



17th Annual Spring House Walk is a Go!

“Tales Our Houses Tell” returns in new format on Sunday, May 2

The Historical Society of OPRF is thrilled to once again welcome Spring with a special “Hybrid Edition” of *Tales Our Houses Tell* on the traditional first Sunday in May between 1 and 5 p.m.

Our 17th Annual Spring House Walk now has its own historic story to tell, that begins when the pandemic abruptly canceled the planned

In 2021, we are blending features of our traditional Spring House Walk with elements of, and lessons learned from, our popular neighborhood walking tours. And to meet the challenge of ensuring the health and safety of our guests, volunteers, and homeowners, we will



scrupulously abide by the guidelines established by the state and local health departments. Everyone



May 2020 Walk, just as it was gearing up to full speed last March. And it ends, with gratitude to our amazing staff, fabulous volunteers and generous homeowners who are working together to create what we are calling a “Hybrid Edition” that safely tweaks our traditional walk.

Returning to the same 2020 location, this year’s *Tales Our Houses Tell* will share the stories of five beautiful homes built at the turn of the 20th century in Thomas H. Hulbert’s subdivision. These five homes, built by “day’s work - not by contract” and “of the best materials that can be bought,” will tell the tales of how families and neighbors transformed “one of the most prominent subdivisions in south Oak Park” into their neighborhood and home.

will be required to wear a mask at all times. And please note: the biggest shift will be that our historians will share the home’s stories outside of the house, and attendees will be guided through the interiors of all five homes in small groups.

We are excited to share the stories of this fascinating Oak Park neighborhood. We were first drawn to this section of Oak Park by one of the stories discovered researching the 2019 *Tales Our Houses Tell* in River Forest. John C Rigueimer, who built the

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featured home on Forest for his three nieces, happened to own three saloons in the Loop with Tommy O'Connor. Mr. O'Connor happened to live on Wenonah, and while driving by his home, the neighborhood caught our attention. With a variety of beautiful houses, two subdivisions (Hogans & Hulbert) and an urban legend (Oak Park Golf Club), the opportunity to celebrate the neighborhood's stories and history along with the great architecture was clear.

As research began, we learned the Hulbert subdivision, along the 500-800 blocks of Clinton and Kenilworth Avenues, between Madison and Harrison Streets, is illustrative of a major change in the way American homes were built and marketed. Thomas H. Hulbert was one of a new breed of developer that not only subdivided the land but also built entire blocks of homes "on spec" and marketed them as a planned community. Hulbert was one of many real estate entrepreneurs following this new model. Among those taking this new approach in the Oak Park and River Forest area were the Gunderson Brothers, Henry Hogans, E. A. Cummings, and Rosewall Jones.

The Hulbert Houses, Oak Park
\$4250 to \$7500 Booklet Sent Free
Residences Only—No Flats Allowed

Headline of advertisement for the Hulbert Subdivision
- Oak Leaves, October 7, 1905

These developers went beyond selling houses, to selling the very idea of home ownership; the dream of suburban living; the pride of belonging to an exclusive, planned community. It was a marketing strategy that became the template for the development of suburbs for at least the next half century.

House Walk tickets are available in advance online at www.oprfmuseum.org or stopping in at OPRF Museum. Tickets are \$25 for members or \$30 for non members. Order now! You can buy tickets the day of the event at our Oak Park Hospital ticket pick-up location, but the price goes up to \$35! Email us at oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net or call (708) 848-6755 if you have any questions. 




It's the story of these gates pictured in the c. 1910 photo above that inspired OPRF Museum's new Hulbert Neighborhood Walk, first shared in October 2020. We initially assumed that Thomas Hulbert, the developer, installed the gates, but further investigation revealed that it was the home owners—not Hulbert—who had the gates installed at the north and south ends of both Clinton and Kenilworth to "make the avenue a boulevard, or a "private street," and prevent heavy carts and trucks from being driven thru the residence district. The Wisconsin Lime & Cement company, to the south, is the greatest offender of the neighborhood and [Improvement Club] President Frederick Hildman says that the citizens expect to force the heavy wagons onto some other street."

The homeowners formed the Oak Park Hulbert Improvement Club for the chief purpose of installing these gates. Improvement Clubs formed all across the country beginning in the 1890s.

The Oak Park Improvement Association was established in 1900, two years before the village itself was incorporated, for the purpose of providing "co-operation in cleaning, beautifying, and improving the streets, alleys, parkways, vacant lots, and railway rights of way in the village."

As the 1902 *Oak Leaves* explains; the Oak Park Improvement Club launched a campaign to procure and colonize squirrels in the village. Villagers who contributed \$5 would receive "a pair of squirrels and a suitable squirrel house for their accommodation."

By 1909, there were pro- and anti-squirrel camps because squirrels were thought to destroy birds' nests. It's an argument that continues today. 

