



Community Support Allows OPRF Museum to Thrive in Tough Times

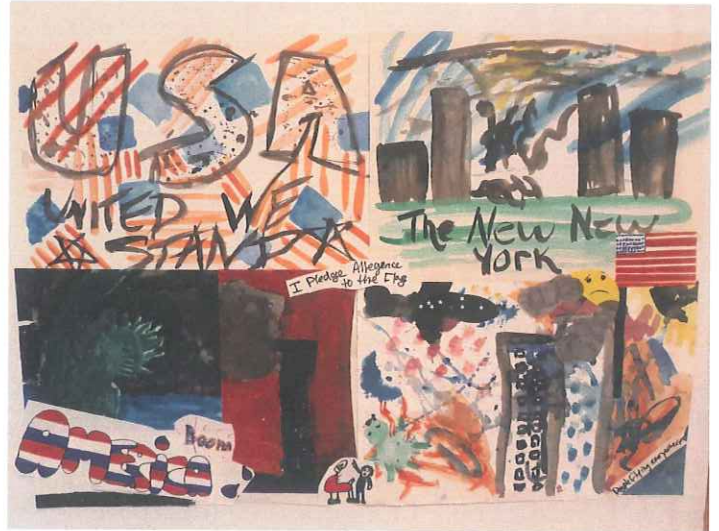
The Annual Meeting of The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest was held via Zoom on June 30 and the theme was perseverance and new directions as leadership reported on how the organization has weathered the storm that was Fiscal Year 2020-21.

President Peggy Tuck Sinko welcomed a few dozen virtual attendees and spoke of the ways in which the Historical Society was able to remain relevant, active, and connected with members and the communities we serve during a year that required flexibility and new ideas. And she expressed gratitude for the financial support that kept the organization moving forward.

Despite Oak Park River Forest Museum being closed to the public for six months by the Governor's orders encompassing all the museums in Illinois, the Historical Society ended the year in a very strong position. Sinko noted how the events of the past year drove home the importance of historical agencies, including The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, to serve as trusted sources of information. Throughout the year, the Historical Society was able to be a place to come (either in person or virtually) for information that was fact-based and relevant; a place to engage, to learn, and to be inspired.

(Continued on page 2)

New Display Captures Impact of 9/11 on Kids in River Forest



Roosevelt Middle School art teacher Sally McPartlin knew that her 8th grade students would struggle to process the thoughts and emotions triggered by the tragedy of September 11, 2001. So she asked her River Forest students to create art collages the very next day to express something that was so hard to put into words.

Seeing the rich stories they tell and the "once-in-a-generation" history that they captured that day, McPartlin kept these art pieces until 2018 when she donated them to Oak Park River Forest Museum.

(Continued on page 2)

Museum Garden's Flame-Like Perennials Impress Visitors, Brighten Corner



Pedestrians walking by the corner of Lake and Lombard or waiting for a bus often pause and admire the new perennial garden, questioning staff or volunteers about certain plants, snapping a photo on their phone, or asking about the museum.

The garden has become an attraction unto itself and volunteer Judy Thompson can often be seen planting, weeding, testing the soil's moisture, mulching, and watering from late spring through late autumn. The chosen color palette pays homage to a building constructed in 1898 as a firehouse.

(Continued on page 9)

Community Support (continued from page 1)

President Sinko presented the Financial Report for FY 2020–21 on behalf of Treasurer Jack Norton. The budget was drawn up in spring 2020, just before the full impact of the pandemic was apparent and before we knew we would have to cancel much revenue-producing programming.

The board-approved budget of \$194,000 in revenue and expenses for the 12 months ending April 30, 2021 was similar to recent annual operating budgets. Despite major drops in revenue from admissions, program fees, retail sales, rentals, and memberships, and the cancellation of our annual Gala, the Society finished the fiscal year with income of just over \$182,000. A strong Annual Fund drive and a federal Paycheck Protection Program loan (which was converted to a grant) helped fill our revenue shortfall below the budgeted goal. Expenses for the year were nearly \$188,000—just \$5,600 over revenue—a small gap in such a tough year. The Historical Society left unfilled a part-time staff position to reduce personnel costs and come in under the projected level of expenses.

Executive Director Frank Lipo presented his report, “Telling Stories in New Ways,” which highlighted the many achievements of the past year such as new virtual programming. The monthly Zoom-based programs “Inside OPRF Museum” and “Ask the Historians” allowed many to hear fascinating stories from their own homes during the live sessions which were later posted on YouTube, growing the audience. A virtual trivia contest and Zoom-based lectures shared stories of the centennial of Oak Park Art League and Christmas traditions at Marshall Field’s. We also expanded neighborhood walking tours and found a way to safely have both the annual Tale of the Tombstones in October 2020 with timed tour slots and masks and the annual Tales Our Houses Tell spring house walk in May 2021, with modifications to ensure the safety of participants.

