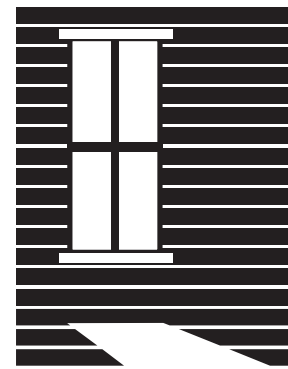


# GAZETTE



Winnetka  
Historical  
Society

Fall/Winter 2021 Volume 28 No. 2

winnetkahistory.org

## Children's Fair of Winnetka is a Gift to the Community



Siblings Paul and Annamarie Weaver steer their carnival cab, 1964. (Photo courtesy of the Weaver family)

by Helen Weaver

Phoebe Massey Ryerson was looking to raise funds for the new Winnetka Community Nursery School back in 1945 so she decided to host a "fair" in her backyard. The success of that event began a tradition that families have enjoyed for decades. The Winnetka Children's Fair will celebrate its 75th anniversary in June 2022. The fair, organized by the nursery school's board, has been held every year except for this year and last when it was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The first few fairs were held at

*continues on page 6*

## Kate Dwyer, One of Winnetka's Finest and Longest-Serving Teachers

by Duff Peterson

In a village justly proud of its schools, Winnetka has only one street named after a teacher, Dwyer Court, which runs between Elm and Oak. It's one of our few one-way streets, and our only street without a single residence or business on it. It honors a much-loved Winnetka teacher, Kate Dwyer, who taught as many as 3,000 Winnetka children in a career spanning 48 years. She taught first grade at Horace Mann School, which stood from 1899-1940 on the present site of the U.S. Post Office.

Both of Kate Dwyer's parents came from Ireland, probably during 1845-1849 when famine, epidemics and civil unrest overwhelmed the country. At least a



Education pioneers Carleton Washburne and Kate Dwyer, c. 1920. (WHS archives)

*continues on page 7*

## Upcoming Events

**Making the Movie:  
"Home Alone" & Trivia Too**  
Thursday, December 9,  
7-8:15 p.m.



Enjoy a captivating presentation on the making of "**Home Alone**" and other movies filmed on the North Shore. Play trivia to test your knowledge about these films!

**Virtual Event: Visit our website**  
**winnetkahistory.org**  
**to register.**



**Winnetka Historical  
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new Board Members:**

Carrie Hoza • Tim Ring • Susan Sullivan





*"The Seeker: I Sent My Soul Through the Invisible," by Pauline Dohn Rudolf, 1897. (WHS collection)*

## Painting by Winnetka Artist Pauline Dohn Rudolph on Exhibit at North Shore Community Bank

"The Seeker: I Sent My Soul Through the Invisible" (1897) is a noted painting of its time that alludes to a woman's spiritual quest. It will be on exhibit at North Shore Community Bank, 567 Lincoln Avenue in Winnetka through December, thanks to a donation by the M. Christine Schwartz Collection to the Winnetka Historical Society.

The artist, Pauline Dohn Rudolph, was born in Chicago in 1865. At 13 years old, she finished high school and started her career as a student at the Art Institute of Chicago. A few years later, she made history when she exhibited an oil painting in the Fine Arts Palace at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. In 1901, the *Chicago Tribune* referred to her as "one of the best-known of the women artists of the West." In 1907, she and her husband moved to Winnetka, purchasing a home at 745 Sheridan Road where they raised three children. She passed away in 1934 in southern California.

"The Seeker" was donated to WHS in 2021 by the M. Christine Schwartz Collection, which aims to preserve Chicagoland art and expand its audience. It was exhibited in the Art Institute of Chicago's 1899 annual show of work by Chicago artists, where it received "a position of honor" and abundant attention from reviewers. Special thanks to Bank Branch President Liz Taylor, who graciously welcomed the painting into the bank's community-friendly lobby.

## Schmidt-Burnham Log House Reopens to the Public

The community celebrated the reopening of the Schmidt-Burnham Log House on October 2nd and traveled back in time to explore its history through new exhibits, fascinating artifacts, and a scavenger hunt game.