PBS Documentary Researchers Visited OPRF Museum Before Telling Hemingway Story

by Rachel Berlinski, Operations Manager

Time flies. After the great success of esteemed filmmaker and historian Ken Burns' most recent PBS documentary *Country Music* in 2019, he is already giving us enthusiasts another treat. *Hemingway* is Burns' latest series airing on PBS this spring. And, while it is new to viewers like you, it's been three years since I first was contacted to assist in research.

I was excited to watch this series and learn more for myself about one of Oak Park's most notorious and most celebrated native sons. I would not have expected what a thrill this series would be when the researchers from Burns' production studio Florentine Films contacted OPRF Museum in April 2018. While looking at Burns' Wikipedia page, though, it's a little less surprising; he has projects scheduled for release in 2027 and beyond.

And of the thirty-or-so films that Burns has made so far, he already chronicled Oak Park's other favorite son, Frank Lloyd Wright. Think about that. Burns has covered such universal topics as jazz, baseball, and the U. S. Congress. Of all the people in the world he has covered or could cover on behalf of telling America's cultural history and legacy, he's chosen two from the Oak Park community. Call it Oak Park exceptionalism, but by any name, it's pretty special.

The Historical Society's part in this project was minor but exciting. Researchers contacted me looking for context on the community where Hemingway

grew up. In May 2018, two film producers made a trip from New York to Oak Park. While they spent much of their time with my colleagues at the Hemingway Foundation and Special Collections Department at Oak Park Public Library, they also visited what was then the fairly new Oak Park River Forest Museum.

We looked at postcards, Philander Barclay's photo collection, and map booklets that were printed at the turn of the last century trying to entice people to move to the blossoming village. I also got the chance to brag on George Hemingway whose legacy is incredibly important for Oak Park as

the village we know today. He was one of the most influential real estate agents and land developers in the area in the early 20th century, turning up regularly on land deeds and building permits; and he was Ernie's uncle! And when I get the chance to tell that to people who already know a lot about Ernest and his immediate family, I get the same feeling as a Hemingway scholar might get uncovering one of Ernie's lost diaries or love letters!

Nevertheless, I want you, reader, to know that as a supporter of the Historical Society you helped contribute to this film. Your support makes OPRF Museum possible so that we may share our community's stories not just with our members, but with the larger world as well. I hope this film will fill you, as a member of the Oak Park and River Forest community, with great pride to be connected to this world-renowned village.



Oak Park Avenue, looking north to Lake Street in 1915, as Ernie would have seen it. This photo from our collection appears shortly after the ten minute mark of the new documentary.



Small Statues at OPRF Museum Tell a Big Story

In 1977, 80-year-old Elmer Roberts, son (and later partner) of well-known Oak Park architect E. E. Roberts and a talented architect in his own right, donated a pair of figurines to The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest. They were described at the time as “2 statuettes cast in terra cotta and made by Frank Lloyd Wright (per donor).” The statuettes are a 16” tall male figure identified as Nakoma and a 12” tall female figure identified as Nakomis. The figures are inspired by characters from the traditional lore of the Ojibwe people of Wisconsin.

At the time of the donation, Roberts stated that he had purchased the statues from a man named Charlie Morgan around 1932. Roberts described Morgan as “a rendering artist for many architectural firms and a friend of Frank Lloyd Wright.”

Were these statuettes really made by Frank Lloyd Wright? And who was Charlie Morgan?

The story begins in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1915. That year, the Madison Realty Company began developing the upscale Nakoma Subdivision on Madison’s west side. To this day, it is among the most prestigious neighborhoods in Madison. Plans included a private Nakoma Country Club, to be built adjoining both the subdivision and the University of Wisconsin Arboretum and overlooking Lake Wingra.

Construction of the golf course began in 1921. In 1923, Frank Lloyd Wright was commissioned to design a clubhouse for the country club. The following year he was asked to create a grand Memorial Gateway entrance to the complex. The gateway was to include two reflecting pools, one with an 18-foot-tall statue of Nakoma in the center and the other with a 16-foot-tall statue of Nakomis, his wife.

Neither the clubhouse nor the Memorial



Gateway were ever built for Nakoma Country Club, though. Although Wright was paid for his designs, Madison Realty Company asked him to scale down his plans due to the excessive cost of the project. Wright, being Wright, flatly refused to change a single thing and the clubhouse and gateway projects were cancelled. In 1929 a clubhouse by another architect was erected at half the cost of Wright’s design.

Enter Charlie Morgan. Charles L. Morgan (1890-1947) was a licensed architect, but he was also a talented artist who gained the greatest notoriety for his work as a draftsman and architectural artist. Morgan collaborated with Wright on several projects in the late 1920s.

