



## A New Website for Your New Museum



First we renovated the old fire house to create Oak Park River Forest Museum. Now we've renovated our website to make it simpler to use and more accessible from almost any device, including your smartphone, so you can easily keep up with the latest information about coming events, exhibits, programs, and other news about the Museum.

The new website also makes it easy to browse through our special features like: "This Month in History," which shares stories about people and events from River Forest and Oak Park's past; "Hometown Legends," which offers brief biographies of some of our amazing citizens and their contributions to society; "Ask the Historian," where you can submit simple questions about local history and get an answer by email; and much more. And our two Museum Shops (*see below*) make online shopping a breeze.

So please come explore our new website and let us know what you think. We'd love to hear your comments and suggestions as we continue working to make your Museum experience even better, both in person and online. You can email us right from the website's Contact page.

Our new website URL is [www.oprfmuseum.org](http://www.oprfmuseum.org), but if you have our old URL bookmarked on your devices, you don't have to change a thing; you'll automatically be redirected to our new online home.

## Visit Our Museum Shops for Gifts, Books, Photos, & More

The History Store The Online Photo Store

Welcome to the online History Store for Oak Park & River Forest Museum  
Members and donors receive a 10% discount on your purchase in our online History Store. Enter code **FIREHOUSE** at checkout. To check the status of your membership or to see if you have made a donation in the past year, please call us at 708.848.6755.



Shop in the History Store for books, artwork, gifts, souvenirs, and more, all with an Oak Park-River Forest theme. You can also order tickets for coming events, join or renew your membership, give a gift membership, or make a donation to the Museum right from your computer, tablet, or phone.



Enjoy browsing through hundreds of pictures from River Forest and Oak Park history in the Photo Store and then you can order prints of your favorites in a variety of sizes as a gift or to decorate your home or office. Your order will be shipped to you directly from the photo processing lab.

**10% Discount on All Purchases for Museum Members and Donors**



# Historical Society Celebrates Its Golden Anniversary

In 2018, The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest will mark its first full year in the new Oak Park River Forest Museum after moving from Pleasant Home, its headquarters for nearly a half century. 2018 is also the 50th anniversary of the Historical Society as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving and telling the stories of all aspects of our sister villages.

The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest was born from the commemorations of the 150th anniversary of the State of Illinois in 1968. An organizational meeting was held at the Oak Park Public Library on May 2, 1968, called by the Oak Park Beautification Commission and chaired by Elsie Jacobsen. Just a week later, *Oak Leaves* was already reporting that a local history museum was an “Oak Park need” and that the new group would

“develop an archive and museum to house and display collections of local interest.”

In 1969, officers of the new Historical Society approached the Park District of Oak Park to request that the new group be allowed to open a



The Historical Society garnered headlines in 1968-1970

museum in one of the bedrooms on the second floor of Pleasant Home in Mills Park. The Pleasant Home mansion had been purchased by the Park District in 1939 and had housed the Senior Citizens Center of Oak Park and River Forest since the 1950s. By the late 1960s, though, the cost of maintaining the massive house had become burdensome and there was talk of demolishing the building. The Historical Society successfully argued that if it opened a museum in the space, the Park District could levy a new museum tax under Illinois state law that would allow for building restoration and renovation. That proposal proved crucial to the funding of Pleasant Home, now designated a National Historic Landmark.

The Historical Society continued to grow, and was soon cramped in its one bedroom. By 1992,



Elsie Jacobsen, a driving force behind the founding of the Historical Society

the Historical Society was renting the entire second and third floors of Pleasant Home, with a stand-alone Research Center, office space, exhibit rooms a gift shop and a children’s room. That growth brought more donations of artifacts and a growth in the donation of the records of organizations like the Rotary Club of OPRF and the

League of Women Voters of OPRF. In essence, the Historical Society became the “go-to” repository and archives for the two villages. Space became crowded and a more aggressive search for a new home was ramped up.

