



URBANDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER
4010 70TH STREET
URBANDALE, IA 50322
(515) 270-2917



www.urbandalehistoricalsociety.org

Fall 2019

Olmsted-Urban House Listed in National Register of Historic Places

The Olmsted-Urban House, the Olmsted Family farmhouse, is now listed on the prestigious National Register of Historic Places. This is the Federal Government's official list of historic properties deemed worthy of preservation. Listing on the National Register is administered by the National Park Service and assists in preserving the nation's heritage.

Recognition is a long-involved process. Some initial work was led by Madeline Kaloides, Historical Society president in the 1980's. At that time regulations were much more stringent about what changes and remodeling could be made to the two-story house of American Foursquare architecture which was built in 1904, and the application was not pursued.

In more recent years the significance the Olmsted family played in Urbandale's history and the Olmsted House itself prompted the Historical Society Board to consult with Will Page, public historian and preservation planner.

After initial inspection of the property grounds and the exterior and interior of the house, Mr. Page felt the property could meet the National Park Service standards. He was contracted in 2017 to lead the application process.

Society president Norm Huitt spent many hours helping document details of the house architecture, physical condition and changes made to the property. Virginia Gee searched for photos and information about the use of the house and the significant role the Olmsted family played through the years.

An initial 40-page report was submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs. Norm and Pat Finnerty met several times with Will Page to answer questions raised by Laura Sadowsky, State Historian, and the Nomination

Review Committee. After some study, the nomination was approved and sent on to the National Park Service. The property known as the Olmsted Family Farmhouse was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places effective August 6, 2019. An official plaque will be purchased and placed on the House. It is a great honor to have the property approved. The only other site in Urbandale is the Flynn Mansion and Barn at Living History Farms, which received the historic designation in 1973.

We are planning for a special celebration later this Fall to commemorate this special honor. Watch the newspaper, our Facebook page and the website for more information.

Programs - Fall 2019

For years the program meetings of the Urbandale Historical Society have been held in the evening of the first Monday of the month. Now some changes are being tried. Beginning with our September program meeting we will be holding the program on the second Sunday of the month at 2:00 pm.

We are hoping that this change to a Sunday afternoon will be more appealing to those who do not like to drive in the evening. In many ways this is more typical of life years ago when families looked forward to going out for Sunday afternoon visits. We will try this new schedule for a while and see how everyone likes it. We are hoping that we will see increased interest and attendance at our monthly program meeting.

Remember, you do not have to be a Society member or Urbandale resident to attend. Looking forward to seeing you and invite your friends to come along.

Fall Programs:

September

The Fourth of July has become an important celebration in Urbandale involving hundreds of volunteers and thousands of visitors. A leader in the activity has been Ron Cross who in 1993 was named the Citizen of the Year by the Urbandale Chamber of Commerce. He will be telling us some of his experiences of serving for years on the 4th of July Committee at the September 8 meeting of the Urbandale Historical Society at the Olmsted-Urban House.

Virginia (Ginny) Olmsted will also be on hand to tell how her father "Mugs" Olmsted in 1953 helped organize a street dance for the young people at 70th and Douglas. In the following years the American Legion began backing the dance and sponsoring a parade and family activities in Lions Park – the forerunner of our current July 4th celebration.

In later years a small-scale fireworks display was added with a bucket being passed around to collect donations to cover the costs. In 1980 commemorative buttons were being sold, a tradition that continues today. By this time Ron Cross was a part of the July 4th Committee.

Come to the interesting meeting on Sunday September 8 at 2:00 pm (Olmsted house) and share your memories of the July 4th Celebrations in Urbandale.

October:

On Sunday October 13 (2:00 pm) we will be hosting Jim Fromm, a balloonist from Indianola, as he presents about ballooning and the Indianola Balloon festival. As an added treat, we will be having a Raffle for a balloon ride for two (2). We will be selling Raffle tickets from the middle of September through the drawing on December 8 (our Christmas Open House). These will make a great Christmas gift.

