




## Celebrate at our Holiday Open House Invite your friends and neighbors to join in, too

Join us from 1 to 4 on Sunday afternoon, December 3, for our first Holiday Open House at Oak Park River Forest Museum. It is the perfect chance to check out our new space if you have not yet made it to the museum. It is also a great chance to do a bit of holiday shopping in our gift shop using your member discount, which is doubled to 20% until December 31, 2017.

And to spread the holiday cheer and the word about the opening of our great new facility, consider calling or texting a friend today to bring as a guest. So many have worked so hard for so long to make this dream a reality. We need our members, donors, and friends to help us spread the word about the newest museum in the oldest public building in Oak Park.

The Open House will include refreshments and special sales in the new Museum Store, featuring some new gift merchandise developed just for our new museum, as well as new and classic local history books. We are planning to have local authors autograph their books for anyone purchasing that day, including David Sokol, author of *Oak Park: The Evolution of a Village* and *Oak Park: Continuity and Change*, and Tom Holmes, a pastor and *Wednesday Journal* religion columnist who will sign copies of his new book, *The Soul of a Liberal Village*.

Our friends at the Oak Park Conservatory will be hosting their annual Holiday Open House the same day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. with poinsettias and paper whites, among other holiday plants, on display and for sale. Make it a holiday doubleheader and really get into the spirit of the season! 



## The Grand Opening Was Truly Grand

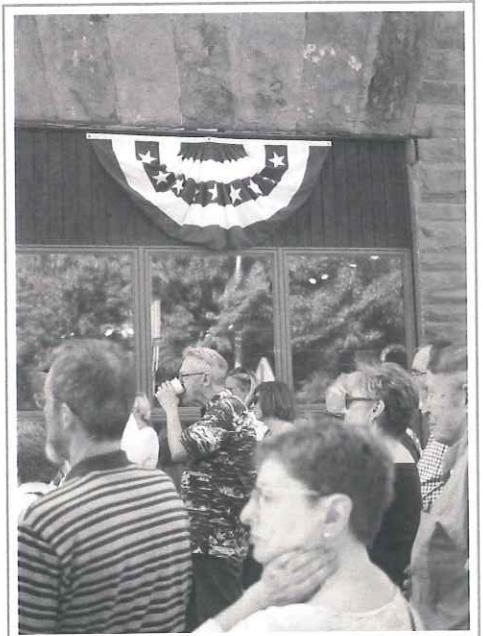


Years of hard work came to fruition on Saturday, Sept. 16, when Oak Park River Forest Museum officially opened its doors to the public. Hundreds of people from throughout River Forest and Oak Park gathered at the former firehouse at Lake St. and Lombard Ave. to celebrate this new facility. Here, the stories of the people and places that make our villages unique will be remembered, researched, and shared for generations to come. Our first chapter may have come to an end, but our story is just beginning. We hope you will continue on the journey with us. Thank you all for your support, your work, your generosity. The best is still to come!

See more pictures on page 2



# The Community Gathered to Welcome the OPRF Museum



*Our deepest thanks and gratitude to all our members, donors, volunteers, and friends.  
None of this could ever have happened without you.*



## Help Us Tell the Stories of Our Community with a Gift

Thanks to the generosity of so many friends and members, \$1 million in private donations has transformed a vacant eyesore into a 21st century museum. We are grateful for the realization of a decades-long dream that has transformed The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest into the Oak Park River Forest Museum.

With your support, a spectacular building will be just the beginning as we embark upon a journey to be the place to tell the many fascinating stories of our home villages of Oak Park and River Forest.

In fact, our new museum is already bursting with stories and we have only been open for a few months.

We are looking ahead to our first full year of operation of Oak Park River Forest Museum in 2018, a milestone as The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest celebrates 50 years serving our villages.

Your year-end donation will support:

- New exhibits, including a look back at the passage of Oak Park's Fair Housing ordinance in 1968
- A colorful and flexible new website that will allow us to spread the word about our work
- A school outreach pilot program to make the museum a destination for student field trips
- Planning for a new elevator to ensure that our entire facility will be accessible to all
- Access to our irreplaceable collection through our Fields Research Center

Please donate today and partner with us to make history continue to come alive at your Oak Park River Forest Museum! All 2017 gifts will be added to the campaign total for our facility and will be acknowledged as part of the Donor Recognition signage to be installed in early 2018. A sample of the signage has been on display in the museum this fall.

Make your check payable to: The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest. You may also make your donation online at [www.oprfhistory.org](http://www.oprfhistory.org). The Oak Park River Forest Museum also accepts gifts of appreciated stock, property, or other assets.

