



FROM THE STUDY



GENERAL LEW WALLACE
STUDY & MUSEUM
HOME OF BEN-HUR

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Mission Statement

The General Lew Wallace Study & Museum is deeply committed to the protection and preservation of Lew Wallace's legacy now and for generations to come.

2025 Exhibit “Building a Blockbuster”

Thomas R. Meeks Jr.
Associate Director

Each year, our museum presents a new exhibit to explore the life and legacy of Lew Wallace. We are excited to announce the opening of *Building a Blockbuster: The 1925 Ben-Hur*, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the iconic silent film's release.

In the decades before the highly anticipated debut of MGM's 1925 film, Lew Wallace's 1880 novel *Ben-Hur* had already become a worldwide sensation, the bestselling novel in the world. Its immense popularity led to a stage adaptation that captivated audiences, with an estimated 20 million people attending performances during its 21-year run.

This success sparked a growing demand for a film version, and the nascent movie industry sought to capture the novel's spectacle.

One early filmmaker, attempting to produce the film without rights, was sued by the Wallace estate, resulting in a landmark Supreme Court case over copyright law in the film industry.

In 1921, Lew Wallace's son, Henry, sold the film rights for a groundbreaking \$600,000—then the largest sum ever paid for film rights. With numerous setbacks, including costly delays and production

challenges when the film's production moved from Italy to California following the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer merger. The film proved to be a breakout role for Ramon Novarro as Judah Ben-Hur.

The final budget reached a staggering \$4 million, making *Ben-Hur* the most expensive film of the silent era. When it opened on December 30, 1925, the film received critical acclaim, though it only returned a modest profit after expenses. Nevertheless, the film cemented MGM's status as a dominant force in Hollywood.

Building a Blockbuster will be on display through December 2025. The exhibit is free to visit and open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.



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Notes From The Director



In the 1990s, the City of Crawfordsville and the volunteers responsible for the Lew Wallace

Museum were faced with a difficult choice. The old Wallace Carriage House that had been built by Lew Wallace on his property in the late 1860s, had been abandoned for many, many years and was in a poor state of repair. It had served the Wallace family through the 1930s as a carriage house, garage, and storage space for sixty years. When the City assumed ownership of the property in 1941, the old building was refurbished and given a second life serving as headquarters for local scout troupes for decades. Affectionately known as the Little Green House, generations of young people grew up using the building. There was a serious fire in 1964, but the building was again refurbished and continued in use until it was no longer safe. At that point the building was basically abandoned and sat idle.

By the 1990s, the City and the trustees of the museum were faced with either demolishing the building, or coming up with a plan for reusing it and raising money for renovation. To their credit and our constant appreciation those

leaders decided that this building—the oldest building in Crawfordsville directly related to Lew Wallace—would be saved. Museum director, Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko, spearheaded a campaign with a talented group of volunteers to raise the needed funds, worked with architects to develop a restoration plan and initiated the project in 2004. Many people in Crawfordsville and beyond contributed in many ways to support the project.

In 2006, the building opened to the public as the museum's visitor center, gift shop, office space, exhibit space, and collection storage space. For those of us who inherited the results of their work in bringing the Carriage House back to life, it is hard to imagine how all of these activities used to take place in the crowded Study—but for decades the staff toiled under those difficult circumstances!!

After almost 20 years of use, current (and former) staff began to recognize that the building was again showing its age. In the years since 2006, over 100,000 people have been through the front door, and the second floor was carrying much more weight than was anticipated in 2005. In particular, the floor upstairs showed significant signs that all was not well—it was sloping in a number of directions! Desk drawers upstairs required

cont. on page 3



@WallaceStudy

Notes From The Director Continued

child-proof locks to keep them from falling open, the floor bounced when people walked across the room, and other concerns were showing up. As a result, we felt it was time to again help the poor old building! With the support of the Montgomery County Community Foundation we secured enough funds to complete an engineering study in 2022 which showed that, in fact, the building had structural deficiencies. With budget numbers provided we began fund raising and grant writing. With an additional grant from the Community Foundation in 2024, private gifts from some very kind donors, and funds from our annual fund raisers, memberships, and annual fund gifts, we secured the monies needed to do the project. For the staff, this meant clearing the Carriage House of all the artifacts, display cases—

everything from the first floor and much from the second floor in the fall of 2024. In early January of 2025, the project began.

