



# Cultural History

## Our Connection to the Land

In a world awash in change, where new information redefines daily life at a pace unheard of across the span of human history, the preservation of significant structures, prehistoric sites and historic icons provide a cultural anchor. McHenry County Conservation District owns several historic structures and cultural sites in McHenry County which including: McConnell Farmstead (Richmond, IL); Wiedrich Barn (Ringwood, IL), Powers-Walker Historic Site (Richmond, IL), Pichen Farm (Cary, IL), Kennedy Way Station (Woodstock, IL), and Camp Algonquin (Algonquin, IL). Aside from the Powers-Walker homestead, these properties are not yet open to the public. But the mere protection and existence of these historic assets of McHenry County connect residents to a community's tangible past.

These historic places provide a snapshot into the past cultural history of the area they reside – the older buildings and barns have their own distinctive character, and retain old methods of workmanship. To witness such resources allow communities, businesses and neighbors to pause and take stock of where they have been before moving forward. Ideally, in the near future sufficient operational funds will become available for the required maintenance and upkeep of these properties. Once that is accomplished, the District can enable public access and historic interpretation of these cultural resources. We know that the historic, architectural, and cultural heritage of an area contribute to community pride, local tourism, and provide a better understanding of the community's sense of place.

### McConnell Farmstead, Richmond

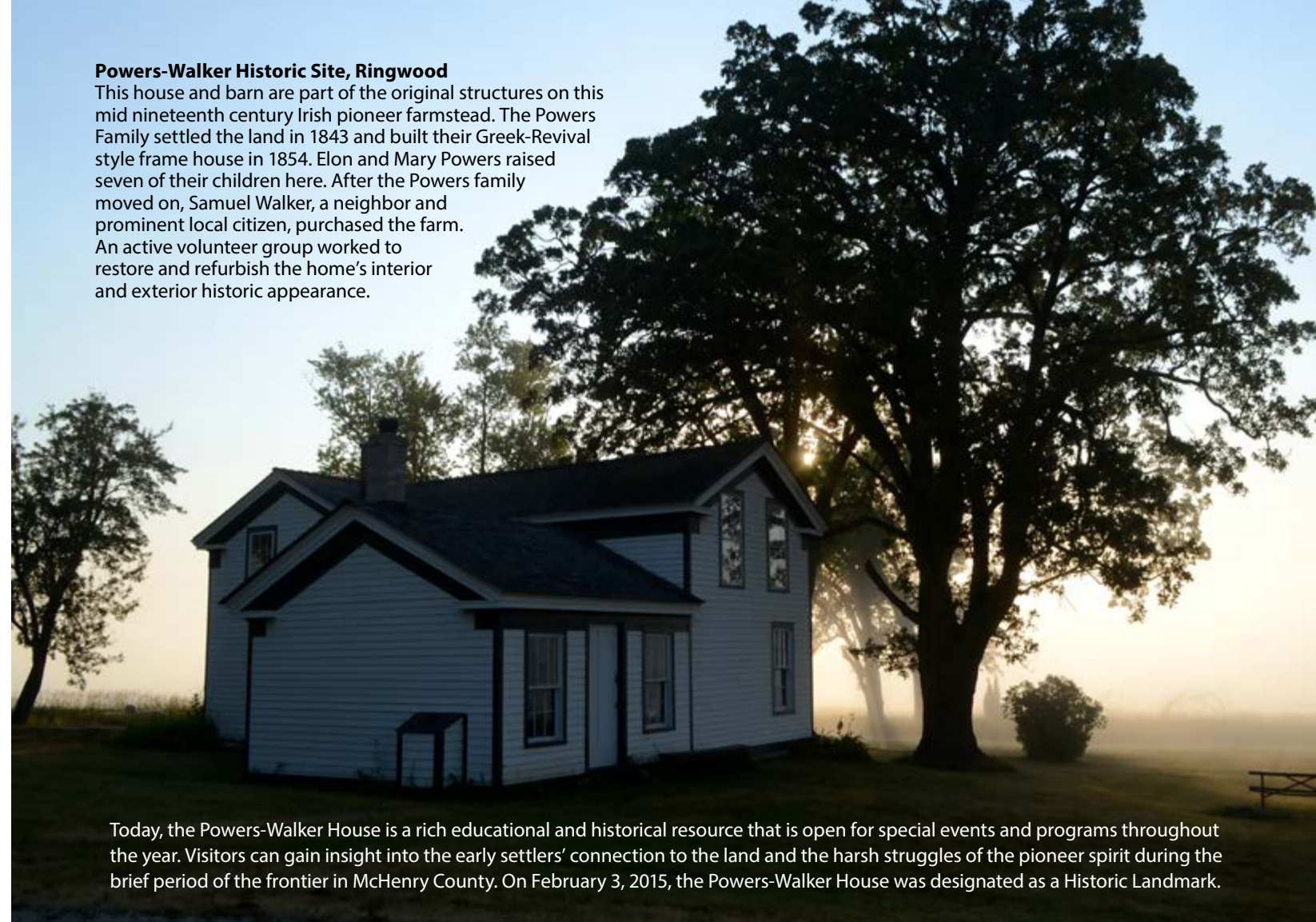
What would compel a man to sleep in an oak tree his first night in the area in the year 1835 just to claim his land? This farmstead complex (comprised of 11 of the original farm structures including a Greek Revival-styled house and two large barns) is the center of the original 1,400-acre farm of the founder of Richmond, William A. McConnell. McConnell went on to serve as a McHenry County judge and served in the state legislature.

