



The Bell Tower

The newsletter of the Oswegoland Heritage Association...

August 2022



Roger Matile, editor

The Oswegoland Heritage Association's Board of Directors

Judy Wheeler, President
Ted Clauser, Vice President
Tina Beaird, Secretary
Jean Kent, Treasurer
Mary Church
Linda Heap Dean
Ken Holmstrom
Brian LeClerc
Roger Matile

In this issue...

Museum collections continue to grow...Page 2

OHA officers elected in June...Page 2

Full schedule of summer and fall programming...Page 2

Museum acquires a new high-tech document scanner...Page 4

Looking for virtual Oswego history?

To visit the Little White School Museum virtually, go to their web site, www.littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org, click on "Visit" at the top right, then choose "Gallery to Go." To e-mail us, send your note to info@littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org. You can also find us on Facebook. And remember: OHA memberships make great gifts for friends and family. ♥

Fred Mitchell honored with OHA's 2022 Mary Cutter Bickford Award



Accepting this year's Mary Cutter Bickford Award for Excellence in Local History on behalf of the late Fred Mitchell from heritage association president Judy Wheeler were his wife, Renie Mitchell, as the couple's children and spouses looked on (L-R) Phil Curtis, Jennifer Curtis, Cathy Hubbard, and Frederick Morgan Mitchell V. Fred Mitchell served on the group's board of directors from 1981 until forced to resign due to health reasons in late 2020.

At the Oswegoland Heritage Association's May 26 Annual Meeting, the association's Board of Directors honored the late Fred Mitchell with the association's highest honor, the Mary Cutter Bickford Award for Excellence in Local History.

Mitchell resigned from the board in December 2020 due to ill health and passed away Jan. 8, 2021. He had served on the board of directors since he was elected to serve his first three-year term of office in May 1981.

The Bickford Award, named for lifelong Oswego resident and local historian, the late Mary Cutter Bickford, is presented to recognize truly outstanding efforts to preserve Oswego area history. Mary Bickford's collec-

tion of hundreds of historic Oswego and Kendall County related photographs, documents, and books and ledgers formed the basis for the Little White School Museum's extensive archival and artifact collections that currently stand at nearly 35,000 items.

Mitchell is the eighth winner of the heritage association's most prestigious award since it was first introduced in 2000, when the late John Lee Hafenrichter was honored. Other previous winners were Ted Clauser, Helen Zamata, Stephanie "Stevie" Todd, Glenn Young, Cathi Mundsinger, and Bob Stekl.

During his board tenure, Mitchell served in a variety of offices. Most recently he was acting as the OHA's fundraising chair. In the 1980s, he'd worked on doing some of the Little White School Museum's original collections catalog-

ing. He also assisted in helping restore the Little White School and he organized and conducted the OHA's popular "Antiques Road Show" fundraisers, among other projects.

Mitchell, a retired chemist, owned Ancient Argosy Antiques with his wife, Lurena "Renie" Mitchell for more than 45 years. They enjoyed living in the stately and historic Gorton-Bartholomew House on Ill. Route 25.

"Over the years, Fred was one of the heritage association's most faithful members," noted heritage association board president Judy Wheeler. "Fred was one of the members we could always count on when projects were ongoing." ♥

Museum collections continue to grow, preserving local history...

Thanks to friends and members of the Oswegoland Heritage Association, the Little White School Museum's collections are continuing to grow on a regular basis.

As of July 20, the museum's collections database contained 35,024 items. That's 2,810 more than were in the museum's database last year at this time.

Since our last newsletter, we received author donations of two books written and recently published by former Oswegoans, *Love Cares: Encouraging Words and Stories from an Alzheimer's Caregiver* by Charles Towne and *Nettles and Roses: A Story of Resilience and Redemption* by Dr. Judith Towne Hanks; four wall calendars, 1932-1935 from the Wheatland-Oswego Insurance Company, Michael Lambert; tin pan and ice cream scoop and blue enamel bowl, Judy Wheeler; OHS yearbooks and miscellaneous Oswego-related booklets, Carol Burke; Tamarack School student newspaper, Phyllis Prisla; a 1940 Tamarack School student newspaper, Phyllis King Prisla; a collection of 19 vintage Oswego postcards, Larry Hageman; a 1924 photo of Zentmyer Motor

Sales, Tom Adkins; an auto mechanic's creeper advertising Verne Killian's Auto Parts Store, Bob Stekl; entries in Oswego American Legion Auxiliary Unit 675's annual Americanism essay contest during the Covid years, Jane Jacobsen; a copy of the Oswego's Kitchen Secrets cookbook from 1951, Marion MacLean Dugan; and minutes of various Oswegoland Park District Board meetings and a copy of the Oswego Woman's Civic Club's *The Way Oswego Cooks* book, Oswego Public Library District. In addition, Glenn Young brought in a series of photos of the student body at the Red Brick School taken between 1909 and 1918 and photos of gay rights activist Velma Young Tate as a child that we scanned for our collections.

In addition, we purchased a 1946 print of a photo of author Marian Johnston Castle, who grew up in NaAuSay Township.

Without the help of our donor friends, it would be impossible to protect and preserve Oswegoland's rich history. Thanks to our most recent donors, that history is a little safer now than it was last year at this time. ♡

August Heritage Notes

Museum announces a busy late summer and autumn programming schedule...

A full slate of programming is scheduled at the Little White School Museum for the balance of the summer as well as this autumn. Programs on tap will be hosted and co-hosted by the Oswegoland Heritage Association (OHA) and Oswegoland Park District (OPD). To pre-register for programs (required for some, optional for others), call the OPD at 630-554-1010 or visit their web page at <https://www.oswegolandparkdistrict.org/>:

History Happy Hour – The Oswego Drag Raceway, Thursday, Aug. 11 and Thursday, Aug. 25, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., Oswego Brewing Company, 61 Main Street, Oswego. Pre-registration is required, \$15 for Oswegoland Park Dis-



trict residents and \$25 for non residents. On your mark...get set...GO! When the Oswego Drag Raceway opened for its first season in 1956, Oswego residents didn't know quite what to make of it. Within weeks, the strip drew thousands of visitors from all over the Midwest right through the heart of Oswego at a time when the village's total population was 1,200. Join the Little White School Museum staff at Oswego Brewing Co. at 61 Main Street (the lower level of the old Fire Barn) in historic downtown Oswego to chat about some of the craziest cars and most daring drivers to roar down the quarter-mile dragway. Space is limited and reservations are required by contacting the Oswegoland Park District (see contact information above).

Bell Tower sponsor:

**Your Business Name
Could Be Here!**

Want to see your business's name right here three times a year? Just purchase a Business/Institutional membership, and your name or the name of your business or organization will appear in this space in three consecutive issues. See page 4 for membership information.

New OHA officers elected...

At their regular meeting on Thursday, June 30, in accord with the organization's by-laws, the heritage association's board of directors elected officers for the coming year.

Reelected for another year were President Judy Wheeler, Vice-President Ted Clauser, and Treasurer Jean Woolley Kent.

Mary Church decided to step down as board secretary, although she will remain on the board. Elected to replace her was Tina Beaird. Beaird has served for several years as the OHA's Program Chair and has also been the presenter at several OHA programs. ♡

Admission for this event sponsored by the Oswegoland Park District, comes with one beer ticket to enjoy during the lecture.

Felt a Hedgehog, Thursday, Aug. 18, 6-7 p.m.. Pre-registration, \$25, is required. If you've ever wanted to make something by stabbing wool, have we got a program for you! Join Natasha Lehrer Lewis of Esther's Place at the Little White School Museum as participants learn how to create an adorable hedgehog with wool. Using needle-felting techniques, she will walk you through the entire process of transforming wool into a figurine. All supplies are included to create together in this in-person workshop sponsored by the Oswegoland Park District.

The Illinois Midland Railway, lecture and book signing, Saturday Sept.

Continues on Page 3

August Heritage Notes, contd...

10, 1 p.m. Registration at the door, \$5.

Did you know northern Illinois is home to "The World's Shortest Railroad"? Built in 1914, the Illinois Midland Railway connected two small towns barely two miles apart: New-ark and Millington. Originally planned to be a 120-mile railroad across northern Illinois, financial issues resulted in just 1.962 miles of rickety track being built. That didn't stop the local townspeople and farmers from using the railroad for decades, though. Join the Oswegoland Heritage Association and author Jeff Kehoe as he discusses this amazing story and learn what ultimately happened to the tiny rail line, billed as the world's shortest commercial railroad.

Oswego History Tour – Legacy Farms. Saturday Sept. 24, at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Pre-registration, \$7, is required.

We've seen the barns in town, so now it's time to venture out into the real farmland surrounding Oswego. Join members of the Oswegoland Heritage Association as they lead visits to three area family farms with deep roots in the Oswego community. Learn how generations have cultivated the land and made it their home. This is a bus tour so pre-registration is required as space is limited. Each tour begins and ends at the Little White School Museum and lasts about an hour and a half.

Oswego Heritage Tour – Germans.

Sunday, Sept. 25, 12 noon and 1:30 p.m. Pre-registration \$7, is required.

Do you "Sprechen sie Deutsch"? Did you know that German settlers developed a lot of Oswegoland? Hop on the bus for our first Heritage Tour and learn about some of our town's most prominent German settlers. We will discuss their careers, real estate empires, community service and their lasting imprint on our town. This bus/walking tour will begin at the Little White Museum and last about an hour. This tour is part of an Eagle Scout project for Alexander Harrison, Troop 889.

Oswego German Heritage Jubilee.

Sunday Sept. 25, 11:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.

FREE. Come learn and celebrate the Oswegoland community's rich German heritage at this free family fun event. Bring the family to explore German culture and all it means to Oswego's historical roots. Enjoy food, games, music and learn about Oktoberfest and its origins. The Little White School Museum proudly supports this event as part of an Eagle Scout project for Alexander Harrison, Troop 889.

Oswego Cemetery Walk. Thursday Oct. 6, 5 – 9 p.m. (tours start every 20 minutes). Pre-registration is required.

Experience local history come to life during our annual Oswego Cemetery Walk. Participants will be guided through the cemetery to visit with "ghosts" of early Oswego residents and pioneers. Pre-registration, \$5, is required as there are multiple start times. Participants should be able to walk for 45 minutes, wear comfortable shoes, and are encouraged to bring a flashlight. An adult must accompany all children. Registration is per person.

Try-It Illinois. Oct. 13, 7 PM. VIRTUAL PROGRAM. Pre-registration, \$5, is required.

Interested in discovering your family history but don't know where to start? "Try-It Illinois" is an annual Illinois State Library sponsored event where hundreds of genealogical databases are available free to try. It runs every fall, from Oct. 1 until Nov. 30, giving family historians unprecedented access to genealogy and history sites. Join Oswegoland Heritage Association board member Tina Beaird, an experienced genealogist and professional genealogical librarian, as she walks you through how you can use these online sites to trace your family tree at this virtual event.

School Reunion – Music Department,

Sunday Oct. 16, 11-3. FREE. We warmly welcome former students and faculty who participated in Oswego High School and Oswego East High School music programs like band and chorus to join us at the Little White School Museum to reconnect and reminisce as you explore our Back to School museum exhibit. Bring your instruments and your voice for this interactive, fun reunion!

School Reunion – Athletics. Saturday

Oct. 23, 11-3. FREE. Calling all former jocks! On Saturday Oct. 23, the Little White School Museum welcomes former students and faculty who participated in Oswego High School and Oswego East High School programs to join us as we reconnect and reminisce about your time in local sports. Bring your letter sweaters and jackets and any memorabilia you have to share with others. This will be a reunion you don't want to miss!