In January significant demolition began with ceilings and walls taken down to expose the structure of the old Carriage House, portions of the floor were taken up to expose the brick piers supporting the floor structure, beams exposed, windows and window sills removed. By early February, the renovations of the interior were well underway or, in some cases, completed and work moved to exterior repairs, paint removal and repainting.

As you read this newsletter, the work has been completed, artifacts returned, the 2025 exhibit installed and we have resumed normal operations. It's been an exciting project

and we appreciate the support of those who made it happen, the understanding of those who were inconvenienced by it, and the architects and craftsmen who lent their talents. The work completed in 2025, assures that this building would have a future when that was truly in doubt. In our work we learned a lot about the construction of the building in 1870, removed some hornet's nests, secured some basic structural elements that had come loose, and truthfully have enjoyed walking across the office floor upstairs without a bounce or sway! This project has assured that this building will be available and safe for decades to come.

Larry Loubrey



Winter Carriage House construction site.

One Shoe and a Wandering Eye: Who is the Turkish Princess?

Thomas R. Meeks Jr.
Associate Director

In his introduction for the 1894 picture book *Famous Paintings of the World*, Lew Wallace wrote, “I have always loved art... to me there is art in everything we construct. The natural is of procession from God. Art is human.” Wallace’s appreciation for artistic expression is evident the moment one steps into his Study—a building that embodies this sentiment itself. Among the many artworks displayed within, none captivate visitors quite like *The Turkish Princess*. In fact, countless visitors have remarked that this colorful painting is their one enduring memory from a previous visit, recalling her eyes that seem to follow you around the Study building.

Given its ability to leave such a lasting impression, it is curious that the identity of the girl in the portrait remains a mystery. Despite much speculation, no one has been able to identify her with certainty, leaving this long-standing enigma unsolved.

According to the original museum catalog, Wallace acquired *The Turkish Princess* as a loan from Sultan Abdul Hamid II after viewing the royal collection at Yıldız Palace. Wallace is said to have declared the painting “the finest picture in his majesty’s extensive collection,” noting that it would

serve to “brighten his dull office room” at the American Legation. In an effort to gain Wallace’s favor, the Sultan graciously agreed to lend the artwork.



The Turkish Princess

Upon Wallace’s resignation from his diplomatic post, the painting was reportedly returned to the Sultan. However, Wallace made one final request: an album of photographs to serve as a lasting memento, something his family could treasure forever. When the album was received at his final meeting with the Sultan, Wallace stated, “in looking through the album I failed to find the photographs of your majesty’s children... I would like to give my wife some pictures of your family.” In response, the Sultan requested Wallace stay an extra couple

days to dine with his family one last time, and have the picture given by the princesses own hand.

Speculation abounds that this “picture” was none other than the painting now known as *The Turkish Princess*. Yet, this theory is as much a mystery as the portrait itself. Wallace’s final meeting with the Sultan and his family occurred on a Tuesday, likely May 5 or May 12, 1885. Remarkably, by May 30, Indiana newspapers were reporting that Susan Wallace had invited the Indianapolis Art Association to view the painting at their Crawfordsville home. While it is technically possible for the painting to have traveled from Constantinople to Crawfordsville within this timeframe, the speed of its arrival seems almost implausibly swift given late 19th-century travel logistics.

So, what can we say about this painting with confidence? First and foremost, we know that it was created by Charles Louis Müller, a renowned 19th-century artist celebrated for his intricate and captivating depictions of women, particularly in orientalist settings. Müller’s mastery of detail and color led to significant commissions, including the ceiling of the Denon Wing at the Louvre. We can also confidently say

that the painting portrays the princess “in the light of the Harem.” The concept of the Harem is far more complex than Western portrayals suggest. There is an abundance of inaccurate interpretations from this era reflecting the outsider’s fascination with the often misunderstood Ottoman cultural dynamic. It is worth noting that the daughters of Sultans held significant influence within the Harem hierarchy—a story best saved for another time.

