

In 2002, The Wednesday Journal did a wonderful commemorative section honoring its centennial. It was entitled "Oak Park Stories 100 Years of Big News in a Small Town." Excerpts of articles from that edition are presented here, with permission from The Wednesday Journal.



Oak Park's Defining Moments

1902 - Oak Park de-annexes from Cicero Township and incorporates as an independent village.

1906-07 - The new OPRF High School building north of Lake Street opens.

1907 - Saint Edmund Parish is formed in central Oak Park. Long known as Saint's Rest and home to congregations of all major Protestant denominations, this first Roman Catholic parish set the stage for a rapid influx of Irish Catholics and others into Oak Park.

1912 - The park district is formed and begins acquiring land for parks.

1915-17 - The Cook County Forest Preserves are created.



1917 - Ernest Hemingway graduates from OPRF High School.

1900-1920 - Frank Lloyd Wright and other local architects give Oak Park and River Forest structures a pronounced "prairie" flavor.

1920s - A building boom creates numerous commercial districts and develops the portion of the village north of Division.

1925 - The World War I Memorial is dedicated in Scoville Park. The U.S. vice president attends the ceremony.

1922 - The Oak Park Arms Hotel opens for business.

1924 - The OPRF stadium is built using private funds, raised by subscription.

1926 - Robert Nicholas, a successful hardware merchant attracts the Chicago department store, the Hub, to Oak Park. Within a few years the so-called Father of the Lake Marion business district also attracts The Fair department store to Oak Park. The arrival of Marshall Field's and other large stores makes Downtown Oak Park a west suburban shopping center without parallel for more than 30 years.

1929 - Marshall Field's opens within weeks of the stock market crash. Fenwick High School holds its first classes that same fall.

1930s - Oak Park & River Forest maintain an uneasy co-existence with Cicero during Prohibition. Several prominent mob figures take up residence in the two villages. A negative aspect of the business growth was the forced relocation of African-American residents in William Street area (now Westgate).

1936 - The Lake Theatre opens and the "new" Oak Park Post Office is built as a WPA project. The Community Chest is formed to raise funds for social service agencies.

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1940s & '50s - The "Catholic" invasion sweeps in following World War II.

1950 - Renowned African-American scientist Dr. Percy Julian moves to Oak Park.

1952 - Village Manager form of government is voted in by citizen referendum in Oak Park.

1953 - The first VMA-backed slate of trustees is voted into office. Russ Christiansen becomes village president. Mark Keane is the first village manager.

1950s - Extensive renovation of the District 97 elementary schools. The Congress Expressway plows through South Oak Park. 1960s - Elsie Jacobsen's Beautification Committee eventually turns into the Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest. Fair Housing marches begin and the Community Relations Commission is formed, later to become a division of village government.

1962 - The Lake Street CTA tracks are elevated. Scoville Institute is torn down to make way for a new public library building in 1964.

1962 and '65 - Ridgeland Common Pool and Ice Rink and Rehm Pool open.

1968 - Oak Park's Fair Housing Ordinance is passed. Henry and Sherlynn Reid become the first African-American couple to buy a house with a conventional loan from a local lending institution. The addition to OPRF High School is completed, closing off Ontario Street.

1971 - The old Lowell School is sold to developer Jonas Stankus who razes the building and replaces it with the gaping hole that will forever bear his name and which became a symbol of the economic downturn.

1972-73 - Oak Park goes "wet," allowing liquor to be served and sold for the first time in 100 years. Bobbie Raymond's Housing Center sets up shop in the basement of First United Church of Oak Park and becomes a major player in the integration effort.

1974 - The new Oak Park Development Corporation, private-public sector partnership to encourage economic development is formed with Art Replogle as executive director. Replogle works with others in the community to purchase the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio. The new FLW Home and Studio Foundation begins tours and the Oak Park tourism industry is born.

1974-87 - The Oak Park Pedestrian Mall attempts to compete with the larger suburban malls, but after 13 years, Lake Street reopens to traffic.

1975 - Two pioneer Oak Park churches, First Presbyterian and First Congregational, merge to form First United on Lake Street. This creative approach keeps alive the spirit of these churches in a new, cooperative entity.

1976 - Oak Park is named an All-America City. Emerson and Hawthorne elementary schools are converted to junior highs and District 97's boundaries are redrawn. A few years later, Hawthorne's name is changed to Percy



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Julian Junior High.

1980 - Wednesday Journal begins weekly publication, providing the Oak Leaves with much-needed competition.

1980s - Wieboldt's and Field's close, sounding the death knell of the villages' retail heyday. 100 Forest Place finally fills the Stankus Hole. Sara Bode becomes the first female village president. Police corruption is investigated by a high-profile panel, led by soon-to-be best-selling novelist Scott Turow.

1984 - The Ernest Hemingway Foundation is established, following in the footsteps of Frank Lloyd Wright.

1990 - Marjorie Judith Vincent is named Miss America.

1990s - District 97 passes a referendum to build two new middle schools to replace Emerson and Julian. The village board passes a Domestic Partnership Ordinance, providing benefits for partners of gay village employees. A few years later, a Domestic Partnership Registry allows gay couples in Oak Park to be officially recognized at village hall.

2000 - Voters approve the construction of a new, much larger, library building.

2001 - Oak Park celebrates its centennial.

