

## Outline History of the Winnetka Village Improvement Association

BY WILLIAM A. OTIS

The destruction of supposedly all the early official records of the Village Improvement Association, by the burning of the home of Mr. Willoughby G. Walling in 1919, necessitated the starting of entirely new books and files. In order, however, that there might be some record and information, even if informal in character, as to the activities of the Society up to the present, it was suggested that an outline history, which might be inserted in the new records, should be compiled covering the period of the destroyed records.

In attempting to do this, inquiries led to the unearthing of a few old and forgotten minutes of meetings at the very beginning of the Association's existence, which in some inexplicable way had never gotten into the regular archives of the Society, and so had escaped destruction. Valuable as these are, they, however, are only limited in number, and do not in any way touch upon full twenty intervening years of useful activity, so the notes already outlined, forming this sketch, were completed from the best information at hand, especially with the aid of the new light obtained from the resurrected records, in the thought that thus, the entire life of the Association would be covered.

### A Feeble Beginning

As a small Village in the sixties, the amount of possible improvement at Winnetka was so enormous that evidently the average citizen was agnostic and simply did nothing. There were, however, a few choice souls who had, if not much enthusiasm for so-called improvements, yet a certain kind of civic pride. They evidently foresaw future beauty. A public spirited man, Mr. Peck, early gave the Common to the Village, and the authorities had it carefully surrounded by a board fence—probably to protect it from the stray cow. The majority of the inhabitants, however, began with few and simple improvements. But they fortunately chose mostly the fundamentally important scheme of all, and the one which, as a matter of fact, has been the backbone of the present Association's policy—viz., tree planting. These men loved trees, although they probably would have been ashamed to put it in these words, but appreciating their future beauty, they certainly planted them generously.

The glory of east Elm street, that most beautiful of Winnetka's thoroughfares, is due almost entirely to the actual manual labor and real generosity of "Old Joe" Sherlock—one of those characters most picturesque, when viewed at a distance. He, indeed, owned considerable property then, at what is now Sheridan Road. To go out west of the track and grub up small Elms, and tote them on his back, to plant in front of his own possessions, was possibly not so very unusual, but to take the time and expend the energy to plant both sides of the whole street

from the Railroad east, is well worthy of honor and appreciation, especially when one considers and compares this attitude with that of about 150 lot owners now in Winnetka, who cannot find the time to do this even for their own parkway, requiring on an average only about three trees!

### Tree Planting Movement

There was a similar tree planting move at several other though rather isolated, points in the town, as well as upon one or two beautiful properties, almost estates, one might call them. Aside, however, from these thoroughfares, and the foresight of private owners, in the lines of planting, very little was done.

As seems inherent in the very air of the town, the people were then, as now, apparently quite well satisfied with themselves, and their surroundings. At that period of self-satisfaction and content with simple things, opposed blatant advertising, laying out of sub-divisions, paving of streets, laying of walks, installing water-works and sewers, as well as all other changes. In fact, everything along the so-called line of "improvements" that would destroy the country-like character of the town, and rapidly increase the land values by changing acres into small town lots with closely packed houses, and possibly uncongenial people, was severely frowned upon. There was a four board fence, as already spoken of, around the Village Common; there were, on several streets, plank walks, usually with numerous loose boards; and a little later occasional kerosene lamps served to make evident the night's blackness, while all roads were dusty or muddy, according to season, and all had deep ditches at the sides, that were not by any means to be ignored.

A slow growth in the Village eventually forced changes, but they came only very gradually. As far as known, such a thing as civic adornment, other than the planting of trees, was utterly unknown during a period of many years. If there was any such move it was due entirely to individual and isolated initiative.

### New Station—New Winnetka

During the early nineties the old Railway station, which was a small wooden affair on the west side of the track, and north of Elm Street, became so dilapidated and shabby that even Winnetkans, conservative as they were, began to complain, and a movement was started among a few of the residents to agitate for a new station. As a result a meeting of about a dozen interested citizens was held one evening at Mr. James A. Hunt's residence—to be exact, on April 24, 1895—and Mr. James H. Miller was elected the first President, Mr. Hunt modestly refusing to be a candidate. This was the birth of the Improvement Association, and largely due to the efforts of Mr. Hunt,

ably seconded by Mrs. Bertha Mandel de Windt, this scheme of a new Station was successfully carried through, and the present attractive brick building was erected by the Railroad, so that on Thursday evening, December 19, 1896, a Village glorification and dedication of the building, to which the notables of the Railway Company were also invited, was held in the new station under the auspices of the Improvement association.

Incidentally it should be noted that an Elm tree, as a memorial to Mr. Hunt, the founder of the association, was planted by the society about 1910, near the northwest corner of the Common, and is now a fine tree of considerable size, but still lacking the memorial tablet frequently suggested.

### Birth of Civic Pride

The success of the association in ob-

taining the station started a new feeling of civic pride, and although it was, of course, not permissible for outsiders to criticize Winnetka in the least, yet an era of home criticism started that showed there was ample work to be done in the Village to make it even approximately what it should be. All this with the result that much of this work was seriously taken in hand, and much accomplished.

(To be continued next week.)

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The decision was handed down in the case of Mrs. Jennie Baramore, owner of a rooming house in Chicago, who was found to have typhoid bacilli and placed under quarantine.

She brought habeas corpus proceedings in the supreme court against John Dill Robertson, then health commissioner of Chicago, and Dr. Bunderson, the assistant health commissioner, to effect her release on the ground that she did not have the typhoid bacilli and that the authorities had no right to quarantine her.

The supreme court, however, ordered that she be remanded to quarantine.



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