The museum has had Turkish visitors who expressed their belief the Princess was depicted within the Harem. Furthermore, Susan Wallace, in her book *The Storied Sea* gives a glimpse of a young girl in the harem that exactly describes what the painting portrays: “...reclining on pillows of silk and lace, rested the lady we sought. One little foot, in red velvet slipper, was first seen below wide trousers of yellow silk; a loose robe of white silk, embroidered with gold thread, was partly covered by a sleeveless jacket of crimson, dotted with seed pearl; a broad variegated sash wound the slender waist. Half concealing the arms was a light scarf, airy as the woven wind of the ancients. A head-band, with diamond pendants, fringed her forehead... oh, what a revelation of beauty!”

With the means of acquisition clarified and the painting’s artistic and historical context established, the final puzzle

remains: Who is she? Sultan Abdul Hamid II had thirteen daughters, though the exact number is debated due to the private nature of the Harem. Many of his children were born after Wallace’s departure in 1885, allowing us to narrow the possibilities considerably.

Of the daughters born before 1885, we can immediately rule out the Sultan’s first daughter, who tragically passed away at the age of seven in 1875. This leaves two plausible candidates: Zekiye Sultan, the Sultan’s second daughter, who would have been nine years old when Wallace arrived in Constantinople and thirteen when he departed, and Fatma Naime Sultan, his third daughter, who was just five when Wallace arrived and nine by his departure.

While the precise identity remains uncertain, the evidence tilts toward one of these two. Zekiye Sultan, the older of the two during Wallace’s tenure, seems the more likely subject. However, Fatma Naime Sultan, despite her younger age, cannot be discounted as Ottoman portraiture often stylized its subjects to project maturity beyond their years.

If the painting indeed depicts one of the two, both their ages and the customs of the time present intriguing evidence. Ottoman princesses often wore elaborate attire and posed for portraits to honor their status, even from a young

age. The artistic elements in the painting—its intricate textiles, jeweled adornments, and intimate yet formal tone—could suggest it was crafted to embody the mystique and grace associated with the royal family.

Ultimately, the identity remains elusive. Yet, the story behind it—a blend of diplomacy, cultural exchange, and artistic excellence—ensures its place as one of the most intriguing artifacts in the Wallace museum’s collection.



Zekiye Sultan in 1879.



Fatma Naime Sultan in 1882.

Spring & Summer Programming

The Dr. Howard Miller Lecture Series

The Dr. Howard Miller Lecture Series programs help to compliment our yearly exhibit in the Carriage House Interpretive Center. This year there are several lectures scheduled to support our 2025 exhibit *Building a Blockbuster: The 1925 Ben-Hur*.

Our first speaker will be Bela Sandor, a Professor Emeritus of Engineering Physics from the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Sandor, a leading expert in the physics of ancient chariots, has been featured in the PBS Nova documentary *Building Pharoah's Chariots*. He will join us on **Thursday, May 8** for his talk **Ben-Hur Chariots**, diving deep into the ancient sport's portrayal in Wallace's masterwork novel and in the 1925 silent film adaptation.

On **Tuesday, May 20**, Dr. Thomas J. Slater, an English professor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, will be discussing his new book **June Mathis: The Rise and Fall of a Silent Film Visionary**. A pioneering woman in Hollywood, Mathis worked on the 1925 *Ben-Hur* and chose to film on location in Italy. However, conflicts with director Charles Brabin led to

complications, and after the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer merger, she was removed from the project. At 38, Mathis tragically died of a heart attack while at the theater with her mother. Copies of the book will be available and Dr. Slater is happy to sign them.

Hoosier Authors Book Club

The Hoosier Authors Book Club began as part of our Indiana Bicentennial programming in 2016 with the Museum's exhibit on the Golden Age of Indiana Literature. This Golden Age began with the publication of Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*. The book club has proven to be a popular program with almost 50 books on a wide range of subjects having been read since late 2015.

