



## *The Historical Society receives \$200,000 donation from Oak Park family; \$100,000 in 2015 and a \$100,000 matching grant challenge for 2016*

The renovation of an 1898 firehouse into a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum serving Oak Park and River Forest received a big boost toward completion thanks to a \$200,000 donation from Patricia and Kendall Hunt on behalf of the T. Kendall Hunt Family Foundation. Caroline Kenworthy, daughter of Patricia and Kendall Hunt, presented the gift on November 19, 2015, at an event attended by more than 150 people at the future museum and research center at Lake St. and Lombard Ave.

The donation is structured in two parts: first a \$100,000 immediate gift to the Historical Society, and a second \$100,000 to be donated when our communities match that amount in new donations by June 30, 2016. Over \$10,000 was donated by attendees just on the night of the announcement, making a great start toward reaching the challenge goal.

A new green geothermal HVAC system has already been installed, as well as a new roof, new plumbing, a new electrical system, and, for the first time ever in this building, a fire sprinkler system. The Historical Society is in the midst of scheduling the balance of the electrical work and the installation of a fire and security alarm system

(continued on page 2)



Caroline Kenworthy presents the gift.

## *Facing the future, remembering the past*



*"And now let us welcome the New Year, full of things that have never been."*

– Rainer Maria Rilke

During January each year, I am reminded of the double-faced Roman god called Janus, the god of beginnings and transitions who is sometimes represented by a doorway. I think he is an especially appropriate symbol for the Historical Society as we begin 2016.

Through one of his faces we look back proudly at our 45 years at Pleasant Home. At first we had only one room, but we eventually filled the entire second floor and attic. Countless researchers climbed up the stairs to discover amazing things about their families, their homes, their businesses. Community members donated photos, papers, maps,

costumes, and more. The *Oak Leaves* donated a virtually complete set of their newspapers. Parties, tours, programs, and fundraisers were all planned to keep our doors open without any tax dollars. Our loyal members, volunteers, and boards worked hard to make us a stronger and more visible part of our communities.

Through Janus' other face we look toward our exciting future at the renovated firehouse. We can envision what more we can accomplish with the added space; our new, energy-efficient heating, cooling, and humidity control system; the improved accessibility; and our very own name over the door! Like Janus, we are standing at the threshold of a great moment in the history of The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest.

Thank you for all your support, both past and future. We're so glad you have joined us on this journey forward.

*Jan Dressel, President of The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest*



## \$200,000 donation (continued)

as well as wall, ceiling, and floor finishes.

Local businesses continue to support our project with donations of materials, labor, and professional expertise. Among these companies are Classic Cinemas, owners of the Lake Theater; McAdam Landscaping of Forest Park, who donated their services to replicate the original driveway on the Lake Street side of the building with vintage paving blocks; Heritage Tile of Oak Park, which is donating the new interior tile work for the bathrooms and vestibule; and Brendan McNulty of McNulty Plastering & Stucco, who is repairing the original Plaster.

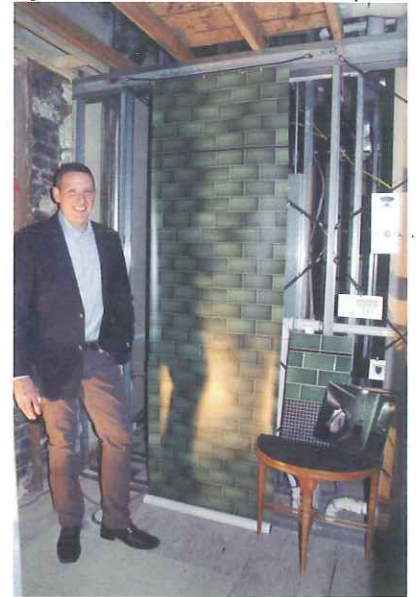


McAdam Landscaping staff installed the vintage paving blocks (Photo by Frank Lipo)

While the building is owned by the Village of Oak Park and leased to the Historical Society, all renovation, restoration, and improvements are paid for by the Historical Society. To date, all work has been funded by private donations. We invite you to make a donation in memory of a family member or friend and earmarked for specific lighting fixtures, bathroom fixtures, and flooring options. All donations before June 30, 2016, will be matched dollar for dollar by the T. Kendall Hunt Foundation. Your \$50 contribution becomes \$100, your \$250 contribution becomes \$500, and so on. Details are on the Historical Society's website at [www.oprhhistory.org](http://www.oprhhistory.org). With your continued support, the Historical Society will begin opening our new museum this year.

