

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2015

REPAIR AND UPGRADES TO THE JORDAN HOUSE & BENNETT SCHOOL

Much needed repairs and upgrades are scheduled for the West Des Moines Historical Society's two historic properties – the Bennett School and the Jordan House. David White, chair of the Building and Grounds Committee recently presented to the Society's Board of Directors a 3-Month, 12-Month and 36+ Month plan for upgrades and improvements to the properties.

Planned repairs to the Jordan House within the next three months include a new cellar door, replacement of exterior lighting, security cameras and repair of the stair railing and newel post leading to the basement. Other improvements will change the entrance to the house from the East side to the South side and modify locks on the entry doors in order to provide greater accessibility to the house and to facilitate wheelchair access. The outdoor interpretive sign will also be replaced.

For more than 15 years the façade of the Bennett School has been plagued with peeling paint. After carefully studying the causes and options to solve the ongoing problem, the Historical Society voted to remove the existing siding and replace it with new cedar wood siding. A generous donor has contributed \$50,000 for the siding project and for security lighting and cameras. The Society

is thrilled and confident that the Bennett School will soon look as good as new.

Within the next 12 months at the Jordan House, the deteriorating eave overhangs and corner boards will be replaced. The trim around the porch columns will also be replaced and the entire house will be painted. The three existing chimneys will be repointed and a new fire alarm system that will monitor individual rooms providing increased protection for the house and its contents will be installed.

Within the thirty-six month or more time period, the fence surrounding the Jordan House will be replaced with 700 lineal feet of a historically accurate fence. This large and expensive project will make a significant difference in the appearance of the Jordan House. Another important project to be completed in the future is the installation of perimeter pavers around the house. This will protect the house from critters who call areas under the porches home! In addition, security cameras will be installed to monitor the Jordan House.



Jordan House



Bennett School

ARBOR DAY TREE PLANTING

On James Jordan's first night in Walnut Township in 1846 (now West Des Moines), he and his family camped under the bur oaks that line the south side of the Jordan House.

Almost 170 years later, Arbor Day celebrants gathered on the lawn of the Jordan House on a rainy April morning to join West Des Moines Parks and Recreation forester, John Olds and other City dignitaries in the planting of a small Bur Oak tree. The tree, grown from a local acorn, will insure that oak trees will continue to grow and thrive on James Jordan's ancestral land.



The Bur Oak is a massive tree, with a coarsely textured crown, big acorns and a massive trunk with deeply furrowed bark. Bur Oak trees grow one to two feet a year and can easily reach 90 feet in height. Bur Oaks can live for 500 years.

Mark Your Calendar For These Events



5K Fun Run/Walk
Saturday, October 24
8am-Noon

Raccoon River Park * West Des Moines

Whether you are an experienced runner or simply looking for a fun event that helps your community, the first annual Journey to the Past 5K Fun Run/Walk looks to be a fantastic first year event, PLUS you will be supporting a terrific non-profit organization right here in West Des Moines.

Registration is \$25 until October 15, and \$30 after and day of event. To register, go to journeytothepast5k.org



Home for the Holidays

Two Sundays!
December 6 & 13
2pm-5pm
Jordan House and
Bennett School

We've put up our holiday decorations and we want you to join us for an Open House at the Jordan House and the Bennett School.

The Jordan House, an 1850 Victorian home and historic stop on the Underground Railroad will be decorated for a Victorian holiday. There will be tours, music, refreshments and picture taking opportunities.

The Bennett School will feature family friendly crafts, including gingerbread house decorating and traditional holiday decoration crafting.

Cost is \$5 for adults and \$3 for students and includes both properties.

THE WEST DES MOINES HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEEDS YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS!!

Every dollar we save on printing and mailing will help us protect and preserve our two historic properties. We are launching an e-newsletter so your email address will allow us to communicate with you regularly without the expense.

PLEASE HELP! Send your email to us at
info@wdmhs.org



FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Mary Sheldahl

Recently I spent the day at the Iowa State Fair. It was a typical August day -- hot and humid and a perfect day for anything on a stick and a liquid beverage. I was born and raised in the Des Moines area so going to the Fair is a long standing tradition in my family. I wonder how many of you have such a tradition. And I wonder if James Jordan attended the State Fair, especially after it moved permanently to Des Moines in 1879. He was elected to the state legislature that year so he might have been involved in the decision to move the Fair.

