



Main Street, Downers Grove, c. 1900. Looking north up Main Street about a half block south of Curtiss Street.
Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society and © 2017 Downers Grove Museum

Greetings to you from the Downers Grove Historical Society. Glad to see that Spring in full swing, allowing us to get out for walks and into our yards again -- always appreciating all the beauty Mother Nature is providing us. Perhaps this Spring will also be the inspiration to donate your time to a worthwhile cause.

As with most non-profit efforts, in addition to dues and donations, we are also looking for volunteers for the membership committee to help build a bigger and more interesting organization. We are looking to connect with several volunteers in the Downers Grove area with the following interests and skills:

- A. One to two volunteers - skills: writing, long-form writing, historical storytelling
- B. One to three volunteers - skills: event planning, fundraising

Hopefully you are interested, or perhaps you can recommend a friend. Please email us at info@downersgrovehistory.org with your information and area of interest.

2017 Membership Update

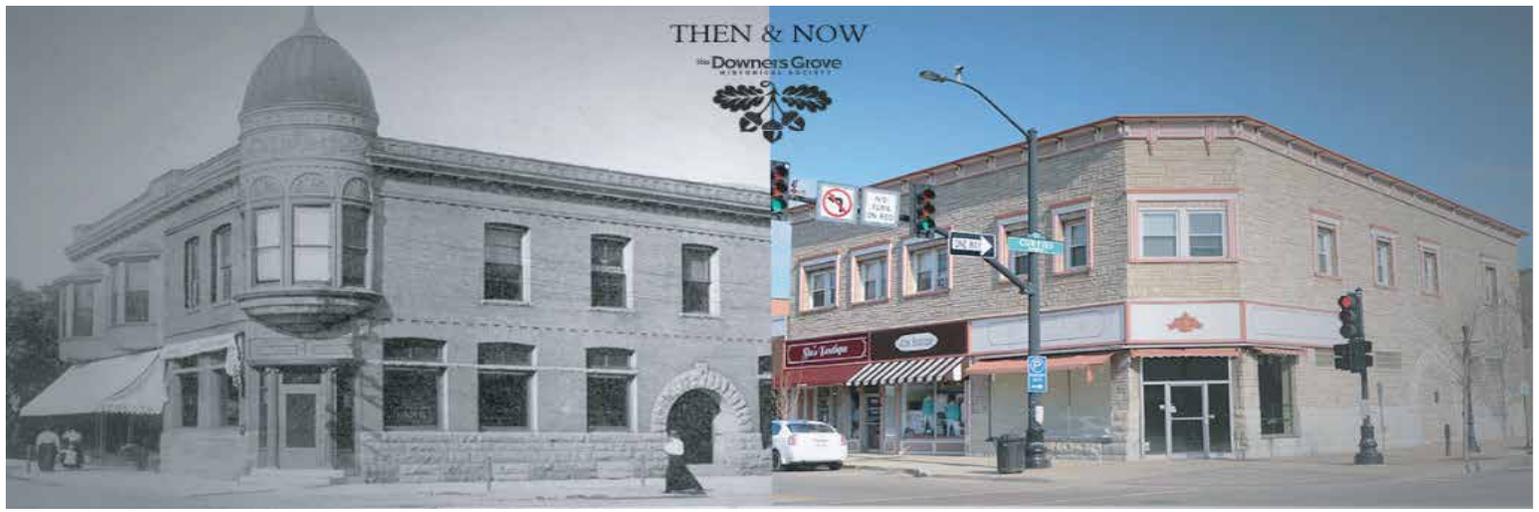
As you may be aware, our dues notices were sent out in February. While we have received dues from many renewing members, we are still looking to grow our membership community. If you have already donated, but would like to continue to contribute, there is a donation link below the membership links.

Dues levels are as follows:

- * Individual - \$15
- * Family - \$20
- * Senior/Student - \$10
- * Business - \$25
- * Life Individual - \$100
- * Life Couple - \$200

The Historical Society is grateful for the support of our programs which help keep Downers Grove history alive. If you would like to contribute, please feel free to support us by clicking below.