In 2007, the Historical Society went to the Village of Oak Park to explore the possibility of creating a new museum in the vacant village-owned building at Lake St. and Lombard Ave. Years of planning and fund raising began. And then, more planning and more fund raising! Finally, renovation and construction began in 2014. The dream became a reality with our Grand Opening last September.

For The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, 2018 is a milestone: a celebration of both our Golden Anniversary and our next chapter as the operator of OPRF Museum. Thank you for joining us as we continue to explore the past of Oak Park and River Forest and carry the stories of our exceptional villages into the future for both residents and visitors alike.



# New 2018-19 Exhibit Marks 50th Anniversary of Oak Park's Fair Housing Ordinance

Beginning later this spring, our Museum will be telling the story of the passage of the Oak Park Fair Housing Ordinance 50 years ago and how it changed the face of the village. The exhibit, titled *Open House Today! The Legacy of Fair Housing in Oak Park*, will open with a reception on Thursday May 17.

1968 is a year marked in U.S. history for its dark side: assassinations, political unrest tied to the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement,



An Oak Park fair housing demonstration on Lake St., 1966

and a growing distrust between citizens and their government. But in Oak Park, in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that sparked race riots a few miles to the east, the Village Board decided to open a new door. In the face of angry opposition by some in the community, the decision to become an “Open Community” helped shape the village’s path toward greater diversity and inclusivity.

America’s broader struggle with race and equality played out in a unique way in our streets and homes from the community’s earliest days. In short, it has been a process, with ups and downs, progress and backsliding. Life in our hometowns in 2018 is still impacted by this important issue. This first-ever exhibit about this subject will put the spotlight on the emergence of a “new Oak Park” that pursued racial integration in a comprehensive, deliberate way.

Co-curated by North Park University Professor and Oak Park native Sarah Doherty and Museum Executive Director Frank Lipo with creative direction from the team at Museum Explorer Inc., the exhibit places the 1968 ordinance in context of what went before, recounting how early African American residents faced discrimination and yet were a key part of the fabric of our

community, interacting with their neighbors and community institutions. It assesses the impact that the arrival of noted scientist Dr. Percy Julian had on the community and the multi-step process of grassroots volunteerism and governmental action that led to public pursuit of housing equality.



Local religious leaders joined the open housing marches in 1966

community, interacting with their neighbors and community institutions. It assesses the impact that the arrival of noted scientist Dr. Percy Julian had on the community and the multi-step process of grassroots volunteerism and governmental action that led to public pursuit of housing equality.

We are still seeking photos, documents, and artifacts that can help us tell this story. If you have any material that you would like to lend or donate, please call us at 708-848-6755 or email: [oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net)

## History Matters

The Quarterly Newsletter of  
Oak Park River Forest Museum ©2018  
129 Lake St., Oak Park, IL 60302  
Published by The Historical Society  
of Oak Park and River Forest  
P.O. Box 771  
Oak Park, IL 60303-0771

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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)



## Two friends, sharing memories and making new ones

"Reminiscing" was the theme of the day on a recent sunny Saturday, as two formerly long-lost friends stopped at the Museum to look through copies of *Oak Leaves*, share stories, and fill an afternoon with memories.



Lincoln School Kindergarten, 1956-57. Martha is second from left in the second row. Jeanne is fourth from left in the same row.

Martha and Jeanne grew up a few blocks apart in south Oak Park and met in kindergarten at Lincoln School. They lost touch after sixth grade when Martha moved to a place that Jeannie described as "a world away"-- Lombard, Illinois. Thanks to social media, they reconnected with each other a few years ago. They met up one afternoon and unexpectedly spent an entire day together. As Jeannie explained, they met for lunch and ended up staying at the restaurant until closing time, ordering another meal while joyfully and tearfully catching up on days-gone-by. That was when they decided to make this an annual outing, spending a day in Oak Park revisiting their old stomping grounds. One of those annual stops is our Research Center. This year was their first visit to the new Museum instead of Pleasant Home.