I am so pleased to have the honor of serving as President of the organization this year and would like to tell you of my goals for the remaining months of my term:

- Our committee structure allows each Board member to serve on at least one committee. The committee members will become more involved in the activities and projects at the Jordan House and the Bennett School and committee chairs will be encouraged to expand their numbers by adding new members from the community.
- We need to increase awareness of the Society and the visibility of our two properties. My hope is that by holding 6-8 yearly events, community members will feel a connection to our history and our mission and will support the Society with their time, talents and treasure!
- We must develop a program to recruit, train, retain and reward volunteers. A dedicated core group of volunteers have supported our organization for many years but it's now time to enlarge our volunteer pool if we want to grow and thrive.

Below is a list of our working committees. Please contact us at info@wdmhs.org if you are interested in serving on a committee.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Sheldahl *President*
Ann Schodde *Vice President*
Mindy Aust *Secretary*
John Norwood *Treasurer and President Emeritus*
Matt McKinney
Rick Messerschmidt
Sally Ortgies
John Nash
Robert Parks
Kay Rosene
Mark Rocha
Phyllis Staplin
Manoj Tomar
Bryan Webber
Dave White

MARY SHELDAHL ELECTED PRESIDENT

The Annual Meeting of the West Des Moines Historical Society took place on April 28 at the Bennett School. Four new board members were elected: Matt McKinney, Bryan Webber and John Nash will serve 3 year terms and Kay Rosene will fulfill an uncompleted two year term.

Mary Sheldahl was elected President of the West Des Moines Historical Society. Other officers are Ann Schodde, Vice President; John Norwood, Treasurer and President Emeritus; and Mindy Aust, Secretary. John Norwood was thanked for serving as President for the past two years.

WDMHS COMMITTEES

Building & Grounds – includes buildings, gardens, lawns and strategic planning with Walnut Church and Iowa Christian Academy.

Fund & Membership Development – Works with other committees to enhance positive financial outcomes through increased memberships & donations.

Promotion – Includes events, tours, volunteer recruitment/management and marketing.

Education Programming – Includes the James Jordan Scholars Leadership Institute.

Collections, Curatorial & Exhibits – Includes work with city/public library on storage & access.



WEST DES MOINES HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Make and live history with us!

BECOME A MEMBER

West Des Moines' history is colorful, rich and diverse. You are a part of this history so help us preserve and keep it alive for future generations.

We invite you to join us as we uncover, explore and shape our history.

Go to wdmhs.org today or use the attached envelope.



JAMES JORDAN SCHOLARS LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

The first session of the 2015-2016 James Jordan Scholars Leadership Institute was held Wednesday, August 26 at West Des Moines City Hall.

Presented by the West Des Moines Historical Society, this ten month program brings together 17 high school juniors and seniors from area schools, including East, Roosevelt, North, Lincoln, Johnston, Hoover, Dowling, Walnut Creek and Valley. The Scholars, chosen by teachers and staff, will participate in interactive meetings with community leaders in business, government, agriculture, insurance, education, transportation and social justice, all areas in which James C. Jordan, an extraordinary leader and

19th Century visionary and abolitionist, excelled.

At the first session, John Liepa, retired instructor of Iowa history at DMACC walked students through Central Iowa's history from 1840-1880. Rob Barron, Political Director for Next Gen Climate, spoke on the qualities of leadership and community service.

The James Jordan Scholars Leadership Institute is sponsored by: **the West Des Moines Historical Society, the City of West Des Moines, West Bank, Kemin Industries, Polk County, Ruan Transportation and Patricia and Ed Berkley.**



Pictured L to R: Jordan Jenkins, Linda Melara, John Liepa, Noah Phillips, Haley Ness, Colton Zimmerman, Ryan Hummel, Rachel Greene, Cheyann Neades, Abigail Dowd, Calla Lloyd, Vivian Broderick, Nick Toulouse, Libbie Skeffington, Elliot Anderson, Cesar Marfal, Allison Tow, Lal Zual, Rob Barron.