In 1999 the McHenry County Conservation District purchased the McConnell Farmstead as part of a larger parcel to preserve and protect the high quality North Branch of the Nippersink Creek. The North Branch Conservation Area, which has grown to just over 520 acres, is open to the public via the Keystone Road parking lot and provides a link from the Prairie Path to the multi-use Hebron Trail. A majority of the farmstead structures retain their late 19th century appearance. The home, barns and outbuildings are in the stabilization phase with volunteers assisting in the work. In 2006, a long term conceptual plan was approved that calls for the site to be developed as an educational living history farm depicting late 1800's farm life and technologies.



### Powers-Walker Historic Site, Ringwood

This house and barn are part of the original structures on this mid nineteenth century Irish pioneer farmstead. The Powers Family settled the land in 1843 and built their Greek-Revival style frame house in 1854. Elon and Mary Powers raised seven of their children here. After the Powers family moved on, Samuel Walker, a neighbor and prominent local citizen, purchased the farm. An active volunteer group worked to restore and refurbish the home's interior and exterior historic appearance.



Today, the Powers-Walker House is a rich educational and historical resource that is open for special events and programs throughout the year. Visitors can gain insight into the early settlers' connection to the land and the harsh struggles of the pioneer spirit during the brief period of the frontier in McHenry County. On February 3, 2015, the Powers-Walker House was designated as a Historic Landmark.



### Wiedrich Barn, Ringwood

Wiedrich Barn is the last remaining major building from the Wiedrich Homestead, the first parcel purchased in what is now Glacial Park. The Wiedrich brothers farmed this area with the Wiedrich sisters eventually owning this parcel. Significant oral and written documentation of the land use history of the site exists, including interviews with the sisters talking about life on the farm for eight decades and how the dust bowl affected this area. The Barn has undergone adaptive reuse over the years serving as staff offices, meeting space and a program area with a modern interior and a historical facade.



### Kennedy Way Station, Woodstock

The Irish settlement of "Brookdale" was so rough (populated with more taverns than houses) that no "respectable" woman would dare stay there even for one night if traveling through the area. Situated about a mile away is the 1850's red brick Greek Revival house that was used as a women's boarding house during this period. This house has been landmarked / plaqued by the McHenry County Historical Society in recognition of its historical significance.



### Pichen Farm, Cary

This farm is the last remaining farmstead in the heavily populated south east portion of McHenry County. The farm's history was documented in interviews with Harry Pichen who was born there and died there 95 years later. The land traces 135 years of one family's history of farming in McHenry County. Their story is representative of our county's agricultural past and our ties to the land. To live a lifetime on a piece of property, to walk every square foot of its soil, to toil the soils of the earth where your family has left their footprints for over 135 years is what legacies are made of. The land remembers and the memories will be preserved.



### Camp Algonquin, Cary

The organized camping movement in America began in the late 1870s as an educational protest movement against certain features of an increasingly urbanized and industrial world. The movement expressed a pervasive mood of loss and a belief that the "out-of-doors" was essential to a better way of life. Camp Algonquin was started in 1905 as part of this movement. Although the area is now heavily populated, for many years it served as a fresh air break for inner city children and families on the banks of the Fox River. A few buildings remain standing testament to the early years of the Fresh Air Camp movement.