## Coming in 2018: "Spindle Wall" will help us Tell Our Stories

In our first months of operation, many visitors have marveled at the original walls, floors and ceilings when they walk through the door. Coming in 2018, front and center, will be a new unique display wall to help engage visitors and tell stories in a contemporary way.

Designed by President Rich Faron of Museum Explorer Inc. after long consultation with our board and staff and many draft iterations, the stylish and colorful custom-crafted "spindle wall" uses materials, colors and scale that respects our beautiful space but also features bright LED lighting, two video screens and two-sided glass display cases to allow us to tell multiple stories in a stylish and efficient way. Under construction this fall at Dimension Craft, Inc. on Chicago's Southwest Side, the see-through display wall will complement our space and also be a bold 2018 statement in our 1898 home.

Don't plan a visit to the museum in January as we will be using that frigid month to install the new

exhibit wall, do behind-the-scenes work with the collection, and to prepare the space for our first full year of operation of Oak Park River Forest Museum.



*Museum Explorer, Inc. President Rich Faron (left) and Oak Park River Forest Museum Board member Gary Schwab examine the display wall under construction at the Dimension Craft workshop*

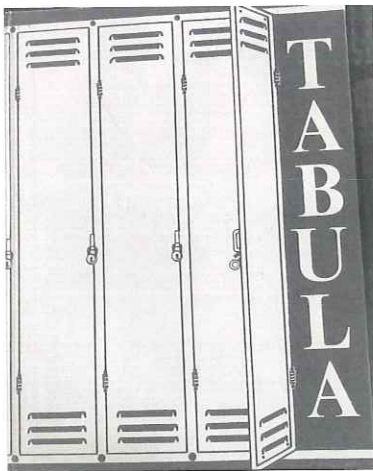


# "Tabula" Collection is a Community Treasure

by Michael Guerin

As the new Oak Park River Forest Museum was taking shape, one of the challenges was assessing and organizing 110 years of a local treasure - *Tabula*, the Oak Park and River Forest High School yearbook. Over the years the museum has received 372 copies thanks to donations from students' families, teachers, the River Forest Library, and especially Don Vogel, retired director of the library at OPRF High School. They cover every year from 1907 to 2015, with the exception of 1908 and 1909. Given our generous community I expect the 2016 and 2017 editions will be added sooner rather than later.

Of these 372 books, 201 are in excellent condition and 108 are in good to fair condition. One half of all copies are inscribed or marked, most commonly with



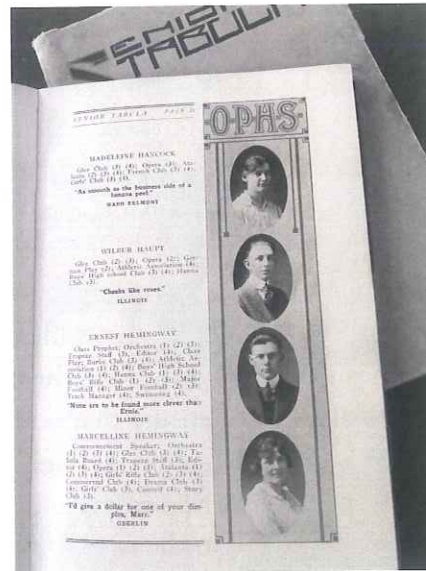
autographs or comments from friends or teachers, a practice which seems to have appeared for the first time in the 1920s. The first few years of these editions are in paperback and are very fragile; they are housed in the Research Center along with up to three copies of all the later editions. All are

accessible to the public with assistance from staff. In addition, two shelves of *Tabula* yearbooks are located on the main floor of the museum for public browsing.

A few observations as I organized the collection:

- There is a slow transition from the staid formality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the informality of the 20<sup>th</sup>, both in text and photos. Compare the editions from the 1920's to those in the 1960's for the most evident examples.

- The format and themes of the editions would be relatively stable and similar over the course of several years, followed by sudden and innovative changes; the new format would then be the standard for several subsequent years. This has



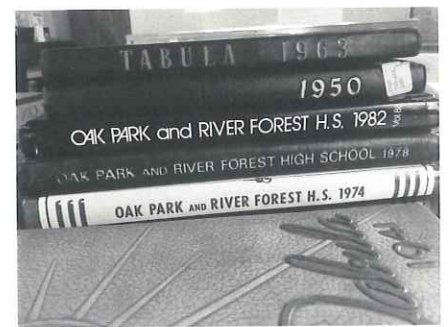
happened decade after decade through the present day.

- There is minimal reference to wars or other national and international events or their immediate impact on the school, students or community. The pages of the *Tabula* focus on

the school community.