Around this time, Wright was going through one of the periods of financial difficulty that he encountered off and on throughout his career. In a legal move designed to shield his personal assets, he incorporated as Frank Lloyd Wright, Incorporated. Morgan was among the former contract freelancers



Elmer C. Roberts, c. 1970

Small Statues... (continued from page 4)

who would now be considered partners, at least in the eyes of the law if not in the mind of Wright.

As Wright said in a letter to Morgan dated December 12, 1929, "I have never entered into any partnership and probably never shall, being totally unfitted for that type of co-operation. I prefer 'association'... All contracts should be made, and plans too, in the name of Frank Lloyd Wright, Incorporated: Charles Morgan, Chicago Associate."

At about this same time Wright licensed Morgan to create terra cotta replicas of the Nakoma and Nakomis statues. Morgan had a lifelong interest in Native American history, culture, and art. As an architect, Morgan's most famous building is his collaboration with Robert de Golyer on the 22-story Art Deco Powhatan Apartments at 50th Street and Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, featuring Native American themes in terra cotta exterior details and lobby mosaics designed by Morgan.



Charles L. Morgan, c. 1930

It is likely that Wright may have authorized Morgan to reproduce editions of the Nakoma and Nakomis statues, at least in part, as a way to compensate Morgan for work he had done for Wright.

Morgan appears to have reproduced the Nakoma and Nakomis statues in a few different sizes but the 16" Nakoma and 12" Nakomis were by far the most common. He also produced some sets glazed with black enamel and even a few gilt with gold. These statues are still produced today by several different licensees in a variety of materials and sizes for indoor and outdoor decoration.

There is a coda to this story, over half a century in the making. In 1976 H. F. Johnson, Jr., President of SC Johnson Corporation, commissioned full-sized statues of Nakoma and Nakomis, to be erected flanking the entrance to the Wright-designed Research Tower on the SC Johnson corporate campus



Nakoma and Nakomis flanking the entrance to the famous Wright-designed S. C. Johnson Research Tower in Racine, Wisconsin

in Racine, Wisconsin. These statues, carved from Minnesota granite and matching Wright's original designs and dimensions, were installed in 1979.

In the late 1990s, a consortium of investors purchased the plans for Wright's Nakoma Clubhouse and engaged the Taliesin Architects to update the design using modern materials and redesigning some of the interior spaces to be better suited to a 21st century lifestyle and to conform to contemporary safety and accessibility regulations for public spaces. In 2001, Wright's Nakoma Clubhouse was finally built, though in a somewhat altered state, as the centerpiece for the Nakoma Golf Resort and Spa in the Sierra Mountains near Clio, California. The



The clubhouse at the Nakoma Golf Resort in Clio, California, near Lake Tahoe, designed by Wright in 1924 and finally built in 2001

resort even features replicas of Nakoma and Nakomis, although at only 85% the size of Wright's original design and molded in reconstituted stone rather than carved from granite.

The statuettes Elmer Roberts donated to the Historical Society will be on display in the first floor gallery of OPRF Museum throughout the summer of 2021. Plan on stopping by the museum to see them in person.



Join Us for These Great Coming Events

Neighborhood Walking Tours Return for 2021 Season

Spring is here and with it comes the return of our popular neighborhood walking tours. Each month from April through October we will offer a tour through an Oak Park or River Forest neighborhood.

We start the season off with *West Side Stories: People and Architecture that Shaped River Forest*. Our April edition of this sidewalk tour along Edgewood Place and Thatcher Avenue sold out quickly, but we've added a second walk on Saturday, May 8, due to popular demand.

On Saturday, May 15, *Growing With the Gundersons* explores the Gunderson Historic District on South Elmwood and Gunderson Avenues in Oak Park.

Next, on Saturday, June 12, we'll do the *Ridgeland Ramble*, touring the neighborhood along Lake Street that is home to OPRF Museum and was the Village of Ridgeland before its merger with Oak Park.

In July, we return to River Forest on Saturday the 17th for *The Street of Dreams: Founding Families & Early Architects of Keystone Avenue*. This walk explores Keystone Avenue between Lake Street and Chicago Avenue.



The oldest home still standing in River Forest, the David C. Thatcher House (shown here in 1903) is a featured house on our "West Side Stories" tour.

All of our neighborhood walking tours begin at 2 p.m. and take about 90 minutes. Tickets are \$8 per person for OPRF Museum members or \$10 for non-members. Please visit oprfmuseum.org or call us at (708) 848-6755 for more information and to purchase tickets.



Free Black History Bike Tour to Mark Juneteenth on June 19

Oak Park River Forest Museum will participate in the community's Juneteenth celebration on Saturday June 19 by debuting a free bicycle tour of sites that tell some of the many stories of African-American life in Oak Park.