The Schmidt-Burnham Log House is the oldest log structure in Cook County. Built c. 1837, it was the longest occupied home in northern Illinois until the daughter of artist Anita Willets-Burnham gifted it to the Winnetka Historical Society in 2001. The Log House first opened to the public in 2006 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The historic home is named for the Schmidt family, who lived in the house from 1841-1870, and the Burnham family, who called it home from 1917-2001. It was originally part of a German immigrant settlement on Ridge Road near the present-day Indian Hill Club. The Schmidt family, the first documented residents, immigrated from Trier, Germany in 1839 and moved into the Log House by 1841.

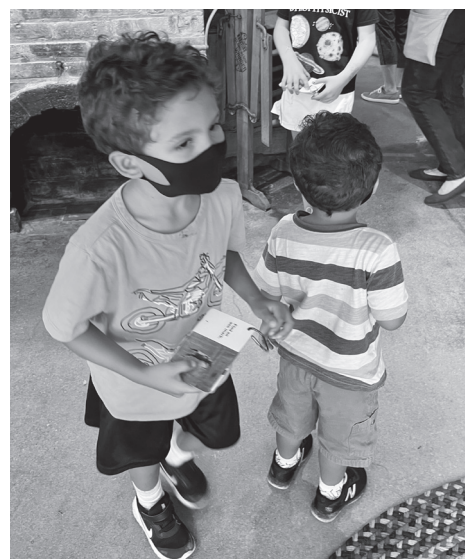
Decades later, Anita Willets-Burnham discovered the Log House while exploring the Winnetka area. She purchased the home in 1917 for \$25 and moved it from Ridge Road by a horse-drawn wagon to 1407 Tower Road that same year. To ensure the Log House would be preserved, the Burnham family donated it to Winnetka Historical Society in 2001. The Historical Society moved the Log House to Crow Island Woods in 2003, where it remains today. Programs for school groups, clubs, and other organizations are offered throughout the year. Contact [curator@winnetkahistory.org](mailto:curator@winnetkahistory.org) or call 847-446-0001 for inquiries.

**Visit the Schmidt-Burnham Log House for self-guided tours  
May-November 2022.**

**Check our website for dates and times.**



*Captivating new Log House exhibits opened this fall. (Photo by Winnetka Historical Society)*



*Children playing the Log House scavenger hunt game. (Photo by Winnetka Historical Society)*



*Puppets from Japan that Anita Willets-Burnham brought home from her family's trip around the world, 1928. (WHS archive)*



## From the Executive Director



by Mary Trieschmann,  
WHS Executive Director

I grew up in Winnetka in the 1960s-80s and taking on the role of Executive Director at the Winnetka Historical Society has given me many opportunities to appreciate our Village in new ways. As a child I took for granted the bridges that allowed me to safely travel from the east to the west side of town to shop at the A&P, Village Toy Store, or Carson Pirie Scott & Company. The other fond memories I have of growing up in our special Village include:

- The conscientious policeman who found me riding my bike home from a sleepover at 1:00 in the morning (I missed my own bed!) and escorted me to my front door to ensure I was safely home.
- The endless days spent swimming and eating sandy cheese sandwiches at Tower Road and Elder Lane beaches where my mom had the chance to relax and Dad built elaborate sandcastles and let us bury him in the sand.
- Staying out until dusk in the summer to join neighborhood kids in games of kick-the-can and capture-the-flag at the Village Green.
- Taking ballroom, ballet, tap, and modern dance at Wilson's Dancing School.

- Going to the movies at the Winnetka Community House unaccompanied by parents to watch "Wait Until Dark" with friends (an extremely disturbing thriller).
- Performing in the Children's Fair play, "The Music Man," and feeling part of a magical production even though we mouthed the words back then!

The similarities I see today are notable. I see kids confidently riding their bikes around town on their own. I see preteens buying salty snacks and candy at Lakeside Foods or a drink at Peet's coffee and then hanging out in Chestnut Court.

