



# HISTORY MATTERS

## 20th Annual House Walk Goes South of the Tracks' Tour Five Beautiful River Forest Homes on Sunday, May 5

By Cheri Bentrup, OPRF Museum Community Outreach Coordinator

This year's annual spring House Walk, "Tales Our Houses Tell," will feature five private homes in southwest River Forest as we venture "South of the Tracks." Homes on our 20th House Walk will be open for interior tours from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday, May 5.

These private homes, within walking distance of each other on Gale and Keystone Avenues, are located between the Metra tracks and Madison Street, just east of the GAR Woods Forest Preserve. The homes were built between circa 1890 and 1910 in the popular styles of the time.

The event features Victorian and Prairie-style homes that were mostly built on lots in the 1872 Gale & Blocki Subdivision. William F. Blocki and Edwin O. Gale were partners in a pioneering drugstore in Chicago's Palmer House, which later had branches in River Forest and Oak Park. The local entrepreneurs also partnered in real estate investment. The Blocki home is a landmark on the south side of the railroad tracks on Keystone in River Forest and was featured on our 2015 House Walk; the Gale family was a fixture in Oak Park from the 1860s until the late 20th century and Charles Gale was a president of the Historical Society in the 1970s.

The proximity to the nearby train depot was one of the selling points of these homes, as well as "perfect drainage, pure water, stone sidewalks [and] graveled roads," according to an 1886 Gale & Blocki advertisement.

Thanks to our volunteers who thoroughly researched these houses, visitors will hear the true stories of the homes, the architects who designed them, and the residents who lived in them. Their research provides insight into the fascinating people and the beautiful homes they built more than a century ago.



**SPRING HOUSE WALK**  
SOUTH OF THE TRACKS  
IN RIVER FOREST  
SUNDAY, MAY 5, 1 TO 5 P.M.



**TOUR THE INTERIORS OF  
FIVE PRIVATE HOMES**



QUESTIONS?  
CALL OPRF  
MUSEUM AT  
708-848-6755

**\$30/PERSON IN ADVANCE, \$35 DAY OF THE WALK**  
PURCHASE TICKETS AT [OPRFMUSEUM.ORG](http://OPRFMUSEUM.ORG) OR AT  
OPRF MUSEUM, 129 LAKE ST., OAK PARK

Housewalk (continued from page 1)

Among the stories to be shared are

- How a prominent 21st century coffee shop owner and realtor and her family restored a 19th century structure that had lost its original charm.

- How a jewel box of an early Prairie-style home has been attributed to the wrong architect— and how the same building was once home to a River Forest trustee and later a journalist whose investigation helped expose the corruption of an Illinois governor.

- How a home built for two sisters, both who worked as principals in Chicago schools, changed ownership several times over the years with relatively few changes to the original building.

- How the owner of one home received an invitation to the White House for a revival with evangelist Billy Sunday.

Please join us on Sunday, May 5, for Tales Our Houses Tell 2024. Tickets are \$25 for OPRF Museum members (\$30 for non-members) and may be

purchased in our online store at oprfmuseum.org, in the gift shop at OPRF Museum, or by phone at 708-848-6755.

“Day of” tickets can be purchased for \$35 a person at the River Forest Community Center, 8020 Madison St., which will also be the site of advance ticket and program guide pick-up after 12:30 p.m.

Parking is available in the lot at the River Forest Community Center and on the streets surrounding each home. This year is particularly walkable!

The event is limited to those over age 12. Please note that pets will not be allowed in these private homes. The homes are not ADA/wheelchair accessible and public restrooms are only available at the River Forest Community Center.



BEAUTIFUL GROVE PROPERTY

**For Sale**

BY GALE & BLOCKI, AT RIVER FOREST.

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Perfect Drainage, Pure Water, Stone Sidewalks, Graveled Roads.  
—Easy Payments, Low Prices.—  
Building up rapidly.

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This choice property lies between the N. W. Depot and Madison Street, and is within 600 feet of the Wisconsin Central Depot and the dummy track.

