



Telling Our Community's Stories Through Good Times and Bad

Oak Park River Forest Museum is open for business!

That innocuous statement doesn't begin to tell of the enormous effort by many to restore a sense of normalcy to our operation and community service during this international pandemic that has tested all of our grit, determination, and resilience. Our struggles as your hometown museum pale in comparison to the tragic loss of life, economic dislocation and deterioration, racial justice reckoning, and poisonous political environment we have been experiencing in our local communities and across the United States.

But in reality, only our building closed, as staff and key volunteers continued the organization's work as much as possible in the "social distanced" world of 2020.

When spring began "2020" was not yet a number that conjured up feelings of dread and uncertainty, as it has become for so many of us both here and around the world! In March, even as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to reach a crisis point, staff, board members, and volunteers were planning for our annual May house walk, working on several new exhibits, finalizing details about upcoming live programs, preparing to host an Institute Day for Oak Park middle school social studies teachers, and wondering how the Lake Street resurfacing project might impact access to the museum at Lake and Lombard in the summer. Important work, but certainly not life-and-death!

To comply with state health guidelines, in mid-March we cancelled our planned public events and locked the front door to visitors and volunteers for the first time since we opened to the public in summer 2017. What we thought was a brief break, turned into the new normal.



Museum docent Bob Messer (right) helped guide this family through our museum and answered their questions during their recent visit.

But our staff and board decided to not let the shuttering of our building be the news headline. Instead, we embarked on a plan to continue to document our community's past, present and future and tell all of our stories. Here are a few of the many ways we have done this:

- The board authorized the continued employment of our three staff members, who worked both from home and at the museum when possible. This allowed the continuation of routine business and allowed staff to expand its on-line training and development and for the organization to receive

(Continued on page 2)

- funding through the Paycheck Protection Program. Staff worked on revising some of the museum's procedures and policies, how to safely re-open after the crisis, and its own continuing professional education, including a grant-funded seminar on digitization of photos and other materials which will allow Archivist Elizabeth Nichols and others tools for upgrading our planning in that area.
- An on-line initiative to gather stories and artifacts from the shutdown and pandemic of 2020, spearheaded by board member Fran Knechel and Operations Manager Rachel Berlinski. This google doc survey is online at oprfmuseum.org. Please check it out and share your thoughts and memories. We also stepped up social media posts and email blasts, including a popular contest to write humorous or clever captions for photos from our collection.
- We continued to expand the collection during the shutdown with the addition of materials donated by Drechsler, Brown and Williams Funeral Home and Pieritz Brothers Office Supplies. These two landmark businesses, both with roots stretching back to the nineteenth century, have partnered with the Historical Society in the past and both knew that their legacy should be in our archives after they closed. In fact, all the time spent at home by so many has meant that we have received many inquiries about what sort of things might be donated to expand our collection.
- The expansion of our popular walking tours spearheaded by many talented volunteers including Kurt Etchingham, Jan Saeger, Peggy Sinko, Mary Ann Porucznik, Polly Novak, Jan Dressel and Mary Boyaris. Some old favorites and new walks allowed small groups of masked



participants to get some fresh air and exercise and learn about some forgotten chapters in our shared history.

What has changed since the museum re-opened July 8? Of course, the safety of visitors, volunteers, and staff is of utmost importance and we urge anyone who is not feeling well to visit us a different day. Those who do enter the museum must sanitize their hands, wear a mask at all times, strive to maintain a six-foot distance from others, and follow a one-way route through the space as much as possible. We have

adjusted our hours so most volunteer slots are in the morning, to separate our volunteers from the general public and to keep the overall numbers down in the building to comply with health guidelines.

Please come visit us during our new regular public hours from Wednesdays to Saturdays from 1 to 5 p.m., with appointments available for other business six days a week! See for yourself how we are telling stories.

Thank you to our volunteers, members, donors and the entire Oak Park and River Forest community for your continuing support through this difficult time. We know our community has survived and even thrived during crises in our long history, and we can do it again if we

work together! But like so many of you, we also are looking ahead to 2021, for a fresh start. We need your engaged participation and good ideas to make certain that we continue to do our job as a repository of local history and a story teller, which keeps finding new and better ways to do our important work. That will include more virtual experiences, even as we look for full "live" programs sometime in 2021.