DONATE at
www.downersgrovehistory.org/donate.html



The northwest corner of Main Street at Curtiss Street. Downtown Downers Grove. (c.1920 / c. 2017)
Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society and © 2017 Downers Grove Museum

Then & Now: Curtiss and Main.

What a difference one hundred plus years can make. The iconic Farmers and Merchants Bank building, which still stands at the northeast corner of Curtiss and Main streets has undergone significant architectural changes over the past century.

First, a bit of this building's history. In approximately 1891, Charles Curtiss, Dr. W. A. Tope and W. H. Edwards were able to organize a capital stock investment of \$25,000 to fund and build this splendid landmark building as headquarters for one of DuPage County's only banks. In its first footprint, built around that same time by Mr. Herring, this multi-story brick and stone structure was reminiscent of many German Renaissance structures being built in Europe.

By 1895 this bustling building housed the Farmers and Merchants bank, the Downers Grove post office, The Reporter office, editorial rooms for the Columbian Magazine, a barber shop accessible from a basement entrance. Even the beginnings of the Downers Grove Library started there – the Ladies Library Association started a small reading room on the second floor, loaning books out for \$.25 to fund the book purchases. On the first day, 75 books were loaned out.

As modern water, sewer, and drainage systems were installed in the streets, the street levels rose so that by 1920 the buildings lower level entrance and the front door six-step riser disappeared.

Today, 120 years after construction, you may notice the the most prominent feature is now gone; the finely-detailed, stamped metal and copper-topped turret that once cantilevered high above the Main street entrance. In many historical buildings that were not properly maintained, structures that

continued

As many new buildings rise to change the skyline and storefronts in our downtown area, it's interesting to see some of these older buildings that have endured the test of time. This makes them wonderful candidates for future restoration and a new vision. Sometimes to look back at what once was gives us the opportunity to see what could be again.

(A) 1891 – The building started as just a single footprint, with no building to the north; note the high six-stair entrance, gas street lamp on corner and the garden entrance for the barber shop in the buildings' basement retail space.

Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society and © 2017 Downers Grove Museum

(B) 1895 – notice the elimination of the gas street lights and the addition of a network of telephone lines. Horse carriages still line the streets.

Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society and © 2017 Downers Grove Museum

(C) 1920 – note the addition of brick building to the north which carried through the bank buildings stamped metal cornices; the barber pole and basement entrance are both gone at this point. Electric street lights are seen in glass domes.

Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society and © 2017 Downers Grove Museum

(D) 1978 Suburban Life article chronicling the buildings' rich history.

Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society and © 2017 Downers Grove Museum



were attached were prone to leaking and displacement, which probably sealed the fate of this majestic architectural element.

Also gone are the south-facing, arch-topped transom windows. Those masonry openings were all reshaped over time to allow for more economical, off-the-shelf replacement-style windows. And the once grand arched-stone side entrance on the south side was filled in (the outline is still visible today).

Further inspection shows that the north-neighbor-ing brick building built in the early 1920's was incorporated into the building's flattened re-design in 1944. This re-design lost some of the era specific charm of the turret style, second-story bay windows and finely detailed cornices. The building's redesign took approximately two years to complete and eventually became home to the longtime and memora- ble clothier Muriel Mundy.

The building was recently purchased by Sean Chaudhry (owner of Cellar Door in Downers Grove and Hinsdale Wine Shop in Hinsdale). The build- ing's first floor tenants are area restaurateurs Patricia and Sam Vlahos. They plan to open a restaurant aptly named Pierce Tavern. (They currently operate Fuller House in Hinsdale.) There are 8 apartments in the upper levels. The restau- rant is scheduled for opening in 2017. The plans for additional interior and exterior refurbishment will evolve over a 5 year plan.



Post Office Mural (c. 1940)

Post Office Mural.

The artwork located in the Downers Grove post office has a rich history. This painting is a Section of Fine Arts mural titled, "Chicago, Railroad Center of the Nation" painted by Elizabeth Tracy in 1940.

During the depression (1930's), The Federal Arts Project under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) created many jobs for Americans which included struggling out of work artists. Murals became a substantial component of the Federal Arts Project under the New Deal. The Section of the Fine Arts commissioned pieces of art like this one which were created for federal buildings such as court- houses and post offices. This particular mural

articulates the significance of the railroads in and around the city of Chicago, and their impact stretch- ing out to Downers Grove and beyond. This beauti- ful mural has proudly decorated the lobby wall of the Downers Grove post office for 77 years.