- Oak Park's success in the encouragement of racial integration in the 1960s and 1970s is told through the pages of the *Tabula* throughout those decades.

Finally, while the museum has multiple copies of most editions, more than 50 have five or more copies with the extras available for sale. Let us know if there is



an edition you would be interested in and we'll see if it is available. And, if you have a 1908 or 1909 edition in the attic that you would like to donate, let's talk!

(Michael Guerin is a regular volunteer at the museum.)

If you would like to purchase a surplus copy of *Tabula* or if you have a copy you would like to donate, please call us at (708) 848-6755 or email [oprffhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprffhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net). Donated copies will be added to the collection if needed or sold to benefit our museum if we have a surplus.



## Former and Current Home Owners Share History

by Rachel Berlinski

Finding an original photo of a house circa 1890 would be considered a remarkable discovery when researching a home. A recent researcher, however, found that and more.

The Historical Society often receives requests to perform research for out-of-town former Oak Parkers and River Foresters. I recently received a message from a woman in Central Illinois asking me to help research her childhood home on Home Avenue, in an area including many nineteenth-century houses. She told me that she knew of an early owner living in the house in 1887. After scouring the usual sources—listing sheets, city directories, and our bound copies of the *Oak Leaves*—I found a photograph of this house from 1896, which was included in a coffee-table book of Oak Park scenes named simply *Oak Park 1896*.



Photo of the home from *Oak Park 1896*,

This photo was captioned with the name of the owner at the time, a different owner than the one whom we knew lived there in 1887. Yet even after discovering this interesting detail, I felt I was coming up short. A 130-year-old house has to have more of a story to it than just a few names on paper. I reached out to a volunteer with the Historical Society who is a whiz with genealogical research, and he was able, through newspaper and local directory records, to find the name of an even earlier owner, Matthew J.

Garty, who built the house in 1884. We had found a definitive beginning to the story of this house.



The carving on the attic wall, done 56 years ago.

But our story does not end there. A home's story is always growing as long as someone is bringing it to life. I stumbled upon the home address of a researcher who had previously visited the Historical Society to research her house. Her home address was the same as the address I had spent the past few days mulling over. I contacted her, thinking that because of her obvious interest in history, she might appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the history of her own home. She responded to me with a photograph of the wall in her attic, asking of the previous owner "Does she remember?"

The marking had been carved by my researcher's father shortly after the family moved in. The researcher fondly remembered the sight, and the old and current owners began an email conversation of their own, sharing stories and information.

A true treasure of researching a home is being able to speak with previous owners. While the current owner could have never expected to find the person who "vandalized" her attic 56 years ago, she and the researcher both found a treat within the walls of this home on Home.

(Rachel Berlinski is the OPRF Museum Administrative Assistant.)





# Museum News & Recent Events

## Museum Receives Chamber of Commerce Award

The Oak Park River Forest Chamber of Commerce awarded OPRF Museum the second annual Business Spotlight Award for Investment and Development.



Chamber President Robert Stelletello presents the award to Museum President Jan Dressel

Calling it one of six "Oscars of Local Business," Chamber leaders honored the \$1 million project that transformed a vacant building on Lake Street into a museum for the community.

The framed certificate and medal now hangs proudly at the museum entrance. ❁

## Cemetery Walk a Success Despite Rain Postponement

For the first time in 26 years, our annual Cemetery Walk was rained out. But over 200 people came to Forest Home Cemetery the following Sunday, Oct. 29, to hear stories of immigrants and their contributions to our community and our nation.



A tour group at Forest Home listens to re-enactors tell the story of August Spies ❁

## Hundreds Visit Museum for "Open House Chicago"

It was pouring rain, but that didn't stop more than 500 participants in the annual Open House Chicago tour from visiting the Museum, Oct. 14 & 15. This was the second time our museum



Our youngest visitors kept the Children's Corner on the 2nd floor busy all day!

was one of the tour sites. Visitors came from as far away as California, New York, and Florida. ❁

## "What's It Worth" Showcases Family Treasures

An antique doll, a Tibetan scepter, and an 18th century map of China were among the unusual and fascinating pieces that people brought to "What's It Worth."

This museum-sponsored event brought professional appraisers to Concordia University to discuss

the history and value of family treasures brought in by attendees.



J.B. Carr of Bellwood brought "Bessie Lou," her mother's childhood doll

[Pioneer Press Photo]

While the dollar value of items varied, the real treasure was the history and stories behind them. ❁

## First Lectures Held in New Facility

In conjunction with our World War I exhibit *From the Home Front to the Battle Front*, the museum hosted two well-attended events.

