



WESTERN SPRINGS

# Historical Society

Spring 2024 Newsletter



## Celebrating the Return of the WSHS HOUSE WALK

*The Western Springs Historical Society has been hosting House Walks in town since 1986. Home styles and décor may have changed over the years, but the spirit of the event remains the same, and continues to be the main fundraiser that supports the WSHS. This year, seven families have graciously agreed to open their homes to the public on Sunday, May 19, from 11:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.*

Each of this year's seven homes are in the Old Town North neighborhood allowing guests to walk from home to home, like a true house walk. To enhance the walk, we have included two complimentary "hop on/hop off" trolleys. The trolleys will depart from the Water Tower and First Congregational Church and make a loop through Old Town North with stops near each of the tour's homes. The trolleys have been graciously provided by @properties and Proper Rate.

Event co-chairs Julie Kenmitz and Carolyn Tobin have been guiding their team of designers, florists and volunteers for over a year to organize what is sure to be a special day. The 2024 House Walk celebrates Western Springs' rich history and features an exceptional collection of homes from historic to contemporary, in a variety of sizes. As they view the homes themselves, our guests will have a chance to gather design and architectural inspiration via a program book and docent commentary. New to this year's walk, we are allowing our seven homeowners to decide how much of their homes they would like to share with guests. Therefore, some homes will show first levels only, while others will share multiple levels.

On the day of the event, visitors will exchange their tickets for program books which allow access to each home. Online tickets must be exchanged for a program book at the Tower Green, while paper tickets can be exchanged for a program book at any of the homes or the Tower Green. The First Congregational Church will serve as this year's hospitality oasis with water and restrooms available for House Walk participants, as well as a tour of the Church.

Attending the House Walk is a great way to give back to the community while enjoying a day of design inspiration—and it's a lot of fun. We hope you join us on Sunday, May 19 for this worthwhile event! For more information, please visit us online at [westernspringshistory.org](http://westernspringshistory.org).



*House Walk sketches by local artist and Trustee, Mark Tobin*

# It Takes a Village...

On behalf of the Western Springs Historical Society, I would like to encourage everyone to attend our 2024 House Walk on May 19. It's been five years since the last House Walk, so we're very excited to renew the tradition. This event wouldn't be possible without a team, starting with the generous homeowners willing to open their homes to the public. Thank you from all of us here at WSHS—we are very grateful!

Thanks to the following sponsors: @properties/Christie's International Real Estate; Amy Avakian-Berkshire Hathaway, Amy Rooney Interiors, Baird & Warner LaGrange, Clever Girl, Creber Construction, Inc., FNBC Bank & Trust Western Springs, Laura Glosniak-@properties, Matt Gross-State Farm, Hillgrove Avenue Magazine, Hinsdale Nurseries, Trish Orndorff-@properties, Pompeian, Inc., Redwood Construction Group, LLC, Riordan Signature Homes/Signature Cabinetry, Carol Walsh Rosentreter Group-RE/MAX Properties, Tartan Builders, Van Beek Family

Dental and Washburn Homes. And finally, thank you to our co-chairs Julie and Carolyn, and to all of the florists, tablescap designers and volunteers—we could not do it without you!

We would also like to congratulate John C. Devona, whom the Board recently elected Trustee Emeritus of the Historical Society. John, whom many will know as the author of *Western Springs Short Stories*, has been, and continues to be, the Society's most tireless supporter. He has devoted years to compiling and narrating our village history, and he is more than deserving of this honor.

We look forward to seeing everyone on May 19 to help us celebrate our biggest fundraiser!

*Michael Scodro*

President, WSHS

## CICADAS MAKING HISTORY BY CLARISSE BECKER

*2024 has been dubbed by some to be the "Year of the Cicada" for Illinois. But what exactly does that mean? While there are indeed cicadas that emerge every year around summertime, the reason lies in the species of cicada that will be emerging in 2024.*



Periodical cicadas, Magicicada, are separated into two main types: 13-year and 17-year cicadas. Named as such for their synchronized development cycles and emergence periods, these cicadas crawl out of their holes every 13 and 17 years. And the year 2024 just so happens to be one of the incredibly rare years that these two groups' emergence periods occur simultaneously. The last time this has happened was 221 years ago—all the way back in 1803. To put that into perspective, Illinois was not even an official U.S. state the last time these two groups emerged together.

Brood, and the 17-year Brood XIII, the Northern Illinois Brood. Though for those who are dreading the cicadas' eventual return, it should be noted that while they will emerge around the same time, they will appear in different parts of the state. As the name implies, the Northern Illinois brood will appear primarily in the north while the Great Southern brood will appear in most of southern Illinois. However, there will be a very small, unfortunate section of central Illinois that may have to deal with both broods at once.

trouble fully digesting the exoskeletons. Otherwise, cicadas arguably help us more than they hinder. They aerate soil, act as a great fertilizer for our trees and plants, and are a nice snack for birds and other predators.

Periodical cicadas are further divided into broods based on the year and geographic location where they emerge. There are several different broods that appear in Illinois but the two major groups set to emerge in 2024 are the 13-year Brood XIX, also known as the Great Southern

Though they may be considered nuisances by some, cicadas are ultimately harmless. They lack the ability to bite or sting and do not harm the plant life they perch on during their relatively short time above ground. However, newly planted trees and plants could potentially be crushed if too many cicadas decide to land on them. They are also not good for dogs to eat in large amounts, though they will no doubt try, as dogs may have

For residents of Western Springs, opinions on cicadas over the years have been mixed to say the least. While some are indifferent or even outright despise the insect, some enjoy the time shared with cicadas. Residents in the past have even made a hobby of hunting for the real but incredibly rare blue eyed cicadas. In 1990, John Lister recorded different people's impressions of the cicadas' raucous cries as a fun way to prepare his children for their 2007 re-emergence. However you may feel about them, cicadas are returning this year from late April to early June so enjoy the silence while you still can.