Some of the most zealous promoters of River Forest “south of the tracks” were also local residents. Above is an 1886 ad from Gale & Blocki, who were discussed on Page 1 of this newsletter. On the right is an 1888 ad from River Forest resident and real estate tycoon Edward Carson Waller. Three of the homes on our walk are in Waller’s subdivision. Waller is perhaps best known as the developer and financial backer of both the Home Insurance Building and the Rookery, two world-famous buildings in the architectural history of Chicago.

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**RIVER FOREST**

CHICAGO'S MOST DELIGHTFUL SUBURB

**-Desirable Homes-**

Grounds ornamented with beautiful shrubbery. Several new houses have recently been completed. Choice lots two hundred feet and upward deep.

We will build to suit purchasers, or will loan money at low rate and on long time to those desiring to improve for themselves.

Fine water and perfect sewerage.  
Fifty-six trains daily.

**E. C. WALLER**

109 HOME INSURANCE BUILDING  
CHICAGO

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# Community Spirit Reigns in Scoville Park Oak Park Celebrates 50 Years of A Day in Our Village

By Cheri Bentrup

Oak Park is hosting its 50th A Day in Our Village celebration this year on Sunday, June 2. But the festival's 50th anniversary comes with an asterisk because it actually began 51 years ago. More about that later!

The first A Day in Our Village, June 3, 1973, was a day full of activities throughout the village. Resident Thomas Steinkellner brought the idea to the village's Community Relations Commission just two months earlier and served as chairman for the inaugural steering committee.

"The idea is to offer every resident opportunities for recreation, for meeting other residents, and for learning about public services

## History of the Event

A Day in Our Village began 51 years ago, but this June will be the 50th festival because a shortage of committee volunteers prompted the village to cancel in 1996.

After 22 consecutive years, the 1996 event didn't attract the minimum 50 people needed to staff the committee, the Wednesday Journal reported. It was a rough year for organizations that relied on volunteers. The Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Association similarly canceled its sixth Cultural Arts Festival and the Ernest



Some "Day in Our Village" memorabilia from OPRF Museum's archives

available in the village," the Oak Leaves reported prior to the 1973 festival.

The ambitious schedule that year offered activities in every corner of the village, among which were free roller skating at Ridgeland Common, a pie-eating contest at Stevenson Park, an art display at Maze Library, a wildflower walk through Austin Gardens, tours at several elementary schools, an ice cream social at St. Giles Church, and a rock band performing on the OPRF High School mall. Thirty local organizations were present to provide information to visitors.

Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park didn't sponsor its July fiesta commemorating Hemingway's birthday.

There was a concern that if enough volunteers were not found for the following year, A Day in Our Village would be permanently canceled. It was thought that maybe the festival had run its course.

Just a few months later, by October 1996, the village said it had enough committee volunteers to resume the festival in 1997.

The festival also faced a challenge in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic. In April, the village's Health Department banned gatherings of 10 or more people through the end of June to help slow the spread of Covid. The ban also canceled sidewalk sales, sporting

*(Continued on page 4)*



In 1976, "A Day in Our Village" tied into the U.S. Bicentennial celebration with a Patriot Costume contest. Above are the winners of the 7 to 13 age group.

events, and theatrical productions. A Day in Our Village organizers opted to host a virtual celebration by requesting videos from the regular participants to put online June 28.

The festival has successfully evolved through the years. In 1974 the festival had 10 "main islands of happenings," the Oak Leaves said, with a full day of events scheduled from noon to 11 p.m. CBS newsman Bill Kurtis (then an Oak Park resident) gave a talk on filmmaking at the

Oak Park Public Library and Oak Park Township officials hosted a housewarming for their new office building at 105 S. Oak Park Avenue.

#### Diversity Helps to Define Oak Park

A Day in Our Village has always been a way for Oak Park to highlight its diversity. It certainly did that with the food offerings in 1975 which included a Danish luncheon at United Lutheran Church, a Hindu vegetarian lunch at the Stevenson Park playground, a Mexican fiesta at Unity Temple, and an Italian dinner at First United Methodist. That summer Ascension Catholic Church hosted a "Gay '90s Beer Garden" and reportedly sold 3,500 beers, 3,000 soft drinks, 2,000 hotdogs and 1,500 bratwursts.