Please call us at (708) 848-6755 or email us at oprffhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net to share your ideas about the sort of programs, exhibits, and activities you would like to see us create for you and the community in the coming year.



Award-Winning "Open House" Exhibit Takes to the Road

OPRF Museum seeks to tell the stories of all in the spirit of equity and seeks your ideas

Just as the pandemic shut down non-essential services in March, The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest received word it was selected to receive a \$1,800 grant from the Oak Park Area Arts Council to partially fund a traveling version of its award-winning exhibit *Open House: The Legacy of Fair Housing*. That was before the shocking death of George Floyd in Minnesota at the hands of a police officer sparked protests that broadened to address racial inequities that remain in the United States.

So while telling the story of our community's past and ongoing struggles with building a diverse, welcoming community is one obvious way we can contribute to the overall community dialogue, what else should we be doing to be a force for good when it comes to racial inclusivity and justice? What can one museum do to make a difference? How can we ensure that we are allowing all in the community to be a part of our mission and work?

OPRF Museum is one of 13 Chicago area museums participating in the American Alliance of Museum's "Facing Change" program to advance diversity and inclusion among museum leadership. The museum is also participating in "Unvarnished" a program initiative of Naper Settlement funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services that is exploring racial discrimination in housing in the northern and western United States. The project aims to develop a website that offers case studies on racial discrimination in various communities and how museums can tell those stories and bring them to students in communities around the nation.

Suburban Promised Land, published in 2009 by the Historical Society, documents much about Oak Park's African American history. But more stories could be found and told via exhibits, programs, and the like. More could be discovered about River Forest's African American history, which has been suggested publicly by River Forest officials as they pursue a relationship with their sister village Maywood. Some community members approached the museum about the idea of creating a Black

History bike tour, which we already have been exploring. The museum's board has discussed placing a marker at the site of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, which stood on what is today Westgate from about 1905-31, a beacon of self-determination of the local Black community.

We know this short list is just a start. OPRF Museum leadership wants to tell the stories of all in spirit of equity, taking multiple steps toward that goal and are seeking your ideas. How can we do our work better in this area?

If you have any ideas or would like to volunteer to get involved, contact Frank Lipo at oprhistorian@sbcglobal.net or call 708-848-6755. 🍁

First Girls: Trailblazing Girl Scouts in 1920s Oak Park and River Forest

The Museum's newest first-floor exhibit exploring Girl Scouting in our villages in the 1920s is open



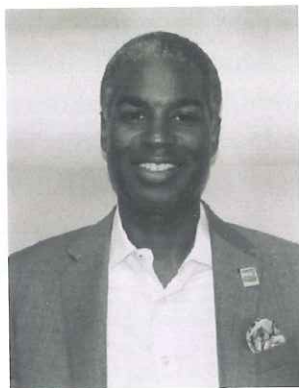
THE GIRL SCOUT

now. From the original 16 girls who joined Troop 1 in the summer of 1920 at First Baptist Church, Girl Scouting grew to include over 20 troops in the two villages by the end of the decade. Visitors will learn about early activities and badge work, camping and the opening of Camp Lone Tree in 1927, and the "Girl Scout Dessert" (AKA S'Mores). Watch excerpts from a 1919 Girl Scout promotional silent film, *The Golden Eaglet*, which is believed to be the first moving picture produced by a public service organization. Using real Girl Scouts in the cast, the movie tells the story of Margaret and her friends whose lives are changed for the better after joining the Girl Scouts.

Uniforms, handbooks, badges and other artifacts from the 1920s will be on display including an official khaki camp uniform consisting of bloomers and a sailor-style middie blouse, designed to be "roomy and comfortable for walking and camp wear." 🍁

Ty Mayberry Joins Museum Board of Directors

Oak Park River Forest Museum is pleased to announce the appointment of Ty Mayberry to the Museum Board of Directors at its 2020 Annual Meeting in July.



Mayberry, a nine-year resident of Oak Park, is Hybrid and Managed Services Architect for CDW Corporation, a provider of technology products and services for business, government and education.

He holds a BS degree from Western Michigan University and an MS in Technology from Georgetown University. He also serves on the St. Giles School Board in Oak Park as the Technology Chair as well as on the Black Excellence Unlimited Leadership Group at CDW that focuses on equitable opportunities in leadership for people of color.

