

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 31, 2024



CONTACT: Alison Costanzo
Executive Director
LombardHistory.org
director@lombardhistory.org
630-629-1885

AN UNEXPECTED AND BELOVED HEROINE TURNS 100

The “Annie-Versary” invites all ages to celebrate the independent and self-assured character who won the hearts of generations of Americans.

LOMBARD, IL – Whether you remember her for her indomitable spirit, moral compass, or fiery red curls, Little Orphan Annie remains an important icon in American culture 100 years after the character’s debut in the namesake comic strip. Affectionately dubbed the “Annie-Versary,” the Lombard Historical Society (LHS), Village of Lombard, and the DuPage Convention & Visitors Bureau (DCVB) today announced a series of events that will run from April 26 through December 23, 2024, commemorating Little Orphan Annie’s enduring legacy and paying tribute to Harold Gray, the creative genius who brought her to life.

The Little Orphan Annie comic strip first appeared in syndication in *The New York Daily News* on August 5, 1924. Of the more than 40 comic strips running at the time, Little Orphan Annie became the fourth to feature a female in a prominent role. Defying gender stereotypes, Annie quickly became a beloved and unexpected heroine, known for her many adventures solving crimes alongside her dog Sandy — often persevering through dangerous situations. By the 1930s, Little Orphan Annie was one of the most popular strips in syndication.

“Purely as a character, there is a lot to admire and love,” said Lombard Historical Society Executive Director Alison Costanzo. “That is the mere tipping point for Annie’s relevance and why we created ‘Annie’-Versary. There is much to recognize historically and throughout popular entertainment. We hope to showcase the broad reach of Annie throughout the decades.”

Gray was masterful at using Annie to embed his own conservative, political viewpoints, making Little Orphan Annie the first nationally syndicated comic with a political perspective. 1930 brought about another first when Little Orphan Annie became the first comic strip to be adapted for radio and first to be aired coast to coast. Written for children and drawing in six million young listeners, Little Orphan Annie became the biggest and most profitable children’s program of its time.

Gray illustrated the comic strip until his death in 1968, after which it was continued by other cartoonists until its final installment on Sunday, June 13, 2010. The success of the comic strip spawned two film adaptations in the 1930s, a 1977 Broadway musical, a 1982 film adaptation of the Broadway musical, a 1999 made-for-television adaptation, and the 2014 film *Annie* produced by Jay-Z and Will Smith.

“Harold Gray resided in Lombard when he first created this iconic character,” said Costanzo. “On behalf of everyone who embraced Annie in print and on radio, and then later on the musical stage and big screen, it is our honor to welcome you to Lombard to celebrate Gray’s masterful storytelling and the inspirational, wily ways of Little Orphan Annie.”

The Village of Lombard is located in DuPage County, 20 miles west of downtown Chicago, and is a well-known destination for history and arts & culture enthusiasts. The “Annie”-Versary celebration comes several months after the close of *Marvelocity: The Art of Alex Ross* — the 2023 blockbuster exhibition highlighting the renowned comic book illustrator, which was also hosted in DuPage County at the Elmhurst Art Museum.

“What a fitting following in 2024 to be honoring Harold Gray, another legendary illustrator and storyteller,” said DCVB Executive Director Beth Marchetti. “The past several years, DuPage County has welcomed visitors from across the United States and in some cases the world, bringing people together over a shared love of history, artistic expression, and culture. We are pleased to partner with LHS to deliver another meaningful exhibition for engagement and enjoyment.”

“ANNIE”-VERSARY ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

***Leapin Lizards! A Hundred Years of Little Orphan Annie* Exhibition presented by the LHS**

April 24, 2024 - December 23, 2024

Open Tuesday – Saturday, 10am - 4pm (check the website for holiday hours)

The Carriage House in Lombard

A captivating exhibition that will showcase the life of Harold Gray and the rich history of Little Orphan Annie through a collection of original artworks, artifacts, and more.

The Museum and Exhibition are free; suggested \$5 donation at time of admission.

***Meet & Greet with Aileen Quinn presented by LHS**

Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at 6:30pm

The Carriage House in Lombard

LHS welcomes Aileen Quinn, the beloved actress who charmed audiences worldwide as the plucky and spirited Little Orphan Annie in the 1982 film adaptation.

**By invitation only, including LHS members. If interested in membership, visit lombardhistory.org.*

Little Orphan Annie House Walk presented by LHS and Kiwanis Club of Lombard

Saturday, June 22, 2024, 10am - 4pm

Discover the origins of the beloved character and explore Harold Gray’s creative spaces.

Additional details coming soon. Please visit lombardhistory.org for further details.

Week-long “Annie”-Versary Birthday Party Celebration presented by LHS

Tuesday, July 30, 2024 - Saturday, August 3, 2024

Visit lombardhistory.org for complete details including time and tickets.

#

ABOUT THE LOMBARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY (LHS)

The Lombard Historical Society aims to foster an understanding and appreciation for Lombard's history. Residents and visitors are invited to explore Lombard's past through exhibitions, collections, and programming. LHS operates the Victorian Cottage Museum, the Carriage House, and the Society's Archives at 23 W. Maple Street, and the Sheldon Peck Homestead (a National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Site) at 355 E. Parkside Avenue in Lombard. For more information, visit lombardhistory.org, email info@lombardhistory.org or phone 630.629.1885.

ABOUT THE VILLAGE OF LOMBARD

The Village of Lombard is located in DuPage County, Illinois. It is a suburb of Chicago and is known for its residential neighborhoods, schools, and community amenities. Lombard is recognized for its historical significance and community events. The Village hosts various cultural and recreational activities throughout the year, providing residents and visitors with opportunities to engage in a diverse range of events. Lombard is also home to Lilacia Park, a botanical garden featuring a stunning display of lilacs during the spring season.

ABOUT THE DUPAGE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

The DuPage Convention & Visitors Bureau (DCVB) is the official destination marketing organization for DuPage County, Illinois' second largest county comprised of 38 communities. The DCVB works in partnership with community businesses and civic leaders to maximize travel and tourism opportunities which ultimately contribute to the economic vitality of the County and its residents. For more information, visit DiscoverDuPage.com.

Media inquiries: DCVB Executive Director Beth Marchetti at Beth@DiscoverDuPage.com.