All of these childhood experiences are part of our history just as much as the progressive education movement championed by Carleton Washburne, the building of the Skokie Lagoons or the moving of the Schmidt-Burnham Log House. I've experienced the intense dedication to our history from our incredible board members and supporters throughout this pandemic. It has not quashed their commitment nor spirit to ensure that our mission to honor and preserve the Village's heritage, gather and share the artifacts and stories of its past, and foster meaningful connections among Winnetkans and the broader community. I am truly grateful for all the support and look forward to a wonderful 2022 as we continue to provide engaging historical experiences both in-person and virtually. ■

The Winnetka Historical Society is a non-profit 501c-3 organization and is primarily funded by individuals.

**You can help preserve our history by making a donation today.**

**THANK YOU!**

## Curator's Corner:



### Winnetka's First Toy Store

by Meagan McChesney, PhD  
WHS Curator

Few local businesses have held such fond memories for children growing up in Winnetka as the Village Toy Shop. For over 70 years, the store was a staple in the Village, providing the only one-stop shop for classic and new toys, free polka dot gift wrapping, and amazing customer service.

Prior to the 1940s, the Village of Winnetka had never had a toy shop. While toys were sold in various local hardware, clothing, and gift shops throughout the Village's early decades, local families were forced to venture out of Winnetka for that truly magical toy shop experience. As the population doubled in size from the 1920s to the 1940s, prospective business owners surely recognized the growing demand for dedicated



Village Toy Shop train set, 1962. (Photo courtesy of the Trieschmann family)

children's entertainment and shopping in the burgeoning downtown area. In 1948, that demand was met when the Surprise Shop opened at 807 Elm Street.



The familiar sign on Elm Street beckoned kids to find toy treasures inside. (WHS archive)

While the name was changed to the Village Toy Shop in the early 1960s, the Village's love for the shop remained for decades to come. "It seemed like everyone bought toys at the Village Toy Shop," former employee Ellen Rice said. "And, of course, everyone recognized the polka dot wrapping paper," she added. Rice worked for the shop during the 1960s when it was owned by the Massey family.

Penny Trieschmann also remembers when the Masseys owned the shop. "The Masseys wrapped all our Christmas gifts,

stored them, and then delivered them to our house on Christmas Eve day! We loved that store," Penny said. She also recalled that "the toys they carried weren't typically advertised on TV. They didn't carry Barbie dolls or plastic toys -- only high quality, unique toys like puppet theaters, large 18" wooden train cars and engines as well as Madame Alexander dolls."

Like many Winnetkans, Pat Berwanger fell in love with the Village Toy Shop early on. She

*continues on page 6*



# The Molitor Family: School Memories, Baseball Games, Sunfish Sailing

by Holly Marihugh

*Our WHS theme this year was “Growing Up in Winnetka,” and the Molitor family embodies that theme. They joined our community in 1994, moving into a house on Scott Avenue in Hubbard Woods. All six members recall their favorite memories about the village and the reasons they’ve enjoyed living here.*

Driving north on Gordon Terrace during the December holiday season about 20 years ago, neighbors and friends would spy a roof-top Santa, illuminated in a spotlight, sitting on the house where Gordon Terrace dead ends into Scott Avenue. That’s the Molitor family home, which sported a Jolly Old St. Nick every Christmas who, after 9/11, held an American flag that waved into the new year.

“When we were kids it was just fun to watch our Dad strap an 8-foot-tall stuffed Santa suit to his back and climb up onto the roof for the holiday season,” says Ellie Molitor, a 29-year-old general manager of an entertainment event venue in New York City. “I don’t think I understood how dangerous that was, but it put our house on the map. I remember that friends would start dropping off cookies at our house and beer for our Dad.”

Now imagine the opposite season, one of early summertime along Lake Michigan when maple trees leaf out and lilacs are blooming. Grade-schooler Mary Molitor can’t wait until the last school bell rings, signaling the start of an almost three-month vacation and the carnival games, rides, and treats waiting for her on the Village Green.