I met them when they came to the Museum after stopping at Oak Park Bakery, their usual haunt. There, they began a conversation with the gentleman behind the counter about their kindergarten teacher at Lincoln School. It was then that another customer joined in, filling the bakery with happy conversation about everyone's favorite teacher. This is the Oak Park they remember, and while many things have changed in the village, this is the Oak Park they still find when they return.

At the Museum, the friends jumped headfirst into a pile of copies of the *Oak Leaves* from the 60s, when the two lived in the village. After learning that Martha's family had lived in Oak Park for several generations and that her parents also attended the same elementary school as Martha and Jeanne, we looked at a collection of photos from Lincoln School. Martha shrieked with excitement when she discovered a photo of her father as a rambunctious-looking first grader, explaining that he was a bit of a troublemaker. They found obituaries with familiar names--friends of parents and parents of friends. After being shocked to find the obituary for a friend's mother, who died in a traffic accident in the early 60s, Jeannie broke this moment of solemnity with a cheerier discovery: "Wow, half a gallon of ice cream for 55 cents!"



Martha and Jeanne sharing memories over copies of the *Oak Leaves* in our Museum and renewing a bond formed 60 years ago.

As they were leaving that day, I realized the significance of their visit. Martha put it beautifully, saying, "This place means a lot to a lot of people." She told me of her sister, who passed away a few years ago from cancer. She insisted on driving around Oak Park once again as a last request.

Sharing a common history can make for incredible lasting connections. No matter how long they may have been out of touch, Martha and Jeanne remain strong and caring friends. I was honored to spend an afternoon with these ladies, sharing in their memories and learning about what continues to make ours a unique community.





## "Night at Your Museum" Launches New Evening Hours April 4th

We all get busy and run out of time to complete everything on our to-do lists. Whether it's picking up the dry cleaning or firing off an email to a friend, we often find ourselves wishing for a few more minutes in each day.

That's why Oak Park River Forest Museum is adding some evening hours to allow the whole community some extra chances to visit us. And even if you have visited before, pop in again and see how we glow at night!

Our first *Night at Your Museum* is Wednesday April 4 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Come with family or friends after dinner for some light dessert and refreshments. Admission for members is free, as always, and regular rates apply to others.

The evening hours are scheduled for the first Wednesday nights of each month, except for July and August. Come over and say hi!

Remember that our regular daytime hours will continue to be Wednesday through Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. We will evaluate hours of operation after we have completed a full year of operation, so feel free to give us feedback when you visit.



## Outreach to Schools a Priority

The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest has been a resource to local teachers for decades, assisting with research questions, visiting classrooms and the like. But our new Museum is the catalyst to take our outreach to teachers to new heights.

On April 12 and 24, we are working with Oak Park Elementary School District 97 to host after school Open Houses for teachers 3:30 to 5 p.m. so local teachers can visit our Museum and share their ideas about how we can be a resource. President Jan Dressel, herself a retired teacher who worked for years at Hatch and Lincoln schools, recently discussed our resources and



Students visiting the Museum enjoy ringing this 1869 bell from Oak Park's first school

possible field trips with a Beye School teacher and hosted a tour of River Forest Elementary School District 90 curriculum staffers. We are planning outreach to staff at Oak Park and River Forest High School and area private schools in coming months. Our goal is regular field trips from area school children and to be a strategic resource to teachers and students in 2018 and beyond.

If you are a teacher or know any teachers who might like to see how our resources can help their students, please spread the word about the two April Open Houses.



## Fire Pole Holes Open Again After 100 Years

Kearney Construction of Oak Park has done it again. You may remember them as the carpenters who "flipped our floors" to reveal the "like new" underside of the 1898 planks. Recently, they re-opened the two fire pole holes that had been covered up since 1916.



Girl Scouts from Beye School had fun looking down through the newly-opened fire pole holes during their March visit to the Museum.

