

Spring 2010 Newsletter

Protect Your Heritage

PDHA next
Meeting
Thursday
May 27, 2010
7 PM
Lincoln Center
Room 307

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Adopt-A-Highway
CLEAN-UP DAYS

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Pierce Downer's
Heritage Alliance
P.O. Box 422
Downers Grove
Illinois 60515

1846 Blodgett House Update

In 2007 Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance helped in the formation of another group, the Downers Grove Heritage Preservation Corporation, in order to preserve and renovate the 1846 Blodgett House. This House, built by Israel and Avis Blodgett, is one of the oldest homes in Downers Grove. The Blodgetts were important early settlers of Downers Grove, who used their home as a stopover point on the Underground Railroad, providing shelter to escaping slaves who sought freedom in Canada.

Restoration work on the 1846 Blodgett House has uncovered several interesting architectural features, such as its post and beam construction with mortise and tenon joints throughout. Removing lath and plaster from a first floor room revealed that the Blodgetts used issues of a leading abolitionist newspaper, THE WESTERN CITIZEN, as their builder's paper. Fragments of the June 13, 1844 edition are still visible today adhering to the original studs.

The Blodgett House group has made great progress on restoring the house to its original, mid-19th Century appearance. The exterior renovation is now virtually complete. The house has been re-roofed and new siding applied. New windows matching those in a Blodgett family 19th Century photo have been installed together with appropriate Greek Revival front door sidelights. The front and rear porches with a rear boardwalk are finished, and the basement stairway and concrete floor have been poured. The Heritage Preservation Corporation has commissioned custom front and rear doors specially designed to match the period; they were fortunate to discover an original interior door that can be used as a reference point for style and construction technique. These final pieces of the exterior renovation should be completed by early spring, at which time finishing touches will be made to the landscaping.

Bringing the Blodgett House to completion of this first phase in the project has been an arduous effort. With generous community support, it has also been very satisfying one. Still ahead are the interior renovation of the house and the development of museum exhibits. The Blodgett House group has recently suspended its construction activities until it can raise additional funds. When funding becomes available, the next step will be converting the Blodgetts' early home into a significant public museum emphasizing the community's connection with the Underground Railroad. Please visit the website www.1846BlodgettHouse.org for progress updates.

The Greek Revival style 1846 Israel and Avis Blodgett House is now located on the Campus of the Downers Grove Historical Museum just to the west of the Victorian 1892 Charles Blodgett

House at 831 Maple Avenue. These two historic Downers Grove buildings provide important contrasting glimpses into our community's cultural heritage. - *By Charles Smart & Gordon Goodman*



Fragment of June 13, 1844
THE WESTERN CITIZEN
on 1846 Blodgett House stud



Victorian Charles Blodgett House and Greek Revival Israel & Avis Blodgett House

Rain Barrel Sale

The Village of Downers Grove and The Conservation Foundation are partnering to make rain barrels available to residents at a reduced price during the month of April.

The 55-gallon recycled, food-grade plastic rain barrel comes with a garden hose threaded spigot and an overflow outlet.

It also has a screw-on lid with a screen in the top to help keep out bugs and debris.

In this sale event rain barrels cost only \$70 each.

Buying a rain barrel as part of the Village's bulk order cuts \$15 from its regular price of \$85.

Payments will be made on the pickup day, May 8th, with a check written to The Conservation Foundation.

For more information and to place your rain barrel reservation order, please visit the Village website:

Downers.us/story/view/330

–By Mark Thoman

Rain Gardens

During rainy periods, many property owners experience problems with standing water in their yards or with seepage or flooding in their basements. A "Rain Garden" on the property can ease these problems. A rain garden is simply a shallow depression planted with native wetland or wet-prairie wildflowers and grasses. It is designed to collect water that runs off a roof or driveway, or from a sump pump discharge.

A home rain garden should be located in a low area that is down gradient ('downhill') from a sump pump or gutter downspout discharges or that receives runoff from your driveway or other impervious surface. Low areas in your yard where rainwater accumulates and the ground remains soggy for extended periods of time are also good candidate areas for a rain garden. At the selected spot, the soil should be dug 4 to 9 inches deep, with the sides sloped gradually and a berm built up at the bottom (the 'downhill' end) of the garden.

Look for plants that do well in wet soil conditions. Plants that are appropriate for a rain garden include: swamp milkweed (*Asclepius incarnate*), Joe-Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*), prairie blazing star (*Liatris pycnostachya*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), and wild blue flag iris (*Iris virginica shrevei*), along with many others. Fertilizers are not recommended or needed.

The native plants in a rain garden will filter and clean runoff before allowing it to soak into the underground aquifers. By keeping runoff out of storm drains, the water quality of streams, lakes, and so on is improved. The plants will also draw water from the soil, helping to reduce the amount of standing water or very wet soil remaining at that location. Finally, a rain garden will develop into a beautiful, low maintenance garden that provides food and shelter for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects. Websites of both the Rain Garden Network (<http://www.raingardennetwork.com/about.htm>) and The Conservation Foundation (<http://www.theconservationfoundation.org>) include some helpful links for more information on rain gardens. – By Cathy & Ihor Hlohowskyj

Downers Grove Is Planning Its Future

Downers Grove is in the middle of a multi-year process to update the community's formal plans. In 2009 we saw many community meetings of the Total Community Development (TCD3) effort, and Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance (PDHA) submitted input which was published as part of the final TCD3 Report (available online and in the library). In 2010 the effort turns to revising the formal Comprehensive Plan, and a committee of eleven residents has begun meeting. This Plan is wide-ranging and covers many topics important to the PDHA mission, in preserving both the natural and cultural heritage of Downers Grove including its rich architectural heritage.