“One of my favorite memories about Winnetka would be the Children’s Fair,” says Mary, now a 28-year-old teacher in Chicago Public Schools. “I remember the days before school was out, and the fair was slowly being set up. I ran there after the last day of school to celebrate with a sugary snow cone and play the carnival games. Looking back at it now, it’s so heartwarming seeing all these parents and other community members coming together to celebrate the children’s successes and welcoming the summer.”

The sisters’ older brother, Tom Molitor Jr., remembers how easy it was to navigate the village as a kid. The 31-year-old is a consultant in data analytics and early in his career spent five years working in U.S. Naval Intelligence.

“I could ride my bike to Tower Road Beach in a couple of minutes,” Tom Jr. says. “Or I’d ride up and down the Green Bay Trail. There were so many different places to go, and you didn’t have to rely on your parents to drive you. As a kid, having that freedom was pretty incredible.”

The Molitor mom, Sherry, a local broker for Coldwell Banker Realty, is rock solid certain that one of the main reasons she values Winnetka is the public education her children received.

“I have a unique situation because my girls are quite different,” Sherry explains. “Mary is now a Chicago Public Schools teacher, but also is dyslexic. Ellie was the opposite. She was always the youngest in her class because her birthday is August 31st, and she finished college in three years. I was able to get a full insight into how well the teachers worked with Mary’s dyslexia as well as Ellie’s intellect. The school system was really able to adapt to those very different styles.”

Tom Jr. agrees that the quality of education he experienced at New Trier High School was extremely high.

“I spent five years in Naval Intelligence under the NSA [National Security Agency],” Tom Jr. says. “When I got out, I had a renewed understanding of the opportunities that my parents had provided for me and that I had growing up in Winnetka and attending New Trier. I tried to push myself a bit more in college and got a degree in three years from DePaul [University].”



Mary, Tom Jr., Mike, and Ellie Molitor at the Hubbard Woods School pumpkin carnival, 1997. (Courtesy of the Molitor family)

Mike Molitor, the youngest sibling, talks about how living next door to Lake Michigan gave him an open invitation to learn sailing and swimming and to discover what lies beneath the water’s surface.

“My favorite memory was during the summers of 6th and 7th grades,” Mike says. “I was in the sailing program at the beach, and we got lessons on Sunfish boats, the real tiny ones. You learn the basics, like how to handle the boat, tie knots, and sail, and how to reorient your boat when you capsize. Sailing was so much fun.”

The 25-year-old now works in Guest Services for the Chicago Cubs, and he recalls the mystery of glimpsing history underwater during those Sunfish outings.

“We’d also sail out to that shipwreck that’s near Spruce Street,” Mike says. “You definitely could see parts of it from looking into the surface or swimming down with goggles.” (Learn more about the shipwreck on the Winnetka Historical Society’s website.)

Tom Molitor Sr. is an attorney and part of his business is in criminal defense which places him in contact with local police departments.

“The safety of living in Winnetka is a real asset,” Tom Sr. says. “I do a lot of different things in my business, and one of them is criminal defense work. I’ve also represented police personally and police unions on the North Shore. People don’t realize what a fabulous Police Department Winnetka has compared to almost any I can think of on the North Shore. These officers are just the best.”

However, Tom Sr. says that coaching baseball in Winnetka when his kids were growing up was the icing on the cake of living here. Over a dozen years, he coached teams of 1st through 7th graders in the Kenilworth-Winnetka Baseball Association. Even a former Illinois governor joined Tom coaching the young players.

“There were so many wonderful kids, moms, and dads,” Tom says. “I coached with some great guys that I’m still friends with today. All the Dads were there for the fun, and we had a blast doing it.” ■



# Our House was a Very, Very, Very Fine House

by Mary Westerman

Research can be challenging, but the findings are often insightful and surprising. During my quest for historical information regarding our family's house in Winnetka, what started out as a personal exploration soon revealed much more.

I lived in the house at 1161 Chatfield Road until it was sold and subsequently demolished in 2008. Until then, I had always considered it home. I was even married there, and it held a lot of good memories. The memories of the house were not only my own, however, but also those of the previous dwellers who created their own stories.

