

HISTORICAL 'TIME LINE' VILLAGE OF OAK BROOK

For 10,000 years before the coming of the French and Spanish explorers, Indian cultures lived within the Village of Oak Brook. Their presence here is demonstrated by the finding of their beautifully chipped projectile points, scrapers and knives – all tools associated with hunting and butchering. The mixed forest-prairie of northwestern Illinois abounded in game, particularly the white-tailed deer and American elk.

From the late 17th Century to 1833-35, Potawatomi Indians lived in the Chicago area. A Potawatomi village called “Sauganakka” was located in the eastern section of present day Oak Brook.

*1833 – Following the Treaty of Chicago, having sold the last of their lands from Cleveland, Ohio to the Mississippi River, the Potawatomi Indians traveled to their new home in Oklahoma westward along the “Black Hawk Trail”, now Ogden Avenue.

*1834 – Early settlers arrived in the Fullersburg area located at what is now Ogden Avenue and York Road. They purchased land from the U.S. Government for \$1.25 an acre. Benjamin Fuller built his home in 1840 and “The Farmer’s Home” a tavern and grocery. The Torode family built and operated a sawmill on the banks of Salt Creek just west of York Road. The mill was destroyed by fire. Subsequently, Frederick Graue built a grist mill on the site in 1852 and in 1860 built his home.

Ben Fuller platted the town in 1851, but never incorporated the town. When a proposed railroad along Ogden Avenue corridor was diverted from the Fullersburg area (south to what is now Hinsdale), Ben Fuller’s small town lost early prosperity and eventually slid into obscurity except for the five historic buildings remaining in the historic district. Today, the Forest Preserve District of DeKalb County owns the Mill, the only operating grist mill in the State of Illinois, and the Graue home, recently restored to its original condition.

*1890’s – Frank Osgood Butler, president of The Butler Paper Company, purchased land south of 31st Street along Salt Creek for a summer home.

*1906 – F.O. Butler purchased the Natoma Dairy, located on the north side of 31st Street and operated it for 30 years. F.O. Butler acquired hundreds of acres in the area to support the dairy operation that served communities as far west as Wheaton. The dairy became the principle business in this part of York Township.

After selling the Natoma Dairy, F.O. Butler continued to purchase land and created what was called “The Base Farm” for cattle brought here from his ranch in South Dakota.

*1918 – Francis Stuyvesant Peabody, coal magnate, purchased land from F.O. Butler and established an estate south of 31st Street. He built a Tudor Revival mansion and

Gatehouse (1919-1921). At his passing in 1922, the land was purchased by the Franciscan Order in 1924 and used for Retreats. They built St. Joseph Seminary which opened in 1927.

*1921 – F. O. Butler donated the land, and built a two-room school at the corner of 31st Street and Spring Road. This new school was named the Butler School. It replaced several one-room schools in this area, primarily the “Rabbit Hill” school at the corner of 31st Street and Midwest Road and the Torode School on north York Road.

*1922 – The son of F.O. Butler, Paul Butler, established the Oak Brook Polo Club. This was the first use of the words “Oak Brook”.

During the ensuing years, Paul Butler expanded his polo operation to nine polo fields, plus built the necessary horse stables to serve the visiting teams. Soon, Oak Brook became one of the “polo capitals” of the world.

*The 1940’s – Paul Butler took over management of The Butler Company. He continued to purchase land in this area and eventually The Butler Company owned approximately 3,600 acres of what is now Oak Brook.

*1942 – A community-wide organization called “The Oak Brook Civic Association” was created to serve the area between Hinsdale and Elmhurst as a World War II civil defense operation. It marked the first time that the words “Oak Brook” were used to identify anything other than polo.

*1945 – Following World War II, The Oak Brook Civic Association was incorporated as a “not for profit corporation”. It flourished as a “quasi-governmental” organization that held monthly meetings at the Butler School. Local problems were discussed and resolved. The 300-plus residents who belonged to the Civic Association resided primarily in the Fullersburg Woods area. Students attended Butler School and most moved on to the Hinsdale High School.