With the women's movement in full swing, the 1977 Day in Our Village featured a unique attraction, a "Dunk the Chauvinist" booth sponsored by the local Rotary Club. It gave "women a chance to get back at Rotarians for excluding them from membership in that organization," the Oak Leaves reported.


Throughout the years, A Day in Our Village has had sites at Mills Park, Downtown Oak Park, Scoville Park, Rehm Park, OPRF High School, various churches, local libraries, Village Hall, and smaller parks. Though festival hours in 1983 were from noon

to 5 p.m., the village sponsored a volleyball game between elected officials and residents (listed as "ordinary mortals" in the program) at 6 p.m. on the Village Hall green to allow the fun to continue ... followed by square dancing from 7 to 9 p.m.

Many remember the penny carnival for children held at Rehm and the firefighters spraying foam in which children would play. Residents were encouraged to bike from location to location or make use of a free shuttle bus. In the 1990s the map showed the bus making 10 stops.

According to the Oak Leaves, in 1993 the committee decided to concentrate activities in three areas - Rehm Park, Downtown Oak Park and Scoville Park.

In 2005, Cedric Melton, community relations director for the village, said A Day in Our Village attracted an estimated 25,000 visitors and participants. By 2017, Melton said, a record number of 170 vendors filled Scoville Park.

For this 50th Day in Our Village, which runs from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on June 2, Scoville Park will be brimming with participating organizations, entertainment, and food. Be sure to stop by the Historical Society's booth and say hello. 

## History Matters

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Forest, P.O. Box 771, Oak Park, Illinois 60303-0771  
[oprfmuseum.org](http://oprfmuseum.org)

Executive Director:	Frank Lipo
Operations Manager:	Rachel Berlinski
Community Outreach Coordinator:	Cheri Bentrup
Newsletter Editor:	Pam Lyons

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We welcome your suggestions and comments.  
Please email us at: [oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net)

# Spring into Summer at the Oak Park Farmers Market

By Cheri Bentrup, OPRF Museum Community Outreach Coordinator

It's a time-honored summer tradition in Oak Park that kicks off in May each year. Head to the Farmers Market early on a Saturday morning, buy a freshly made doughnut and a cup of coffee, visit the vendors' food and flower stands, and stop to listen to some bluegrass music. The market, started in 1976 on North Boulevard between East and Euclid Avenues, has grown into much more than a place to buy fresh produce.

The market has truly become a community gathering place and has stood the test of time as it approaches its 50th birthday. On any given market day, you'll find several groups lined up along the Lake Street sidewalk informing visitors of their causes and asking for support. You'll see neighbors greeting each other, children playing, musicians performing, and local groups raising funds with a bake sale.

The market began as an idea shared by residents Marge Gockel and Carla Lind after seeing markets in Ann Arbor, Mich., and Evanston. The two lobbied to bring a farmers market to Oak Park and in 1975 the village agreed to sponsor the market and formed the Oak Park Farmers Market Commission, with Gockel serving as its chair. Many publications refer to 1975 as the beginning of the farmers market in Oak Park.

The market started small but has steadily grown. In 1977, the market expanded another block to the east, reaching Scoville Avenue. Construction in 1978 on the Euclid Place residences, at Euclid and Lake Street, displaced the market until the village reached agreement with Pilgrim Congregational Church to

host the market in its parking lot at Lake Street and Elmwood Avenue. The village said the lot was ideal for the market because while the space doesn't allow for significantly expanding the number of vendors, it was a "nice manageable size."

A caption on a photo page in the July 5, 1978, *Oak Leaves* said, "For the third year, Oak Parkers are spending their Saturdays at the Farmers Market."

The market hasn't been without scandal though.

The so-called "cauliflower caper" of 1986 rocked the market and attracted national media attention. One of the rules of the Oak Park Farmers Market is that items sold (now with the exception of bread) have to be raised by the vendor within the five-

state area (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Iowa and Wisconsin). Cauliflower is usually harvested in the fall so a vendor who was selling a 12-inch cauliflower at the market in June quickly raised suspicion.