November:

Urbandale's own hero from WWII, Glen McDole, will be the topic of our November program. Pat Finnerty will be presenting on the adventures of Glen during those trying times. This event will be Sunday, November 10, 2:00 pm at the Olmsted house.

Historical Society Fall Bus Trip

The Historical Society Fall Bus Trip is scheduled for Tuesday, October 8. The first stop will be the Warren County Historical Museum in Indianola. The main building has two floors of historical exhibits which include a large collection of Winchester tools, McCoy pottery, quilts and toys. Displays are arranged to depict old time businesses, family homes and a model train replica of Indianola. A special exhibit of nearly 200 hats honors women with a century of hat designs.

The Historical Village also includes a log cabin, Mount Hope Country School, pioneer church, George Washington Carver Museum, machinery building and general store. All are in close proximity so walking is not a problem.

Off to Oskaloosa in Mahaska County and a quick stop at Mahaska Drug. More than just a drug store since the 1990's, the business is more like a modern equivalent of a general store. You can find everything - cards and candles to medication and college gear with gifts for everyone.

Lunch will be at Brick House Cafe with special sandwiches and of course, pie ala mode.

Now we go back in time to the Nelson Pioneer Farm Museum, a complex of restored buildings developed around the original homestead of Daniel Nelson who acquired his land in 1844.

The land was farmed by the Nelson family until 1958 when it was given to the Mahaska County Historical Society. The Nelson Home built in 1852 and barn built in 1856 are both designated as National Historic sites. A number of other buildings open for tour include a log cabin, Friends Meeting House, one-room school house, country store, blacksmith shop and coal miner's house.

To participate in the bus trip, reserve your spot by September 24. Send a check for \$80 (which pays for bus transportation, lunch and admission fees) to Urbandale Historical Society, 4010 70th Street, Urbandale, IA 50322. Mark for Bus Trip. Please include your phone number and the phone number and name for the emergency contact list.

The bus will leave from the Olmsted-Urban House parking lot promptly at 7:30 a.m. Bob Simon, trip advisor, estimates the bus will return about 5:30. A

minimum of reservations must be received by Sept. 24 or the trip will have to be cancelled. Talk to your friends and encourage them to come with you for this interesting day. For more information call Jo Henry 515-360-5768.

Fall Open House

The Fall Open House will be held Sunday, October 6 at the Olmsted-Urban house from 2-4 pm.

All rooms will be available for viewing with historical Society members on hand to answer any questions. Come and see some of our recent acquisition. The Wayne Robbins Barn will be open with farm items and Urbandale memorabilia on display. Bob Simon will be on hand as your host to share experiences.

Newcomers to Urbandale are especially encouraged to visit and learn more about Urbandale History. Invite your friends and come enjoy the Fall visit to the house. There will be light refreshments.

Robert J. (Jim) Olmsted

Robert J. (Jim) Olmsted passed away at his home in Surprise, Arizona on August 13, 2019. He was born June 23, 1935 in Des Moines, the son of Robert C. and Mary Jo Olmsted and the grandson of Clarence. Ginny Campbell and her brother Charles Olmsted are cousins.

Jim had visited the Olmsted House with his children Tom and Krista in connection with some Olmsted Family events and had continued his interest. As a result, the family suggested that memorial funds could be donated in his name to support the Olmsted-Urban House. The Historical Society certainly appreciates this consideration.

A graduate of the University of Nebraska, Jim was a Signal Corps Officer in the United States Army. He later worked for 35 years for the phone company beginning as lineman working up to his final position as Manager of Revenue Operation. He was an active member of Masonic Lodge, American Legion, Optimists Club and Shrine International. He spent countless hours in support of the American With Disabilities Act and received recognition from the Mayor of the City of Surprise for his efforts. He also was awarded a certificate of appreciation from the U.S.

Army Freedom Team for his ongoing support to the United States Army.