James Grogan of the Nominating Committee presented the 2021–2022 board slate. As provided for in the bylaws, these terms are for three years, ending in 2024.

The slate was adopted by acclamation:

Mary Boyaris (second term)

James Grogan (second term)

Peggy Tuck Sinko (third term)

Joel Summy (first term)


Clyde Watkins (second term)

(full 2021-22 list in staff box on page 9.)

Following the election of board members the Historical Society presented its annual awards for outstanding volunteer service.


For 2021, River Forest resident Jan Saeger was selected to receive the Faye Devine Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service. Jan has worked closely with Vice President Kurt Etchingham on the development of River Forest walking tours and actively promotes and supports the work of the Historical Society.

Frank FioRito was recognized with the Carol Kelm Award, given each year to a volunteer who shows skill and professionalism in organizing and preserving materials in the collection. An Oak Park resident, Frank is an avid researcher and shares his passion for uncovering and better documenting stories about our area, helping especially in the research and preparation for this spring’s house walk in south Oak Park’s Hulbert neighborhood.

Beth McBride was awarded the 2021 Philander Barclay Award for exemplifying the love of local history demonstrated by that bicycling photographer. In more than two decades as a weekly volunteer for the Historical Society, she has worked tirelessly on a wide range of projects. The retired teacher, Austin native and long-time River Forest resident, is an avid genealogist and also volunteers as the Archivist for the Infant Welfare organization. This year she reached out to her alma mater, Trinity High School, on our behalf to arrange the donation of dozens of yearbooks that will be invaluable in assisting those who want to find out more about that 100-year-old River Forest school. 

9/11 Story (continued from page 1)

We have put on display these four mini-murals for the months of September and October, one of which is shown here. Also displayed are the *Chicago Tribune* issues published the week following our national tragedy; of course, these stories are back in the current headlines because of the 20-year anniversary of 9/11 and the recent military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The searing images and simple words shared on these collages speak volumes for what was felt not just by River Forest’s 8th graders but by the nation 20 years ago this month: “tragedy,” “anger,” and “for what reason?” But also, “where there is terror, we stand together,” “stay strong,” and “united we stand.” 

Our Slimmed Down, Delayed and Beautiful Pandemic Wedding

By Susan Montgomery

I'm 59 and have waited a long time to get married. When I finally found the right guy, we set a June 2020 wedding. But, then came COVID-19. We tied the knot in June 2021 – our third wedding date!

Our story in no way makes light of the tragic loss of life and suffering many experienced during the pandemic. Our hearts go out to everyone who has suffered. Yet our story is one of resilience.

Howie and I are both writers. He is editor of an international trade publication. I am a communications writer for a medical society that focuses on laboratory medicine. My medical society's members were in the trenches battling COVID-19. I had great resources, including a microbiologist colleague who has studied pandemics. She was my go-to person for insights on how long the pandemic might last. By April 2020, Howie and I decided to postpone our wedding.

As we looked for a new date, Fall 2020 seemed like a good bet. We settled on Oct. 5, 2020. The church was available, as were our friends and family, and the reception venue (The Carleton of Oak Park).

As spring rolled into summer, COVID-related restrictions eased. But by early August, we were back to Square 1. The pandemic was predicted to worsen. Howie and I did not feel comfortable putting our guests at risk. Not knowing what the future held, we played it safe and cancelled.

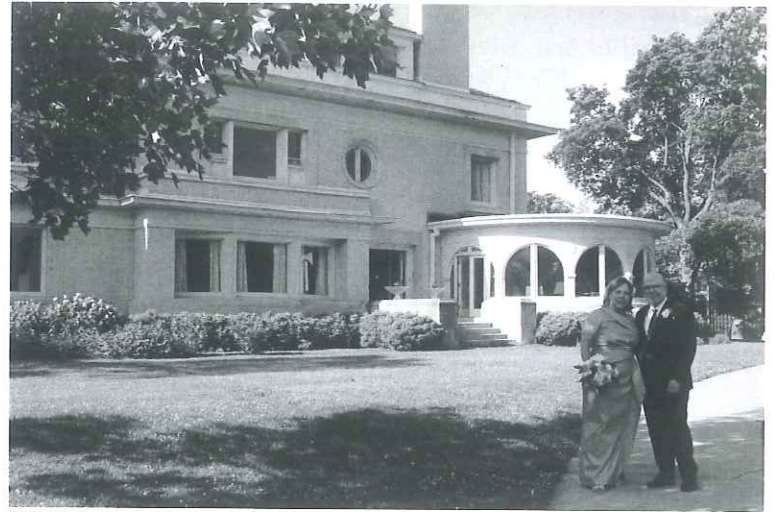
In the midst of all this, we moved from the city back to Oak Park, my hometown. But that's another story!

Fortunately, Howie has a good sense of humor and we both pay close attention to self-care. He took early morning and evening walks with the pup. I love my Pilates classes.

January 2021 arrived. The worst of the pandemic had not yet arrived. I asked my colleague her thoughts about an indoor reception in June. She advised against it.