The project included cutting through the boards covering the two holes, re-trimming them with original wood salvaged from the building during restoration, and installing one-inch-thick plexiglass panels over the holes to ensure safety and clear viewing.

On your next visit, look up to the second floor through the holes and get a new perspective on our new museum. And then walk upstairs and get the "bird's-eye view" of the ground floor.

Still to come in 2018: an actual new brass fire pole on the west wall of the Museum and re-installing the original 1898 brass plaque that marked the dedication of the building.





# Coming Events

Saturday April 14, 3 to 5 p.m.

## Illinois Recipe Roadshow

Culinary Historians of Northern Illinois is looking for handwritten recipes at least 50 years old. Bring your favorite family recipes to OPRF Museum on Saturday, April 14, between 3 and 5 p.m. CHNI will record your historic recipes and related culinary memories as part of their Cookery Manuscript Project. A CHNI expert will tell you more about your recipes and will digitally preserve your contribution in their archives as part of the cultural, political, and social history of Illinois. This is a free event, but reservations are recommended. Please call 708-848-6755 or email oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net.

Please bring a completed recipe submission form with you. The form can be found at: [www.culinaryhistoriansofnorthernillinois.com](http://www.culinaryhistoriansofnorthernillinois.com)



Thursday April 19, 7 p.m.

## Tales of Illinois Innovation

Join author John Wasik as he discusses how and why Illinois became a hub of innovation, from people like John Deere and Cyrus McCormick to modern breakthroughs in architecture, engineering, technology, and more. He then invites the audience to contemplate what must be done to ensure our state continues to thrive in a global economy.

John Wasik is the award-winning author of "Lightning Strikes: Timeless Lessons in Creativity from the Life and Work of Nikola Tesla" and 16 other books. He has contributed to the *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Bloomberg News*, and others.

This free event will be held at the Oak Park Public Library and is co-sponsored by Oak Park River Forest Museum. For more information, visit [oppl.org](http://oppl.org).

Saturday April 28 & Sunday June 24, 2 p.m.

## Women's History Walk: 105 Years of Voting and Activism

Join us for a tour down Lake Street as OPRF Museum guides tell the stories of women in our community who broke down barriers in government, civic life, cultural affairs, and social services.

Learn about Grace Wilbur Trout, suffragist, author, and President of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association; Mary Wessels and Dr. Emily Luff, co-founders of Hephzibah Children's Association which has been helping children thrive and families flourish since 1897; Anna Johnson Julian, civil rights activist, civic leader, educator, and one of the founders of the Chicago chapter of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund; and many other stories of Oak Park women and their role in the struggle for equal rights.



Grace Wilbur Trout driving in a suffrage parade

The tour leaves from the 19th Century Club, 178

Forest Ave., Oak Park, at 2 p.m. on Saturday, April 28 and will last approximately 90 minutes. The tour will be repeated on Sunday, June 24

Tickets are \$10 or \$8 for members. Reservations are suggested but not required. Group tours on other dates may be booked by special arrangement. Contact the museum if you are interested

in planning a special group tour.

Purchase tickets online at our new History Store at [www.oprfmuseum.org](http://www.oprfmuseum.org) or at the Museum. Please call 708-848-6755 with any questions.



Anna Johnson Julian (1903-1994)



# Coming Events

Sunday May 6, 1 to 5 p.m.

## House Walk Tells Tales From the Roaring Twenties

The "Roaring Twenties" certainly roared in Oak Park and River Forest. The decade saw the fastest population growth in the history of our villages, exploding from barely 44,000 in 1920 to nearly 73,000 in 1930. That's about 10,000 more people than live in Oak Park



and River Forest today!

Much of this growth happened in the area north of Division St., as the last farm in Oak Park closed down in 1923 and the land was transformed from vacant fields into manicured streets lined with stately brick homes.

This year's "Tales Our Houses Tell" House Walk explores six homes in six very different architectural styles that were all built during the Roaring Twenties boom.