When I joined the board of the Winnetka Historical Society (WHS), I learned that, among other things, the WHS archives contain records of almost all Winnetka homes purchased and sold since the Village's founding in 1869. They also have historic directories of Village residents, not only listed by name, but also by street.

While researching the house, I found that our brick colonial house was built before 1918. This house was almost a duplicate of the house next door. Both homes shared a driveway which led to two separate garages between the two backyards. These twin houses were first owned by two brothers, Arthur J. and Frank J. Mitchell. According to the January 1920 U.S. Census, the two brothers, together with their older brother, Edward, owned Mitchell Brothers women's clothing wholesale store in Chicago.

The next resident of 1161 Chatfield was Charles W. Popper, who was a women's apparel buyer. Subsequently, Adolf Drey and his wife, Ruth, purchased the house.



*The Westerman family home at 1161 Chatfield Road, c. 1944. (WHS archive)*

They came to Chicago from New Rochelle, New York, when Adolf went to work as a retail advertising manager of the Hearst Chicago Herald-American.

In the 1940s, John B. "Jocko" Conlan purchased the property. Jocko was a celebrity baseball umpire who worked for the National Baseball League from 1941-1965. Jocko played for the Chicago White Sox until 1935, when he left the Sox that year to pursue a career in officiating. He became a celebrity umpire, and was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1974.

On March 22, 1950, Conlan sold the house to my parents, Leah and George Westerman.

Our house was loved and if its walls could speak, many tales of Winnetka family life in the post-war baby-boom era would have been told. My mother lived in the house until she turned 91 in 2007. A year or so later the house was torn down and another was built in its footprint, thankfully in a similar size and style to the original.

It's quite apparent that Winnetka homes hold an amazing wealth of historic information, not only of their construction, but also of their inhabitants, and the neighborhoods in which they are situated. The 1161 Chatfield Road story is only an example of what research, particularly in the archives

of Winnetka Historical Society, can reveal. (For more of Mary Westerman's extensive research on the development of Chatfield Road properties, visit our website at [winnetkahistory.org](http://winnetkahistory.org) ■

## Research Inquiries

Submit a request through  
[winnetkahistory.org](http://winnetkahistory.org)

or call  
**847-446-0001**



## Explore Winnetka Stories

Visit our website [winnetkahistory.org](http://winnetkahistory.org) to learn about Winnetka's long-term businesses and more.



# Children's Fair of Winnetka

cont. from page 1

private homes, but since 1948 the fair has been held at Winnetka's Village Green. While rides and games have been a part of the fair since its beginning, the specifics have changed over the years. In the early years, children seemed satisfied by simpler pleasures. A 1946 *Chicago Tribune* review claimed that "one of the favorite attractions... was the 'Spring Jump,' which consisted of jumping from a tree stump to a blanket covered mattress on the ground." In 1949, one of the games was "throwing wet sponges at a human target." The 1950's fair featured hoof-print autographs from Misty of Chincoteague, the horse hero of the book by Marguerite Henry.

One of the most beloved features of the fair was the "Main Show," which got its start in 1951 as "A Beautiful Land," a musical pageant depicting events in Winnetka history from 1670 to 1900. That same year the fair was extended to a two-day event. The main show started as live performances of original productions written and directed by community volunteers, showcasing dozens of children and sometimes a famous adult or two. Studs Terkel narrated the 1955 performance of "Robin Hood" and teenage television star Susan Heinkel appeared in 1958's



Face-painted Joanie Weaver rides a kid's train at the Children's Fair, 1995. (Photo courtesy of the Weaver family)

production of "The Little Tailor."

By 1959, the audio was pre-recorded, sometimes by the actual casts and sometimes by other actors, making rehearsal less strenuous and sound quality better. Cast sizes grew as roles were given to two sets of performers, sometimes including hundreds of children. In 1981, the *Chicago Tribune's* Howard Reich wrote: "the big draw at each year's edition of the fair is the musical show, a Broadway-style extravaganza performed entirely by local school kids. This year's feature is an updated version of 'Alice in Wonderland,' and it spotlights more than 270 children."