Third Invitation is the Charm!



I immediately thought of Pleasant Home's lovely porch. The Park District of Oak Park said it was available!

Instead of the original 85 guests, we were limited to 50. Five weeks before the wedding, the COVID-19 rates were dropping and we learned we could have more guests! My dearest and most longtime friend, Oak Park native Ann Rosenwinkel, now living in Houston, responded immediately to my text message invite that she was "in!"

The week of the wedding arrived. Friends and family came into town. Everyone was so enthused just to have something to celebrate after months of being cooped up. Our special day arrived. I tried to be as "in the moment" as I could, so as to breathe in every moment of joy – the walk down the aisle, the recitation of our vows, the smiles from our guests, Howie's adorable 4-year-old granddaughter – our flower girl – who charmed everyone, and our magnificent dinner on the porch of Pleasant Home. As Howie exclaimed as we stepped outside the front doors of Grace Episcopal Church, "AT LAST!"



Susan Montgomery is a Historical Society supporter who grew up on Elizabeth Court, graduated from OPRF High School and covered the community as an Oak Leaves reporter.



Museum collection grows as donors share their OPRF memories and artifacts

By Rachel Berlinski, Operations Manager

Many of us have embraced a chance to get outside and return to some of our usual, pre-pandemic activities during the warm months of 2021 and I hope you have been able to safely enjoy the season!

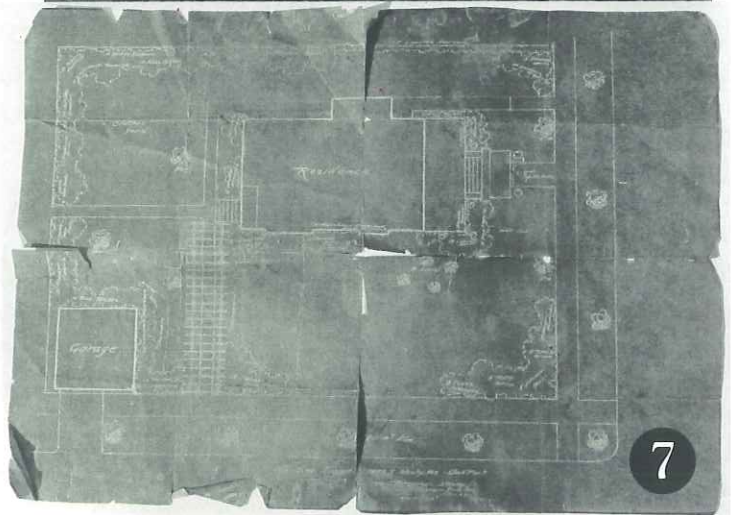
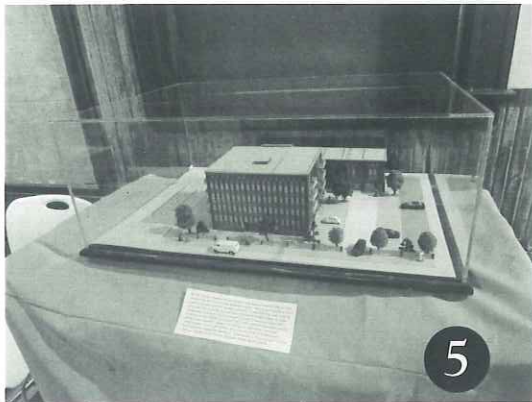
But with so much time spent cloistered inside our living spaces since spring 2020, many also have taken time to evaluate the “stuff” around us and to de-clutter (including long-hidden boxes in my own closet)! Over the past year as people have been organizing and downsizing their own “collections,” the Historical Society has received many wonderful, surprising, and sometimes curious donations of artifacts.

The Historical Society’s collection of artifacts and historic items reflect the unique personality and spirit of this community. The gallery space at Oak Park River Forest Museum provides many opportunities to display a variety of objects and stories. With that in mind, we will be putting some of these newly-donated items on display throughout the museum this fall. So be sure to visit and find out more about these fascinating items and the stories that they tell about our community!

Here are some highlights of recent donations.

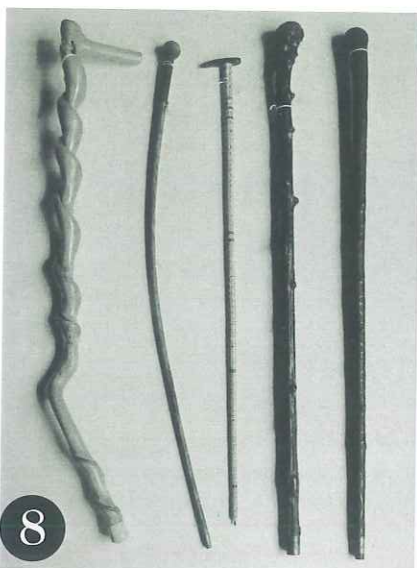
Photos are numbered to match list.