You'll also hear the stories behind the buildings: the little-known architect who designed over 200 homes in Oak Park; the man who turned a sheep-shearing equipment company into one of the world's largest home appliance businesses; the doctor who was the personal physician to two Cardinals, and more.



Buy tickets online at [www.oprfmuseum.org](http://www.oprfmuseum.org), at the Museum, or by calling 708-848-6755. If you have any questions or are interested in volunteering for this event, please email us at [oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net).



Saturday June 9 & Saturday June 23, 2 p.m.

## Rambling in Ridgeland A Walking Tour of this Distinctive Oak Park Neighborhood

Join us for a walking tour along Lake St. and surrounding blocks and learn about the history, buildings, activities, and people of this east side neighborhood. Along the way you will learn about Oak Park's largest employer in 1900; the West Suburban Jewish Community Center; the boy who started a successful pheasant farm in his Harvey Avenue yard; and many more stories of the institutions, the people, and the events that shaped the independent village of Ridgeland that in 1902 would become the east half of the village of Oak Park.



*Ridgeland, 1896, looking northwest from Cuyler Ave. and Lake St.*

The tour will depart from the Oak Park River Forest Museum at 2 p.m. and will last approximately 90 minutes.



*Blase's Grocery, a Ridgeland institution for over a century finally closed in 1998*

Tickets are \$10 or \$8 for members. Reservations are suggested but not required. Group tours on other dates may be booked by special arrangement. Contact the Museum for more information.

Purchase tickets online at [www.oprfmuseum.org](http://www.oprfmuseum.org), at the Museum, or by calling 708-848-6755. Call or email us at [oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oprfhistorymatters@sbcglobal.net).



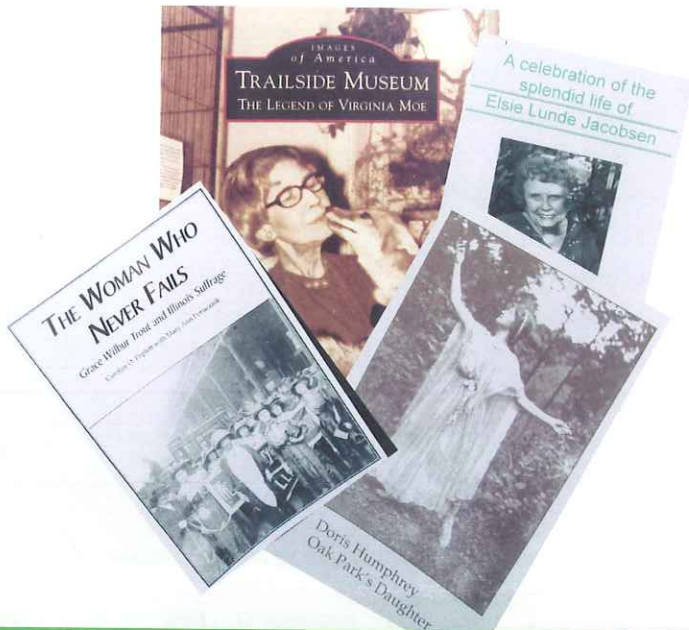




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## Women's History Month Book Sale!



# Women's History Month Specials

Women's history  
books are 50% off!  
Sale extended until the  
Women's History Walk  
on Saturday April 28th

Order Online at the OPRF Museum History Store: [OPRFMuseum.org](http://OPRFMuseum.org)  
or stop by the Museum during our regular Museum visitor hours.

**JOIN US FOR THE WOMEN'S HISTORY WALK ON APRIL 28th (Details on Page 6)**

The Woman Who Never Fails:  
Grace Wilbur Trout & Illinois Suffrage  
*Now only \$5*

Trailside Museum: The Legend  
of Virginia Moe  
*Now only \$10*

A Celebration of the Splendid Life  
of Elsie Jacobsen  
*Now only \$5*

Doris Humphrey: Oak Park's Daughter  
*Now only 50¢*