*1946 – Theodore “Ted” Mohlman was hired by Paul Butler as General Manager of the Butler Company. Before the war, Ted had been a world class steeplechase rider. He became responsible for the polo operation, the Base Farm, York Golf Course, and the Upland Game Hunting facility.

*1948 – Mohlman organized the colorful Oak Brook Hounds (fox hunt) and became its first “Master of the Hunt”. The group was active until the 1960’s when open fields became scarce because of the growing residential nature of this area.

In the early 1950’s, the Civic Association formed a volunteer fire department. The firemen were supported by donations and proceeds from an annual horse show that was first held at Keith Line Stables and then at the Butler horse show area.

*1953 – The Illinois State Tollway Commission was created by a special act of the legislature. The Commission sold bonds worth \$415 million to finance a Tri-State, East-West and Northwest toll roads.

The original engineering drawings of the Tri-State and East-West toll roads revealed that these two major highways would segment Paul Butler's vast land holdings. Butler convinced the toll road authorities to move the Tri-State toll road east to the Cook/DuPage county line, and relocate the East-West toll road north of the 22nd Street corridor.

*1955 – Marshall Field & Company purchased the 160 acre Otto Ahrens farm located at Route 83 and 22nd Street for a future store that became the anchor for the Oakbrook Shopping Center.

*1956 – Construction of the toll roads began and both were basically completed by 1958.

*1957 – DuPage County rezoned land along the toll roads as “commercial”.

*1958 – Four petitions for the incorporation of towns cities/villages were filed, all of them including the coveted shopping center property and land along the East-West toll road. Two petitions failed; however, an area known as Utopia was successful and included the proposed shopping center property on their incorporation map.

A fourth petition, this one sponsored by Paul Butler, created what is now Oak Brook. The original village consisted of only one square mile and had only 103 residents! Because the proposed shopping center was included in the Utopia petition, it could not be included in the Oak Brook petition.

*February 21, 1958, the new Village of Oak Brook became a reality. Through the efforts of Paul Butler, Ted Mohlman and Charles Rhodes, Vice President of Marshall Field & Company, several residents of the new city of Utopia who were located on the northern edge of the proposed shopping center, disconnected themselves from Utopia (subsequently re-named Oakbrook Terrace), and were annexed into Oak Brook. They brought with them the vacant land on which the shopping center was to be built.

*April 3, 1958, Ted Mohlman was elected president of the Village of Oak Brook. The DuPage County zoning ordinance was adopted by the Village.

During 1958 and 1959, Paul Butler annexed all of his property into the new Village.

*1959 – The equestrian event known as the “Pan American Games” was held in Oak Brook. Competitions were held in areas of Oak Brook now known as Brook Forest, Briarwood Lakes, Park District property and the Mayslake Forest preserve.

*1959 – The Oak Brook Utility Company was created by Paul Butler and Philip Klutznik to provide water and sewer service to the future Oakbrook Shopping Center, commercial

properties and planned residential developments. Approximately \$750,000 was spent to construct the facility.

*1960 – Construction began of the Oakbrook shopping Center. The Center opened in 1962. A small portion of the retail sales tax produced at the Shopping Center provided income for the new Village of Oak Brook.

To this date, the Village has never levied a property tax to operate itself. Other than a utility tax, Oak Brook received all its income from retail sales taxes.

*1961 – Paul Butler created the Oak Brook Park District that was co-terminus with the Village boundaries. This action prevented the newly form Oakbrook Terrace Park District from including his vacant land holdings, some of it extremely valuable commercial properties, as part of its tax base.

*1961 – The new Butler School was built on the ten acres Paul Butler traded for the first Butler School. Ownership had reverted to Butler when the original school ceased to operate as a school.

Butler than sold the original site and building to the Village for use as a Village Hall and police station. One room was set aside for a free public library, one of the few such libraries in Illinois. The Village employed its first full time police chief.