"Many of our members and the community at large have been on this long journey with the Historical Society to transform a vacant and dilapidated 19<sup>th</sup> century fire house into a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum," said Executive Director Frank Lipo. "We could not have gotten this far without the support and partnership with the building owner, the Village of Oak Park. Ultimately, this will be the entire community's museum where our stories can be told from the distant past up until today. Our communities' rich heritage needs to be understood and examined and our fascinating stories deserve to be told in a museum of high quality.

"The Hunts have challenged us to raise an additional \$100,000 by June 30, 2016, which they will match, dollar for dollar. These additional funds will allow us to complete the project and not sacrifice quality fixtures and finishes," Lipo said. "It also allows us to plan an orderly, phased move from Pleasant Home to our new facility beginning by the middle of 2016."



(Right) Tony Buttitta of Elite Tile is installing the tile in the bathrooms and vestibule.



Our guests listen to the announcement of the gifts from the T. Kendall Hunt Family Foundation



Tables with information on finishing fixtures for the museum allowed guests to purchase a fixture as a donation to the museum.



Attendees purchased over \$10,000 worth of fixtures and merchandise during the November 19<sup>th</sup> event.

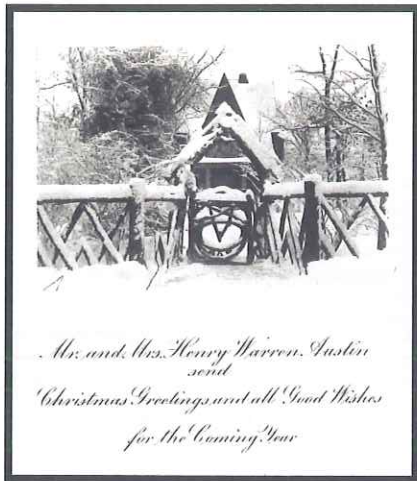
(Photos by Connie Henderson-Damon)

**Save the Date!** Thursday, April 21, 2016! Sneak preview of our renovated *New Home for History!*



## Christmas card recalls a landmark long gone, yet still here

The Christmas card from the 1930s pictured below captures a lovely winter image from Oak Park's past, but it also speaks to other themes of this edition of our newsletter: remembrance, change, and new beginnings.



Henry and Edna Austin's Christmas card, c 1930. (Donated by Dwight Austin)

The card shows the front gate of Henry W. and Edna H. Austin's home in a shroud of snow. Beyond the gate is the front porch of the house and the sharp peak of its gable. This was Henry's home for his entire life.

Henry's parents, Henry W. Austin, Sr. and Martha Voorhees, settled in Oak Park shortly after their marriage in 1859. They bought six acres of land bordered by Lake Street, Forest Avenue, and Ontario Street and built a house facing Lake Street. Here Henry, Jr. was born on January 22, 1864.

The senior Austin found great success as a real estate developer, entrepreneur, and politician. Henry, Jr., followed his father in the real estate business and then found even greater success as a

founder and, later, chairman of Oak Park Trust & Savings Bank.

Over the years, as the Austin family prospered and grew, so too did the Austin house. It was expanded and remodeled and the grounds landscaped. What had been known as Austin's Woodlot became the Austin Estate, an Oak Park landmark.

The Austins saw their estate as an integral part of village life. They hosted community events on the broad lawn and along the landscaped paths. Dances, concerts, and meetings were held in an outbuilding known as the Barn, a carriage house with recreation rooms on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and a ballroom on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

In 1934, though, the lingering Great Depression threatened to destroy Austin's bank. The bank needed a quick infusion of cash to stay afloat. Austin reluctantly sold two valuable acres of his estate—the frontage on Lake St.—to save Oak Park Trust.



A view of the Austin home. The gate is at the far left. (Photo donated by Dwight Austin)


In 1936, the Lake Theater opened where the Austin home had stood. But Austin did not tear down his home. He moved

it northeast a few hundred feet. The house that had been 1022 Lake St. was now at 167 Forest Ave. The Barn was not as fortunate. It was torn down in the summer of 1935.

Henry W. Austin, Jr., passed away on June 25, 1947. His obituary noted that he died in the same room in which he had been born. In his lifetime, he saw Oak Park grow from a tiny village of 300 people to a booming suburb of over 65,000. He and his family had played a major role in that growth.