Village officials inspected the farm and didn't find any cauliflower growing. The Oak Park Farmers Market Commission held hearings and when the farmer was barred from the market, he sued the village and went to court. The complaint eventually went to arbitration and was settled out of court.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to many changes in nearly every aspect of life, including moving the Farmers Market from the Pilgrim parking lot back to surrounding streets, Scoville, East and North Boulevard. The village spread out vendors to

*(Continued on page 6)*



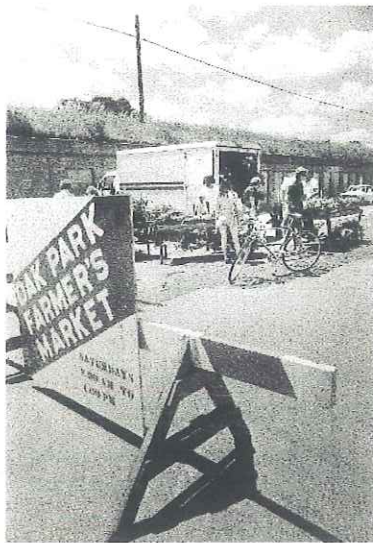
*The Farmers Market, captured in this photo from 1984, is an Oak Park tradition*

## Farmers Market (continued from page 5)

make the market as safe as possible and implemented one-way traffic flow.

The market returned to the Pilgrim parking lot in 2021 but patrons continued to see safety precautions in place, such as the required wearing of face masks, capacity limits, and one-way traffic past the vendors' tables.

The 2023 market was back to normal with 28 vendors selling produce, meats, cheese, eggs, baked goods, flowers, breads, honey and grains from more than 275 acres of farmland in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan, the Oak Leaves reported.



Setting up the Farmers Market in its original location on North Boulevard in 1976

The unique atmosphere of the Oak Park Farmers Market is enhanced with the Farmers Market Musicians who play folk and bluegrass music at the north end of the market, the volunteers in the church basement making doughnuts to sell to shoppers, and the community group raising funds with a bake sale.

Through the years the market has evolved to add special events to its calendar. In 1982, a corn roast was added in August to celebrate National Farmers' Week and the following year the tradition of handing out free bowls of stone soup on the market's last day of the season was started. Most recently in 2017, the market added a pie bake-off in September which also has become an annual tradition.

This year the Oak Park Farmers Market will be open from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays, May 18 to Oct. 26, in the parking lot of Pilgrim Congregational Church, Lake Street and Elmwood Avenue. This year, the congregation is celebrating its 150th anniversary and its Oak Park Landmark building is a picturesque backdrop to the weekly festivities.



## OPRF Museum Honors Volunteers

Good food, good company and the love of history brought many volunteers together at the museum on Thursday, Feb. 29 - Leap Day. It was a special occasion - OPRF Museum's annual recognition of our great volunteers. The event organizer, Jan Dressel, kept things hopping through the luncheon. Thanks to her hard work, the event was a great success.



Our Museum volunteers enjoyed the opportunity to chat and get to know other volunteers with whom they may not regularly serve.

Jan thanked the volunteers for all they do on behalf of the museum from research to giving tours, from welcoming visitors to data entry. Nonprofits appreciate the many contributions made by volunteers and OPRF Museum is no different.

Frank Lipo, Executive Director, Rachel Berlinski, Operations Manager, and Fran Knechel, President of the Board of Directors of OPRF Museum, also extended their thanks during the event.

In keeping with its commitment to local businesses, the luncheon featured sandwiches and salads from the Buzz Cafe in Oak Park, apple tarts from Happy Apple Pie Shop in Oak Park, and s'mores with an Irish touch of green from the River Forest Chocolate Shop.

At the end of the get-together, Jan invited the volunteers to take some S'mores home with them. She quipped, "Whenever you want to volunteer some more, we're glad to hear it. After all, history matters!"