An avid reader of history and an ardent supporter of museums, Mayberry says, "My life is all about exploring history. There are so many great books and museums in every city you visit. The reason you have [history museums] is to give those in the present a gift from the past."

Ty Mayberry's passion for local history, his belief in the value of small museums, and his technological expertise make him an an important and welcome addition to OPRF Museum's Board of Directors.

OPALGA+ Honors Frank Lipo with Founders' Award

The Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Association+ has chosen OPRF Museum Executive Director Frank Lipo as recipient of its 2020 Founders' Award. Lipo was chosen for his leadership in mounting the exhibit *Proud Oak Parkers: OPALGA+ at 30* at OPRF Museum and for the Museum's work as the repository for OPALGA+ archives. The exhibit ran from October 2019 through February of this year.

Lipo, Museum Operations Manager Rachel Berlinski, and Archivist Elizabeth Nichols put many hours of effort into the exhibit and also in organizing a public roundtable discussion featuring several OPALGA+ founders at the museum in February.

New Historical Marker Commemorates Suffrage Leader Grace Wilbur Trout

Last month, a new historic marker was unveiled honoring local suffrage leader Grace Wilbur Trout, who led the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association for nearly a decade and is recognized as one of the nation's leaders in the successful fight to add the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The marker will be placed on the site of Trout's former home on Forest Avenue in Oak Park.

The historic marker is part of the National Votes for Women Trail, made possible through the generosity of the Pomeroy Foundation and the collaboration of The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, The League of Women Voters of Oak Park and River Forest, and the Nineteenth Century Charitable Association.



History Matters

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We welcome your suggestions and comments. Please email us at:
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Robert J. Kerr: Oak Park's Mayor of Veracruz

By Frank Fiorito

Oak Park has been home to many famous residents. By chance, some were born here but left. Others came, took root, but moved on. This is a story about a man, Robert J. Kerr, who sank deep roots here, roots so deep that even though his travels would unexpectedly thrust him into the midst of military conflict in Mexico, his home would always remain Oak Park.

On April 21, 1914, the German ship *Ypiranga* was headed to the port of Veracruz, Mexico, with a shipment of arms. If the U.S. stopped it at sea, it would be considered an act of war against Germany. To seize the shipment upon delivery could start a war with Mexico.

By that afternoon the merchants had fled their shops and the power had been cut off. The mayor was barricaded in his bathroom. The police chief was nowhere to be found. Intermittent sniper fire came from both nowhere and everywhere with deadly results, and in the harbor the US battleships awaited orders to flatten the city.

As a 28 year old making his first trip to Mexico in 1900, how could Kerr have imagined that fourteen years later he would find himself appointed mayor of a Mexican city? This time, when he returned home, he would have quite a story to share with fellow members of the River Forest Tennis Club, that is, if he returned.

Robert J. "Bert" Kerr and his new wife Blanche Weyburn Kerr arrived in Oak Park in 1896 and began to shape it into the home they wanted. Within a few years, they had woven themselves into the social and cultural fabric of Oak Park and River Forest. Soon,

hardly a week would go by without a mention of one of them in the local newspapers. There was Blanche, an artist, arranging exhibitions or, along with co-founder Bert, leading meetings of the Lowell Literary Club. Articles reported Bert, golfing at the Westward Ho Golf Club, appointed as legal counsel for the Art Commission, serving as library trustee, member and eventual president of the River Forest Tennis Club, and as Unity Temple trustee, a participant in awarding the commission for design of a new church building to Frank Lloyd Wright, fellow member of the congregation.

By every measure, Oak Park was home to Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Kerr.

Since rising to power in 1877, Mexican President Porfirio Diaz had opened his country's resources to attract investment from around the world. Investors, including clients of the firm Kerr and Kerr, the law firm he shared with his father, needed representation in Mexico and Bert likely undertook that first trip on their behalf.

Traveling from Oak Park to anywhere in Mexico was a major undertaking involving rail, ship, and even horseback, but the country and its people enchanted Kerr. More trips followed and Bert became fluent in Spanish as he taught himself the intricacies of the Mexican legal system. By 1909, his publication of the Handbook of Mexican Law, established his reputation

as an expert.

