

# HISTORICAL UPDATE

VOLUME 31, ISSUE 1 WINTER 2016

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we look back on 2015, the Board of Directors is grateful for the enthusiastic and professional leadership of our museum's director and curator, Sara Phalen. Under Sara's direction, throughout the year we provided activities that presented Warrentown history to a variety of groups, while highlighting our emphasis on art through our artist-in-residency program. With Connie Weimer's and Nancy Olufs's leadership, the Summer Tea was again a success and our Museum Guild ladies made and sold a large number of items at their annual Christmas Fest, despite the Fest being held in a different location this year due to the road and bridge construction. Our Christmas ornament, "the Roundhouse," has been well received and we are grateful to North Star Credit Union for underwriting its production. Melissa Simmons headed up the group who conducted another successful Cemetery Walk in October. Thank you to all of you who supported our work through your membership, visits to the museum,

attendance at our programs, volunteer work, and financial contributions. Thank you, also, to the City of Warrentown, for all of the support provided.

As we look ahead in 2016, we hope you will: RENEW your membership, ENCOURAGE a friend, family member, neighbor, colleague, or local business to join (our dues are modest; consider the gift of a membership), and VOLUNTEER at the museum and/or for some of our special programs. Remember that we are an organization of volunteers who believe the story of Warrentown's history and art is worth preserving and telling.

Our first program of the year, "The Seven Sisters of Colonel Warren" (see accompanying article), will be held this month. We hope to see you there—and throughout the year.

--David Anderson, President  
Board of Directors

## THE SEVEN SISTERS OF COLONEL WARREN

Join the Historical Society on Sunday, **January 31st** as we present our original program *The Seven Sisters of Colonel Warren* at 2:00p.m. at the Warrentown Public Library. Our town's founder, Colonel Warren played an important role in his family. As the only son in a large family, one of his main personal duties was to find seven suitable husbands for his seven sisters. All seven men turned out to be prominent leaders in the early and developing northern Illinois area. Join us for this multi-media program detailing the lives of Colonel Warren's sisters and their husbands.

**Reservations are required**, please contact the Warrentown Public Library at (630) 393-1171 or at [www.warrentown.com](http://www.warrentown.com) to reserve your spot. Light refreshments will be served.



*Harriet Warren Dodson, her and her husband Christian Dodson were some of the earliest settlers in Geneva, Illinois*

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

Jan 31 The Seven Sisters of Colonel Warren

Save the Date:

Aug 6 Annual Summer Tea

*Warrentown Historical Museum & Art Gallery*  
*February - May, September-December*  
*Sun. 1-4 p.m.*  
*June, July & August*  
*Wed. & Sun. 1-4 p.m.*

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## THOSE WERE THE DAYS: WARRENVILLE'S CONNECTION TO THE 1903 CHICAGO IROQUOIS THEATER FIRE

ADAPTED FROM LEONE SCHMIDT'S "ASK THE HISTORIAN"

Each December, the nation remembers the deadliest theater fire and the deadliest single-building fire in United States history. This tragic event has local ties which City Historian Leone Schmidt addressed in an "Ask the Historian" article. There is also a tie to one of Colonel Warren's sisters, Louisa Goddard Warren Bird, who will be featured in our January 31st program *The Seven Sisters of Colonel Warren*. Louisa's son-in-law and daughter were killed in the disaster. Below the terrible tale is told in the words of our local historian.

"The 1903 Chicago Iroquois Theater Fire was headlined as the 'greatest horror of a century,' and took the lives of James McKee and his sister-in-law, Marion Bird, both 64. They were just two of the nearly 600 theatergoers who were fatally burned, suffocated, or trampled underfoot at the matinee performance of 'Mr. Blue Beard, Jr.' on Wednesday, December 30.

"Flames had burst onto the stage when a pattering calcium light ignited the curtains and engulfed the stage, cutting off the escape of gallery and balcony occupants.

"Bernard Boecker of Naperville was seated on the first floor, fifth row from the rear, and had no trouble exiting, but he narrowly missed being crushed to death just outside the door.

"James McKee was a former treasurer and assessor for DuPage County, and the son of pioneer Chicagoan David McKee. He and Frances Bird, niece of Colonel Warren, were married in 1860. Her younger sister, Marion, made her home with them, and after 'Frankie's' death in 1899,

Marion stayed on at the Eola Road farm as her brother-in-law's housekeeper.

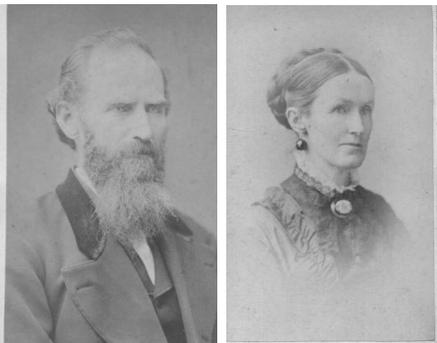
"Both James and Marion were buried in the Warrenville cemetery the following Sunday afternoon. Surviving McKee was an adopted daughter, Katharyn (Mrs. Rutherford Hadley)."

