

December 2019

The Downers Grove Historical Society Newsletter



Photo by Slav Polinski of Slav Polinski Homes

History on Tap Creates a Buzz in Downers Grove

The Historical Society's first annual pub crawl took place last month with a sell out crowd of 200 participants (which also included a hefty wait-list). The History on Tap event included stops in four downtown Downers Grove watering holes and an after party at Tivoli Bowl. As attendees visited each location they learned a little about the history behind them. Many thanks to all who attended and to the venues that participated: Ballydoyle, Cellar Door, Emmett's Brewing Co., Pierce Tavern, and Tivoli Bowl.



We'd also like to thank all the volunteers, as well as Mayor Bob Barnett who made a special appearance to help announce the trivia winners. Four lucky winners received a \$50 gift certificate to one of the participating venues. Did you miss this year's

pub crawl? Don't worry, we're already planning another round for next fall! Stay tuned!

Did You See a Ghost?

Everyone who enjoyed Living Cemetery this year talked with many of our early founders and pioneer families. Thank you to Marilyn Ludwig and her Drama Club from Herrick Middle School (including some upper classmen actors from previous years) for representing our early settlers so ably.

Also in attendance were members from The Living History Guild of DuPage County and a number of local citizens who come out in period dress to portray Isrel Blackburn, Mr & Mrs. Blodgett, Captain Blanchard, and others.





Pictured is Bill Sprague, descendent of early settler William Sprague, talking to visitors about early days in Downers Grove



Craig Dorsey (from The Living History Guild of DuPage County) portraying founder and first shopkeeper Henry Carpenter, explains how some of the items in his shop were used in the mid-1800's.



Herrick Drama Club student Logan Rudd talks to an attentive group about his character (and founder) Samuel Curtiss.



You've got to see it to believe it!

How do you know what Downers Grove was like over its 187 year history? A photo always helps! We are very lucky to have thousands of old photos and important documents at The Downers Grove Museum (operated by the Park District) to help tell the story. Getting those images scanned and catalogued so they can be preserved and appreciated is a lofty goal worth supporting and the Historical Society wanted to lend a hand. We donated a new Epson FastFoto 680 photo and document scanner to the Museum in November with the hope that it will help to make the process of preserving our photographic history a little easier and faster. The DG Museum can always use volunteers to help with this effort. If you can help, give them a call at 630-963-1309 or email them at museum@dgparks.org



Haunted Halloween Hunt a Success!

The owner of Cellar Door, Sean Chaudhry, asked the Historical Society to partner with him to create a fun Halloween evening for guests of his restaurant which ended with Sean generously sharing 50% of his proceeds with the Downers Grove Historical Society. The surprise snowfall didn't dampen the spirits of over 50 participants who showed up to enjoy some beverages and a Trivia Hunt in the historic Main Street Cemetery which is situated right next door. A little rivalry...and a lot of fun were had by all. Thank You Cellar Door for a great event! Cellar Door guests scramble on Halloween to find the answers to Trivia Questions supplied by the Historical Society.



Bringing Local History into the Schools

Since retiring as an aide from Whittier School in 2008, Downers Grove Historical Society board member Lois Sterba has been generously sharing her knowledge of Downers Grove history with elementary school students. As part of their local history lesson the students at Whittier School were recently led by Lois on a tour of several historic sites around town; including Maple Grove, Belmont Prairie, Pierce Downer's home, and the Pierce Downer cemetery. Teachers, students, and parents got to see all of these local treasures while Lois explained the history behind each one. Many thanks to Lois for her continued efforts to educate Downers Grove students on our fascinating local history!



Pictured: Liz Chalberg, President of the Downers Grove Historical Society accepts donation from (left) owner Sean Chaudhry and Cellar Door Manager Ryan Jansky.

The Grave of Annie Wetten

Researched and written by Lois Sterba



On a walk through Main Street Cemetery today you will not find the grave of Annie Wetten. That was not always the case because for about 40 years her grave was there. The story of why her grave is now missing is a part of the history of the Main Street Cemetery. The Main Street Cemetery dates back to 1856 when Samuel Curtiss gave a piece of his cow pasture to be used as a village cemetery. Over the years some 100 plots were sold and many people were buried here.