1. Two boxes of military memorabilia from the Trout family of Oak Park. John and Eleanor Trout were heavily involved in organizing veterans’ ceremonies and parades throughout the Chicagoland area in the mid-to-late 20th century. The donor, family member Janet Guthrie, added these items to a donation of other things she had given to us in 2018. See the story on page 8 for more about this collection.



2. Museum volunteers Kurt and Barbara Etchingham have donated many items this year as they prepared to move out of their long-time Oak Park home. Among these treasures are OPRF High School programs and documents from Barbara’s dad Richard Young.

- Materials from the Lisa Madonia Memorial Fund, which, like the Make-A-Wish Foundation, worked to grant wishes and special requests for young adults with cancer. This donation came to us as the foundation's founders Carlotta and Loretto Madonia also plan a move after many years living in River Forest and Oak Park.



- Four paintings by local artists. Chicago area collector M. Christine Schwartz donated three paintings, one by Jess Hobby and two by Carl Krafft, founding president of the Oak Park Art League in 1921. And William Bradley from New Mexico donated a painting by Robert Zuppke, best known as head football coach at Oak Park River Forest High School, later moving to the same role at the University of Illinois. All were hung in our first-floor gallery last month.



- To capture current history, former Oak Park Village Manager Cara Pavlicek donated a collection of documents, photographs, and items from the village government related to COVID-19 and the pandemic, including a facemask decorated with the village logo and empty vials from Moderna and Pfizer vaccines. Separately, but on the same theme, Museum Explorer founder and OPRF graduate Rich Faron donated a cloth facemask (which, for the record, is unused in its original packaging).

- Blueprints and house drawings for 1045 Wesley Ave., donated by Linda and Richard Reiter.
- Items donated by Jill Benthin of Glen Ellyn from her grandfather, River Forest mover-and-shaker Eli Brooks, which include a collection of his hand-made canes.

- A quilt given by the family of Rev. William Barton, well-respected leader at First Congregational Church (which eventually merged with First Presbyterian to form today's First United). Barton was also a noted scholar on Abraham Lincoln.

- Architect James E. Collins donated items from his architectural practice, including a scale model of the Artist Square townhomes at the corner of Madison and Wisconsin. This building constructed about 20 years ago was the first of what are now many new residential buildings in the Madison Street corridor, which transitioned from auto-related uses to apartments and condos.

- Photos of Edward Borneman, also known as "Old Borne," and his Oak Park home, c. 1900. Donated by Janet Gless of Oakland, California, whose great grandparents were friends of the Borneman family.



Oak Park's Field of Dreams was Located in Berwyn a Century Ago

Semi-Pro and Barnstorming Teams Battled, Banned "Black Sox" Entertained Large Crowds
By Frank Lipo, Executive Director

This summer Chicago White Sox fans like me have been reveling in a season to remember with a talented young team poised to make the postseason for the second straight year, a first in club history, in pursuit of a World Series championship last earned in 2005.

A highlight of the team's summer surge was a thrilling made-for-TV walk off homer by All Star shortstop Tim Anderson to win the first-ever major league game in Iowa, at a specially constructed diamond nestled in a cornfield adjacent to the farmhouse where the acclaimed 1989 movie "Field of Dreams" was filmed. Although ultimately about family reconciliation and baseball as a metaphor, the movie had at its core the story of the 1919 White Sox team, eight of whom were banned from major league baseball for life for conspiring with gamblers to deliberately lose games; the movie imagines that they so yearned to play again that they walked out of the cornfield magically attracted to a new baseball field.

In the summer of 1922, area residents didn't have to go to Iowa or wander cornfields to see a return of the so-called "Black Sox" to the ball park. They just had to travel to Roosevelt and Harlem in Berwyn with at least 50 cents in their pocket.

Playing teams like the Milwaukee Red Sox and teams from Waukegan and Port Washington ("semi-pro champions of Wisconsin") the ex-major leaguers typically trounced their opponents and dazzled the fans.

The gushing local sports reports said the ex-Sox players "are proving favorites in the cities and towns they have been playing of late, despite their boycott from organized ball following unpleasant revelation in a certain world's series." That's one way to put it! The players had recently played in Manito, Illinois and Asheville, North Carolina, hardly centers of the baseball world.

The exploits of these talented players, most banned in the prime of their careers and just a few years removed from a World Series championship in 1917, were reported in detail. In one game ace pitcher Eddie Cicotte had ten strikeouts and Happy Felsch smacked two home runs and a triple. Buck Weaver, Shoeless Joe Jackson and the others were lauded for their dazzling skills.

But how did these disgraced players end up playing in the near west suburbs and what was Feron Field?

The venue, which went by several different names in its short history, was opened in spring 1920 under the name "Oak Park Stadium" on the Berwyn side of Harlem and Roosevelt, built by the Oak Park Athletic and Amusement Company as "the most up-to-date semi-pro park in the country" with a covered grandstand, seating for 5,000, ample automobile parking and major league quality clubhouses for the players.

