



WESTERN SPRINGS

Historical Society

Fall/Winter 2022



THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF

CHARLES VICKERY

Charles Vickery (1913-1998) was a famous seascape artist whose works have been featured in galleries across the world. He is most well-known within his field for his vivid depictions of waterscapes and ships, taking inspiration from Lake Michigan and the Atlantic Ocean.

BY CLARISSE BECKER

A longtime resident of Western Springs, Vickery began his career as an artist at 24 after studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the American Academy of Art. However, his success in the art world was not immediate, having to support his income through various jobs such as mail clerking, woodworking, silk screen operator, and working as a surveyor's assistant. However, in April 1954, Vickery had his work featured alongside fellow Illinois marine artist Gaspare Ruffolo at an art exhibition held by the Chicago Galleries Association on Michigan Avenue and saw a major boost in popularity following a glowing review from Chicago Tribune art critic Eleanor Jewett. Vickery went on to win several prizes at international marine art shows as well as the Palette and Chisel Diamond Medal from the Palette and Chisel Academy of Fine Arts in Chicago. His works have been featured in many prominent locations such as the Norwegian Embassy in Washington D.C. and the Chicago Union League Club.

Despite his works now reaching a global audience, Vickery still found the time to lend his talents to local Chicago suburbs. He held oil painting workshops at the Hinsdale Cultural Arts Center, donated some of his works to local fundraising events, and even illustrated a set of three historic maritime scenes for the special Christmas issue covers of the now defunct Western Springs Sun newspaper, causing them to quickly sell out. Several of his works were featured in local art galleries such as the Clipper Ship Gallery and Brigantine Gallery in La Grange, both unfortunately permanently closing their doors in 2013 and 2019 respectively. To many of his fellow Western Springs residents, Vickery was seen as an eccentric but well-meaning hometown hero who gave back to his community in spades. Charles Vickery died of heart failure on September 22, 1998, at La Grange Memorial Hospital.

Vickery stated in interviews that the main artistic inspiration came from fellow marine artists Winslow Homer, Montague Dawson, and Frederick Waugh. He admired how they all worked to move away from what Vickery described as the "brown gravy school" of 19th century marine art, which he believed lacked proper color, movement, and depth. Despite living most of his life in landlocked Western Springs, Vickery made great efforts to "go to the source" and study his subjects in person. He made frequent visits to the Chicago lakefront, as well as trips to the Indiana Dunes and the East Coast, to properly capture and illustrate nature and the churning waves. He even went so far as to board a freighter ship to Turkey in his early 50s to observe the more wild and stormy aspects of the ocean. Vickery preferred this up-close-and-personal method over simply using photographs as he believed photos did not accurately capture how the human eye views light and how it is reflected by the waves. Vickery's style focuses on capturing the various elements of nature—such as the sun, wind, light, and water—and illustrates how they all work together to recreate the essence of the sea in all its forms.



Charles Vickery paints in his LaGrange studio in 1979. Stop by the Tower Museum to see our collection of original oil paintings by Vickery, including a recent large painting donated by BMO Harris that hung in the building for decades.

A LETTER FROM THE BOARD

Sharing Our Past for the Future

Our town's history is not just about our collections of artifacts and photos—but more about the stories behind them. This holiday season, we encourage everyone to share your Western Springs stories with neighbors, friends and family. Your children will love to learn why you chose to move to Western Springs; a friend might like to know why you chose your house; or an elderly neighbor may tell you what it was like to grow up here, etc. We are all living tomorrow's history. You and your family are part of Western Springs, so your stories are part of our Village's history. Consider sharing your stories with us so they can be archived for years to come by emailing them to info@westernspringshistory.org.

As 2022 comes to an end, we would like to thank our members for your continued financial support. As a self-funded non-profit organization, that operates completely by membership fees, donations and fundraising events, we cannot exist without your donations. Like many nonprofits, our fundraising opportunities have been limited these last two years but our expenses continued to increase (see our financial report on page 5). If you are not a member, we ask you to consider joining our organization or making monetary contributions towards funding our programs.



On behalf of your friends and neighbors at the WSHS, we wish you a wonderful holiday season.

The Board of the Western Springs Historical Society

Mark Tobin, Mary Rintz, Jason Kilarski, Lori Mitchell, Pete Caris, Chris Cone, Brigid Garrity, Jim Havlat, Karla Hudson, Susan Morrow, Mike Scodro, Patsy Shutack, Leslie Walters

Volunteer of the Year



The 2022 Volunteer of the Year Award is being presented to Ken Nash. This past year, Ken was an integral part of our organization because of his project

management efforts at the Ekdahl House Museum. Over the past twelve months, the Ekdahl House Museum required a new sump pump, exterior painting and repairs to the roof. Ken diligently perused multiple bids, coordinated all of the contractors and oversaw the work.