The 6 x 13 foot oil on canvas mural was commis- sioned for the Downers Grove Post Office. The artist, Ms. Tracy, was a Fine Arts graduate of Rad- cliffe College.

This painting and the site was honored by the Downers Grove Historical Society in 2004 as one of its a Heritage Sites.

The History and Significance of the American Foursquare.



A wonderful example of one of Downers Grove's American Foursquares.

Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society



President Liz Chalberg introduces Dave and Amy Gassen, keynote speakers at the Foursquare program at Emmet's Brewing Co. Image ©2017 Downers Grove Historical Society

The Downers Grove Historical Society had a fantastic “sold-out” crowd for a recent event they sponsored at Emmett’s Brewing Co. The evening included food, drinks, and a presentation on American Foursquares by Dave and Amy Gassen. The American Foursquare is a type of home common during the early 1900s and is characterized by its cube shaped massing, hip roof with wide eaves, and front porch. The Gassens are Downers Grove residents who live in a Foursquare and recently went through the process to have it designated a local historic landmark. Their home was also recognized through the DG Historical Society and DG Museum’s Historic Home Program last year. The Gassens performed an informal survey of Foursquares in Downers Grove and determined that approximately 130 of them still exist in neighborhoods surrounding the downtown.

For more information on their efforts please visit the American Foursquares of Downers Grove Facebook page: [facebook.com/dgfoursquares/](https://www.facebook.com/dgfoursquares/)

For more information on the Historic Home Program or to download the application: downersgrovehistory.org/historic-homes.html

Founders Day 2017.

The Downers Grove Historical Society and the Downers Grove Museum will hold the annual Founders Day Celebrations on April 29th and May 6th & 7th this year. Important events on May 6th include the naming of the Founder of the Year, Israel Blodgett and the dedication of a new plaque commemorating the contributions of Israel Blodgett to the efforts of the Underground Railroad. Mayor Tully is scheduled to officiate at the Main St. Cemetery starting at 11:30. Then at 1:30pm at the Library, be sure to attend the special presentation by noted author and local Underground Railroad expert Glennette Tilley Turner. Ms. Turner will discuss the Underground Railroad and will highlight the roll Downers Grove residents played during that period in history.

For more details on many other Founders Day events including a petting zoo, golf outing, and family bicycle ride...go to www.downersgrovehistory.org.



Like us on Facebook

Are you related to any of the founding families of Downers Grove?

We are looking for anyone with lineage to the founders of Downers Grove. Are you a distant relative of Pierce Downer? Do you know anyone who is related to him? Have you recently started to research your genealogy and discovered you were related to the Blodgetts, Carpenters, Curtiss or other early settler families? We would love to hear from you to continue to flesh out our town's deep and rich history.

Please email us at info@downersgrovehistory.com

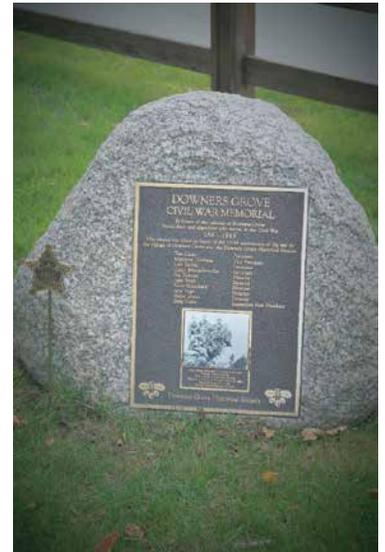
Main Street Cemetery App

A quick update on the exciting project underway to bring to life the rich history of the Main Street Cemetery.

Soon smart phones and computers will help people standing grave-side (and even all the way around the world) learn about the founding members of our town and others who are buried there.

As you visit each headstone you will be able to listen to audio biographies or read along on your phone, look through relevant, historic photos and documents and interact with real Downers Grove history. Please stay tuned for launch details about this ambitious initiative sometime later this Spring.

Also, please be reminded, that we are 100% fueled by donations, so continue to donate time and dollars as you are able to support additional programs like this in the future.



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