In his will, Austin left the four remaining acres of the estate to the Park District of Oak Park. He designated that it should be known as Austin Gardens and that his beloved wife Edna have a life estate in the house they had shared for more than 40 years. Edna lived there until her death on July 13, 1964. In February 1965, the Austin home, over a hundred years old, was razed.

Though greatly changed, the Austin Estate lives on today in Austin Gardens. People still walk the landscaped paths and rest beneath the trees in this refuge from the bustle of Downtown Oak Park. In summer the community still gathers here, but now to enjoy performances of the Oak Park Festival Theatre. And soon the new Environmental Education Center will open very near where the Barn once stood.

Henry and Edna Austin must be proud to see that the Austin Estate is still a part of life in the village they loved. 

# Thank you to our generous donors for your support

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\* Denotes pro bono donation of professional services or in-kind donation of materials or products



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\* Denotes pro bono donation of professional services or in-kind donation of materials or products



## Beautiful music on a beautiful day in a beautiful place

A crisp fall day with sunny skies and a gentle breeze made perfect conditions for the 24<sup>th</sup> annual Historical Society Cemetery Walk at Forest Home Cemetery on October 18, 2015.



(Photo by Michael D. Stewart)

Folk group The Reclaimers performed songs from the IWW songbook.

This year's walk featured musical performances at each stop. The Reclaimers (Curt Bewley, Elliott Nott, and Laura Goetz) performed the labor anthems *Joe Hill* and *The Rebel Girl* near the Haymarket Memorial and the grave of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Doug Deuchler and Nancy Greco appeared as local realtor and impresario Frank June and popular early 20<sup>th</sup> century entertainer Grace Hayward. Glenn Braun and Lee Conte re-



(Photo by Michael D. Stewart)

A tour group listens to Lee Conte and Glenn Braun perform as the Jannottas.

counted the May-December love story of Signor Alfredo and

Stella Skiff Jannotta. Kathy Atwood sang our state song, *Illinois*, at the grave of its lyricist, Charles H. Chamberlin. And John Atwood performed his original composition about the 1915 Eastland Disaster, *The Great White Ship*, beside the grave of a victim of that tragedy, accompanied by Deborah and Marcus Hostetler, and Dan Hoenisch.

## Journalism students from Hinsdale visit Historical Society



(Photo by Frank Lipo)

Hinsdale Central journalism students examining the *Oak Leaves* archive in the Historical Society research room.

Nearly 50 Hinsdale Central High School students visited the Historical Society on October 30, 2015, on a special research trip to Oak Park. The senior Literary Journalism class split in two with half the group walking around the village checking out the architecture and history while the others pored over *Oak Leaves* issues spread over 80 years, accessed with the help of Historical Society employee Emily Sterrett. "What is a girdle?"; "How did Oak Park become racially integrated?"; "What does 'His Girl Friday' mean?"; these were just a few of the questions fielded.

## Boy Scouts lend a hand for firehouse clean up

Community service is one of the pillars of the Boy Scouts program. This fall, members of Oak Park's Troop 16 gave their time and labor to the firehouse project, helping clean up the basement and grounds.



The Troop 16 volunteers who donated their time and hard work.



Yet another bucket of rubble goes into the dumpster!



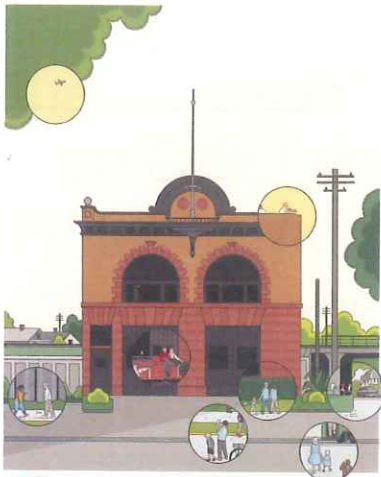
The basement was filled with trash and debris when Boy Scouts began work...



