

# RIDGE RECORD



A publication of the Ridge Historical Society

Spring 2016

Beverly Hills • Morgan Park • Washington Heights • Mt. Greenwood

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## An old friend with a new look – a message from the Newsletter Editor

By Carol Flynn

With this issue, the Ridge Historical Society *Record* pilot tests a new look with larger type and fewer columns to make the text easier to read.

The “new” masthead actually comes from an old newspaper. The *Ridge Record* was a Morgan Park publication that premiered in 1899 and ran for about 15 years. The incredible graphic that depicts the sun shining in the western sky over the Blue Island Ridge appeared for some years as the masthead of the paper. The Givins House, also known as the Irish Castle, appears in the illustration.

The masthead is scanned directly from a copy of the newspaper that is 110 years old. This and several more editions of the paper are in the RHS collection. Thank you to Linda Lamberty, RHS Historian, for suggesting the use of this historic image. It helps establish the identity of the society and the newsletter.

We welcome your feedback on the new look and any other input you would like to share. Send your comments to RHS via email, letter or phone (see p. 2) and to the newsletter editor at [cflynn2013@yahoo.com](mailto:cflynn2013@yahoo.com).



Morgan Park Day was an annual event in late summer. The community welcomed visitors from all around the area. Beverly Hills to the north and Blue Island to the south joined in the celebrations. Activities included sports events, donkey and goat cart races, concerts and church socials. The highlight of the day was a parade like the 1905 one pictured here from the August 24, 1906 issue of the *Ridge Record*. The newspaper is in the RHS collection.

### NEW YORK COMPLIMENTS MORGAN PARK.

*Newspaperdom* is a technical journal read by all the newspaper publishers of America. It is a critical weekly, looking for flaws; hence the following unsolicited notice in regard to the *RIDGE RECORD*, which is sent for filing purposes to the New York office of *Newspaperdom*, is praise for Morgan Park:

“When it comes to uniqueness, your paper is among the crowd close to the band wagon. It is neat and full of meat. The news is written in good English. But your display head man is a wonder. For the benefit of headline men I have produced a couple of samples from your first page. If they are not quite as ‘heavy’ as some of those used in papers I have seen before, they are certainly novel in construction and intent. Anyway, Brother Porter, your weekly is all right from cover to cover—good ink, good paper, ads carefully displayed, make-up above the average, and for originality, well—”

The *Ridge Record* was a popular local paper, with a circulation of 1,800 by 1911. The paper received good reviews in the trade, as it reported in this Dec. 20, 1901 article. “Brother Porter” refers to the editor, A. S. Porter.

# Neighborhood Magic transforms RHS

By Carol Flynn

The sweeping lawn of RHS became a magical place of sculpture and poetry on April 8 when performance artist Carron Little continued her "Neighborhood Magic" public art project. This all began last fall with the Beverly Art Walk.

Fantastically shaped mailboxes have been installed on the Longwood Drive lawn. From April 8 to May 8, the public is invited to post to the mailboxes messages about important life moments. These messages will be collected by Ms. Little, who will write poems based on the life moments, and return these poems to the participants.

An opening night event was held on Friday, April 8. Ms. Little performed several of the poems she wrote for Neighborhood Magic in 2015. On Thursday, April 14, at 7:00

p.m., also at RHS, a documentary on public performance will be screened.

Neighborhood Magic was commissioned by the Beverly Area Arts Alliance, and was made possible by a generous donation from the Beverly Bank.

Carron Little is the founder and director of Out of Site Chicago public performance series. She earned a Master in Fine Arts degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), where she is now a faculty member in the Performance Department.

Ms. Little began the project by interviewing eight older adult residents from the Beverly/Morgan Park community about their life stories. Sue Delves, a past president of RHS and an emeritus member of the Board, was one of the interviewees.

Ms. Little then wrote poems for each of the participants based on their life stories, and composed the poems into song.

On the day of the Beverly Art Walk, Oct. 5, singers and musicians joined with Ms. Little to debut the songs, and other performers presented dances interpreting the stories learned from the interviews. The mailboxes installed at RHS were originally set up around the neighborhood as the sites for the performances.

