

RIDGE RECORD



A publication of the Ridge Historical Society

Summer 2016 Beverly Hills • Morgan Park • Washington Heights • Mt. Greenwood Vol. 45, No. 2

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

By Carol Flynn

Out of the ashes of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 rose a new city – a modern, progressive, ambitious city. To prove to the world that Chicago had not only recovered from the fire but was indeed thriving, Chicago civic and business leaders went up against New York City and Washington, D.C., to win the Columbian Exposition planned to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World. This became the 1893 World's Fair.

Daniel Burnham, architect and urban planner, served as the Director of Works for the Fair. White stucco buildings illuminated at night with over 100,000

new-fangled electric light bulbs earned the Fair the name "The White City." This was Burnham's ideal city, and ushered in the City Beautiful Movement, a reform philosophy of the Progressive Era. The beautification of cities with parks and recreation areas was promoted not only for appearance, but to increase the quality of life for inner-city tenement dwellers and thereby promote social harmony.

Chicago was built on a flat plain, the bed of prehistoric Lake Chicago, surrounded by bluffs and woodlands. As the city expanded, it became obvious that this encompassing land offered abundant opportunities for recre-

ation. The Special Park Commission, formed in 1899, worked to create recreational spaces across the city. Two of the leaders were Dwight Perkins and Jens Jensen. The Commission recommended the formation of a forest preserve system for the outlying lands. Perkins, an architect, led Saturday afternoon walking trips that introduced thousands of Chicagoans to this outer belt. He became known as the "father of the forest preserves." Jensen, a landscape architect, led tours for prominent politicians, winning over key players in the Illinois General



The E. S. Pike House (left) became part of Beverly woods in 1921, and still stands. Eugene Pike was a real estate developer who built the Mentor Building, long a part of Carson, Pirie, Scott & Co. department store. Photos from historic websites.



Assembly, whose votes were needed to enact forest preserve legislation.

By 1909, when Burnham created a master plan for the development of Chicago, *The Plan of Chicago*, the movement to purchase the natural areas that have become the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) was well under way. In 1913, the Forest Preserve District Act was passed, and in 1915, the Board of Commissioners of Cook County also took on the role of Board of Forest Preserve Commissioners. Dan Ryan served on the Board as the Finance Chair.

The earliest days of the "Mystic Forest Preserve"

In 1917, the land bordered by 83rd St., Western Ave., 89th St., and the railroad tracks to the east was purchased by Cook County to become part of the forest preserve system. This was unusual because the area was in the city and not connected to the outer belt. Although the official name was the Beverly Hills Preserve, they were commonly known as the Beverly woods.

The new preserve immediately engaged the public's imagination. On August 6, 1919, the *Chicago*

Tribune featured an article, "Beverly Hills Unique Among City Viewpoints," authored by an anonymous Eye Witness. The subtitle was "Mystic Forest Preserve is 'Good Place to Muse In,' says Eye Witness."

The author eloquently told us:

"I was telling the boys yesterday about the accessibility of Beverly Hills tract of the Forest Preserve for their purposes of scouting and Indian make-believe, and remarked ... that the spot also had its appeal for grownups.

"'Tis a great place to mull over many things relative to the now, and the then, and the what's to come, for it combines solitude with the teeming associations of an age when this seat of present quiet was a point for briefly marking time in the westward march of empire.

"Many a time I have passed that way, and ever found it worth while to tarry. Always there is a witchery of sunlight and shadow gliding over the prospect the height commands - in winter when it rears itself, austere and white, above miles of slow-shifting, frosty vapor; in the menace of storm when all the plain is empurpled and the thunder-wind comes scudding down from the north with a lashing sound; at the July noonday when the rock radiates visible heat like a gigantic oven and the locusts make the place vibrant with their metallic sawing, and at twilight when the locomotives, like fire-eyed mon-

sters, creep across the darkening purple and the White City tower ... takes on the aspect of something Florentine and fine.

"Yes, next to its accessibility ... the value of the Beverly Hills preserve is its view, for in this low lying region, ... the natural eminences that give us a spacious survey of our town are few and meager. Of these few the Beverly rise is perhaps the most impressive. Citadel like, it bulwarks the soft region of farms and woodlands behind it.

"Furthermore ... it arises from spoilt wildwood, while the picture beneath is all emblematic of commerce and industry. ... I don't know in what land you could survey a more pregnant panorama, or one fraught with fresher or more decisive contrasts.... Before you, a city grumbling and sweating and aspiring under its mantle of smoke and under the mid-summer sun; behind you, children shouting, birds whistling, and the hot wind in the trees.

"But 'tis futile and mere space filling to try to catch with words the elusiveness of such light and shade or to mark the routine of these regularly recurrent wonders. ... Ah, mystery and magic of the craft of words, the craft which is the first and the last we use in life, but which only the heaven-touched master.