While Kerr could admire Diaz for his efforts to enhance Mexico's position in the world, he could also see the inequity tolerated by a regime uninterested in ever relinquishing power. Bert saw Diaz for the tyrant he was, and with every trip, he also saw the signs of the coming storm. It was no surprise when, in 1911, after 33 years of rule, President Diaz was forced from

(Continued on page 6)



Chicago Tribune, August 19, 1918

Robert J. Kerr (continued from page 5)

office and Bert would witness, firsthand, the ensuing power struggle now known as the Mexican Civil War.

Within two years, another self-declared "President for Life", Victoriano Huerta, was ruling from Mexico City. The U.S. viewed Huerta as a threat to its interests in Mexico, especially those of the railroads, mining, and petroleum companies, but what to do about him?

Kerr, a conservative Republican, believed the U.S. should use its might to protect its interests. He was a vocal critic of President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat more focused on domestic policy than foreign affairs. Wilson would only go as far as to condemn the Huerta regime as illegitimate. Huerta responded by inciting anti-American sentiment and making threats against American interests. As the German steamer *Ypiranga* approached Veracruz, the stage was set for war.



U.S. Army raising flag over Veracruz
(photo by Walter P. Hadsell)

From the U.S. point of view, landing troops in Veracruz was an intervention to protect American interests. The Mexicans viewed it as an invasion. The slim hope that bloodshed could be avoided faded as shots were fired and the tally of killed and wounded mounted. The U.S. possessed superior military strength and the fighting soon ended, but now the military leaders faced the responsibility of

keeping the citizens of Veracruz safe.

Running a city requires a much different set of skills than invading it. Police, firefighters, and sanitation workers were among the many employees needed to keep a city running. Who would stay to keep things running when cooperation meant aiding an enemy, a crime punishable by the most severe means?

Before the last sniper was silenced, Bert Kerr presented himself to the U.S. military leaders to offer his help. Within hours, he had compiled a report to identify critical services, who would stay to provide them, and how to fill the gaps. He also identified U.S. citizens in Veracruz willing to step into critical roles. The leadership of a provisional governor was needed, and to the relief of the military it was clear that Robert J. Kerr was prepared to fill that role. So began Bert Kerr's short reign as mayor of Veracruz.

Kerr's plans were quickly implemented with progress made over the next three days when, unexpectedly, orders came from Washington that Kerr and his team were out.

To the dismay of the military leadership, Kerr's appointment had become a political issue. President Wilson would not tolerate a critic of his Mexico policies playing any role in the operation. Within days, Kerr was on his way back to Oak Park, but first he headed to Washington to give Wilson an eyewitness report on the situation in Veracruz. Wilson refused to meet with him.

Within months, the Mexican intervention would fade from memory as World War I started.

Bert never stopped traveling to Mexico. Often Blanche accompanied him, but sometimes Bert made the trip alone. That was the case on his last trip, in 1918. Sadly, Robert J. Kerr contracted typhoid that August and died in Mexico City. He never returned to his beloved home, Oak Park.

More about this story and the extended Kerr family can be found in the Museum's collection thanks to the donation by Bob Trezevant of his late wife's family history archives.

**CHICAGO MAN TO
RULE VERA CRUZ**

**Robert J. Kerr to Be Civil Governor
Under Martial Law—Other
Officials Named.**

Headline from Leavenworth (Kansas) Times,
page 1, April 29, 1914

The Hilliard Ellis Story: "If You're Right, You Fight!"

by Kurt Etchingham, Vice President, OPRF Museum

On July 22, 1936, Hilliard Ellis was standing outside the National Malleable and Steel Castings Company plant at 25th Avenue and Main Street in Melrose Park. Every day, hundreds of men would gather outside the plant to vie for a handful of job openings. In the depths of the Great Depression, National Malleable was one of the few companies that was hiring, and one of the very few that would hire any Black men at all.

An upper-level plant manager named George Flood approached him and said, "You're Hilliard Ellis, right? I remember you from River Forest. You used to hang around with my son. Come with me."