A seven-minute documentary of Neighborhood Magic and a blog of pictures and poems from the event can be viewed on Ms. Little's website at <http://www.carronlittle.com>.



Left picture: Performance artist Carron Little (far right) delivers a poem at RHS on Oct. 5, 2015, as part of Neighborhood Magic. Right picture: Other Neighborhood Magic performers surround one of the mailboxes now installed on the RHS lawn.

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## Part I on the History of Dan Ryan Woods: "A real beauty spot"

By Carol Flynn, with research assistance from Linda Lamberty, RHS Historian

On Nov 10, 1916, a small article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that the Cook County forest preserve board would have a walk through the woods at Beverly Hills that day, with an eye towards purchasing them. That visit was a success, and in September 1917, for the price of \$152,937, the forest preserves district purchased 112.88 acres of land from the estate of John B. Sherman, roughly bordered by Western Ave., 83<sup>rd</sup> St., the railroad tracks to the east, and 89<sup>th</sup> St. This was the beginning of what today is known as Dan Ryan Woods.

The Forest Preserves of Cook County issued a report in 1918 that enthusiastically praised the Beverly Hills Preserve. Peter Reinberg was President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners at the time, which also had responsibility for the forest preserves. Daniel Ryan was a commissioner, Chairman of the Finance Committee and Depositories Committee, and a member of the Real Estate Committee, Plan Committee, and Forestry and Improvement Committee.

The report stated that the location had long been recognized as a historical attraction because of the towering bluff "Indian warriors utilized as a look-out and signal station in the days when they were fighting to hold their homes against the invading white men."

This version of the early history of the land recounted the tale of the signal station atop the "Beverly Bluff" bursting into flame with the bonfires of the Indians, which produced the ribbons of smoke that warned tribes for miles around.

Of course, the Native Americans in this area were almost all gone by the mid-1830s, thanks to the federal Indian Removal Act of 1830. The Treaty of Chicago in 1833 led to the final withdrawal of the Potawatomi, Chippewa and Ottawa tribes from the Lake Michigan area.



The Forest Preserves of Cook County issued a report in 1918 that included this picture from the Beverly Hills Preserve. The report stated, "In Beverly Hills, the southern end of Cook County has a real beauty spot. It is a preserve only 126 acres in extent but for its acreage it boasts more spectacular points of interest than any other stretch of forest land in the county. It is an ideal natural park."



In 1922, the Dewalt Mechlin Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed this marker in the woods along the north side of 87<sup>th</sup> St. to commemorate the Indian lore that earned the bluff the name Lookout Point. Photo from S. Smith.

### The founding of the forest preserves

As early as the 1860s, Chicagoans were concerned about adequate space for recreation and outdoor activities. By the 1890s, there was growing sentiment to preserve the "outer belt" of forested lands surrounding the city.

Daniel Burnham, the architect and urban planner who gave Chicago the White City at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, is largely credited as the father of modern city planning. His 1909 Plan for Chicago urged the acquisition and development of these outlying tracts as next in importance to developing the lake front.

Other notable leaders of the outer belt movement were Jens Jensen, the famous landscape architect, and Dwight H. Perkins, a prominent architect.

After a ten year political struggle the Forest Preserve District Act of 1913 was passed. This act set the mission of the district "to acquire, restore and manage lands for the purpose of protecting and preserving public open space with its natural wonder

significant prairies, forests, wetlands, rivers, streams, and other landscapes with all of its associated wildlife, in a natural state for the education, pleasure and recreation of the public now and in the future.”

On February 11, 1915, the Board of Commissioners of Cook County also took on the role of Board of Forest Preserve Commissioners, an arrangement that continues today. This finally put the forest preserves in business. Daniel Ryan was Finance Chair for the county so became the same for the preserves. Bonds were issued to raise money to purchase land, and the first tract purchased was 500-acre Deer Grove in Palatine in 1916.



This picture of the John B. Sherman family dates to 1856-57 and is in the Burnham collection in the Art Institute of Chicago archives ([www.artic.edu/research/archival-collections](http://www.artic.edu/research/archival-collections)). Pictured are Sherman; his first wife, Ophelia Graham Sherman (1823-1894); their daughter Margaret who would marry Daniel Burnham; and their son Arthur.