# THE WESTERN SPRINGS ZOO

1206 WALNUT STREET AND THE STORY OF ITS MENAGERIE

If you grew up in the Old Town neighborhood of Western Springs, there is a good chance you learned the house at 4324 Central Avenue (aka the house in the alley) was once a zoo. Actually, the zoo was in the backyard of the home at 1206 Walnut Street—which is 4324 Central Avenue today. Coincidentally, both homes will be part of the Western Springs House Walk Sunday, May 19.

The story of 1206 Walnut Street dates to 1892, when the house was built by Mr. William Bailey Wickersham. Wickersham, a prominent leader for the public library and school systems in Chicago, moved from the city to Western Springs in the centennial year of 1876. Wickersham purchased a large plot of land on the corner of Walnut and Central which he originally intended to be a self-sustaining community with its own utilities including an "electric light plant and gas plant." Beyond having his own well, this community never materialized because Wickersham sold the home and land to Samuel Winternitz, a Chicago auctioneer.

Mr. Winternitz and his family had a love for animals, so they established the first small zoo in the area. They built a large fish pond, an animal shelter, a monkey cage and a rookery. While their

collection did not include any wild or endangered animals, it became a fascinating attraction for the neighborhood children. Ducks, swans, fish, monkeys, deer and a pony were all part of the backyard zoo.

Today, the property at 4324 Central Avenue is where the Winternitz family built a garage that doubled as a barn for the animals. On the Central Avenue side of the house was a large sculptural fish aquarium and the backyard included a tennis court. The home was quite elaborate for the times.

Robert Cline purchased the home in the 1920s after the passing of Samuel Winternitz. The Niemann Family owned 1206 Walnut Street in the 1930s and established the Niemann School of Music. Mary Niemann taught piano, while other instructors taught flute and clarinet. The generously sized third floor was a ballroom used for dance lessons.

The garage/barn in the alley became 4324 Central Avenue when it was converted to a single-family residence in the 1940s. Today's home was built in 2001 and it was significantly remodeled in 2021. The interiors of both 1206 Walnut Street and 4324 Central Avenue are two of seven uniquely Western Springs homes that can be viewed in person at the 2024 Western Springs House Walk on Sunday, May 19.

Photos at left (c.1914): A guest poses with the fish aquarium (top); Samuel Winternitz feeds one of the deer.



Daughter Pearl Winternitz feeds the monkeys (c.1914).

## Our Storied Past

Did you know that Western Springs once had its own zoo and a "Baby of the Month" Club? Or that we've had not one, but three planes crash in our quaint town? You can learn all about these fun facts and more in Western Springs Historical Society's book, "Western Springs Short Stories" by John Devona.

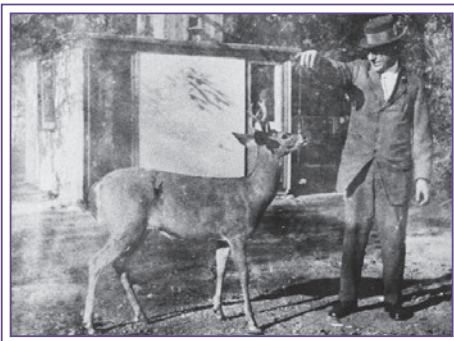
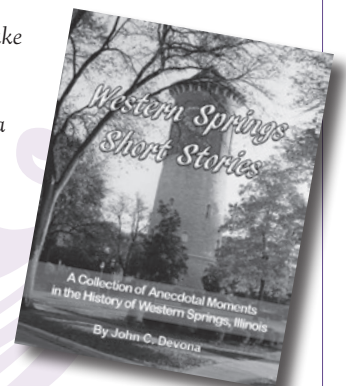
John, a resident of Western Springs since 1972, has been a volunteer for the WSHS since 2011. He's served as a Trustee, the Archives Manager, Newsletter Editor and museum docent, among other roles. Because of his ongoing involvement, the WSHS Board voted to elect him our first Trustee Emeritus—a well-deserved title for someone who has contributed so much to our Village and its history.

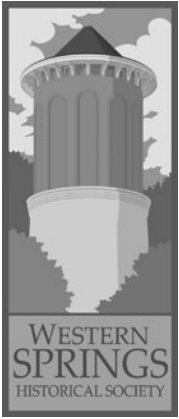
Back in the day, John also wrote a weekly story for the WSHS website called "Blast from the Past". At the suggestion from some fellow residents, John decided to collect and update the stories and put them into one book for residents to enjoy.

The book's 514 pages feature 220 short stories and many photos. While not chronological, this collection describes our Village's early years, right up to the present. It is written in an entertaining, easy-to-read style, with each story requiring only a few minutes to enjoy. If you appreciate history or just want to learn more about our wonderful Village, this is the book for you!

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 Uptown Shop and Village True Value. All book profits support the Western Springs Historical Society!

This would make a great gift for Mother's Day, graduation or a new neighbor!





**WESTERN SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 139  
Western Springs  
708-246-9230  
WesternSpringsHistory.org

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are housed in the historic Water Tower

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**SUNDAY, MAY 19 | 11:30AM – 4:30PM**

**JOIN US FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE DAY!**

**Tickets:** \$35 in advance; \$45 day of event

**Tickets can be purchased with cash or check at:**  
Clever Girl  
Thomas Ford Library  
Tower Museum (Saturdays, 10am to noon)

Tickets can be purchased online at:  
westernspringshistory.org

Houses are not wheelchair accessible.  
Guests must be at least 10 years old.

*Benefiting*  
**THE WESTERN SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY**