



WESTERN SPRINGS

# Historical Society

Fall 2017 Newsletter



## ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER BIRTHDAY

*The much-loved Western Springs Water Tower is 125 years old this year! This historic building was built in 1892 when Western Springs was only seven years old and had only 500 residents. The parkland surrounding the water tower was donated by resident Charles C. Collins, with the caveat that a water tower be the only structure built on the property.*

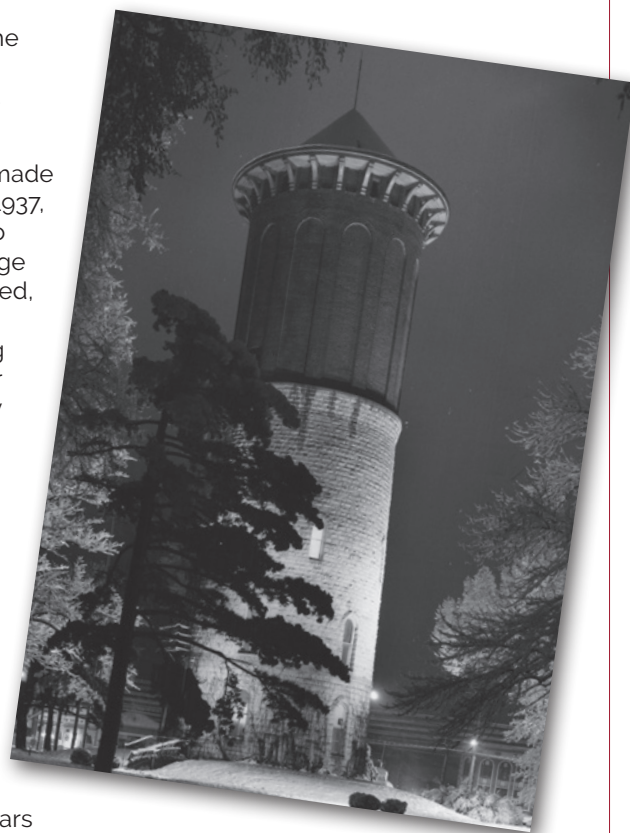
The Romanesque style tower was designed by local resident Benzette Williams. In addition to his architectural design talents, Williams was a renowned civil engineer who served as the City Engineer of Chicago. He also helped design the Chicago Sanitary Canal and the drainage and sewage systems in the Pullman neighborhood, as well as the sewer and water systems for St. Louis, MO, Seattle, WA, and La Crosse, WI. Two other local civil engineers, Edgar Williams (no relation) and Ethan Philbrick, also worked on the project.

Since Western Springs was a young village with few residents, the cost was a concern. The village sold special assessment bonds and managed to complete the entire project for just over \$79,000. The construction was completed by the firm of MacRitchie and Nichol Engineers and Contractors. They used local limestone for the base of the tower and red brick for the top. The entire tower was built without the use of any sort of crane; instead, the workers just built a walk-up scaffold higher and higher as construction proceeded. The stones were cut by hand right on the premises.

In addition to the original water tank, which held 133,000 gallons of water, the tower was also home to the police station, the village government offices, and even a court room. There was a consistent problem with humidity, however, due to the condensation on the water

tank, and the village workers in the building were constantly battling problems with mold, mildew, and general discomfort.

Many improvements have been made since the tower was first built. In 1937, the original tank was upgraded to hold 169,000 gallons. As the village grew and its water needs increased, an additional tower holding one million gallons was built at Spring Rock Park, and later, a third tower with a two million gallon capacity was built near Lyons Township High School South Campus. Despite serious overcrowding, the Water Tower continued to serve as the seat of village government until 1957 when the offices were moved into the new fire house on Wolf Road. Even that move proved inadequate, and ten years later the current village offices were built. It was around that time that the Western Springs Historical Society was formed and three years later, in 1970, the tower reopened as the Historic Water Tower Museum. The Water Tower was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981, and in 1992, following a lightning strike that severely damaged the roof, several renovations were made, including the installation of a sprinkler system and new energy-efficient windows.



The Water Tower is still considered the symbol of Western Springs. In addition to housing the Historical Society's flagship museum, it brings people together throughout the year for events like the Christmas Walk, May Fest, the Garden Club's Plant Sale, the Memorial Day Parade and Gathering on the Green.

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# A Time of Reflection

*Birthdays and New Year's are a time for looking at how far we've come, as well as where we might be going.*

This past weekend the WSHS had the opportunity to host families for some holiday cheer. As we have done for the last several years, we opened the Water Tower museum during WSBA's annual Winter Wonderland. It was truly heartwarming to see their fascination with decorations from years past. We heard many comments about how different things are now. I couldn't help but wonder how different things will be for our own children.