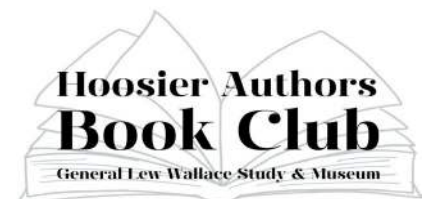
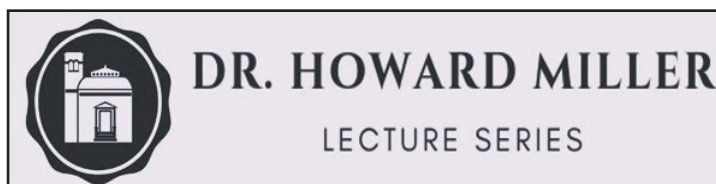
The meetings are at **7:00 p.m. EDT** in the **Lew Wallace Carriage House**. The books selected this year demonstrate the broad range of Hoosier literature that is available!

Book Club begins **Thursday, April 17** with *Hawaii and a Revolution* by Mary Hannah Krout. Krout, a native of Crawfordsville, details her personal experience as a journalist and correspondent for the Chicago *Inter-Ocean* covering the 1893 revolution in Hawaii.

On **Thursday, May 22** the book club will meet to discuss Kelly O'Dell Stanley's memoir *The Artist, Ladoga, Indiana*. In this memoir, the brushstrokes of the author's father, Rob O'Dell, echo long after his passing in 2017. In her quest to understand her father's legacy, Kelly dives deep into his art—discovering that its true beauty lies not just in technique, but in the profound connections it fosters. Rob found magic in the broken and the overlooked, reminding us all of the power of being seen and celebrated.

The third book club selection is Meredith Nicholson's *The Port of Missing Men*, which will meet on **Thursday, June 26**. Published in 1907, the novel follows wealthy young John Keith, who embarks on a sea voyage to the Philippines in search of adventure. After his ship is wrecked on a deserted island, Keith and other survivors struggle to survive while uncovering a sinister plot involving missing men. With the help of Hope, a young woman, Keith works to unravel the mystery.

This thrilling adventure explores love, betrayal, and redemption, delving into the complexities of human nature and the lengths people will go to



Spring & Summer Programming

achieve their goals. *The Port of Missing Men* is a classic tale of survival and intrigue that keeps readers on the edge of their seats.

ArchiCamp 2025

Every year the General Lew Wallace Study & Museum hosts ArchiCamp in partnership with Indiana Landmarks. The two-day camp is open to students ages 8-12. It costs \$25 and scholarships are available. ArchiCamp 2025 will be held on **Tuesday & Wednesday, June 17 & 18.**

ArchiCamp is an architecture-based camp that uses historic architecture to educate and excite children about local history and instills stewardship and responsibility for our cultural heritage. During the two-day camp, students will learn about Crawfordsville's architectural heritage, including the historic Study building. Campers will take walking tours, learn about architectural terms, do architecture-related crafts, learn about careers in historic preservation, and discuss preservation successes in our community.

Taste of Montgomery County 2025

The Taste of Montgomery County is one of the area's most anticipated festivals and the General Lew Wallace Study & Museum's largest annual fundraiser. The event features local food vendors and musical acts, supporting the Museum's programming and exhibits. This year's event is on **Saturday, August 23.** Stay tuned for updates on the 2025 vendors and performers—we hope to see you there!

Adopt-A-Spot Program

"A place where I can get away..."

Lew Wallace dreamed of a sanctuary, and his vision lives on today at the Museum. The serene grounds, filled with gardens and trees, offer a peaceful retreat for visitors and are an integral part of the experience.

The Museum invites you to help develop and maintain its gardens and arboretum. Thirteen gardens, each named after an aspect of Lew Wallace's life, are available for adoption: Ben Hur, Susan's, Henry's, Lew Jr's, Tee's, Water Babble, Wallace, Old John's, Terrace, Princess Irene's, Moat, Statue, and Zouave.

The Adopt-A-Spot program provides essential funds to sustain and enhance these gardens, supporting tree and plant labels, interpretive signs, maintenance, replanting, and other improvements.