Coverage of the semi-pro circuit included lots of hyperbole about "major league" material or "several players of national prominence" and lots about former major league stars. The ballpark opened with the home team called the "Oak Parks" playing in the Chicago League against "the crack Rogers Park Club, a team that only recently were victors over the world-famous American Giants, the

Former World's Champions

EX-WHITE SOX

TODAY and SUNDAY, May 13 and 14

AT

Feron's Baseball Park

Harlem Ave. and Roosevelt Road

**EDDIE CICOTTE
HAPPY FELSCH--SWEDE RISBERG
LEFTY WILLIAMS**

Today--Saturday May 13

EX-MAJOR LEAGUERS vs. MILWAUKEE RED SOX

Tomorrow--Sunday May 14

EX-MAJOR LEAGUERS vs. WAUKEGAN

Games Start at 3:30 P. M. PRICES: 50c, 75c and \$1.00

Baseball **OAK PARKS**
MEMBERS OF THE CHICAGO LEAGUE

EVERY SUNDAY

HARLEM AVENUE AND ROOSEVELT ROAD

Last Week's Score: Oak Park 6, Rogers Park 5

This Week

Joe Green's Chicago Giants
Aggressive Colored Team, Are the Attraction

Game Starts at 3 O'CLOCK SHARP

Come and See Our New Home

Oak Park Athletic and Amusement Company

Banned from major league baseball forever by the baseball commissioner even though acquitted at the end of a trial in August 1921, the ballplayers turned to the lively and largely unregulated semi-pro circuit to earn a living.

In weekly *Oak Leaves* reports in May 1922 it was claimed that "the ex-major leaguers have picked Feron Field for their home grounds and will play there every Sunday," describing the "wonderful reception" and "record-breaking crowd at Feron's Park Saturday and Sunday."

JUDGE JAMES M. FERON



ELECTION
TUESDAY
April 3rd
Polls Open
6 A. M. to 4 P. M.

Judge Feron has resided in Oak Park for the past nineteen years at 843 South Ridgeland Ave. He served as a member of the Village Board. He has been a judge of the local courts for the past ten years. For the past ten months he has been acting police magistrate and feels that his experience qualifies him for the office he is seeking.

CIVIC WELFARE PARTY CANDIDATE FOR

POLICE MAGISTRATE

phenomenal colored team, and the baseball fans of Oak Park, Berwyn, Forest Park and surrounding suburbs will have the baseball treat of their lives.”

The American Giants ball club was a charter member of the Negro National League that very same year, with Hall of Famer and league co-founder Rube Foster owning and managing the team to a first place finish in the first three years of the league’s existence. Foster, the “father of Black baseball,” had been a star pitcher on both Black and integrated teams starting as a teenager.

He built the Chicago American Giants into a powerhouse. Late last year, Major League Baseball announced that Foster’s Negro National League and six others in existence between 1920 and 1948 were retroactively given major league status, acknowledging the high level of play of these Black players who regularly played all-white teams in Chicago area semi-pro leagues as featured attractions, including the second week the new field was open at Roosevelt and Harlem, as seen in the May 16, 1920 *Oak Leaves* ad on previous page. The Chicago Giants were also a charter Negro National League team, separate from the Chicago American Giants.

In August 1921, just a year after Oak Park Stadium opened, James M. Feron was elected president of the company that owned the new athletic field. He announced that the former groundskeeper for the White Sox and Cubs was hired to care for the new “Feron Field,” that he was cutting admission fees, and that a pro football team would be organized to play in the fall (initially named the Oak Park Friars and later known as the Feron Wonders). “Mr. Feron has been a baseball fan since he was a boy...He is known to all the famous ball players and he....probably will entertain some of the big stars.”

Feron was a true mover and shaker in Oak Park in the 1920s. A major realtor with his business focused in south Oak Park, he was president of the Oak Park Board of Realtors and served in a succession of elected offices including justice of the peace, village trustee, and police magistrate. His love of sports may have been sincere, but he also clearly used sports as a promotional tool and he was certainly a self-promoter of his real estate business with full page ads promoting “A Feron Square Deal.” In addition to the Roosevelt and Harlem sports field, he later ran the Feron Athletic Club and the “Feron” captured many headlines in the local press.



BASEBALL PROMOTER

James M. Feron, realtor, magistrate and village trustee, has organized a lively baseball team on the south side. Games are played in South Park, and the club is winning popularity by skill and sportsmanship.

Competition was stiff among semi-pro teams in the Chicago area and Feron Field went out of business within a few years, despite the delusions of grandeur expressed by its owners. In addition to games played in public parks, a large number of private ball parks, some owned or subsidized by local companies, hosted a wide variety of leagues. Mills Stadium at Lake and Kilpatrick in Chicago, Phipps Field at Chicago and Harlem in River Forest, and Parichy Stadium at Harlem and Harrison in Forest Park were three nearby venues, the latter best known for its Parichy “Bloomer Girls.”