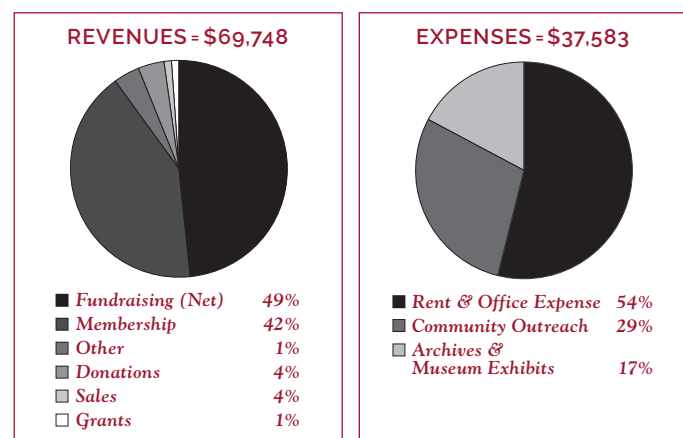
The beloved Western Springs Water Tower has stood as the symbol of our town for 125 years. It has had many uses over the years, from water storage to courtroom to museum. It has seen Western Springs grow from a small little town outside of Chicago, to a bustling suburb, very much tied to the city. While working with some of our dedicated volunteers at our WSHS archives, we often wonder what will be next for our town. I look forward to seeing if any of our observations come true.

We at the Western Springs Historical Society wish you and your family a very joyous and memory-filled Holiday season!

**Susan Wyckoff**  
President, WSHS

2016-2017

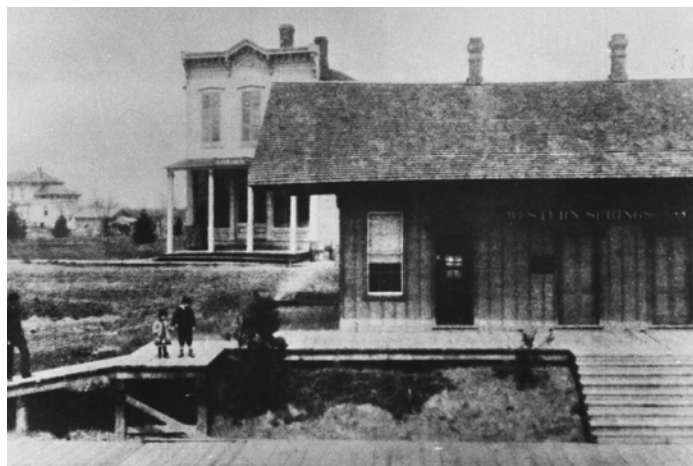
## Combined Financial Report



The Western Springs Historical Society is an independent all-volunteer, non-profit organization that does not receive any federal, state or local government funding.

As such, it relies on the generous support of concerned residents like you, combined with careful management of its financial resources, to ensure that the Society remains a viable organization, able to plan and implement programs and services for the community.

The pie charts shown above summarize the revenue and expenses for the WSHS. Since the biennial House Walk represents a major source of income, some of which is carried over to cover expenses in the following year, these charts include data for both 2016 and 2017 (the most recent two year period for which complete data are available).



## TRAIN STATION RENOVATIONS PAST AND PRESENT

*It's impossible to miss the construction currently underway along both sides of the railroad tracks. The project is scheduled to be completed by winter. The retaining walls, stairs, and platform are all being replaced. New planters and signage will help create a visually appealing gateway to the village.*

This is actually the fifth time that major construction has occurred at the Western Springs Train Station. The first train station was built sometime in the 1880's. The Chicago to Aurora line was built with a stop at Western Springs in 1864, and many assume there was a depot; however, the first historically known depot was constructed around 1890 at north side of the intersection of Wolf Road and Hillgrove Avenue. It was a simple structure made of wood and surrounded by a wooden platform. Another depot on the south side of the tracks was built a year later.

Oral history records that the original depot burned down in 1891 and was rebuilt at its current location between Lawn and Grand Avenues. That structure lasted until 1972, when it was replaced by a new, more modern station.

The 1972 station needed so much repair in 2005 that a new one was designed, and the architect modeled the design after the station from 1891, including the lookout tower that would have been used for spotting oncoming trains before gates were installed.



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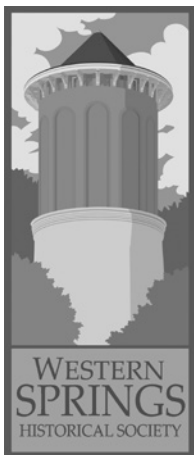
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### *Preservation Awards*



What is your favorite building or home in town? Every two years, the Historical Society accepts nominations for the Preservation Award – a way to acknowledge those who have lovingly preserved or restored their older home, added a compatible addition, or built a new home that is in character with the older homes in the village. Only the building or home exterior is considered when determining awards.

Applications will be available at the Historical Society beginning on February 1, 2018, and nominations must be submitted by March 1, 2018. Judging occurs during the month of April, and awards will be announced at MayFest. Winners receive a plaque to display on the front of their home or business.

The Preservation Awards began in 1996. Judges use criteria established by the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

### *We Need You!*

The Western Springs Historical Society is always looking for volunteers. Our immediate needs are for two people to co-chair the **Mayfest** for this coming spring, and two people to co-chair the 2019 **House Walk**.

Whether you like history, architecture, or just getting to know your neighbors, helping out at the historical society is a great way to contribute your valuable talents to the village while making new friends and acquaintances. Check out our website at [www.westernspringshistory.org](http://www.westernspringshistory.org) and let us know how you can help!

### *Speaking of the House Walk...*

The most recent House Walk was a tremendous success! 544 tickets were sold, raising over \$35,000 for the Historical Society. A big thanks goes out to co-chairs Laurel Schumm and Susan Wyckoff and to the generous homeowners, advertisers, and countless volunteers. A great time was had by all!