"I told you Beverly Hills was a good place for musing."

Continued on page 4

Directors

RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

10621 S. Seeley Ave.
Chicago, IL 60643

773/881-1675

www.ridgehistoricalsociety.org
ridgehistory@hotmail.com

Call, write or visit the website for hours,
membership information
and upcoming programs.

RHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS—2016

Edris Hoover, President
Mary Quinn Olsson, Vice-President
Larry Brown, Treasurer
Mary Ellen Cassidy, Secretary
Linda Lamberty, Historian
Carol Flynn, Newsletter Editor
Jessica Gradolf, Office Assistant

Anna-Marie Brodsky
Paula Everett
Sue Hendricks
Margot Burke Holland
Carol Macola
Cathy Majeske
Dan McCabe
Joseph O'Connor
Fran Oehmen
Elaine Spencer
Monica Wilczak
James Wognum

Emeritus

Julie DeHaan
Sue Delves
Lois Grayston
Linda Lane
Mati Maldre
Patricia McGrail
Joel Morbito
Doris Moulton
William Sandstrom
Herman Schell

RHS hosts photography exhibit

By Carol Flynn



Mati and Kathy Maldre own the Jenkinson House (above) designed by Walter Burley Griffin, built in 1912 on 104th Place, now known as Walter Burley Griffin Place. The interior of the house (right) shows Griffin's distinctive Prairie style. Griffin is credited with originating the "L" shaped living room/dining room plan. In 1981, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks designated 1600 to 1800 W. 104th Place as the "Walter Burley Griffin Place District." Photos by M. Maldre.



An exhibit of photographs by RHS Emeritus Board member Mati Maldre is on display at RHS through July. The photos document historic homes and parks in the Beverly/Morgan Park area. Mati became interested in architecture photography and Prairie School architecture in 1971 while studying at the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he earned an M.S. in Photography.

In 1980, Mati and his wife, Kathy, purchased one of the Walter Burley Griffin houses on 104th Place. Mati eventually photographed all 64 of the existing

Griffin structures in the U.S., and these appear in *Walter Burley Griffin in America*.

Mati also documented the significant historic homes in Beverly and Morgan Park and his photographs are used in a number of publications that showcase the neighborhood, including the *American Institute of Architects Guide to Chicago* and the guide brochure published by the Beverly Area Planning Association.

In addition to the historic homes, the exhibit includes photographs of the parks in the area designed by noted landscape architect Jens Jensen. Jensen is

known for his Prairie style design, using open spaces and pathways, and native plants and building materials. He was one of the most influential landscapers to promote native gardens.

Mati is an emeritus professor of art at Chicago State University, where he taught photography for 35 years. He also taught at the Beverly Art Center. He has received numerous honors, including a National Endowment for the Arts grant. Call or email RHS for the hours the exhibit is open, or check the RHS website.

In September of 1921, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Eugene R. Pike, former city comptroller, sold the family homestead to the FPCC for \$12,259. The paper said "we believe one of the prettiest spots to be found in the state is now located in the Beverly Hills district."

The Pike homestead added 32 acres to the southeastern end of the Beverly woods, bordered by Hopkinson Place, Pleasant Ave., 91st St., and the tracks to the east. It included a fine home, the E. S. Pike House at 1826 W. 91st St., designed by Harry Hale Waterman in 1894, that would be used for the superintendent's headquarters.

The house was named for Eugene R.'s father, Eugene S. Pike (1835-1916), a wealthy and socially prominent real estate developer and financier. Pike built several early skyscrapers in downtown Chicago on State St., including the Pike Building (1872), which was the first home of the Art Institute of Chicago, then known as The Academy of Fine Arts. He also built the first (1872-3) and second (1906) Mentor Buildings.

Pike sat on the Board of Directors for the 1893 Fair. He owned a mansion at 2101 Prairie Ave., right across the street from John B. Sherman, the original owner of the Beverly preserve land immediately to the north of the Pike land.



Western Ave. was graded, widened and repaved in 1922, a significant undertaking. (Top photo, RHS collection.) As a result, 87th St. was extended west to Western Ave. and an attractive new entrance was built to the preserves at that location. (Above photo, from the FPCC collection at the U. of I. Chicago Library.) The woods also had an entrance at 91st Street convenient to the train station there. (Left, from RHS collection.)



The Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1918. Dan Ryan, seated second from left, was the Finance Chair when the forest preserves system was established. Ryan became President of the Board when Peter Reinberg, third from left, died while still in office. Picture from the 1918 report of the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

The role of Dan Ryan

Daniel Ryan was born in County Tipperary, Ireland, around 1860. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1880 and became a naturalized citizen. As did many Irish before him, Ryan found a job at the stockyards where he soon became a successful buyer. He married Alice A. Carroll, also from Tipperary, in 1883. They had seven children. By 1910, the Ryans were settled in Englewood, and Ryan was listed on the U.S. Census as a concrete contractor, owning his own company.

During these years his involvement in local politics began. The *Chicago Tribune* stated that Ryan's "political genius" was recognized when he became a Democratic leader in the 32nd ward. This included Morgan Park when it annexed to the city in 1914. By that time, Ryan had become a member of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Within a year, he was Chairman of the Finance Committee. In early 1921, Peter Reinberg, the Cook County

Board president, died while in office. Ryan was unanimously elected by the Board to fill Reinberg's unexpired term. Ryan took office in February 1921 and served as president until December 1922.

The Cook County Board oversaw a wide variety of services and facilities, including hospitals, roads, jails, courts, schools, tax collections, records, and the forest preserves. Ryan's most lasting legacy to his community may well be the forest preserves and the system of roads in Cook County. That these were favorite projects of his is obvious, from an article he wrote for the *Chicago Tribune* in January 1922.

"Cook county is fast becoming a paradise for the automobilist. The forest preserve is a natural adjunct to our system of good roads. More than 4,000,000 persons there found rest and relaxation in 1921. So the forest preserve district is a promoter of the automobile, and the motor car, in turn, is a populizer of the preserves. Cook

county intends to continue extension of its paved highways, as well as its forest preserves," wrote Ryan.

Ryan carefully guarded the intent of the forest preserves. Newspapers reported he declined the suggestion to place captured World War I German cannon in the preserves, explaining that "God has given us the peaceful forests, and it is not right to place these grim reminders of war in them."

Ryan did allow the Gold Star Mothers to place bronze markers in the preserves, commemorating the sons lost in the war. The remnants of one are visible on the southeast corner of 87th Street and Western Ave. He also worked with the American Legion, Boy Scouts and Kiwanis to plant 11,000 trees for Armistice Day (now Veterans Day) which were dedicated to individual veterans.

Ryan suffered a "stroke of apoplexy" while riding with his son, Dan, Jr., in May 1923, and died on June 14. He was buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

Upon his death, the *Suburbanite Economist* referred to him as "good old Dan Ryan." The *Chicago Tribune* stated "he was considered one of the most valued members [of the Cook County Board of Commissioners], as he was the leader in giving the county the wonderful system of Forest Preserves. He was highly respected in all circles."

Dan Ryan, Jr., was elected to fill his father's vacancy on the Cook County Board. By 1926, the Beverly woods were renamed in Dan Ryan, Sr.'s honor. The Dan Ryan Expressway was named for the son in 1961.

Activities at the Beverly woods

The Beverly woods were an incredibly popular place and influenced the growth of the area. Real estate developers capitalized on the preserve and used it advantageously in advertisements.

Early sports facilities included two baseball diamonds, tennis courts and a half-mile cinder track. By the mid-1920s, for winter sports, there was a 30-foot ski jump for "amateurs," toboggan slides, and flooded baseball diamonds for ice skating.

There was strong support from the Beverly Improvement Association and the Beverly Country Club in 1921-22 to establish a public golf course in the preserve. Indeed, the small parcel of land north of 83rd St. bordered by Western Ave. and railroad tracks apparently was purchased with that possible goal in mind. In January 1922, *Tribune* golf columnist Joe Davis reported that a temporary course would be set up that spring. However, no further mention of a golf course appears in later newspapers so it seems doubtful this actually occurred.

The golf course idea might have derailed when the decision was made to make the Beverly woods one of twelve free tourist camps for automobile travelers in Cook County. By the early 1920s, there were over nine million automobiles and trucks in the U.S., and this new means of transportation offered people the freedom to travel whenever and wherever they wished. Road trips became very popular; new roads were built, and old ones, like Western Ave., were improved.

Western Ave. was part of the Dixie Highway, a system of roads started in 1915 that connected the

**AT EDGE OF
FOREST PRESERVE**

5-rm. brick bungalow, near Beverly hills. Beautiful trim and decor, all hard wood. Double garage. Street paved. Furn. ht. B. I. 1925. \$5500.00 (Cash \$1500.00)

McINTOSH, WAGNER & CO.

6167 Ashland Ave. Phone 3749 (bet)

Advertisements appearing in the *Suburbanite Economist* newspaper in the 1920s showed how developers capitalized upon the Beverly woods for marketing houses and property (above). Also, horseback riding was very popular in the woods' early days, and ads for stables in the area appeared regularly (below).