Located on the Main Street of the downtown area of Downers Grove the cemetery remained as the village grew around it. About 1900 some felt this old cemetery did not belong on Main Street anymore. So a movement to remove the cemetery was discussed. The families who had loved ones in the cemetery thought about moving their graves. Thankfully, it was decided that the cemetery would remain but at least one family feared it might happen and that was the family of Annie Wetten. After reading that her grave was removed from the cemetery in 1909 some 40 years after her death, I wanted to find out something about her family.

Annie was born in 1865 the daughter of Valentine and Hulda Wetten. Her father was born in Switzerland and her mother in Prussia. They came to America in the early 1860's and met and married in Downers Grove. Valentine served in 1865 for a few months in the 156th Illinois Infantry during the Civil War. They made their home on Maple Avenue and Valentine joined the Downers Grove police force that had only 2 policemen that served the village. He was the night watchman. The Wettens raised a family of 5 children, Annie was their first born. She died in 1870 when she was only 5 years old and was buried in lot 137 in the Main Street Cemetery. The Wettens planned to be buried there with her someday but in 1909 that changed when their son Emil had her removed and reburied in Bronswood Cemetery in Hinsdale (now Oak Brook). Emil's brother Albert had just buried his own infant daughter in Bronswood on July of 1909 so that is where they moved Annie.

The Wettens' son Emil was an attorney in Chicago. He

never knew his sister Annie as he was born 3 years after she died. Emil grew up in Downers Grove and after attending school here he went to college and obtained his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1895. His career included working for several law firms in Chicago and even running for Mayor of Chicago in 1935 against Mayor Kelly. He was married to Louise Walton who was from a prominent social family in Chicago and named one of the 10 most beautiful women in Chicago in 1910. Emil was considered one of the most prominent bachelor lawyers in Chicago.



EMIL AND LOUISE WETTEN

Emil felt the future of Main Street Cemetery was questionable so on August 6, 1909 he wrote a letter to the Downers Grove Reporter Newspaper advising the people of Downers Grove of his family's decision to remove his sister. As an attorney he felt the land on Main Street would become so valuable that the cemetery would certainly be closed someday. His letter stated his family gave up all rights to their plots in Main Street. He also stated in his letter that removing the grave after 40 years was no problem as the rough box came out of the ground in good condition and was easily buried in Bronswood. Emil hoped his letter would convince others to follow his families actions. No record has been found that other families followed his advice.

Today Annie is resting in Bronswood Cemetery with her father Valentine who died in 1911, her mother Hulda who died in 1929, her brother Emil who died in 1947 and his wife Louise who died in 1923. One of 10 Wettens buried in Bronswood, Annie is surrounded by many family members.

2019 "Historic Site" Selected



The original Grant E. Dicke Fire Station #1 located on Warren Avenue was named as the Historical Society's 2019 Historic Site. This structure was the first dedicated fire station built in 1927 and it remained the only fire station until 1953. Located on Warren Ave

and named for the longest serving fireman, Grant E. Dicke who had served 50 years at that time, it is now part of the Oak Tree Towers Residential complex. You can still recognize it when you drive by it (located across from 1121 Warren Ave). Learn more about this historic building at a dedication ceremony to be held on February 5, 2020... stay tuned for those details.

Save the Dates

- * January 22 - 6:30pm-8pm; Emmett's Presentation: Preserving Your Home and It's History
- * February 5 - 2pm, 1121 Warren Ave Historic Site Dedication at the Grant E. Dicke Fire Station

Make a Difference in Downers Grove



It's true that you can volunteer, have fun, and not feel like you have a second job. The Historical Society meets once a month in our mission to promote Downers Grove history, although not in a text book, slide show, boring kind of way. We're looking for fresh new ideas that will excite a younger audience about the history all around them. To be more specific, we are looking for people like you who have talents in the following areas:

- Writing
- Social Media
- Public Relations
- Interviewing
- Photography
- Passion for History
- Leadership

You really can make a difference! Hurry up and reach out to our fearless leader Liz Chalberg at 630-660-6767, or feel free to send her an email at president@downersgrovehistory.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