The Weaver family has a long

history of involvement with the Winnetka Children's Fair. Paul Weaver and his sister Annamarie attended annually beginning in toddlerhood in the early 1960s. Paul appeared in at least two main show events including "You're A Good Man Charlie Brown" in the early 1970s. Brian, Eliza, and Joanie Weaver all performed in multiple main shows during the early 2000s. Eliza remembers: "I was in the main show for five or six straight years. I have great memories of being a kite in 'Mary Poppins' and a munchkin in the 'Wizard of Oz.'"

George Massey Jr., the brother of fair founder Mrs. Ryerson, directed many of the shows during the 1960s. Other longtime volunteer directors/producers include Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Woolson, Gail Johansson and Jeff Kane. Unfortunately, the main show era ended in 2009 as fair volunteers got harder and harder to recruit.

The original goal of the fair was to raise money to support the nursery school, but as the scope of the fair has changed over the years, so has its primary objective. The *Chicago Tribune's* Gregory Trotter wrote in a 2013 interview of fair Chairperson Elizabeth Smylie: "Though the fair raises money for the nursery school, it's not really about the money. The intent of the fair is actually to be a gift to the community." ■

# Winnetka's First Toy Store

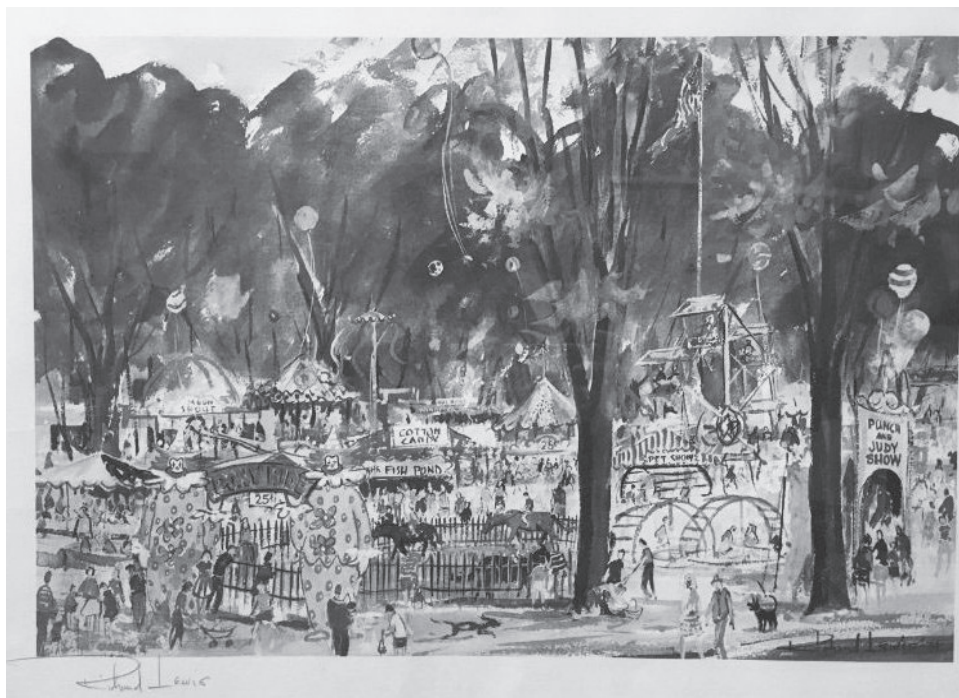
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started working there in 1980 and in 1984, hired her daughter Liz to help out as well. The Berwangers purchased the shop a year later, helping the business thrive until they made the difficult decision to permanently close in December 2019. "This was such a big part of my family's life and the community's history," Liz told the *Daily North Shore*.

When I reached out to Liz about this article, she was excited that the Historical Society wanted to feature the store. "It is really wonderful that people want to remember our beloved shop," she said. The shop's iconic storefront sign was donated to the Winnetka Historical Society in January 2020. Now, a part of the Village Toy Shop will live on in the archives. ■



Former Village Toy Shop owners Pat and Liz Berwanger, 2015. (Photo courtesy of Liz Berwanger)



Painting of the colorful Children's Fair by Artist Richard Lewis, 1972. (WHS archive)

The *Gazette* is funded through generous donations from individuals like you.

