

VILLAGE YESTERYEARS

Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest

March 2000

Our thanks go to...

The nearly 70 individuals and families who joined the Historical Society's Century Club. Local craftsman Marty Hackl is working on a suitable plaque for the Century Club; Marty designed and built the showcase for the Lowy Doll Collection. The Century Club plaque will be unveiled this spring at the Annual Meeting.

Thanks also to Marc Martinez and Susan Price, who generously opened their landmark home on St. Valentine's Day weekend. The Society raised \$2,500 for our operating support! We are lucky to have such friends!

VILLAGE
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Historical Society of
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Centennial Plans Celebrate Oak Park Heritage

The Historical Society is developing a master plan to celebrate the 100th birthday of the Village of Oak Park in 2001-02. Our mission makes us the natural organization to take the lead in this effort, and we want representation from every segment of the community. We are seeking interested individuals to serve on a Centennial Steering Committee that will coordinate the many aspects of the celebration. Also needed are volunteers interested in working on specific aspects of the celebration.

The Historical Society has proposed several key initiatives to Village officials:

◆ **Development of a Comprehensive History Exhibit**

Visitors to Oak Park, school children studying local history, and newcomers who invest in the community currently have no way to experience the overall richness of our unique history. Although world-renowned architecture has long proven to be the area's major attraction, many visitors frequently inquire about what sort of community nurtured such greatness in people and the built environment. Local residents also are curious about how their community developed and grew.

◆ **Marking of Historic Sites**

The Historical Society, with input from the community, will mark several historic sites that are no longer standing or have changed greatly in appearance through the decades. A self-guided walking tour and map will be produced by the Historical Society in 2001 or 2002 and the Historical Society will provide scheduled, guided tours from April to October to see and understand these spots where "history happened."

◆ **Progress on Creation of a Heritage Center**

The Historical Society will use the milestone of the Centennial of the Village of Oak Park to continue to explore the concept of creating a Heritage Center. The Center would house the Historical Society's collection, museum, and research center, with room to include rich history from many individuals and organizations. We will continue our search for a new home and a better location to pursue our central mission of community service.

To get involved in the planning, please call the office at 848-6755. ❖

Recent Donations Enhance Society Collection

When Bob James of W.R. James Realty led his long-time family firm into a merger with Coldwell Banker-Sprafka early in 2000, he didn't forget the importance of history as he entered this new chapter. He gave an important slice of local history to the Historical Society to be accessible to researchers. Specifically, he donated a 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, a bound paper volume of the 1924 *Oak Parker* newspaper, and two file cabinets of Multiple Listing Service real estate listings from the 1950s-90s, organized by address. The latter items have already been well-used!

Waring Jones of Minnesota so enjoyed his visit this summer to the Historical Society's exhibit *Tarzan, Mars, and the Fertile Mind of Edgar Rice Burroughs*, he donated 48 first editions and early editions of Burroughs' novels. These colorfully illustrated and valuable books will be on display soon at the Historical Society.

Thank you to these two generous individuals and all who add to our collection. ❖

More Membership Renewals

Last issue, we welcomed some of our new and renewing members. Here are others whose ongoing support is vital to our organization. If your name isn't among them, please watch for the next issue!

Augie Aleksy
Sue and Patrick Allen
Bill Bango & Lori Malinski
Judy and Tapas Das Gupta
Don Gancer
Barbara H. Hall
Joann N. Heppes
Frances T. Janis
Boni A. Jensen
Cliff Johnson
Eleanor Jones
Jean & Charles Judd
Suzanne M. Keller
Carol R. Kelm
David and Anne Kettlestrings
Mary Glenn Kirkland
Shirley Klem
Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Klein
Fred & Elizabeth Ludke
Lloyd Klein & Barbara Visocan Family
Tom & Kelli Kline
Dr. & Mrs. Peter Lykos
Inger Klumpner
Rick & Ellen Kuner
Doug & Jan Larson
Lynn & Ruel Lehman
Dr. & Mrs. Edwin Liebner
Helen S. Loughlin
LaForge/Walch family
Roberta Raymond Larson
Agnew/Madden family
Helen S. Lyons
Mrs. William R. Mahoney
Judy Maison
Linda Marcangelo
Norma J. Marquardt
(Continued on next page)

Share your memories with the Historical Society

By President Jan Dressel

How many of you enjoyed, as I did, the news stories late in 1999 that attempted to put the century in perspective? I especially enjoyed the letters-to-the-editor section in the *Chicago Tribune*, which ran several letters written by people recalling their favorite memories of the century.

One particular letter, written by Fred Brandt of Marengo, IL, caught my eye because it referenced Russell's Barbeque, Strickland's Grocery, and living in the forest preserves that border River Forest. I had to find out more about the stories he was hinting at!

I reached Mr. Brandt by phone and he described living in the forest preserves with his family during the Depression and working with his brothers at Strickland's Grocery on Marion Street in Oak Park. We promised to exchange information. I sent him information about the "lost subdivision of Edgewater" west of River Forest. He promised to send me some information and to ask his brothers to also share their stories and photos. Enjoy a selection of his memories below.

How many of you have memories like this that you would like to share with your fellow members of the Historical Society, as Mr. Brandt and Grace Olson do in this issue? I would like to include more of *your* stories, especially as we get ready to celebrate the Centennial of Oak Park in 2001-02. Let us hear from you. ❖

River Forest Memories

by Fred Brandt

As we lived in the middle of the forest preserves, my father worked for the County as the "game warden." He was supposed to watch that the animals were left alone and there was no hunting. But in those days, food and money were always scarce. Our landlord lived where the Thatcher Woods Trailside Museum is on Chicago Avenue. I remember being pulled in a wagon by my older brother with my mother to pay the rent. We lived in a five-bedroom, two-story house and the rent was \$10, which was a lot of money in the 1930s. There were two girls and six boys, and sometimes my Dad had problems feeding all of us.