The Music of World War I. Nov. 12, 1 p.m. VIRTUAL. Pre-registration, \$5, is required. World War One has been called the most musical of all wars. This discussion compares/contrasts the British and American experiences of the important year of 1916 through contemporary sheet music-in the case of the U.S., the Punitive Raid on Mexico, reaction to Edith Cavell's shooting, opposition to America's involvement, and the Prepared-

ness Movement/Plattsburg Movement with Britain's Battle of the Somme, the appearance of the tank, and the British Shell Crisis.

FREE Exhibits coming!

Back to School. Aug. 27 through Oct.

24. Did you attend Oswego High School or Oswego East? Want to relive some of your glory days as you step back into the past while learning about the history of schools in our area? This special exhibit focuses on some of the schools that have been in Oswego, starting in 1837, going all the way to present-day. School is back in session this fall at the Little White School Museum! Admission is free.

Remembering our Veterans. Nov. 10 through Nov. 27.

Discover the history of Oswego's fighting men and women through an extensive display of rarely seen military artifacts, including items used during the Civil War up to present day military operations, as well as photos, war souvenirs, uniforms, documents, and more. Suitable for all ages. Admission is free.

The Little White School Museum, 72 Polk Street (Jackson at Polk), Oswego is open Thursdays and Fridays from 1 to 5:30 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.; and Mondays, 4 to 9 p.m. The museum is closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. For more information about OHA and park district programming at the museum, check the museum web site at littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org, the museum's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Little-White-School-Museum>. You can also call the museum at 630-554-2999 during regular hours or send an email to Info@littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org. 🍷

Join AmazonSmile and benefit Oswego history

Do you shop at Amazon.com? If so, use your purchases to help save Oswego history by benefiting the Oswegoland Heritage Association.

Just go to www.smile.amazon.com and sign in using your Amazon information. Type Oswegoland Heritage Association for the organization you want to support. That's it! Start shopping. Bookmark the AmazonSmile site so you can easily go to it the next time you buy something.

Joining AmazonSmile is a quick, easy way to help support the mission and goals of the OHA. 🍷

Please Take One
Free!

Oswegoland Heritage Association
Box 23
Oswego, Illinois 60543

Electronically saving priceless history...

In 2021, the Village of Oswego offered grants funded through a federal Covid-19 program aimed specifically at non-profit organizations. The Oswegoland Heritage Association applied for one of the grants and was awarded \$500.

The OHA Board, on the recommendation of museum director Roger Matile, decided to use the funds to buy a CZUR overhead document scanner with the aim of digitizing the Little White School Museum's priceless collection of historical documents. This spring, museum assistant Emily Dutton began the digitizing process by scanning Vernon Derry's *Thrift Corner Yarns*, newsletters from Aurora Savings and Loan published in the 1960s and 1970s containing a wealth of local history. The second project was digitizing *The Old Rural Schools of Kendall County*, a large comb-bound book by the late Marvin Lawyer that records the history of virtually all the one-room rural schools that once educated Kendall County students.

The scanning process creates searchable PDF documents that allow researchers easy access to the information digitized.

"We're planning to scan many more of our unique documents," said museum director Roger Matile, "to make them available for both the museum's staff and for researchers." ♥



Little White School Museum Assistant Emily Dutton works creating digital copies of the Thrift Corner Yarns collection with the museum's new CZUR document scanner.

✂ Clip and mail

Gift membership?

The Oswegoland Heritage Association has some exciting plans for the future. Why not take out a membership for a friend or relative who has an interest in Oswego's fascinating history and heritage? Benefits include museum store discounts, three newsletters a year, and more. Just fill out this form and mail.

Name: _____

Address 1: _____

Address 2: _____

City: _____ St. _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

I prefer to receive my newsletters electronically: _____

Membership type:

Friend, \$20 per person: _____

Sponsor, \$75 per person: _____

Business/Institution, \$150 _____

Lifetime Gold, \$1,000 _____

Make checks payable to the

Oswegoland Heritage Association and mail to:

Membership
Oswegoland Heritage Association
Box 23
Oswego, IL 60543

Check out our web site at www.littlewhiteschoolmuseum.org