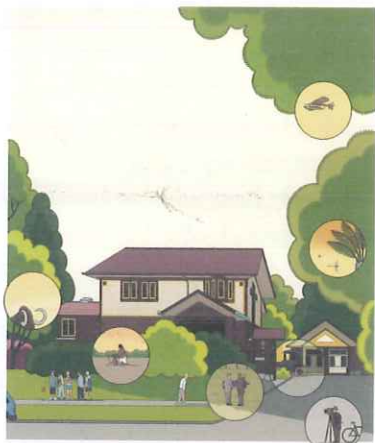
... and what a difference their efforts made! (All photos by Kandiah Kanagandram)



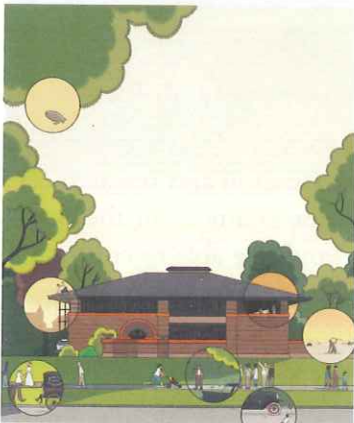
# New Chris Ware Poster of Firehouse Now Available



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
**AK PARK** **RIVERFOREST**



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF  
**AK PARK** and RIVERFOREST

Noted artist, graphic novelist, and Oak Park resident Chris Ware has created a new poster featuring the firehouse at Lake Street and Lombard Avenue to honor the Historical Society's new *Home for History*. It pictures the firehouse as it appeared in 1898, but set in contemporary Oak Park. Vignettes of life in the past and present are highlighted in circular insets.

A companion piece to Ware's earlier works, the River Forest poster featuring the Charles A. Purcell House and the Oak Park poster featuring the Arthur B. Heurtley House, all three works capture both past and present life in our villages and perfectly illustrate the role and mission of the Historical Society.

Each poster measures 19" x 26" and is priced at \$30 each; two for \$50; or all three for \$75. A limited edition of these posters signed by Chris Ware is also available at \$125 each, two for \$225, or all three for \$325.

We also have a limited number of signed, 24" x 33.6" Giclee prints of these posters on White Hahnemuhle 100% acid free paper. These special edition signed prints are \$300 each, two for \$550, or all three for \$800.

All prices include sales tax. Postage and handling starts at \$5.00 for deliveries within the United States. For larger orders or international shipments, we will contact you with costs before shipping your order.

You may place your order online through our website, [www.oprfhistory.org](http://www.oprfhistory.org). Simply

click on the Chris Ware Poster link on the main page. You can also order by phone at (708) 848-6755 or by writing to:

The Historical Society of Oak  
Park and River Forest  
P.O. Box 771  
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## History Matters

The Quarterly Newsletter  
of The Historical Society of  
Oak Park and River Forest

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Published by The Historical Society of  
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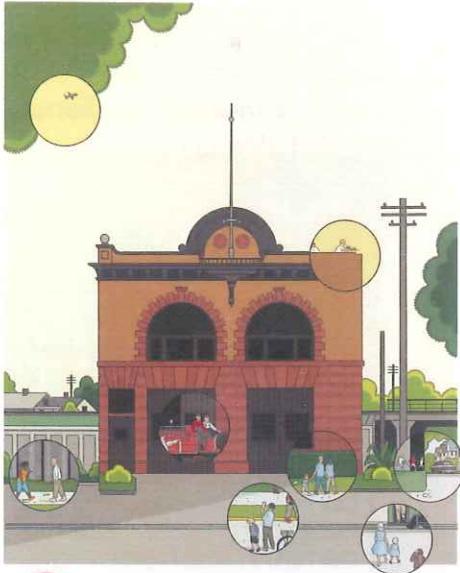
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From now until June 30, 2016, each dollar you contribute to help create your hometown History Museum and Research Center is worth two dollars. A generous challenge grant from the T. Kendall Hunt Family Foundation will match, dollar for dollar, every donation made in the first half of the year up to a total of \$100,000.

Read the full story starting on page 1

## Thank You to All Our Members and Friends

The Historical Society made its own history in 2015, thanks to your generosity and support. When we began the project to convert the 19<sup>th</sup> century firehouse at Lake and Lombard into a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum and research center for Oak Park and River Forest, we knew it was an ambitious plan. When two major grants from the State of Illinois were frozen because of the state's financial crisis, it was unclear whether we would be able to continue the project. But, thanks to the outpouring of support from you, we're pleased to announce that we will begin moving into our new facility in 2016! The complete renovation of the firehouse is an ongoing project; there is still much work to do. But we are planning to start opening the new museum and research center to the public in phases this year while the renovation work continues. And we are doing this with no tax dollars! It is becoming a reality entirely because of private donations from people like you. Thank you!

See a complete list of donors on pages 4 & 5