Daniel Burnham (1846-1912) (inset) gave Chicago the White City for the 1893 World’s Fair and laid the groundwork for the Cook County forest preserve system. Photo from Wikipedia.

### Sherman Farm at Forest Hill

In an 1899 “outer belt” report, the Blue Island Ridge was mentioned as one of the areas that should be preserved “for the benefit of the public ... and for their own sake and scientific value.”

It was well known that the Blue Island had been an actual island that rose out of prehistoric Lake Chicago, and the elevation of the area was the highest in the city, as much as 60 feet higher than downtown Chicago. The Ridge was formed by wave action along the eastern shoreline of the island.

At the time of its purchase for the forest preserve system, the land containing Lookout Point was owned by the estate of John B. Sherman (1825-1902), the founder and past president of the Union Stock Yard and Transit Co. The land was part of a vast working farm that was known for decades as the Sherman Farm at Forest Hill.

Sherman was born in 1825 in New York and grew up on a farm. The 1849 Gold Rush led him to California, where he made several thousand dollars. He returned east as far

as Illinois. After farming for a bit, he moved to Chicago and bought up several small stockyards. He convinced most of the other small operations in town to consolidate with him, and in 1865, the Union Stock Yard and Transit Co. of Chicago was formed.

Sherman was called “the master spirit” in guiding the growth of the enterprise in the decades that followed. He was recognized as the ablest manager of this kind of business in the world. Although Sherman founded the company, he never assumed the role of president, which was more honorary than operative, until 1899, preferring to serve as general manager and superintendent. He retired only a year later.

During Sherman’s life, the Chicago livestock market came to be called one of the greatest wonders of the age and the greatest institution of Chicago. He was considered a friend of the common working man, establishing a minimum wage of \$2 per day, roughly \$57 today, for laborers in the Town of Lake where he lived and where the stockyards were



The Sherman family resided for many years in this grand mansion at 2100 S. Prairie Ave., in an elite section of the city today known as the historic Prairie Ave. District. The house, built in 1874, was one of the first big commissions for Burnham and Root. Daniel Burnham and Margaret Sherman met during the building of the house and married in 1876. The house was demolished in 1936. From [www.glessnerhouse.org](http://www.glessnerhouse.org).

located. This area was annexed to the city of Chicago in 1889, which Sherman very much opposed.

Sherman became known and respected for his efforts to improve stock. Central to this was the 640-acre Forest Hill Farm. The intersection of 87<sup>th</sup> Street and Western Ave., near the top of the Ridge, was known as Forest Hill, and the farm included land north of 79<sup>th</sup> St, and west of Western Ave. In 1902, the *Chicago Live Stock World* newspaper, a publication he helped found, referred to Sherman's estate as "the largest [farm] within the city limits of Chicago if not in Cook county, always the home of splendid herds of stock."

The farm was referred to as Sherman's "laboratory." Prize livestock such as cattle and pigs were bred or brought in there. Sherman won numerous awards for the size of his livestock. Prize animals were slaughtered with cuts of meat given as gifts to his friends at Christmas and other occasions. More than one famous steer had its head mounted for display at the stockyards.

Veterinary medicine experiments were also conducted. In 1888, Sherman allowed some of the healthy cattle from his farm to be placed in a pen with cattle from Texas infected with "Texas fever" to see if the malady was contagious. All of Sherman's cattle became infected also. The study was conducted for a session of the Cattle Growers' Association annual meeting.

Sherman was described as a "public-spirited man," and took particular interest in designing and developing the public park system. For 25 years he was a member of the South Park Commission Board, and he was elected as president in 1898. He declined election to any other public offices.

The South Park Commission, which had been formed in 1869, oversaw parks on what then was the southern edge of the city, which included Jackson Park, Washington Park and the Midway Plaisance.

These sites were selected for the 1893 World's Fair and Daniel Burnham and partner John Root were selected to oversee the design and construction of the fairgrounds.

Sherman's relationship with Burnham dated back to 1874, when Sherman hired Burnham and Root to design his house at 2100 S. Prairie Ave. in one of the most elite sections of the city. His neighbors included George Pullman and Marshall Field.

Burnham and Sherman's daughter, Margaret, met at this time, and married in 1876. They had five children and eventually moved to Evanston.