Between 1 and 5 p.m., visitors are invited to come to the corner of Lake and Lombard in front of OPRF Museum to pick up free paper copies of a map that includes stops at the site of the legendary Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, the homes or home sites of several prominent African American residents, and some more contemporary stops like the Black Lives Matter street mural near OPRF High School.



Mt. Carmel Baptist Church was torn down in 1930 during the redevelopment of Westgate, a project that destroyed the heart of Oak Park's Black community.

The tour will be self-guided but we will have volunteers at OPRF Museum and some of the stops to offer details about some of the many stories of the contributions of Black residents and the discrimination many have faced through the decades.

Not a cyclist? Or is the weather too bad for biking? While the tour covers too much distance to be walkable, you could easily do it by car, if you prefer.

Telling the stories of Black residents in our community's history is important all year long, not just for one day, so after the Juneteenth celebration is over this year, we will post the map on OPRF Museum's website so it can be downloaded free of charge. We also will work to promote it to schools, residents, and visitors to our community.



"Inside OPRF Museum" and "Ask the Historians" Offer an Online Virtual Visit to Your Museum

Keep in touch with OPRF Museum online with two monthly live programs. And if you can't make the live-stream event, we record both shows and post them on our YouTube channel so you can watch them any time you want.

Inside OPRF Museum runs on the third Thursday of each month at 11 a.m. On this program, Historical Society members and staff present the fascinating history of artifacts from our collection, offer sneak peeks at upcoming exhibits, relate lesser-known stories from Oak Park and River Forest's past, and more.

Ask the Historians is webcast on the last Friday of



A screen shot from our "Inside OPRF Museum" segment on legendary Oak Park resident John Farson, presented by Theresa Czarnik

each month at 11 a.m. OPRF Museum receives a plethora of questions every month. Is my annual block party the oldest in town? Which Oak Park department store had a cage of monkeys? How do I start researching the history of my home? On *Ask the Historians*, we pick two or three of the most interesting or most asked questions and answer them live.

Each of these shows lasts around 30 minutes. They are free for everyone, but advanced registration is required to watch the live-stream event. Register online at www.oprfmuseum.org/contact to join us live. If you can't catch the live broadcast, you can view past episodes online at your convenience on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/OPRFHistSociety/playlists>

"Firehouse" Canna Lily Bulbs... From a Real Firehouse!

Many people complimented the lush, beautiful flowers we had last year in front of Oak Park River Forest Museum. This year, we want to share our bountiful harvest with you!

We are selling bulbs from our "Firehouse" red canna lilies. They were dug up last fall from our garden, split apart, and overwintered for planting this spring. They multiplied quickly during last year's growing season, thus providing us with too many rhizomes for us to plant this spring. They have green leaves, simple red flowers, and can grow 5'-8' tall depending on growing conditions.

Cost is \$10 per bag of 5 rhizomes. We will include instructions for planting your rhizomes in mid-May, followed by instructions for storing and overwintering in the fall. Purchase yours from our online store.

Canna bulbs may be picked up on Saturday, May 8 between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. at OPRF Museum, 129 Lake Street, Oak Park. If you wish to pick them up before or after May 8th, contact the museum at oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net or phone 708-848-6755 to arrange a pickup time. Sorry, we are not able to deliver them to you.

We hope you will enjoy these beauties in your own garden this year!



History Matters

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We welcome your suggestions and comments. Please email us at: oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net



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Mothers and Daughters: Four Generations From One of River Forest's "First Families"

The marvelous photo above captures four generations of women from a family that played a major role in the early history of River Forest. Seated on the right is the matriarch, 80-year-old Betsie Maynard Broughton. On the left is Betsie's daughter, Martha Broughton Prouty. Standing in the rear is Martha's daughter, Gussie Prouty Thatcher. Finally, seated on Betsie's lap is Gussie's daughter, Helen Thatcher, who was not yet one year old when this photo was taken. It commemorates Martha, Gussie, and Helen's trip from River Forest to Betsie Broughton's home in Poultney, Vermont, late in 1894 to introduce Betsie to her new great-granddaughter.

Join us for *West Side Stories: People and Architecture that Shaped River Forest*, a sidewalk tour of Edgewood Place and part of Thatcher Avenue. The first walk has already sold out, but we have added a second one on Saturday, May 8 at 2 p.m. You will hear stories of the Thatchers, Broughtons, Proutys, and other families who helped shape River Forest as well as a few of the architects who designed some of the remarkable homes that make these two streets a living museum of late 19th and early 20th century American architecture.

See page 6 for details about this and other neighborhood walks we will be offering this summer. Space is limited and tickets sell quickly, so please order your tickets soon. If you would like to book a private group tour for this or another of our neighborhood walks for your family, club, or company, please contact OPRF Museum through our website or call us at (708) 848-6755 for further information. 

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