The draft chapter on Open Spaces and the Environment begins: "The parks, open space, and environmental features in a community contribute significantly to the overall quality of life, image, character, desirability, and aesthetics. These areas within and nearby the Village provide places for residents and visitors to recreate and enjoy. In addition to enhancing and protecting these areas, policies and programs should be created for the overall environment as part of a long-term sustainability plan." [Downers Grove, Illinois Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Report & Workbook: page 91]

Over the course of the Comprehensive Plan cycle, PDHA members can follow progress on the Village web site and attend monthly meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Committee, as well as work through PDHA meetings and programs. Public hearings are expected later in the year, but input earlier in the process is likely to produce more satisfactory results. The Committee's next meeting is to be on Tuesday, April 27th.

– By John Schofield



A typical "Rain Garden"

Landscaping with Native Plants

As spring and summer approach, thoughts turn to countless hours mowing the lawn, watering flowers, and battling persistent weeds. Instead of fighting against nature, more and more homeowners are discovering how to work with nature. By incorporating native plants into a suburban yard, sterile green lawns can become beautiful gardens teeming with butterflies and birds. Native plants are attractive, unique, and hardy, and there are plants that will work in any soil type and any situation- shady, sunny, dry, or wet. Native plants are adapted to our local environment, so they are drought tolerant, pest resistant, and low maintenance. Adding natives to your yard also benefits local wildlife. Butterflies and other beneficial insects, as well as many species of birds, will visit your yard to collect pollen, eat seeds, and drink flower nectar.



The initial demonstration butterfly garden at Lyman Woods was constructed as an Eagle Scout Project with support from Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance. Since then it has been maintained and improved by the Downers Grove Park District and is now certified as a Conservation at Home site by The Conservation Foundation. The garden showcases common native plants like columbine and the easy-to-grow purple coneflower, as well as lesser known species like turtlehead, pussytoes, and the very fragrant bergamot. Plants in the garden were chosen specifically as host plants for butterflies and other insects. Butterflies, hummingbirds,

bumblebees, and hummingbird moths all frequently come to the butterfly garden. Visitors to Lyman Woods are encouraged to stop by the Interpretive Center to view the butterfly garden and learn more about using beneficial native plants in their own yards.

To further the Interpretive Center's goal of encouraging the use of native plants, two new spring programs for adults are being offered. On April 21st Cathy Hlohowskyj, President of the Downers Grove Organic Gardeners, will lead a program entitled "Monarchs and Milkweed" to explore the natural history of the monarch butterfly and provide information on how to create a Monarch Waystation at home. On May 5th, Erin Tuttle will provide participants with the knowledge they need to mimic natural systems in their home landscape during "Organic Gardening." Both programs will be held at 7:00 - 8:30 pm at the William F. Sherman, Jr. Interpretive Center at 901 31st Street in Downers Grove, and pre-registration is required. Visit www.dgparks.org to register, or call the Interpretive Center at (630) 963-9388 for more information. – *By Shannon Forsythe*

ARBOR DAY Is Friday April 30th

Park District Activities: The Downers Grove Park District will be celebrating Arbor Day with a free tree giveaway. The Park District will distribute 1,200 oak seedlings grown from Illinois acorns. Most of the seedlings will go to first-graders at local elementary schools as a follow-up to the District's Little Sprouts program. Seedlings will also be available to the public at the Recreation Center, 4500 Belmont Road. The seedlings will come ready-to-plant, with planting instructions and information on the role of trees in the environment. There will also be a ceremonial tree planting at the Recreation Center at 11:00 AM on April 30th. The Park District hopes to make this an annual event. Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance is supporting and assisting the Park District with this activity.

Morton Arboretum: The Arboretum is planning a number of activities for Arbor Week, April 22 through May 2, carrying out the Arbor Day tradition established by the Morton family. There will be tree planting on April 30, and special activities and celebrations for kids in the Children's Garden through the April 30 – May 2 weekend. That weekend will also feature the Arboretum's Arbor Day Plant Sale with more than 300 unique varieties of plants. Visit their website, www.mortonarb.org, for details. – *By Ken Lerner*



*Please Join Us
on Our
Highland Ave
2010 Adopt-A-
Highway
CLEAN-UP DAYS*

*April 24
June 19
August 21
October 9*

*Saturdays
8:30-10:30 am*

*Check our
website for
updates and to
sign up to
participate!*

*Have you
renewed your
membership in
the Heritage
Alliance?*

*See the back page
of this newsletter
for more info and
how YOU can
make a
difference!*

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Pierce Downer
1782-1863

Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance Spring 2010 Newsletter

You are invited to join us at our next 2010 Meeting
Thursday, May 27, 7:00 pm
Room 307, Lincoln Center, 935 Maple Ave., Downers Grove.
Check our website www.PDHA.org for more details.

Your membership in the Alliance helps in our efforts to petition local government officials to preserve our heritage resources. Your participation in our programs demonstrates to our community the strength of our alliance to protect Downers Grove's natural and cultural heritage.

Please join Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance or renew your membership now as we work for protection of the natural and cultural heritage of Downers Grove.

Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance
P.O. Box 422, Downers Grove, IL 60515

Yes, I want to begin/renew my membership in Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance.

Name(s): _____

Street Address: _____ Telephone: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ Email Address: _____

Contribution: \$ _____ (Employer matching contribution?) _____ I/We can also volunteer some time.

A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTION of \$10 or more will help the Alliance defray expenses, but is **not** required for membership. Your email address will allow us to keep you informed of future events.