Sherman was described in one obituary as a "venerable gentleman farmer" and the farm was sometimes used for social events. In 1883, there was a newspaper story that the twelfth annual clam bake of the Union Stockyards was held at the farm, with over 100 guests and plenty of refreshments, both solid and liquid. Also that year, a night of dog-fighting and chicken-fighting was arranged for guests.

As early as 1889, a developer convinced Sherman to sell off 320 acres at \$1,000 per acre. This was to the

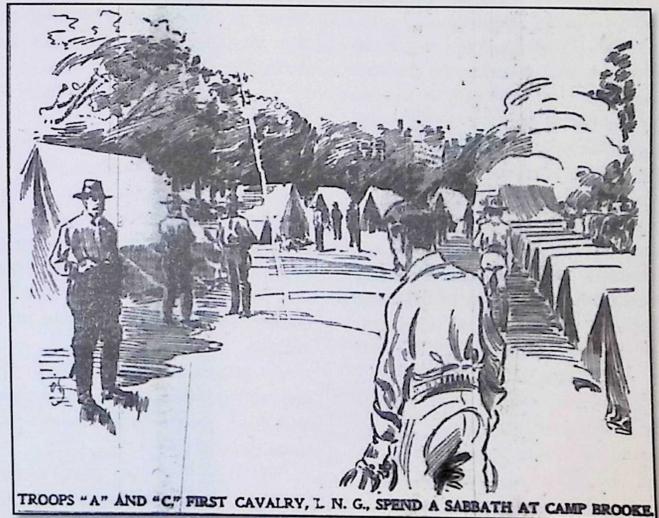
north of 79<sup>th</sup> St. and Western. And in 1891, when he sold off land north of 83<sup>rd</sup> St., the farm was already being referred to as the "old Sherman Farm" with "a high ridge covered with oak and hickory trees."

In 1897, mounted militia of the Illinois National Guard held maneuvers at 95<sup>th</sup> St. and Western. The ground used for drilling was a newly mown meadow of forty acres on the Sherman Farm.

The Sherman Farm also brought several scandals to the Ridge. Two criminal incidents involving the dumping of murder victims were connected with the property. Sherman himself had no involvement in these affairs.

The first was in 1895, when the body of a murder victim named Holzhueter was dumped near the farm, and the foreman of the farm witnessed the perpetrators of the crime in the area at the time.

The second event was the November 1897 murder of Mrs. Pauline Merly, whose body was buried in a ditch on Sherman's property on the north side of 87<sup>th</sup> St. about 200 feet west of



The Illinois National Guard mounted militia conducted exercises on the Sherman Farm in 1897. People came from all over the area to watch the activities. This illustration is from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 19, 1897.



The Sherman Farm was the site for the disposal of the bodies of several murder victims. In 1897, the body of Mrs. Pauline Merry was found in a ditch along 87<sup>th</sup> St. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* ran this illustration of the location on November 29, 1897.

Western Ave. Police received an anonymous letter tipping them off to the crime. The murderer was her husband, Mr. Chris Merry, and he was hanged for the crime several years later.

A description was given of the landscape and the farm:

"As the [Western Ave.] roadway ascends the sharp incline to the top of Forest Hill [at 87<sup>th</sup> St.], it passes under the broad boughs of the giant trees of that point, reaching the top of Forest Hill with its great spreading trees, and in this season of the year, presenting a weird and desolate appearance. Within 1,000 feet are two houses, one occupied by John Andrews, who has charge of the farm of John B. Sherman of Chicago, which includes the land on both sides of Western avenue and of Eighty-Seventh street. The other house, a less pretentious one on the west side of Western avenue, is occupied by Charles Putnam, employed by Mr. Andrews. The place chosen for the hiding of the body in the ditch was along the apple orchard belonging to Mr. Sherman." (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 29, 1897.)

#### Sherman's Legacy

In February of 1902, Sherman died very suddenly from an acute case of the grippe, or influenza. He was buried at Oak Woods Cemetery. The fine parks developed by the South Park Commission were considered a major part of Sherman's legacy to the city. In 1905, Sherman Park, named in his honor, opened at 1300 W. Garfield Blvd. The buildings were designed by Burnham.

