

Outline History of the Winnetka Village Improvement Association

Editor's Note: The accompanying article is the second and final installment of the history of the Winnetka Village Improvement association. The first installment appeared in last week's issue and dealt with the earlier history of the association.

The class of work to be fostered and recommended by the Association was frequently a subject of warm discussion, but almost invariably the unwritten but strongly entrenched sentiment against in any way touching upon Village politics, and always carefully avoiding all movements based upon mere real estate improvements and property booms, was the line decided upon. In other words, the policy of the Association was most emphatically the careful keeping up of the improvements already put in, rather than the putting of them in. Thus the Association took no part in the wrangles attendant upon installation of the water and sewer, or binging in of gas, or paving of various streets, but did use its influence to help keep the streets, when once improved, cleaned and repaired, with papers picked up, and parkways mowed.

In the early days, at every meeting—regular or special—the invariable question of garbage and refuse removal was discussed, until finally though reluctantly, under the pressure of public opinion thus created, the matter was taken in hand by the Village authorities, and the privately paid collector disappeared; the cleaning up of refuse, often thrown surreptitiously on vacant lots, was particularly a sore subject, much discussed and frequently remedied. Likewise a most satisfactory, scientific and sanitary scheme for dry waste disposal of the Village, was, under the leadership of Mr. M. L. Greeley, again and again endorsed by the Association, but was as often side tracked, although its advocates still feel that eventually something of the kind as well as regular garbage incineration will have to be inaugurated by North Shore communities, if they are to continue to make such high sounding claims for scientific and sanitary handling of life's problems as they now do.

The Association early and warmly espoused the scheme of depression of Railroad tracks, as opposed to elevated ones, through the Village; all as advocated in season and out of season by W. A. Otis. Meetings for discussion and promulgating of this idea were held, until again such strong public opinion was created that even the Railroad has now made concessions, and it looks as if Winnetka would lead the procession of North Shore towns with track depression. It will apparently be closely followed by Glencoe, which early caught the spirit from us, and eventually probably by all towns north to Lake Bluff.

There was, until very recently, forced upon the Association, the almost routine, but very essential work of trying to keep the Village "picked up." The town had but limited funds; a great many open and vacant lots; no Manager; and almost no police, so that a great deal of the necessary work, rightly in the province of the authorities and now finally taken care of by the Village, as it should be, then had to be done almost entirely by private initiative. At this period, the faithful and inimitable John Hickey, picking up papers, cleaning waste lots, and clearing parkways, figured largely before the public as the personification of the Association.

Aside then from these matters, which, though each seemingly small, were, as a whole so important to the general neat and orderly appearance of the Village, the Association nearly every season took in hand some one special matter, which tended to the beautification of the town. The planting of trees and shrubbery was always encouraged, even to helping furnish them to parties scarcely able to purchase themselves. Although we can scarcely claim the idea of planting war memorial trees along our country roads, yet, as it has turned out, the most effective planting ever done directly by the Association was quite along this line; viz.,—in the two rows of Lombardy poplars on west Willow Street on the Skokie. At first, very small and cheap little trees, quite the butt for ridicule, they have, however, now become really noticeable and very distinctive features in the landscapes, have started other similar movements along the same line, and give a faint foretaste of what our future country roads may be, if the war memorial idea is fully carried out.

In the year 1906, much energy and diplomacy was expended getting from the then Street Car magnate (Yerkes) of Chicago, the gift of a quite attractive drinking fountain for "man and beast." This, formed of one large stone, hollowed out and with an ornamental stone pentstock above, was located on Sheridan Road, at the intersection of Walnut and Spruce Streets. With the advent of the auto and disappearance of the horse, its usefulness, however, very materially declined, and adjacent property owners complained of the noise of the water—or possibly other drinkers, who stopped there during the night, so that when Sheridan Road was rebuilt it was unceremoniously thrown into the dump heap,

without any consultation with the Association. The resulting expense of pavement may be extremely practical, but can hardly be recommended for universal adoption wherever an improvement association wishes to ornament a square or triangle!

For several consecutive years—at a time when there had not been much general interest shown in the upkeep of premises about the houses, prizes were offered with good and seemingly permanent results for the planting of trees by children, and for the best yards, flower beds, etc., where no professional gardener was employed; several members offering quite substantial money compensation in these competitions. Likewise, the grounds about the Station were for some time kept in order the same as at Kenilworth, with attractive results.

On quite another track of our activities, waste paper and garbage boxes were installed at various points. These have since done such excellent service that several have been renewed, and now that the Council maintains them and collects the refuse, they have seemingly become a permanent, if not a particularly artistic adjunct of our Village.

Probably the most ambitious undertaking, however, ever entered into by the Association was the Anti-mosquito campaign, during the presidency of Mr. Mancel T. Clark, in which several other North Shore villages were induced to join. A very considerable amount of money was raised; the community stirred up on the subject and organized; also the support of the Village authorities enlisted, and an expert hired to advise. Oil was bought and men hired to apply it as and where directed. This work was carried on for a couple of years, and then gradually relaxed. Certainly mosquitoes largely disappeared, although scoffers insisted it was not due to any oil treatment or work of the Association. In the light of recent events, however, and as judged by recent complaints from other suburbs, especially those at the west of Chicago (where nothing of the sort was tried), this campaign was most successful, and should receive due acknowledgment.

Another quite distinct but decidedly important line of activity of the Association has come from the consolidation about 1914 of the Winnetka Art League into the Village Improvement, with its transformation into one of the standing Committees, and an arrangement by which it receives annually one-tenth of the net revenue of our Society.

The original organization of the Public School Art League, an idea which has since become important in numerous communities, especially in the west, had been with the primary idea of providing art objects, especially a higher grade of mural decoration, as well as movable pictures, for the Public Schools. This scope was later somewhat enlarged and extended, so that now there are pictures and statuary in not merely the Public Schools, but also in the Village Hall, and especially in the Public Library, with a total of insurable value of over \$4,000. This collection, we are told, forms probably the choicest group of its kind for a Village of this size, not merely in Illi-



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nois, but some claim even in the entire United States. However that may be, it certainly must have a material effect upon the educational standards of the community.

Alone, the keeping up of this collection is no small task, and its gradual increase is a considerable work for that special Committee, all forming an important element in the total of each year's work of the Association. Also, from time to time, other public, or semi-public artistic activities claim its assistance; as for example, the Soldiers' Memorial at the Horace Mann School, recently dedicated, which was the work of this Committee.

Another and distinct line of activity of this particular Committee was a move worked up to present, by the Park Board of a fir tree on the Village Common, as a Municipal Christmas tree. The buying and caring for the necessary lights, as well as arranging for the annual community singing at the tree, ringing of church bells, etc., which have become a rather distinctive feature in Winnetka town life, have all been under the auspices and direction of this branch of the Association. Also, along the line of "Village Beautiful," it should be noted that our members were foremost among the advocates, if they were not the actual initiators of the Winnetka Village plan, the President of that commission, Mr. Post, being one of the hardest workers and strongest supporters of our Association.

Thus the Association steadily, albeit rather quietly and unassumingly, has worked up to present, emphasizing especially the minor duties of good citizenship, although as shown by this outline of activities entered into, has not by any means been behind in advocating and working for the more important things desirable for the general good and beauty of the Village.

W. A. O.

SOCCER TILT

The North Shore Soccer team will meet the St. George eleven of Chicago at Foster field, Evanston, Sunday afternoon, March 12, in a regular C. and D. league match.

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