*1962 – The Fullersburg Woods area, Yorkshire Woods and Woodside Estates subdivision were annexed to the Village, dramatically increasing the population from 324 to 1,664 residents.

*1964 – The Oak Brook Development Company was formed with the Del Webb Company of Phoenix, Arizona. The new joint venture quickly began commercial development along 22nd Street. Residential development, some already begun in Ginger Creek and York Woods, was expanded to include Briarwood Lakes, Brook Forest and Hunter Trails.

*1965 – A new zoning ordinance was proposed by urban planner, Carl Gardner. The proposal contained provisions for a different kind of Oak Brook – high rises in the commercial area and multifamily residential areas. If approved, the new zoning would result in a population of over 30,000 people.

However, the residents in the Village – now just six years old – strongly disagreed. They preferred single-family homes on spacious lots, low-rise commercial developments, and especially the preservation of open space.

A hastily formed committee from the Oak Brook Civic Association spent many long hours during 1965, testifying at the hearings. As a result of this ‘citizen movement’, most of the provisions in the new zoning ordinance that was adopted in 1966 reflected the recommendations of this committee.

*1967 – Ted Mohlman retired and moved to his farm in Maryland. The office of Village President was passed on to Sam Dean.

That same year, the Village took over the operation of the fire department from the volunteer firemen who had served the community for 15 years.

*1968- The Oak Brook Community Caucus was formed by the Oak Brook Civic Association to select and endorse candidates for public office.

*1968 – a detailed Comprehensive Plan was developed under the guidance of Gerwin Rohrbach, Urban Planner with General Planning & Resource Consultants, Inc., as a guide for managing and controlling future development within the community. The ‘Plan’ specified the preservation of open space, careful placement of commercial buildings and even included the concept of pedestrian pathways throughout the Village.

The ‘Plan’ was adopted by the Village in 1970, and has been modified several times during the past 30 years.

*1971 – The Oak Brook Utility Company was sold for \$6 million. The Village purchased the water system for \$2 million. The Hinsdale Sanitary District purchased the sewer system for \$4 million.

*1973 – Paul Butler developed the Butler National Golf Course. In 1974, the Western Open was first held there.

*1975 – A new Village Hall was built directly west of the old Butler School/Village Hall. The architects, Holabird & Root, received an award for the design.

The old Butler School/Village Hall was converted into the Oak Brook Library. A full time librarian was employed.

*1977 – Village residents voted for the ‘first’ village tax in order to purchase bonds to acquire the 270-acre Sports Core from Paul Butler. Cost: \$11 million. The bonds were retired in the last 1980’s.

Several village -operated facilities are located here: the Bath & Tennis Club, an 18 hole public golf course, fields for polo, soccer and other athletic events.

In the late 1970’s, Oak Brook became a member of the DuPage Water Commission. This organization brought Lake Michigan water to the western suburbs. Oak Brook’s original wells now provide water only for emergencies.

During the late 1970’s, Paul Butler sold his last substantial piece of land, known for years as the ‘Butler Company GHQ’, to McDonald’s. This company developed the property into a ‘campus’ for their world headquarters and ‘Hamburger U.’

*1981 – Paul Butler died.

The 1980's and 1990's -

Although there have been many changes in Oak Brook since its inception in 1958, the high level residential character of the community remains intact.

The Oak Brook Club was annexed to the Village. New residential areas such as Saddle Brook, Forest Glen, The Midwest Club, Trinity lakes, and Coventry, feature large homes on substantial lots.

New retail developments along 22nd Street have replaced several commercial buildings built in the 1960's and 1970's.

Since 2000, a new library has been built. The old Butler School building that served for so many years as the Library has been preserved. Through an inter-governmental agreement between the Village and the Park District the building will be historically restored and remodeled into a museum operated by the Oak Brook Historical Society.

The Village Hall has undergone substantial remodeling and a new firehouse has been built.

As it moves towards the 50th anniversary in 2008, Oak Brook's 8,700 residents can and should be extremely proud of the unique community that became the 'model' for so many other towns.