Investors in the Beverly Country Club purchased 160 acres of the "old Sherman stock farm" west of Western Ave. in 1907. It was considered a perfect place for a golf course by golf professionals and landscape designers. Many of the investors also purchased land for themselves in the vicinity.

An article in a 1912 *Chicago Tribune* about where to go "botanizing" and find native wild flowers mentions Forest Hill:

"What is the best place around Chicago to go botanizing? On large tracts of land held for speculation at the edges of the city, say southwest of Western avenue, you will find practically the original prairie vegetation. In season many kinds of

prairie flowers bloom there - resin weed, several varieties of sunflowers, compass plants, daisies and the like. Down along the Calumet River there are violets a plenty, and all sorts of wild beauties at Blue Island ridge and Forest Hill. But they are not what they used to be."

When Sherman died, it was rumored that he intended to donate his "magnificent Forest Hill farm" to the city for park purposes. Instead, it became part of the Cook County Forest Preserves.



Taken some time after 1880, this photo of John B. Sherman is in the Burnham collection in the Art Institute of Chicago archives ([www.artic.edu/research/archival-collections](http://www.artic.edu/research/archival-collections)).

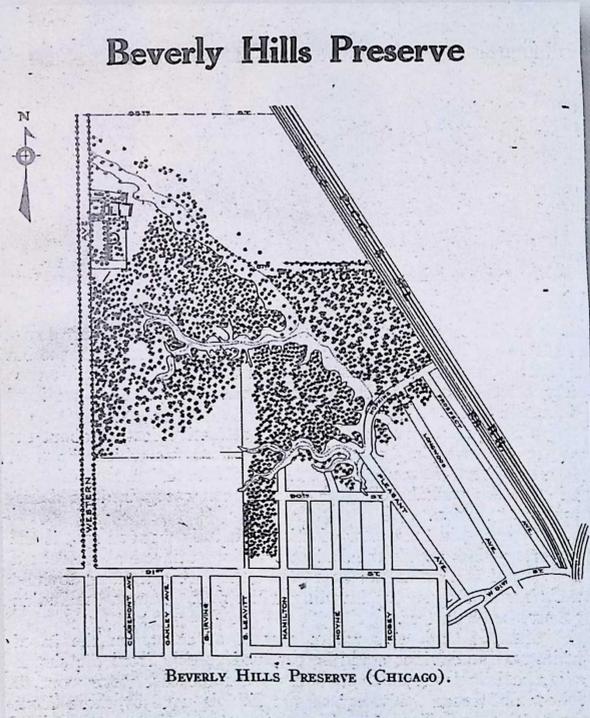
**Next issue: Part II on the History of Dan Ryan Woods: "A good place for musing"**

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The 1918 report of the Forest Preserves of Cook County included this diagram/map of the Beverly Hills Preserve. Most likely some of the buildings dated back to the days of the Sherman Farm, when the land was filled with "splendid herds of stock."

The report pointed out that, in addition to the natural beauties of the preserve, it also had the distinction of being the only one accessible to all of Chicago "on a five cent fare."

Visitors could take the Ashland Ave. street car to 87th St., and walk west to the preserve. Another option was to take the Rock Island Railroad from the LaSalle St. station to the Beverly Hills station at 91st St.

Ridge Historical Society  
10621 S. Seeley Ave.  
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Spring 2016 Issue

Hear ye, hear ye!  
Spring is annual  
MEMBERSHIP  
RENEWAL TIME  
for RHS.  
Please use the envelope  
enclosed with this  
newsletter to return  
your dues.  
Thank you for your  
continuing support!



Immediately following the Ridge Run at 10:30 a.m.  
The parade marches down Longwood Drive from 110th Place to  
Ridge Park at 96th St., where there will be a ceremony and a  
post-race festival. Groups, organizations, families and individuals  
are all invited to participate in the parade. Applications are available  
from the Beverly Area Planning Association (BAPA);  
call 773/233-3100 or email [bapa@bapa.org](mailto:bapa@bapa.org).

Interested in marching with RHS? Call or email us.  
We would love to have you join us!

Mark your calendars .....  
Monday, May 30, 2016 -  
MEMORIAL DAY PARADE