But, like the Black Sox who he brought to Oak Park area fans in 1922, Feron’s legacy was ultimately tarnished and it had nothing to do with the failed stadium or the won-loss column so important to the sports that he loved. In 1930, Feron was accused of misappropriation of funds from the police magistrate’s office, indicted, and removed from office. The office was then eliminated. He agreed to pay back more than \$10,000 as part of a plea deal, but died in 1935 before doing so.



Volunteer Encounters Surprises and Hidden Treats Inside a Box of Family History

By Hilarie Pitman Pozesky

You never know what story is lurking in a box before you when you begin to process a donation at Oak Park River Forest Museum.

My experience with a recent donation by the Trout family is an extreme version of how a family's story can twist and turn when a little bit of kismet is involved. I began processing the collection in February as a new volunteer. From an initial review of the materials, it appeared that Eleanor and John Trout, a husband and wife living at 1127 Wesley for nearly 40 years, were active leaders in local veterans' organizations. Both of their fathers were Spanish-American War veterans (SAWV). And while John served in WWII, I found no evidence of veteran activity tied to his own service.

But curiously, a couple of weeks after I began, the original donor—not heard from for several years—called and explained she had more to donate. I left the museum one day after working with one box and faced three boxes when I returned. Boy, was I in for a treat!

My assumption that the Trouts didn't participate in WWII veterans' activities was false. The story was just incomplete. The new material revealed that in 1943, Eleanor had enlisted in the United States Naval Reserve (WAVES), the first large-scale influx of women in the US Navy since WWI that led to the permanent presence of women in the Navy. The new donation also revealed that John served as a Chief Petty Officer in the supply corps and participated in the invasion of Okinawa, Japan, considered one of the greatest victories of the South Pacific campaign.



John Trout is 2nd from the left, front row. The Okinawa Masonic Club the day after Japan surrendered.

Aug. 16-1945


The variety of new documents filled in the story with a beautiful thoroughness. Enlistment documents, uniform purchase checklists and training manuals on original Navy paperwork, goodbye and good luck WAVE greeting cards, a menu from the last night on the town, photos of Eleanor's training in New York and Georgia and her assignment as the chief storekeeper for the Naval Air Station Jacksonville in Florida. John's story unspooled from a leather bound scrapbook with a map of Okinawa embossed in the front, tied together with his boot laces. There were professional Naval photographs of material drops on the Okinawa shore, war maps, photos of masonic meetings on the island, daily itineraries of ship activities on the post-war trip home, medals and decade's worth of WWII veterans newsletters.

After marrying in 1947, the Trouts were fixtures at local veterans' events and regularly attended Sons of SAWV reunions across the country, spearheaded the 1976 Bicentennial Memorial Day Parade in downtown Chicago and played a role in moving the Oak Park SAW Memorial to a more prominent place in Ridgeland Common—from the west side of the property to smack in the middle on Lake Street. (Side note: the monument was moved slightly west along Lake Street as part of the Ridgeland Common remodeling in 2013-14.)

There was no doubt that this couple was utterly dedicated to honoring those who served our country.



Wave Eleanor Mach in uniform at her desk in the US Naval Air Station, Jacksonville Florida in 1944. She served as chief storekeeper for the base.

We know the lives we learn about at the museum are presented through stories that are just the tip of the iceberg. In fact, sometimes the joy we get from learning about them is from the flights of imagination we take in wanting to know more. And thank goodness for those times when serendipity occurs and we get to know the deeper story. 



Shown here processing the Trout collection, Hilarie Pitman Pozesky is an Oak Park resident enrolled in Dominican University's Certificate Program in Archives and Cultural Heritage Resources and Services. In addition to volunteering at OPRF Museum this year, she encouraged two of her classmates to volunteer, too!

History Matters

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We welcome your suggestions and comments. Please email us at:
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Museum Garden *(continued from page 1)*

"I'm keeping with the 'fire' theme and the colors white, yellow, orange, red, blue – all part of a 'flame,'" says Thompson, who has spearheaded and nurtured the creation of the attractive and colorful oasis that greets visitors in front of Oak Park River Forest Museum. In 2021, she re-imagined the garden, seeking to expand the number of perennials and decrease the number of annual plants.


Like all experienced gardeners, besides color and species, she looks for plants of varying heights and variable light, soil and water requirements. She also looks for plants that attract butterflies, bees, and birds, scouring books for ideas and then checking availability at various garden centers, particularly those with an on-line plant listing.

Jan Dressel and Eloise LaPalio have also lent a hand, particularly during the late spring planting season. "Jan and Eloise are great with helping to plant and water and making suggestions for plants," said Thompson. "It's a group effort as we discussed the plants to pick out and the layout that I came up with, and getting them into the ground."

For serious gardeners, here is a plant list for this year's garden, starting near the building. Check it out before the first frost!