Ken and his son Jack can also be found shoveling the sidewalks in front of Ekdahl House Museum after a big snow. Ken is a regular member of the Archive staff and always steps up to volunteer at our events or with anything else we need. Thank you Ken for all you do!

We Love Our Docents!

It takes a lot of support to keep the doors open at the Tower Museum. We would like to take a moment to recognize and thank these outstanding 2022 Tower Museum Volunteers:

Susan Cardamone
Emily Clott
Bonnie Dietz
Helen Geoghegan
Shaun Gorman
Zach Mayer
Lynn Odgers
Sue Stepaniak
Jeff Wingert

If you'd like to become a docent for the WSHS Tower Museum, please contact us at info@westernspringshistory.org.

The museum is open Saturdays from 10 am – 12 pm, so the time commitment is minimal, yet the rewards are many. Training is provided. It's easy, it's fun and you will be helping this worthwhile organization to thrive.

Plein Air Recap

Thanks to all the artists who gathered on the Tower Green for the second annual WSHS Paint the Tower Plein Air Event on September 25!

Artists could sign up in advance online or purchase art kits "at the door" if they didn't want to bring their own supplies. The event was a great success and we thank everyone for supporting us as all proceeds went to the WSHS.

We also thank the LaGrange Art League for generously donating over 20 easels for the artists' use and local resident Greg Cone for providing musical entertainment.



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WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we rely 100% on the generosity of our members. Your financial support through membership dues, donations, fundraising events and memorial bequests helps us to continue our mission of preserving and presenting Western Springs' history. Thank you for supporting the Western Springs Historical Society!

THE WSHS CAROL YOUNG SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

BY KEITH CHAPMAN

In the early 1990s, several WSHS volunteers created a map and self-guided walking tour to help residents explore some of the village's historic homes. In recent years, however, the tour had become outdated. Some of the houses were no longer standing, while others had been extensively renovated.

Volunteer Ella Neary, a 2022 LTHS graduate, sought to update the tour, make it more accessible and relevant for today's residents. Neary felt like it was an ideal project to undertake during the Covid-19 lockdown.

"Since I started volunteering during the pandemic, I worked mostly online," said Neary. "It still felt like I was getting important and interesting things done, even if it had to be done from my living room."

Neary revamped the tour by updating the content, researching which houses were still present, and bringing the tour online in a digital format. Due to her work on this project and her interest in Western Springs history, Neary was named as the inaugural recipient of the WSHS scholarship award—in honor of past Trustee Carol Young.

The award was presented to Neary at the LTHS Senior Award night in May 2022. Neary, who is a freshman at Boston College this fall, is undecided on her major. She's taking courses in engineering, psychology, history and math. She says volunteering for WSHS



was one of her highlights from her high school years and is grateful for the scholarship—and for what she learned from her volunteer work.

"The Western Springs Historical Society gave me a great way to give back to my hometown and to learn new skills in the process," said Neary.

LTHS will open submissions for the 2023 scholarship early next year so make sure to check out the LTHS Scholarship Tracker (accessible to LT students only).

WSHS Trustees present the scholarship certificate to Ella Neary at the Tower Museum. Pictured L to R: Susan Morrow, Leslie Walters, Nellie Neary, Ella Neary, Mark Tobin, Ryan Neary and Lori Mitchell.

About Carol Young

Carol Young was an educator at heart. She taught English as a second language, kindergarten, and helped develop programs and curriculum for the Morton Arboretum, the Field Museum, and the Chicago Children's Museum. As a trustee at the Western Springs Historical Society, she developed the organization's third floor children's museum program.

Young moved to the Western Springs area from Ohio, where she had attended high school in Cleveland and earned education and English degrees from The Ohio State University. When she



retired, she poured her creative energies into the Western Springs Historical Society.

The WSHS Carol Young Scholarship is a way to honor Young's memory (Young died in 2018). The scholarship carries on Young's passion for education: each year, it will be awarded to a student from the Village of Western Springs who has demonstrated an interest in history, especially the history of Western Springs, through volunteer activities and/or academic coursework.

VINTAGE CHRISTMAS WISHES

By John Devona: The following are actual, unedited letters from 1928 that were written to Santa Claus by the third graders at Grand Avenue School. As the letters attest, the children were convinced that there was a Santa Claus. The only question in their minds was what to ask for.