Learn how to Adopt-A-Spot Today!
Contact the Museum at
study@ben-hur.com
or (765) 362-5769

General Lew Wallace Study & Museum Contributions

Received October 16, 2024 through February 28, 2025

Every member and donor matters a great deal to us and we appreciate your support. We have made every attempt to ensure the accuracy of this list. If we have made an error in your listing, please contact us immediately.

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 Jan Vaughn-Horner
 Beverly Wyatt
 Jerilyn Yerkes



St. Nicholas, also known as Pat McDowell greeted guests as they arrived.



Holiday Tea smorgasbord.

From the Arboretum

Deb King
Grounds Manager

In the fall of 2024, daffodils, hyacinths, snowdrops and tulips were planted throughout the gardens. It didn't take long for the squirrels to find the newly planted bulbs! It became very frustrating to keep finding holes where bulbs were planted. Only time will tell what bulbs will come up this spring. I will continue to plant them but will also incorporate the use of hardware cloth placed over the bulbs in hopes that the squirrels won't chew through the wire.

Elephant ears, lantana, ti plants and angel wing begonias were dug

and potted up for over wintering. Where we were going to store over a dozen 14" pots became the BIG question! Due to the Carriage House rehabilitation, the restroom hallway, where we 'normally' overwinter the pots, was largely unavailable. In emptying the Carriage House, the hallway became a storage area for furniture, the microwave, and the refrigerator.

Larry and I put our heads together to come up with a plan. We took some pots home while the rest were stored in the restrooms and the over-stuffed hallway, which became an obstacle course!

With the Carriage House rehabilitation finished, items were relocated back to their homes. Deb's office (the garage) was emptied of file cabinets, research boxes, gift shop items, and the kitchen table.

Spring will be an extremely busy time with working in the gardens and moving the collection, boxes and furniture back to the Carriage House. With the help of volunteers, we will have it put 'back together', and the grounds spruced up for the coming season. Garden plans are made, and book club, lectures, and weddings, are getting scheduled. It is going to be a busy 2025!

General Lew Wallace deserves his place in history. Help us preserve that place.

Membership to the **Lew Wallace Study Preservation Society** begins with your annual contribution of \$25 or more. Membership offers discounts and complimentary admission and event tickets.

Lieutenant Level—\$25 (Individual)

- Complimentary admission for 1
- Subscription to newsletter

Major General Level—\$50 (Family)

- Complimentary admission for family
- Subscription to newsletter

Governor Level—\$100 (Sustainer)

- Major General-level benefits, plus
- 10% discount in museum shop



Ambassador Level—\$250 (Benefactor)

- Governor-level benefits, plus
- 2 tickets to the annual Taste of Montgomery County

Ben-Hur Level—\$500+ (Patron)

- Ambassador Level benefits, plus
- 1 ticket to the annual Holiday Tea

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Enclosed is my check payable to the Lew Wallace Study Preservation Society

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Please visit www.ben-hur.com/join-support to pay for your membership with a credit card via Paypal

I wish to remain anonymous

I'm declining benefits, making my contribution deductible to the full extent of IRS regulations.



Carriage House Restoration Scrapbook



Crawlspace access to repair foundation piers.



Hornet's nest found in ceiling.



Original joists sistered with new joists.



Deteriorated kitchen beam carrying 2nd floor.



Restoring the windows.



Installed firring strips to level ceiling.



GENERAL LEW WALLACE STUDY & MUSEUM

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2025 Spring & Summer Events Calendar

April 17- **Hoosier Authors Book Club**

Hawaii and a Revolution by Mary Hannah Krout

Book available for purchase on Amazon.

May 8 - **Dr. Howard Miller Lecture Series**

Ben-Hur Chariots by Dr. Bela Sandor

May 20 - **Dr. Howard Miller Lecture Series**

June Mathis: A Silent Film Visionary by Dr. Thomas J. Slater

May 22 - **Hoosier Authors Book Club**

The Artist, Ladoga, Indiana by Kelly O'Dell Stanley

June 17 & 18 - **ArchiCamp**

Architecture themed camp for kids 8-12 years old

June 26 - **Hoosier Authors Book Club**

The Port of Missing Men by Meredith Nicholson

Book available for purchase on Amazon.

August 23 - **The TASTE! of Montgomery County**