First, historian Robert Mueller presented *American Doughboys in the First World War* on Oct. 24.



Retired UIC Professor Bob Messer discussed WWI posters as both art and propaganda,

Then, on Veterans Day, museum volunteer and retired history professor Bob Messer offered *Seeing is Believing: Reading WW I Posters 100 Years Later* to a gathering of more than 50 people.

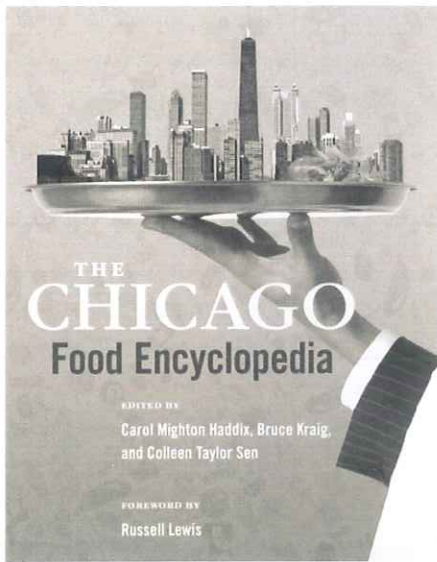
Our WWI exhibit runs through the end of 2017, so if you haven't seen it yet, there's still time! ❁



# Upcoming Museum Events

Saturday, December 9, 3 p.m.

## "Chicago Food Encyclopedia" Book Signing and Discussion



Join us on Saturday December 9 at 3 p.m. at Oak Park River Forest Museum for a free presentation and discussion by one of the editors and contributors to a new publication that puts the spotlight on a topic near and dear to all of us: food.

Oak Park resident Bruce Kraig, a former food columnist for *Wednesday Journal* and one of three editors of *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, published this fall by the University of Illinois Press, will relate how he became part of this project and how hundreds of entries, from "Carl Buddig" to "Prohibition" and from "Chop Suey Joints" to "How R. J. Grunts Got Its Name" were selected. A team of contributors, including

others from River Forest and Oak Park, worked to capture the smorgasbord that is food in Chicago.

The book will be available for purchase and autographing by Kraig and other contributors after the presentation and discussion. ✨

## Spring 2018 Special Exhibit Help Us Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Oak Park Fair Housing Ordinance

On May 6, 1968, the Oak Park Board of Trustees passed the landmark Fair Housing Ordinance by a vote of five to two, committing the community to pursuing a policy that would lead to racial diversity and begin a new chapter in village history.



An Oak Park Fair Housing march, c. 1968

Oak Park River Forest Museum is planning a spring 2018 exhibit on the Fair Housing movement of the 1960s and 70s

and how it changed our community.

Do you have any artifacts, photos, or memorabilia from those days, such as Open Housing marches, community meetings, or other activities that shaped that debate? Can you loan or donate any such items that could be part of our exhibit? Please call us at (708) 848-6755 or email us at [oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net) if you would like to share! ✨

## History Matters

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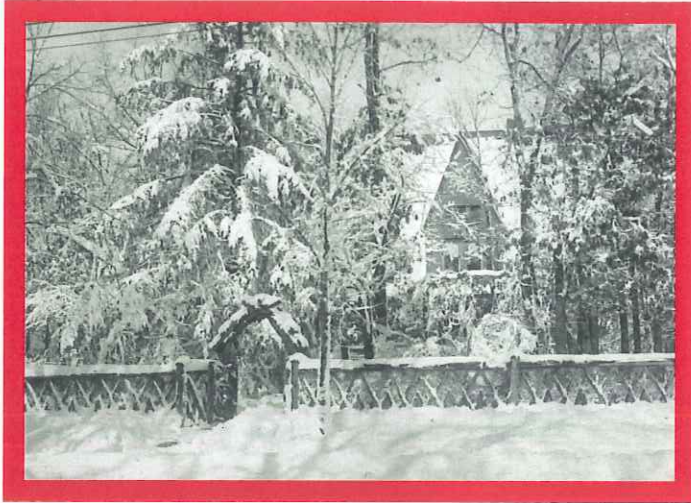
Editor: Kurt Etchingham

We welcome your suggestions and comments. Please write us at the address shown above or email us at: [oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net) and use the keyword "newsletter" in the subject line.



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The Henry W. Austin House in winter c. 1930, where the Lake Theater stands today

# Happy Holidays

*from Oak Park River Forest Museum*

*Please join us at our new home for our first*

*Holiday Open House*

*Sunday December 3<sup>rd</sup> from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.*

*129 Lake Street, Oak Park*

*See story inside for details*