We had to move in 1933 because the county was going to tear down the homes. Mr. Strickland came to our rescue and let us rent a house from him. My older brother Arvid was working for him, and soon my brother Ralph started. I began after I entered high school at Proviso in Maywood. We worked six days. The drivers worked eight to ten hours a day and made \$21 a week. Arvid parked, gassed, and took care of the trucks, so he got \$28 a week. I worked on the truck with Ralph, filled orders in the back of the store, and made \$1.50 on Saturdays and \$2.50 for five days after school. My younger brother started at Stricklands when he entered high school, and was still there when I entered the Army in 1943. ❖



The Strickland drivers. Arvid Brandt is the second from left and Ralph Brandt is fifth from left. Uniforms were mandatory.

This month, voters in Oak Park are voting on a referendum to build a brand new library at the northwest corner of Lake and Kenilworth; if it passes it will be the third library at that corner. Here's one person's fond memories of the first library.

The Scoville Institute: Memories of Oak Park's first library

By Grace Olson

When I was a child, it was such joy to dash over the lawn of First Congregational Church, and to test myself, to walk toes-out on the slanting cement borders of the lawns, and finally to walk up the steps of the Scoville Institute. The steps were already worn at the center by other feet before mine. Mr. Scoville had a notion that his institute would dispense knowledge and be a cultural center. It was, Mr. Scoville. It is.

It dispensed a few other ideas besides those found in books. But when I was a child, I didn't know this. All I knew was that if I went to the library, I might be able to read some of the books that Miss Ayres, the librarian, had described to us on one of her periodic visits to our grade school (Mann School).

In old pictures of the Scoville Institute, you can see the large windows that faced Lake Street. These windows harbored seats in the Children's Section, and were much-prized. They had comfortable plush cushions, and we could sit there for hours, reading and dreaming, and no one disturbed us. However, we were not allowed to take more than two or three books home. I think now that librarians feared finding library books with peanut butter sandwiches or candy bars used as bookmarks. When we were lucky enough to take out books, I remember vividly the seal on the cover. The label was yellow, and there was a stick figure who pronounced: "Wash your hands before you read me, and keep me clean." Of course, most of us did so, and some of us didn't.

When we graduated to the adult section of the library, we were not urged to "wash our hands." There we could find most of what we wanted to read and were not limited to our two or three books. However, we were not allowed free access to "racy" books, which were kept in the basement. I think those books might have included Hemingway's works, with the covers turned inside out. Few scientific books that contained references to "sex" or "anatomy" were on the regular shelves.

At this early date in our lives, we did not care much about what was hidden in the basement. Instead, we indulged our teen-age spirits in the reference room. A tolerant Miss Lewis overlooked a bunch of kids, who giggled and whispered and slid notes across the table. We arrived at the reference room by marching up the stairs past a forbidding painting of James Scoville on the landing. But I don't think we cared about what he would think about our shenanigans. We were just happy to be there. It was, you see, the perfect excuse for leaving the house. Those splendid and kind-hearted librarians put up with our slyness and silliness and in turn gave us a love of books.

Later, they also helped us out with research for our term papers. And when we were adults, they supplied all sorts of information for my husband's radio program on WCFL.

(Continued on page four)



Renewals

(Continued)

James & Alice Marshall
Beverly B. Martin
Pete Mavrelis
Jennie I. McCellan
Helena McCullough
Mary Ann & John McKenna
Richard A. McMahan Jr.
McMahan Family
Richard & Joan Meister
Margaret Gipson Miller
Priscilla Mims
Aurelia Moody
Thomas Murphy
Michael & Susan Nielsen
Thomas Nielsen & Mary
Beth Leonard
Gloria Nissen
June Noonan
John K. Notz Jr.
Grace Olson
Meg O'Malley
Jean Omara
Thomas & Lynn O'Connor
Grace Osborn
G.M. Orr
Gary & Kristi Osga



Historical Society volunteer Georgette Sinkler, left, assisted four Concordia University students last fall in a class project to study and organize the Ashbel Steele papers in the Historical Society's collection. Society member Tina Reithmaier was the student's professor for the Public History class.

Memories of Scoville

Today, when I pass the library, I am filled with nostalgia. The modern building and the and are replaced by Mr. Scoville's Institute. However, I understand that necessity for enable other children, with books clutched under the arm to love books as we did and children, and all the rest of us.

Grace Olson, an Elmwood Park resident and School, taught English at her alma mater until her



History Tidbits

⇒ A researcher called the Historical Society recently with an unusual request: Just do in their base-

rooms? Was it work space, storage, or used in some other way? Any ideas?

The Historical Society hosted the monthly meeting of NEIL, the North East-

at Pleasant Home. The Historical Society showed its museum and research center and

every walk. Thank you to board members Jan Dressel, Joe May, Laurel McMahon, Peggy

Saturday morning for the activity.



Laurel McMahon, Toni Moore, and Jan Dressel, developed a new brochure explain-

accessible by local teachers. Copies were distributed to schools and an Open House

⇒ Society President Jan Dressel re-

Park Rotary Club at a March 1 dinner in recognition of her unselfish service to many

Society. Richard Pogyara, of Community Bank of Oak Park/River Forest, was also

⇒ Save the Date! May 25: the Grand

the adjacent Carleton Hotel has annexed. Watch for more details.

Get Well Wishes

Go to Ken Kilner, an award-winning volunteer, board member, and friend of the Historical Society since 1976. Ken has been recovering from surgery in Oak Park Hospital since soon after the New Year. Thoughts and prayers for his recovery are welcomed. ❖

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF OAK PARK & RIVER FOREST
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