And just like that, Hilliard Ellis had a job, and a good one, too. It paid forty cents an hour. With overtime, he could make nearly twenty dollars a week. Ellis knew he had been hired only because a white boss had recognized him, not because of his ability or his knowledge, but he didn't care. Ellis needed this job badly. His step-mother, Eliza Ellis, was out of work and Hilliard was now her sole support.

Hilliard Ellis could barely remember his birth mother. She and his grandmother had both died within three days of each other in 1919 when he was just four years old, victims of the great influenza pandemic. His father married Eliza soon after, and Eliza loved and cared for Hilliard as if he were her own child. It was she who had brought young Hilliard north from Columbia, South Carolina, after his father's tragic and mysterious death in 1922.

Hilliard's father, known to everyone by the nickname "Sun", was a blacksmith by trade, as was his father before him. He was also a talented, self-taught violinist who earned extra money playing at church services, weddings, funerals, dances, and such.

One night during Easter week in 1922, Sun Ellis didn't come home from work. On Easter morning,

their next door neighbor who worked for the railroad told Eliza and Ellis that Sun had been hit by a train and killed. The police quickly declared it an accident. They said Sun had either fallen asleep or passed out on the railroad tracks and had been run over by a freight train in the middle of the night.



Pouring molten metal into casting molds at National Malleable and Steel Castings, Melrose Park, c. 1945

Eliza and Hilliard Ellis never believed this story, though. A few days before he disappeared, Sun Ellis had had a confrontation with a white farmer he had done some work for, but who had never paid him. Eliza and Hilliard always maintained that Sun Ellis was murdered and then his body was laid on the tracks to cover the crime.

A few days after his death, Sun Ellis's most prized possession, his violin, turned up in a local pawn shop. The police refused to investigate the case any further. Hilliard Ellis would later say, "I can't say if the police killed him or not, but I can say that they sure didn't care who did kill him."

Eliza Ellis decided she and Hilliard must leave South Carolina for their own safety. They came to Oak Park/River Forest because Eliza found a job here as a domestic servant. Hilliard Ellis graduated from River Forest's Lincoln School in 1929 and entered Oak Park River Forest High School the next year.

The 1930 census finds Hilliard Ellis living at 433 Bonnie Brae, approximately where the Petco Store stands today. He is listed as a lodger with a Black family named Carter. Before World War II, the area bounded by Lake Street, Harlem Avenue, the Chicago & Northwestern tracks, and William Street was the poorest part of River Forest. The residents were mostly Italian and Polish immigrants and Black refugees from the southern states. Many of them worked as laborers for the railroads.

But where was Eliza Ellis and why was she not living with Hilliard? A search of 1930 census records

(Continued on page 8)

provides the answer. Eliza was living in Oak Park at 429 Forest Avenue, opposite the Frank Lloyd Wright home. She was a live-in servant in the household of Franklin Saemann, the wealthy president and majority owner of a medical supply company. She had to live there if she wanted the job, but her son was not allowed to live with her. The best she could do was find a family nearby where Hilliard could board.

Hilliard Ellis dropped out of OPRFHS in his junior year to join the Civilian Conservation Corps. Eliza had lost her job because of the Great Depression and Hilliard didn't want to be a burden on her. But within a year he left the CCC and returned to school, this time at Proviso East, because Eliza had found a new job and was now living in Maywood. His observations about the difference between the two schools is fascinating.

Ellis paints a picture of two very different communities with two very different reactions to him as a young Black man. He describes OPRFHS as a very affluent community where he was "accepted pretty good" and was popular with his white classmates. But he also puts his finger on just why he was accepted. There were only seven Black students at OPRFHS and they all came from lower or lower middle class blue-collar families. None of them were wealthy. Ellis says they were accepted and treated well simply because they were few and they were powerless. They were not deemed a threat to the social order of the villages.

At Proviso East, he encountered an entirely different social dynamic. The student body there was very blue-collar and over thirty percent Black. The Black students were of a comparable economic status to the white students. After graduation they would be competing for the same jobs, competing to fill the same economic space. Young Black men were seen as a threat by the majority white student body. The result was a lot of tension, a lot of fist fighting, and a lot of overt racism that he had not encountered at OPRFHS. But to Hilliard Ellis, Oak Park and River Forest were more tolerant not because they wanted to be or believed they should be, but simply because they could afford to be.

