

Construction starts in May on Arcola's Broom Palace

Pat Monahan reported this week that construction on Arcola's Broom Palace is scheduled to begin before the end of May and will be finished before the end of the year. He said Graber Buildings will be the contractor. Graber, based in Sullivan, has hardware/lumber stores in Arcola and Tuscola.

The non-profit Arcola Community Organization will own the building, Monahan said. The city has committed \$125,000 over five years toward the project. It also provided the land, part of the lots where the old Metropolitan Block was razed downtown.

Monahan, who has spearheaded the effort to build the tourism facility, provided the following information.

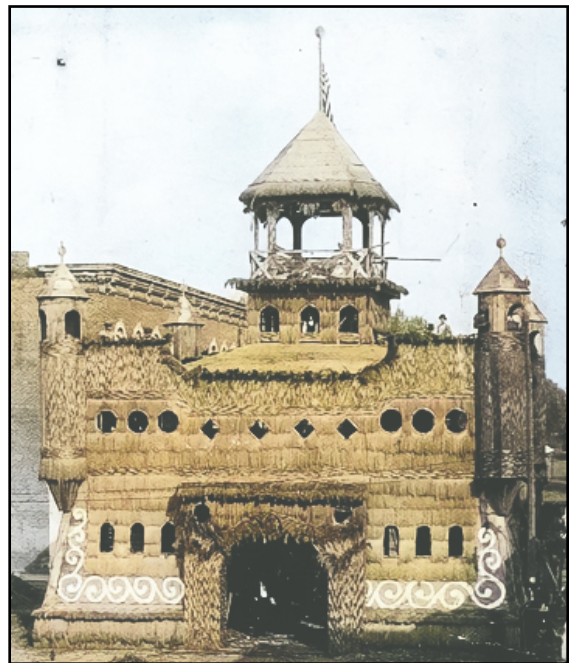


Why build a broom palace in Arcola?

Arcola is the former Broomcorn Capital of the World. It is home to the Libman Company, the largest manufacturer of brooms in the USA. It is a tourist-friendly community with a great collection of public art, a train depot converted to an information center, a busy main street, and a Carnegie Library. Arcola is in Amish Country, one of the most interesting attractions in Illinois and just a few miles outside of Arcola is the Aikman Wildlife Adventure and the Illinois Amish Heritage Center.

It is only natural that Arcola would honor its heritage by building a Broom Palace, just as it built a temporary Broomcorn Palace in 1898. This palace drew 20,000 visitors in 5 days, back when there were no cars and limited ability to spread the news. The Corn Palace in Mitchell, S.D., draws 500,000 visitors a year.

Arcola has strong ties to brooms, is already a tourist destination, is blessed with the best motel in Amish land, has many food and shopping alternatives, and Arcola loves to host its guests. So, why shouldn't Arcola have a Broom Palace?



What will there be to do?

The Palace first floor offers a Libman retail outlet for its well-known and complete line of cleaning tools. A small theatre will bring guests up-to-date on the amazing broomcorn plant, its proud history, and the current state of the art of broom making.

Some of the finest craft brooms, made in the USA, will be displayed in the lobby of the first floor. There are also clean public restrooms and tourist information pamphlets on the first floor.

The second floor will be home to Arcola's A Walk Through Time Museum. Arcola's ties to the Toy Hall-of-Famers, Raggedy Ann and Andy, will be explained as well as some of the highlights of Arcola's community achievements and proud history.

The third floor is an open observation deck where guests can see some of the reasons Arcola is the Public Art Capital of Central Illinois. Our historic downtown is lined with our "Sweeping Beauties" — oversized fiberglass brooms with such sayings as "Lincoln Swept Here" and most of our 16 murals painted by the Wall Dogs, showing more of Arcola's proud history.

On the outside walls of the Palace, there are oversized fiberglass brooms, each broom highlighting an area attraction. On the sidewalk leading into the Palace, there are gray granite pavers honoring the donors who made this Palace possible.

The Palace will be open Thursday through Saturday from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. and Sundays from 12 noon until 6 p.m. Admission to the Palace will be free.

What else is there to see and do in Arcola?

Just a block west of the Palace is Oak Street where you will find a park bench with a delightful statue of Raggedy Ann and Andy resting happily there, a 1/2 block farther north is a statue of Ben Franklin, holding a broom. Ben Franklin is generally credited with bringing broomcorn seed to America. Ben is just in front of our restored train depot, now a visitor's center. Right next to Ben is the Only Hippie Memorial in the USA. On the way to Oak Street, you will pass an historic Metzger Metal front moved to Arcola from an opera House in Stewardson.

Just a block east of the Broom Palace is Arcola's Carnegie Library, which has expanded but remained true to the original architecture of the building. Our downtown, across from the Palace, has a bakery, Saldivar Panaderia, and the Broom Town Cafe. There are plenty of fast food options between the 1-57 Arcola exit and downtown Arcola.

There is a large pavilion just a block from the Palace — across from the restored train depot — a shaded area with many picnic tables — for our guests to enjoy a quiet lunch or just relax.