The fire led to quick and radical changes in theater policies and fire codes. All Chicago theaters closed for six months and theaters in New York City eliminated standing room. Theaters across the United States and even some in Europe closed to make needed improvements required by new codes, including adding exit signage. The Iroquois Theater building was torn down in 1926 and the Oriental Theater was built in its place.



McKee Farmhouse originally on Eola Road. The home was moved to Fermi Lab on Batavia Road.

### FROM THE COLLECTION



Jacob and Ellen Bird Woodworth

Marion Bird, who perished on that fateful December day in 1903 at the Iroquois Theater, kept a photo album. The album was passed through the family and today the Historical Society is lucky enough to have this treasured heirloom in our collection to be preserved for future generations. Among the photographic prints and tin types included in the album are family members and national figures, such as Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. The album also contained the pictures of Ellen Bird (Louisa Warren Bird's daughter) and Jacob Woodworth, who were married in 1850 at Colonel Warren's home on the corner of Batavia and Main Street. Other family photographs are featured at the Historical Museum in the Warren Bedroom which also features the hair sculpture created by Marion Bird. The unique family tree includes hair from almost 60 family members of the Warren, Bird, and McKee family.

## MUSEUM GUILD WRAPS UP ANOTHER GREAT YEAR

A huge **thank you** is owed to the Museum Guild who does a wonderful job under the leadership of Connie Weimer and Nancy Olufs in putting together the Summer Tea and Christmas Fest fundraisers each year! The Guild members work tirelessly to help support the Historical Society's mission and we could not be more appreciative.

At the November 7th Christmas Fest it was clear to see how much time and passion these great women put into their work. Despite a location change to the Community Baptist Church because of continued construction on Second Street, the annual holiday sale was a huge success again this year and we cannot thank the Guild members enough for all they do!

The Guild takes a well-deserved break over the winter and starts back up with meetings in the Spring. They will be hard at work on the 12th Annual Summer Tea when they reconvene. Save the date for this great luncheon, which will feature Annette Baldwin's presentation on



female Civil War spy Elizabeth Van Lew this year! The Tea will be held on Saturday, August 6th and is also supported by a City of Warrenville Tourism and Arts Commission Hotel Motel Tax Grant.

If you would like to join the Guild or help out with either of these two great events, please contact the Historical Society.

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATION AND CALL TO SERVICE

January is National Thank You month. The Historical Society could not operate the Museum, offer programs or adequately preserve our community's history without our wonderful volunteer crew. They truly are the backbone of our organization. We want to extend our deepest gratitude for all the work they do!

If you are still looking for a New Year's resolution, resolve to spend some time this year working on a Historical Society project or helping our museum director at the museum. We are always looking for people to join our

wonderful group of volunteers and especially looking for docents and student docents who can help be at the museum for a few hours each year or a few times a year. This year we are also planning for the upcoming celebration of **Warrenville's 50th Anniversary**. If you would like to serve on a committee to recognize our great town's anniversary please contact us. If you are interested in helping out please contact us at (630)393-4215 or [info@warrenvillehistorical.org](mailto:info@warrenvillehistorical.org). You can also download our volunteer application on our website [www.warrenvillehistorical.org](http://www.warrenvillehistorical.org).

"VOLUNTEERS DO NOT NECESSARILY HAVE THE TIME; THEY JUST HAVE THE HEART." - ELIZABETH ANDREW

## ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP

Do you know a Warrenville senior heading off to college in the fall? The Warrenville Historical Society is happy to continue to offer a \$500 scholarship to a 2016 graduate from either Wheaton Warrenville South or St. Francis High Schools. Eligible seniors must have also graduated from Bower, Johnson or St. Irene's elementary schools and be a current Warrenville resident to apply. Please see our website [www.warrenvillehistorical.org](http://www.warrenvillehistorical.org) for more information and to download the scholarship application. Students can also pick up an application from their school's guidance counselor's office. We strongly encourage all students who qualify to apply. The application deadline is March 1, 2016. Please contact the Historical Society with any questions. Funding for the scholarship comes from the Historical Society's Annual Summer Tea Fundraiser.



Alderman Barry, 2015 Scholarship Winners Marisa Zajac and Tom Hutchison, and Mayor Brummel



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SOCIETY

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Leslie Schatz

Tim Sleep

**Board Meetings:**

Second Monday of the Month

**Newsletter Editor:**

Sara Phalen, Director/Curator

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**Online Resources** You can still access Warrenville history during the cold winter months from the comfort of your home! Virtual walking tours can be taken at [Warrenville.toursphere.com](http://Warrenville.toursphere.com). You can also explore historic photographs on Google Earth at [www.historypin.com](http://www.historypin.com).

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