A few months after Ellis started working at National Malleable, there were rumors of impending layoffs. George Flood told him not to worry about it. After the layoffs came, Ellis still had his job. He asked Flood why he hadn't been laid off when men who had been there three and four years longer than him, men who had wives and children to support, had lost their jobs. Ellis found the answer chilling: "Because I like you." Ellis needed the job, but he knew this wasn't right. He made a decision right there. In his own words, "I ain't starting a union, but if one comes along I'm going to be in the middle of it."

In 1938, a CIO organizer came to the Melrose Park plant and Hilliard Ellis did indeed put himself "in the middle of it." He helped organize the plant, served on the bargaining committee, and was named chief steward of the new independent union. He then led the effort to affiliate the new union with the United Auto Workers.

In 1946 Hilliard Ellis became the first Black man elected president of a UAW local, a feat all the more impressive because the local was two-thirds white. He devoted the rest of his working life to the labor movement. He served several terms as president of UAW Local 453, worked as a CIO organizer, coordinated strike actions, and fought for Black representation at the highest levels of the UAW. He worked and formed close friendships with many prominent activists like Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Gil Green. Along the way he attracted the ire of the House Un-American Activities Committee when he joined the Communist Party.

You can hear Hilliard Ellis tell his own story in a two-hour interview recorded in 1981 for the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, available online through the Tamiment Library of New York University at:

<http://digitaltamiment.hosting.nyu.edu/s/nyaw/item/1819>

In the interview, Hilliard Ellis relates something his father told him when he was six years old that informed the rest of his life. "I don't ever want you to be a bully...", Sun Ellis said. "But I don't want you to be a coward, neither. Don't be afraid of nobody. I don't care who it is. If you're right, you fight!"

The Reticent Matinée Idol

By Elizabeth Nichols, OPRF Museum Archivist

In our social media-driven world, the real-life off-stage romances of actors often get more attention than the fictional roles for which they are paid. In 1912, a young heart-throb appearing at Oak Park's Warrington Opera House got a taste of how his popularity with the ladies of Oak Park eclipsed his on-stage persona, leaving a scandal in his wake. Gossip erupted when reticent matinée idol, Charles W. Dingle, suddenly left for Kansas City just hours before the opening performance of "Lovers' Lane" at the Warrington.

The *Chicago Tribune* described Dingle as a "luminous eyed, Apollo-like leading man...a Prince Charming in the eyes of village femininity." The *Tribune* was quick to cast doubt on the idol's claim that he quit Oak Park due to a case of appendicitis. Instead, they claimed that it was the angry threats of a father of three Oak Park young women that caused Dingle to flee the affluent suburb.

Oak Park High School senior Farington Timmey, who worked as Dingle's valet at the Warrington, admitted, "The women were crazy about [him]. And it went beyond sending him notes and flowers. They used to flock up to his flat at all hours— girls of all ages— when they knew his mother was out of town and he was alone. My, how they tagged after him."

Dingle's reputation as a leading man only exacerbated his image as a willing object of feminine hero worship. Born in Wabash, Indiana in 1887, Dingle made his dramatic debut at age 14. Innumerable roles in stock and repertory companies across the United States and Canada soon followed. By the age of 17, Dingle was a well-established leading man, appearing with such well-known stars of the day as Helen

Menken, Fay Bainter, and Mary Hall. In 1908, Dingle was working for the College Theater in Chicago, and the following year was listed as the "New Leading Man" with the Grace Hayward Stock Company.

The charming Dingle was known for playing hero roles in the comedy and melodrama productions of Grace Hayward's company. He soon became a popular figure in Oak Park social circles, with multiple appearances in the society columns of the *Tribune*. In 1909, Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Gooding "entertained at the Tip Top on New Year's Eve for Mr. and Mrs. John Dingle of Kansas City and their son, Charles Dingle." In 1911, Dingle performed alongside Grace Hayward at the Oak Park Club with socialite Mrs. W. Gifford Jones as his hostess. That same year he was chosen by the children of Oak Park "as the most popular man in town."

But it was the young ladies of Oak Park who *really* adored the handsome actor. Dingle's young female devotees were called a

"matinée idol cult," and reportedly formed a "C.O.D. Sorority" (Cause of Discussion) in adoration. During rehearsals at the Warrington, "the house was filled with women, young and old, including a high school delegation which sighed during the sentimental passages of ['Romeo and Juliet.']"