"Dear S. Claus, North Pole. It is a whole year since I have written to you. It is time to let you know WHAT I want, as Christmas is near. (1) doll house, (2) wall black board, (3) auto, (4) roller skates, and (5) a desk. *Virginia, Western Springs*"

"Dear Santa Claus, I have been very good in school and I am good at home. Please send me a freight outfit for my electric train. Please send me \$10 to give to others. Will you send me a dog? I would like a pair of ice-skates and a new overcoat. *Dean*"

"Dear Santa, Please bring me a set of dishes. I would like a Bye Lo doll and a big doll buggy. I want a big two-wheel bike. *From your friend, Loretta.*"

"Dear Santa, I thought I would write you a letter. How are your reindeers. Are you very busy at your toy shop? I want a pool table and a be-be gun for Christmas. I am going to see you Saturday evening. My father is going to take me in the car. *Your friend, Kenneth*"

"Dear Santa: I thought I would write and tell you what I wanted. So I'll tell you. I want a saxophone and please may I have a lot of lumber and some tools. *With love, Whitman*"

"Dear Santa: I would like some bloks and train and send mother and daddy a auto. *Jean*"

"Dear Santa Claus: I thought I would write a letter to you and ask you if you were coming to Western Springs. If you are, will you leave me a walk and talking doll? Will you please fill my stocking? I would like to have a nice big sled and my brother Jack wants a nice big sled, too. *From Shirley*"

"Dear Santa Claus: I thought I would write you a letter. Will you please give me a sled. There is a hill in front of our house, that is why I want a sled. I think I want one more thing, and that is a pair of ice skates, and that is all I think I will want. I live on Wolf road, Western Springs. I am in the third grade. *From, Lawrence.*"

"Dear Santa: I thought I would write you a letter. I am in third grade. I would like a doll with brown hair and a pink silk dress and a pink silk bonnet. Her name is going to be Rose Bud. I am going to get a wardrobe trunk with lots of clothes in it and I want a typewriter. *Your friend, Eleanor*"

"Dear Santa: I thought I had better write you a letter because it is so near Christmas so I am writing you now. For Christmas I would like to have a baby doll and a doll bed. Remember that I live in Western Springs. I still remember you forever and ever. My mother got a little sweater for my cousin from you. Oh yes, I would like to have a set of Oz books. *With Love, Mary*"



"Dear Santa Claus: I would like to have a doll. Also, a small electric iron so I can help my mother. Please bring to the children who have not many things. *From, Jean Buckman*"

"Dear Santa Claus, I have been a very good boy. I have helped my mother and my father. I want a printing set. *With Love to Santa Claus, from Jack P.*"

"Dear Santa Claus, I thought it would be about time to write you a letter. I know you have lots of children to visit this year. Please may I have a dresser and a kitchen cabinet? I guess that is all I want this year. A Merry Christmas to you. *Joshing*"

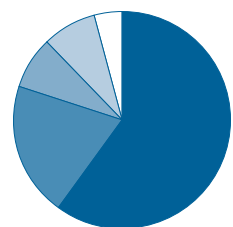
"Dear Santa Claus: I am glad you are back in town at the stores. I want a doll buggy and a two wheeler bike if you can bring them to me. My name is Dorothy Ann Slack. Will you come to our house on Christmas Eve? I am in school now. Good bye. *Love, Dorothy.*"

"Dear Santa Claus, I hope you come down our chimney Christmas eve for I want these things, a fox play with gun, a new sled and electric train., ice skates and roller skates. *Love, John A.*"

2020-2021

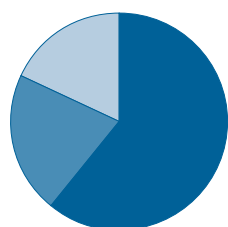
Combined Financial Report

REVENUES = \$39,932



■ Membership	60%
■ Sales	20%
■ Donations	8%
■ Other	8%
□ Fundraising (Net)	4%

EXPENSES = \$40,273

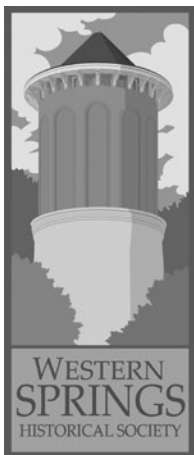


■ Rent & Office Expense	61%
■ Archives & Museum Exhibits	21%
■ Community Outreach	18%

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 at left summarize the revenue and expenses for the WSHS which includes data for both 2020 and 2021 (the most recent two year period for which complete data are available). Due to the cancellation of the biennial House Walk, our revenues remain low.



**WESTERN SPRINGS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**NEWSLETTER
GRAPHICS**

Mary Rintz

WESTERN SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Our Storied Past

Western Springs resident, and past WSHS Trustee, John Devona is the author of *Western Springs Short Stories*, his collection of anecdotal moments on the history of our beloved Village. The book's 514 pages feature 220 short stories and many photos. It is a must-read for any resident past or present, young or old, and makes a great holiday gift!

Books can be purchased for \$30 at the Tower Museum on Saturdays, 10am to noon or at the following Western Springs stores: Clever Girl, the Fruit Store, The Uptown Shop and Village True Value. You can also download the order form online at westernspringshistory.org/get-involved/shop. All book profits support the Western Springs Historical Society!

Make a Difference

As we approach the end of 2022, please consider supporting the Western Springs Historical Society. Become a member, renew your membership, gift a membership and/or make a tax-deductible donation. Payments can be made by sending a check in the enclosed envelope or via PayPal on our website. Visit westernspringshistory.org and click the "Donate" button. Thank you!