Ice Cream Social 2019

This past June as is the tradition in Urbandale, we kicked off the 4th of July celebration in Urbandale with our Annual Ice Cream Social. The weather cooperated and a great time was had by all, lots of ice cream, pie, cake and good fellowship. Carol Lee Riekenberg once again has put together a very nice booklet capturing the fun and photos of the Ice Cream Social. Stop by the Olmsted house and see this and the other books she has produced of our events.

Urbandale School District Staff Visits

Friday, August 16, about 50 staff members new to the Urbandale School District stopped at the Olmsted-Urban House as part of a "Get Acquainted with Urbandale Tour". Divided into eight groups; they went from place to place spending just a few minutes at each location - the different school buildings, administration office, and other city locations.

Virginia Gee spoke of how the Historical Society could provide support to classroom activities and Pat Finnerty gave a brief history of the school district and the role Millard Olmsted played. The visitors were given copies of the brochures about Urbandale history, the Olmsted-Urban House and the Tour of Urbandale. We were happy to have these newcomers visit the House and encouraged them to come to future events and contact us if we could provide information,

Punch on the Porch

A traditional event at the Olmsted-Urban House is "Punch on the Porch". This year it will be held on Wednesday, October 30, 6-8 p.m. Carrying on the long-time tradition of Matie Urban, orange drink will be served in glass cups as we welcome the children in the neighborhood and listen to their "jokes". Last year more than 80 visitors stopped by.

Holiday Open House

When you plan your Fall/Winter schedule be sure to add the traditional Holiday Open House to your calendar. While typically the first Sunday in

December, this year we will be celebrating the second Sunday, December 8. Come anytime from 2-4p.m. The Olmsted-Urban House will again be beautifully decorated. In keeping with our traditions, Norm Huitt will display some interesting toys from his collection. The model trolley/train that runs on a track around the base of the Christmas tree in the living room is a big hit with the children and adults. Listen to the piano music and enjoy the punch and special cookies. Invite your friends and come and participate in the festivities to start the Christmas season.

Alumni Activities & Urbandale Homecoming

The Urbandale High School Alumni Association is planning several events related to the High School Homecoming in September. The group will have an entry in the Homecoming parade and be at the street party following the parade on **Thursday, September 19**. The Homecoming game will be the next day, **Friday, September 20 at 7:00 pm**, following the annual Lions Club Pancake dinner. The very successful 1979 football team will be honored prior to the game that evening. Several classes have indicated they are planning reunions on Saturday, September 21. In addition, a tour of the McDivitt Cemetery with Mary Polson is being planned for 1:00 pm on Saturday. The Olmsted-Urban house will be open for alumni and friends to visit Saturday afternoon as well.

For more information contact Meribeth Haynes (Class of 1976) or Linda Bierman Hoobin (Class of 1973).

History of the Olmsted-Urban House

Leander and Charlotte Olmsted came to Polk County from New York state in 1867, eventually purchasing 40 acres of land from the Michael family. They constructed a simple farm home where they lived with sons Millard and Clarence.

In the early 1900's Leander decided to build a new four-square two-story house on the southeast corner of his expanding farm property along the rural road that is now 70th Street. Millard had now married a local farm girl, Olive Stuart. The floor plan of the new house probably had about 12 rooms, though some changes have been made through the years. Millard and Olive eventually had five daughters and a son all of whom grew up living in the Olmsted house.

In 1937 the house was sold to the Harold Gutfreund family who did some renovation, modernization and changing of the interior. The entry ways to the parlor and the dining room were changed and the oak woodwork and staircase were painted white. Changes were made to the bedrooms upstairs and some steps to the attic were removed.

In the 1940's the house was sold to Karl and Matie Urban. Matie made few changes and lived there for many years after Karl died. When she was in her 80's, she went to be near her son John in New Mexico.