Despite the crowds his fan following brought to the Warrington, Dingle claimed he did not want the fervent attention. "Please don't print that I am a matinée idol," he asked the *Tribune*, "for I'm not, you know. I have been living in Oak Park since September [1910], but I have met so few people that I can scarcely say I know anyone." Making light of his splashes in

(Continued on page 10)



Dingle pictured in an Oak Leaves article about the Grace Hayward Players 1910 Fall season at the Warrington, located at the corner of Marion St. and South Blvd. where the Opear Club condos are today

the society columns, he added, "I have been invited to a few social affairs, but I am always exceedingly busy, rehearsing or learning new parts.... I suppose it's inevitable where there's a new project as this [Grace Hayward Stock Company] that actors should be always under notice."



This 1910 Oak Leaves photo of Dingle on stage offers a glimpse of the kind of melodramatic performance that so captivated local young women

To Dingle's credit, "exceedingly busy" was an understatement for actors in the Grace Hayward Stock Company. Every Monday a new show opened, and ran for nine performances over six days; the entire process repeated the following week. At the close of its five year run at the Warrington, the Grace Hayward Stock Company had put on over 1,350 performances over 145 weeks. The frequency of performances combined with weekly *Oak Leaves* advertisements resulted in the expectation that the stock company—and in particular its matinée idol—would be a fixture of local entertainment and society.

That Dingle's sudden exit shocked genteel Oak Park was not surprising. The reason—to seek medical treatment or to escape a local father's ire—was never definitively answered. Sympathy for Dingle gave way to suspicion that there was an *unspoken reason* for the father's ire. The flock of young ladies gushing at Dingle's stage door only reinforced the idea that his "considerable acquaintance among the women and girls of the village" had led to something untoward. But, more damning to Dingle than any rumor, was the fact that his hasty retreat—and the ensuing gossip—was an embarrassment to Oak Park.

The simmering resentment came to a head two years later. Dingle was slated to return to the Warrington in late February, 1914. Oak Park women's

clubs and ministers held "indignation meetings" protesting Dingle's return to the suburb. At a meeting of the pastor's union, Reverend Rufus J. Wyckoff said that the ministers would try to have Dingle's engagement cancelled. Warrington manager George M. Gatts, Grace Hayward's husband, held firm, saying that he had no reason to believe Dingle would not fulfill the engagement.

Gatts did not expect the indignation meetings to be followed by actual threats against Dingle. In a bizarre escalation of events, police protection was requested for Dingle. During the performance of "The Littlest Rebel," the police kept "in line the throng of people" clamoring to see Dingle perform. Ironically, it was said that the crowd's desire to see Dingle was largely created by the protests of the suburb's clergymen and women's clubs. To the irritation of anti-Dingle protestors, the majority of the crowd at the Warrington was again made up of young ladies. A smug Gatts noted "the women had supplied the theater with plenty of advertising." In the end, the whole off-stage drama closed with a whimper.

Dingle went on to appear in vaudeville, debuted on Broadway in 1928, and made his film debut in 1937's *Double Talk*. He appeared on popular radio programs like *The Lux Radio Theater*. In the 1940s and 1950s, he achieved his greatest success portraying nasties and villains in films like *The Little Foxes* starring Bette Davis; *The Talk of the Town* with Cary Grant, Jean Arthur, and Ronald Coleman; *A Southern Yankee* starring Red Skelton; and *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* starring Gary Cooper. At the time of his death in 1956, Dingle had credits in sixty films.

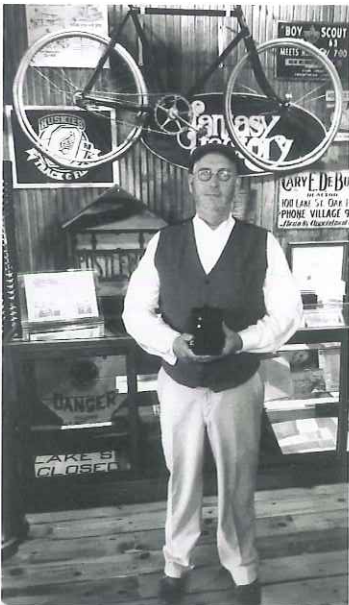
In his biographies, Dingle's time in early 1900s stock and repertory companies is often reduced to a sentence. The Grace Hayward Stock Company and Oak Park are omitted altogether. His success in the golden age of Hollywood overshadows much of his earlier work on the stage. However, Dingle's time in Oak Park is stranger than any fiction he brought to life at the Warrington. From society darling to an object of indignation, Dingle's role as reticent matinée idol was his most celebrated and infamous part in Oak Park history.