Common Name	Botanical Name
Barrenwort, Bishop's Cap	Epimedium grandiflorum 'Lilafee'
Fireworks Goldenrod	Solidago rugosa
Tuscan Gold False Sunflower	Heliopsis helianthoides
Red Canna Lilie	Cannaceae (donated by Jerry Ehrenberger)
White Coneflower	Echinacea purpurea 'Pow Pow White'
White Blazing Star, Gayfeather	Liatris spicata 'Floristan White'
Blue Flax	Linum perenne
Japanese Blood Grass	Imperata cylindrica 'Red Baron'
Voodoo Stonecrop	Sedum spurium 'Voodoo'
Sunsparkler Wildfire Stonecrop	Hylotelephium 'Wildfire'
Fire Chief Arborvitae shrubs	Thuja occidentalis 'Congabe'

McAdam Landscaping planted Allium Globemaster and Prairie Drop Seed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) before the grand opening of the museum in 2017, which are still found in the garden.

Some annuals planted this year to fill in the corners and add a splash of color included yellow and white *Zinnia angustifolia* and Blue My Mind Dwarf Morning Glory, an *Evolvulus* hybrid. Dwarf Nasturtiums were planted next to the bench since nasturtiums were selected as the official flower of Oak Park in a 1912 referendum by public school students. 



Cemetery Walk Celebrates 30th Anniversary on Oct. 17

"Happy Days are Here Again?" Theme Looks Back at 1920s

Some of the dearly departed denizens of Forest Home Cemetery will again tell their stories on Sunday Oct. 17 for the annual Tale of the Tombstones walking tour of Forest Home Cemetery. Kicking off at noon, the walk will again feature guided tours and dramatic performances, marking the 30th anniversary of the outdoor event.



Among the featured stories will be that of Hannah Beyé Fyfe, an artist and activist for women's rights; Billy Sunday, the crusading evangelist; Grace Hall Hemingway, a singer, musician and artist whose son Ernest became an

international icon; and Joey Sternaman, the first Chicago Bears quarterback. The event will tie many of the stories to the Roaring 20s and point out parallels/departures from our own time a century later.

Similar to last year's walk, we will require advanced reservations and assigned starting times that will avoid unnecessary crowds. Tours will leave from inside the gate of Forest Home at 863 Desplaines in Forest Park. Each group will be limited to no more than 20 individuals. Participants will be asked to adhere to social distancing and public health guidelines as of that date, including wearing masks when the group is gathered more closely together at each stop.

Tickets are available for \$20/\$15 for members at oprfmuseum.org or 708-848-6755.



Fall events offer a variety of lectures, walking tours, events

Check out website for the latest news, schedule, details

We have scheduled a wide range of activities this fall inside OPRF Museum, virtually, and out in the community. Below are a few highlights, subject to change, including because of changes in public health recommendations. Details and more at oprfmuseum.org

Have you signed up for our email list that allows you to keep up with the latest news? Please do so at our website, call us at 708-848-6755 or email to oprfhistormatters@sbcglobal.net We average an email per week, we do not give or sell your email to anyone else, and you can remove your name from the email list at any time.

Virtual programs

We offer Zoom-based programs twice each month. "Inside OPRF Museum" is offered the third Thursday of each month and "Ask the Historians" is offered the last Friday of each month. Topics vary each month.

Walking Tours

On Sept. 25 we will again offer "West Side Stories" in River Forest and on Oct. 9 "River Forest Street of Dreams" will be offered. A walking tour of the west side of Forest Home Cemetery, between First Avenue and the Des Plaines River, will be offered on Sept. 26.

Lectures

On Oct. 2 we will host a program on the Chicago Portage and on Oct. 9 we will offer a lecture on the Native American heritage in our region.

Open House Chicago

On Saturday Oct. 16, OPRF Museum will again be open as part of Open House Chicago but we will not participate on Sunday Oct. 17 because of our annual Tale of the Tombstones tour. 🍁

Soo Line Story *(continued from page 11)*

Are you curious about how to research a topic like this? Our Fields Research Center has some great sources like David Leider's 2010 book, "The Wisconsin Central in Illinois", and issues of a publication from the Soo Technical and Historical Society. Our staff and volunteers like me can help steer you in the right direction.

Robin Wardle volunteers on Wednesday and Friday mornings most weeks at OPRF Museum. 🍁

Bumping Over The Last Railroad Crossings in Northwest River Forest

By Robin Wardle

Ever go bumping over the angled railroad track on Thatcher Avenue in River Forest between Division and Augusta streets on a bicycle, as I have?

After doing this a few times and noticing other tracks on the blocks to the east, I grew curious why only these few grade crossings remain, the last vestige of so many which once crossed the streets of our two villages. And I also wondered, as a comparative newcomer, why do old-timers call it the "Soo Line" and what is its history?

The answer to my first question was easy to find. In 2017, prompted by concerns from local property owners, the Village of River Forest sent an inquiry on the status of the track to the Canadian National (CN) Railroad, its current owner. CN replied that the track is considered still active, but there are no immediate plans for use. In other words, CN wants to maintain a potentially valuable right-of-way for possible future use, but does not currently schedule regular traffic.