When it was decided to sell the house there were several prospective buyers who had plans to develop the property. The Urbandale Historical Society, a small group of citizens who had organized in 1977, had hopes of finding a permanent site to house the historic items and memorabilia they were acquiring. In 1987 Madeline Kaloides, Society President, worked with John, who also had an interest in preserving history. They were able to work out a ten-year contract that enabled the Society to purchase the house. The Urbandale City Council agreed to allocate some hotel-motel tax money to help make the monthly payments. One provision of the contract was to recognize the Urban name. That is why the historic house preserves the name of the original builders as well as the original owners. Members of both families contributed much to Urbandale's history.

John gave the Society a considerable amount of his mother's furniture which had not been moved, including the dining room table and six chairs, some living room chairs which would later be reupholstered, kitchen items and the piano. Once the purchase was complete, many people donated other furnishings and money that enabled the Restoration committee to purchase items similar to those used in a home in the periods of the 1920's and 30's.

The house was structurally sound, with a few exceptions. City regulations required a good deal of work. We had to put a foundation under the front porch, re-do the entire electrical system and provide a new sidewalk and paved parking lot. Interior work by many volunteers included selection of wallpaper, carpet, new paint and restoration of the woodwork. Several Questers groups were consulted and they helped with some of the major renovation projects over the years.

By 1997 the mortgage was paid off, but work on the interior, exterior and major upkeep continues. Several fund-raisers have been held and donations are always welcome.

Though the interior floor plan was altered somewhat, the house retains a home-like atmosphere and meeting place. The exterior is basically the same as pictured in a historic photo of 1909. A newspaper article dated in 1924 describes the residence of M.A. Olmsted as one of the most beautiful homes in Urbandale. The house, recognized in 2019 as historically significant is basically the same in appearance as it was when built in 1904.

Your Membership Is Important

Urbandale Historical Society was incorporated January 18, 1977. A dozen or so families kept the Society going for the first ten years. Membership increased dramatically when the Olmsted-Urban House was purchased in 1987. Membership in 1993 peaked at 165. Through the efforts of Marie Long and then Katherine Brush new contacts were made. Since that time there have been some deaths or people have moved away. It is really appreciated when family members continue to support the Society. . Today we stand at just under 100 paid memberships

Hazel Demirjean is the only original surviving member of the group when it first met. Hazel now lives in Conrad but still enjoys receiving the newsletter even though she is no longer able to participate. Another long-time member is Don Avaux who as a friend of Wayne Robbins was actively involved in the first restoration work of the Olmsted-Urban House. Though Don now farms near Adel he is still involved in Historical Society activities, especially the Ice Cream Social. A number of Olmsted family members who live out-of-state have also provided continued support through the years.

The first membership directory published about 20 years ago lists Board Members Kathryn Brush, Kay Readinger, Virginia Gee, Bill Lawson, Ginny Campbell, Beth Haigh and Mary Jo Jablonski. All of these people and some others listed as members are still involved.

Continued memberships are important, but we also need to add new members. Expenses for upkeep of the property have increased, grant opportunities have

decreased and some of the early fund-raising events are no longer being held. Consider encouraging your friends to join or give names to Pat Finnerty or other Board members if there is someone we should contact.

The listing of the “Olmsted Family Farmhouse” to the National Register of Historic Places presents an even greater long-term fiscal challenge. Consider making a special donation or plan for a memorial fund for continued success.

Directory

If you are a Historical Society member you should have received a copy of the most recent membership directory. If there are any corrections to be made now or in the future please notify us so the records and mailing lists will be accurate.

While we have tried to be certain there were no errors, some did creep in. Please note the following corrections:

Iylene Lemon
Phone #: **515-276-2119**

Bob and Verda Simon
Address: **Apt. #3220**

Cynthia Dabrieo
Phone #: **515-331-0494**

New Members

We Would like to welcome the following new members to the Society:

Tom & Jannette Olmsted
Richard Leutzinger
Karen Hanley

Thank You

We would like to thank Endow Urbandale and Gabus Automotive Group for their generous contributions and support for the programs and operations of the Urbandale Historical Society. In addition, Joel Huggins of ADA Mowing has donated their mowing services for this year.

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