Join Us for These Great Coming Events

Sunday, October 18, First Tour at Noon "Faith in Tough Times" is Theme of Cemetery Walk

During these challenging times, this year's "Tale of the Tombstones" spotlights stories of people who themselves faced daunting challenges. Their stories of grit, passion, tragedy, and faith in a greater power as well as faith in their friends, family, and community show us that we can overcome our challenges and that better times lie ahead.

Among the stories we will share are those of a man born in Canada who was a renowned horseman and a member of the pioneer African American




Mike Stewart will appear as Oak Park's legendary bicycling historian, Phliander Barclay

community in Oak Park more than a century ago; an Oak Park woman who fought valiantly for the right of all women to vote; a father and daughter who died in the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918-19; and a founder of the local Methodist church and philanthropist who endowed the first college west of the Mississippi for formerly enslaved people.

The 2020 Tale of the Tombstones Cemetery Walk will be held at

Forest Home Cemetery. All guides and visitors will be required to wear masks or face coverings and maintain social distancing throughout the tour. Tours will depart from the cemetery's main gate in 10-minute intervals between 12 and 1 p.m., and the tour will last approximately 2 hours. Each group is limited to no more than 20 people. You must register in advance as there will be no ticket sales at the cemetery on the day of the event.

Attendees will sign up for a time slot when purchasing tickets and should arrive in time to leave on the walk to avoid forming a crowd. Tickets are \$15 and may be purchased in our online store. Email us at oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net or call 708-848-6755 if you have questions.

This event is subject to changes based on public health guidelines. We will update information on our website and email people who have already purchased tickets if we need to modify the event. 


Saturday, December 5, 3 p.m.

Remembering Christmas Past at Marshall Field's

For many Chicagoans, no Christmas season was complete without a visit to Marshall Field's, the city's grande dame of department stores. This illustrated talk traces the store's beloved holiday traditions, including the Walnut Room Christmas tree, the holiday window displays, the toy department, Cozy Cloud cottage, and the Christmas catalog. See family photos with Santa Claus over the years and peek behind-the-scenes at the employee party. And of course, meet Uncle Mistletoe and his family.



Please join us online for a virtual presentation when noted author, historian, and actress Leslie Goddard shares a fun and fascinating look at one of Chicago's most beloved holiday traditions. Visit our website oprfmuseum.org to order tickets and for further information.

This presentation marks our first foray into the new world of online event programming. Please watch for email announcements and visit our website regularly to find out about our plans for more fun and educational online events and presentations coming soon! 



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From the dedicated accessible parking space and loading zone (at left) to the additional brick pavers to the new light over the door and the beautiful landscaping, the front of our museum was made even more attractive this summer

Front of Our Museum Is Transformed by Lake Street Re-Surfacing Project and Other Changes

The front of our museum has never looked so good—and it is only three years old this fall!

As part of the long-planned Lake Street Resurfacing Project, the front of Oak Park River Forest Museum received a major facelift this summer which included the addition of reclaimed brick pavers on the formerly grass parkway from the sidewalk to the street, mimicking the original brick paved driveway when our building was a fire house from 1898-1916. This has created a plaza-like feel that will allow us to host larger gatherings in our front yard.



Brick pavers now extend to the street to recreate the feel of the original 1898 building

In addition to the new asphalt street and associated safety markings, new sidewalks, a marked accessible parking space, and a drop-off/loading zone were also added to the front of OPRF Museum.

We also added a new light fixture over our front door this summer, which will make future evening events at the museum more inviting and safer. And thanks to our volunteer gardeners Judy Thompson, Eloise LaPalio, and Jan Dressel, our front yard is full of flowers and color in every season.



New light fixture offers a warm welcome to the museum at night