Please consider supporting the Winnetka Historical Society this year.



# Kate Dwyer, One of Winnetka's Finest Teachers

*cont. from page 1*

million people in Ireland died during those terrible years, and about two million people emigrated, mostly to the United States. Thomas and Bridget Dwyer met in a cabin near the Patterson Tavern, which stood near the present entrance of Lloyd Park, and were married there in 1856. The couple lived briefly in a house near the present-day junction of Westmoor and Rosewood, where Kate was born in 1858. In 1864, Thomas Dwyer built a wood-frame house for his family at the north-east corner of Elm and Birch. Kate Dwyer would live in this house for more than 60 years.

In the early days, deep woods surrounded the Dwyer house, and Kate and her sister Emma had trouble finding their way to Winnetka's only store, located at the southwest corner of Linden and Oak, until their father blazed a trail of trees along the way. Elizabeth Otis, an old-time resident, recalled that during the 1870s, the Dwyer house was "the last house on Elm Street . . . before you plunged into the wilderness. To the west, through the woods and down a slope, was a creek that children found difficult to cross. (Today's Provident Avenue follows its course.) Beyond that, after a few hundred more yards of deep woods, lay the Skokie marsh, which in wet seasons was up to a mile wide. These dense forests and wetlands formed an almost impenetrable barrier to east-west travel to and from the tiny settlement.

The founders of Winnetka, Charles and Sarah Peck, employed Thomas Dwyer to plant trees on and around their 11-acre property bounded by Elm, Maple, Pine and Lincoln. Over time, the area became known as an "arboretum," attracting botany professors and their students. This part of Winnetka still features a great variety of trees, many not native to the Midwest. It's possible that some of the trees Thomas Dwyer planted are still standing.

Kate Dwyer attended Winnetka's first public school on the present-day Village Green followed by Academy Hall, then the only school in the area offering a high school curriculum. She did not go to college. As a first-grade teacher, she taught generations of young Winnetkans to read and write, and she had a lot of patience, understanding that not all kids learn these skills in the same way. Reminiscences by her pupils recall her "gentle nature and outstanding ability." For decades, many Winnetka parents specifically requested that Miss Dwyer teach their children.

In 1919, the Winnetka School Board appointed the 29-year-old Carleton Washburne as Superintendent of Schools. Washburne soon introduced what became known as the "Winnetka Plan" of education, which recognized learning differences among children, replaced letter grades with "goals," promoted self-paced learning, and provided kids with greater opportunities for creative expression. Many parents saw Washburne's ideas as a rejection of academic standards, and he



*Young Kate Dwyer strikes a pose for her formal portrait, c. 1890. (WHS archive)*

was controversial in the village, but Kate Dwyer (who by then had been teaching for 40 years) looked favorably on the young Californian's reforms. Soon after Washburne's arrival, she published an article in the local press contrasting the new methods with the old system of rote learning, saying, "We have passed from that day of cold formality to our present schools in which children are self-expressive and responsible." Near the end of her career, she was described as "one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the individual system of instruction."

In 1927, after Kate Dwyer retired, the School Board acquired her property at Elm and Birch to be used as play space for Horace Mann School. Although the Board planned to sell the Dwyer house at public auction, it being in good repair and worth moving elsewhere, it was demolished in July 1929. In 1941, after Horace Mann itself was torn down, the Park District purchased a 0.6-acre tract behind the school site from the Board of Education. This tract, combined with the old Dwyer property, became Dwyer Park. Dwyer Court was platted before the Post Office's construction in 1959.

Kate Dwyer never married. She died in October 1933 and was buried in Greeley, Colorado, where she had been living with her sister. She is remembered today in Dwyer Court, Dwyer Park, the Kate Dwyer Room at Skokie School, and as one of Winnetka's finest and longest-serving teachers. (The full article with references is available on the WHS website.) ■

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