# Coming Events from OPRF Museum


## *OPRF High School 150th Celebration Ends in May, June*

*Exhibit at OPRF Museum Continues Until End of 2025*

OPRF Museum's featured first-floor exhibit "Ever Changing, Yet the Same: OPRF at 150" will continue until the end of 2025, but May and June will mark the end of the 2023-24 formal Sesquicentennial and just a few events are left on the calendar.

Join us on May 1 at OPRF Museum for A Night at the Museum, the monthly free Open House that includes a chance to check out the exhibit. This month we will be pulling out of the Archives play bills and programs from musical performances. Alums who sang, danced or acted will want to check it out.


The last A Night at the Museum this school year on June 5 will focus on graduation, prom and senior week traditions, so bring your memorabilia and memories to share at OPRF Museum.

And don't miss out on the May 19 Community Block Party on the OPRF campus from 1 to 4 p.m., featuring Jade 50s, food trucks, family activities-and the chance to try out the new track! 

*Wednesday, May 29, 6:30-8:30 p.m.*

## *PING! At 25: Providing Instruments for the Next Generation*

PING! brings equitable access to the instrumental music programs in Oak Park and River Forest School Districts 90, 97, and 200 by loaning instruments and providing music enrichment opportunities to students in need, opening the door to music education and all its related benefits for those students who would otherwise be unable to participate.


Celebrate the 25th anniversary of PING! at a panel discussion on May 29 at OPRF Museum. Refreshments will be served and the music of the Juliet Trio will be featured. 

*Saturday, June 1, 2-4 p.m.*

## *Vintage Base Ball Game*

Come see baseball the way it was meant to be played - according to the rules of 1858 (back when Base Ball was two words)!


This free event, which is co-sponsored by the Park District of Oak Park, will feature the Chicago Salmon vs. the Blue Island Brewmasters, both members of the Vintage Base Ball Association.

The game will be held in Lindberg Park in Oak Park in the open field along Greenfield Ave. 

*Saturday, June 8, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.*

## *Third Annual Vintage Car Show*

Come see dozens of beautiful and rare vintage automobiles on display on the streets around OPRF Museum when we present the third annual Vintage Car Show, co-sponsored by the Oak Park Vintage Car Club and OPRF Museum.

This family-friendly event is free to everyone and will include food trucks as well as music provided by Oak Park's School of Rock. OPRF Museum will be open with free admission for all during the show. 

*Thursday, June 20, 6:30-8:30 p.m.*


## *Historical Society Annual Members Meeting*

Join us on the first day of summer on Thursday June 20 at 6:30 for refreshments and conversation as the Historical Society looks back on summer traditions of the past and our own 2023-24 year-in-review, and ahead to our plans and goals for 2024-25. We also will introduce new board members and give annual volunteer awards.

*Last Thursday of Each Month, 7-8 p.m.* 

## *History Book Club Continues*

History lovers and readers unite for the History Book Club!

Space is limited. The Book Club is open to all current members of The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest. To reserve your place or check your membership status, please email [oprffhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprffhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net) or call 708-848-6755. You can check our website for more details about upcoming book selections. 



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*The “Heart of Our Villages” 2024 Award Honorees  
John Rigas (left) and Sue and Nick Bridge*

## *Thank You for Making Our Fifth OPRF Museum Gala a Success*

What a wonderful Gala we had on March 7th at the Nineteenth Century Club! John Rigas of River Forest and Susan and Nick Bridge of Oak Park received the annual “Heart of Our Villages Awards,” presented by OPRF Museum Board President Fran Knechel. The recipients were chosen for their community service. John Rigas is a past River Forest village president and trustee and has served on the District 200 School Board. Sue Bridge is a lifelong educator who served as superintendent/principal of OPRF High School from 1999 to 2007. Nick Bridge is on the Oak Park Plan Commission and has previously served on the village’s Arts Commission and Environment and Energy Commission. All three also have connections to OPRF High School, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year.



*For the third consecutive year, the OPRF Museum Gala and Heart of Our Villages Awards presentation was held in the Margaret Houck Ballroom of the Nineteenth Century Charitable Association.*

*(Photos by Andy Houha)*