public Library Statistics, fiscal year 2005-2006.

Table 7-1: Piatt County Libraries

<u>Library</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Books</u>
Atwood-Hammond Public Library	Atwood	19,771
Bement Public Library	Bement	13,225
Blue Ridge Township Public Library	Mansfield	12,725
Goose Creek Township Carnegie Library	Deland	5,420
Hope Welty Public Library	Cerro Gordo	14,035
Monticello Township (Allerton) Public Library	Monticello	27,341
Willow Branch Township Public Library	Cisco	8,014
Total Piatt County Circulation		100,531

Source: Illinois State Library 2005-2006

It should be noted that modern library facilities provide more than books. Many locations provide DVD's, CD's, periodicals, scanning, printing, faxing, and Internet access to patrons. Additionally, many libraries offer interlibrary loans, allowing small libraries to greatly increase the number of materials available. Adult and children reading programs, GED classes and testing, as well as internet and email are also important parts of the libraries in Piatt County. All of the libraries in Piatt County are part of the Lincoln Trails Library System.

Plans for Historic and Cultural Resources

This section establishes goals, objectives and strategies for the future condition of historic and cultural resources. Recommendations included in this chapter are intended to direct decision makers and the general public towards conserving resources for appropriate use and benefit of County residents and visitors. Preservation can be used as a tool in cooperation with other elements suggested in the comprehensive plan to create affordable housing and use existing infrastructure rather than constructing new. Historic and Cultural Resources covers a broad range attractions including archeological, recreational, entertainment, and educational. The plan concertedly implies that these resources should be preserved and maintained for the benefit of the community at large.

Issues in Historic and Cultural Resources

Residents are split regarding access to the arts in Piatt County while more residents are satisfied with cultural activities. Preservation has a rich history in parts of Piatt County and is obviously an important part of the community. Developing interpretive information such as pamphlets and signs can provide educational and recreational resources for the community. Public private partnerships as well as regional partnerships are other tools that can expand the reach of existing resources and develop accessibility of desirable resources. The following issues were derived from public input received during the planning process and best management practices:

- Survey respondents indicated an equal positive and negative response for access to the arts (defined as musical programs, plays, paintings and other art work). A greater percent of respondents indicated that they are satisfied with cultural activities than dissatisfied.

Best Management Practices

- Greater knowledge and interpretation of Cultural and Historic Resources may increase the positive response to questions about access to cultural activities.
- Regional attractions, while outside of the scope of County resources, can be referenced as assets to the community. Relationships with regional attractions can generate productive partnerships and opportunities for marketing.
- Support decisions that positively impact the overall success and availability of libraries and their services.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Identify, record, and evaluate resources and sites.

Objective 1.1: Encourage the use of professionally developed historic surveys to determine historic and cultural resources.

Objective 1.2: Encourage the coordination of ordinances and plans to develop sound preservation programs.

Goal 2: Preserve Historic and Cultural Resources

Objective 2.1: Support preservation efforts for its contribution to quality of life and cultural vitality.

Goal 3: Increase awareness of Historic and Cultural Resources

Objective 3.1: Provide information to residents and visitors about the historic and cultural resources in Piatt County

Goal 4: Work with the private sector, independent organizations, and citizens to be aware of and enhance and protect historic and cultural resources.

Goal 5: Integrate Historical and Cultural Resource Management into local development policies

Objective 5.1: Preservation is used for inclusion, protection and encouragement of housing options and infill projects, not their prohibition.

Goal 6: Preserve the importance and functioning of the existing Central Business Districts

Objective 6.1: Central Business Districts are vibrant areas in the County.

Future Conditions

In 2030, Piatt County will preserve and use its historic and cultural resources for the benefit of both residents and visitors. These resources will have been identified and integrated into the community through published information, participation programs, and signage. Preservation will not be viewed as a barrier to desirable change in the community. Rather, preservation is a vehicle for enhance quality of life and cultural vitality. Establishing plans and incorporating preservation into policies and ordinances develops a level playing field and focuses the importance of resource preservation.