The answer to the second question is more complicated. In the late nineteenth century, Chicago was the nation's rail hub and access to this valuable commodity spurred vigorous competition from multiple railroads in the Midwest for ways to move their products to market via Chicago. As part of its stake in this competition, the Wisconsin legislature on February 4, 1871, created the Wisconsin Central (WC) Railway from the Portage, Winnebago & Superior Railroad and awarded it a land grant to entice people to move out and settle along the tracks. The railroad would eventually go north to Lake Superior and west to Minneapolis. From Minneapolis it would take flour to the east, and from near Lake Superior it would haul lumber. A Boston financier, Gardner Colby, was convinced to support the undertaking, and became its first president.

By 1885, two railroads were created and backed by the WC: the Chicago & Wisconsin and the Chicago, Wisconsin & Minnesota. The Chicago & Wisconsin right of way was used to construct the railroad from Chicago, through River Forest, to the Wisconsin state line, while the Chicago, Wisconsin & Minnesota continued from the state line to Schleisingerville (now Slinger), Wisconsin, near Milwaukee. After construction, both railroads would be absorbed by the WC.

In 1908, the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railway Co. (known as the Soo Line) effectively took control of the WC through a lease agreement.

The WC still owned the equipment, but the engines were painted in the Soo colors with a small "wc" to indicate ownership. While largely a freight line for much of its history, in the early days passengers used the line to travel to and from Wisconsin vacation spots during tourist season.

During the Great Depression, the Soo Line supported the WC as much as it could, until it ran out of money. The WC then went bankrupt, followed soon after by the Soo Line. The Soo Line came out of bankruptcy in 1944, and the WC followed in 1954. The WC was finally fully absorbed by the Soo in 1961, by which time the Soo was itself part of the Canadian Pacific system.

In 1986, the Soo Line created the Lake States Transportation Division, which included the Wisconsin Central, in part to acquire control over the tracks from Forest Park through River Forest to Minneapolis. A year later, Lake States was sold to a new regional railroad, called the Wisconsin Central Ltd., thus reviving the WC name. This railroad expanded at various times by acquiring other small railroads and became a regional powerhouse.

In 2001, the new WC was bought by the Canadian National, and by 2011 was merged into the CN along with two other CN railroads. Finally in 2013, CN acquired the Elgin, Joliet, and Eastern Railway (EJ&E) and merged it into the WC. This completed an arc around the western edge of Chicagoland, and gave CN an important entrance into Chicago from the south. This southern entrance became more important than the western one, through River Forest, which led to the current dormant state of the tracks through River Forest today.

(Continued on page 10)



Soo Line viaduct shown above what are today the Metra tracks (formerly C&NW Railroad) east from Keystone in about 1905.



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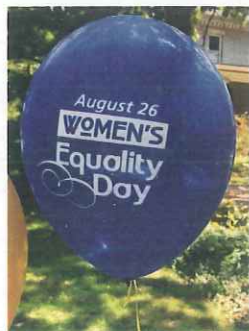
Left to right, Mary Ann Porucznik, Elizabeth Celio, Rachel Berlinski and Marge Massarello

Celebrating Women's Equality Day, New Marker

On Aug. 26, members of The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, the Nineteenth Century Charitable Association, and the Oak Park-River Forest League of Women Voters celebrated the installation of the National Votes for Women Trail Marker honoring renowned local suffragist Grace Wilbur Trout at 414 Forest Avenue in Oak Park.

Trout was president of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association from 1912 to 1920, and spearheaded the campaign for woman suffrage in the state. During that period, she lived in Oak Park and was an active member of the Nineteenth Century Club.

This is only one of 250 women's suffrage sites across the country being recognized with a Trail Marker. Markers are funded by the William G. Pomeroy Foundation and the federal Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission.



New Oak Park Vintage Car Club Meets at OPRF Museum Oct. 2, Seeks Members



This 1921 Ford Model T "Depot Hack" drew stares and questions from pedestrians and motorists this summer when parked in front of Oak Park River Forest Museum. Owner Neil Benchell, an Oak Park resident, answered questions and shared tidbits about the vehicle with passersby. Ford made these vehicles to transport luggage and

passengers to-and-from railroad stations when railroad transport was king. It is the ancestor of station wagons and minivans.

Benchell and his friend Dan Lempa are organizing a new Oak Park Vintage Car Club, which will have a kick-off meeting on Saturday Oct. 2 at 9 a.m. at OPRF Museum. The agenda is to bring together local car enthusiasts to swap stories and to cooperate in showing off their vintage automobiles. Lempa spearheaded two grassroots auto shows in his neighborhood near Beye School before the pandemic and looks forward to doing something similar in 2022.

Any local vintage auto enthusiasts are invited to attend on Oct. 2—and bring your vintage vehicle!