**SHEA'S RIDING
ACADEMY
SADDLE HORSES
And
SHETLAND PONIES**

Ride in the Forest Preserve
\$1.00 Per Hour
86th St. and Seecley Ave.

northern U.S. with the Deep South, ending in Miami. The woods at Beverly were strategically located along the Dixie Highway.

Tourist camps popped up all over the U.S. to provide camping sites. In 1923-25, *Tribune* articles noted that the camp at Beverly was used extensively by motorists. The "deluxe" facilities at Beverly included a shelter house, built from logs from deadwood in the

preserves, with lounge areas and fireplaces, showers, laundry tubs, toilets, and gas cook stoves. Throughout the camps, tables and benches, water and firewood supplies, and "sanitary equipment" could be found. Beverly could accommodate 600 cars.

From spring through fall, hundreds of events were held in the Beverly preserve, including private and group picnics, weddings, sports events, graduations, and retirement parties. The newspapers covered everything from the very small (a birthday party for a six-year old boy) to the very large.

One of the most prestigious early events held there was a 1925 Democratic rally that featured Alfred Emanuel "Al" Smith (1873-1944), speaking from a make-shift wooden platform. Smith was elected Governor of New York four times and was an influential leader in the Progressive movement, achieving a wide range of reforms. He was a strong opponent of Prohibition, believing it could not be enforced. The rally,

Al Smith was the first Catholic to run for President. He mobilized Catholic women to vote for the first time after the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. Photo appeared in the *Suburbanite Economist*, Sept. 29, 1925. Smith was featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1925.



When democracy assembled in Beverly forest preserve. Right to left, Mayor William E. Dever, George E. Brennan, national democratic committeeman, Gov. Al Smith of New York, and City Comptroller Martin J. O'Brien.

attended by over 100,000 people, was considered the kick-off for Smith's campaign to run for U.S. President in 1928. He was defeated in that election by Herbert Hoover. In 1932, he again sought the nomination but it went to Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The details of another event that attracted 5,000 visitors were shared in an article in the *Southtown Economist*, giving an idea of the extent and variety of festivities that went on at group picnics. There were foot races for people of all ages, and some of

these were billed as "novelty contests." These included a 100-yard dash for "fat men weighing more than 200 pounds," a ladies' fan and balloon race, and a baseball-throwing contest for women. The contests were followed by Polish, Irish and Swedish folk dancing performances. Then came gymnastic exercises on parallel bars and the horizontal bar. Vaudeville entertainment included Gus Gilord, circus clown, and Robert Wassman, "prestidigitator and marionette master." Prizes in gold coin were awarded to the owners

of the four most tastefully decorated automobiles driven to the event.

The Beverly Hills Woman's Club (BHWCC) worked with the County Board to establish a bird sanctuary around 91st and Winchester. The sanctuary included 50 bird houses built by Boy Scouts of the community. A bronze plaque dedicating the sanctuary and other improvements was installed in a stone pillar near the 91st St. train station in 1928.



The Chicago and local papers carried hundreds of stories about the Beverly woods throughout the 1920s. The Beverly Hills Woman's Club adopted the 91st St. entrance and spent years landscaping and beautifying the site. They erected a monument near the train station as this *Suburbanite Economist* article (left) from April 10, 1928 reported. All that remains today is the stone pillar (right) Photo by C. Flynn.



Next issue: Part III on the History of Dan Ryan Woods: "From Sighing to Singing"

A 1930s aerial photo of Dan Ryan Woods, looking south. From the FPCC collection at U. of I. Chicago Library.

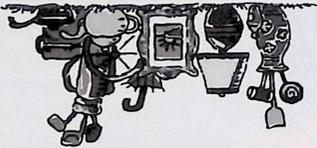


Ridge Historical Society

10621 S. Seeley Ave.

Chicago, IL 60643

Summer 2016 Issue

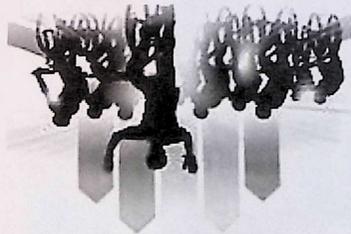


email ridghehistory@hotmail.com.

Held the evening of the Beverly Hills Cycling Classic, RHS offers a prime location for viewing the race while enjoying a hot buffet; wine, beer and soft drinks; and a dessert bar. From 4:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., \$40 per RHS member, \$50 per non-member; children under 12 free. At RHS, 10621 S. Seeley Ave., Chicago. Reservations required by July 8: Phone 773/881-1675 or

Memorial Bike Race Party

Friday, July 15, 2016: The Annual RHS Carl Spencer



Mark your calendar....

The week-end of September 30 and
October 1 and 2, 2016:
The Annual RHS Garage and Better Book Sale
Details will be forthcoming.