

# The Downers Grove Historical Society Newsletter



## Grave of Amy June Wells Now Honored

For many years the grave of Amy June Wells in the Main Street Cemetery was unmarked. It was lost in history, but has been found and properly identified.

Amy June was the daughter of John Manning Wells and Arvilla Bond Wells. Her father was from England arriving in America with his family in 1856 when he was just a young boy. The family settled in New York where John's father Robert enlisted in the Civil War in 1862 and served in the 146th Infantry. Because of a wound he suffered, he was discharged in 1863. Robert died in New York at the age of 60.

Amy's mother was born in Ohio in 1849 and moved to Naperville as an adult. John and Arvilla met in 1871 and married soon after. They came to live in Downers Grove and would make it their home for 57 years. John's mother Sarah also lived with them.

The year 1883 sadly brought the death of their 6 year old daughter Gracie Wells in January, and just five days later the death of John's mother Sarah. In 1886 John and Arvilla had another daughter Amy June. She joined her brothers

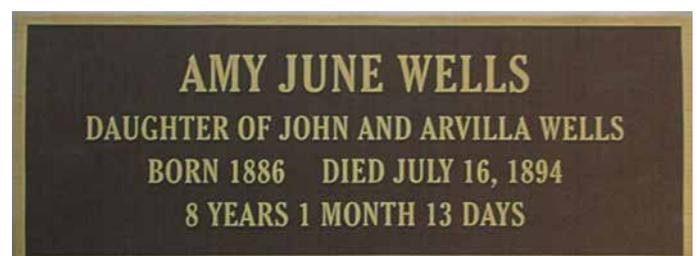
William (born in 1873), Walter (born in 1876) and Charles (born in 1879).

Sadly John and Arvilla lost Amy in 1894 when she was only 8 years old. Some unknown illness may have taken her like the illness that took her grandmother and sister in 1883.

Amy's three brothers all survived. William died in 1949, Walter died in 1920 and Charles died in 1965. Buried with Amy in Main Street are her grandmother Sarah, sister Gracie, mother Arvilla, and father John.

Ongoing research has uncovered yet another piece of history in the Main Street Cemetery.

Written By Lois Sterba



## 2020 Recipient of Montrew Dunham Award - Floyd Mizener

The first line of our national anthem, 'Oh, say can you see,' has special meaning for Dr. Floyd D. Mizener, who dedicated his life to improving vision for all age groups. He will be honored with the 2020 Montrew Dunham Award by the Downers Grove Historical Society on July 25th.



Dr. Mizener arrived in the Downers Grove area with his family in 1932, graduating from Downers Grove High School in 1944. He immediately joined the Marines serving in WWII, after which he completed his degree in Optometry.

His recognition and awards at the state and local levels for his work in vision testing and vision improvement are numerous. And his local civic involvement in the Lions Club, chairing the committee to oversee the building of the YMCA, his service on the DG Township Senior Citizen Advisory Committee and more, all reflect a person committed to Downers Grove. The Montrew Dunham award celebrates individuals who have shared their talents, volunteered countless hours, and provided leadership toward bettering our community and its future. We are looking forward to recognizing Dr. Mizener with this well earned tribute.

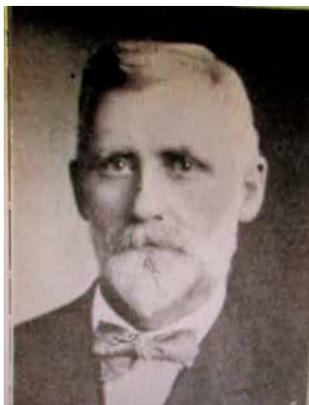
The celebration will be July 25th, pending updated Covid-19 guidelines for gatherings. Please go to [www.downersgrovehistory.org](http://www.downersgrovehistory.org) for updates on the award ceremony details and for a full account of Dr. Mizener's many contributions to Downers Grove.

Interviewed and Information Provided By Joyce Tumea

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## First Mayor of Downers Grove - John F. Kidwell

His name Kidwell may not be remembered by many but it had an important part in the history of Downers Grove. When Downers Grove was incorporated as a village in 1873 the form of government adopted was a President with a Board of Village Trustees. In 1917 the village voted to change to a Commission form of government with a Mayor. The first elected Mayor was John F. Kidwell.



Born on August 27, 1860 in Prince George County, Maryland, John married Ida Nelson from Sweden in 1887. The family moved to Chicago about 1890 and John went to work in a florist shop. Soon he opened a shop with his brother on the south side of Chicago. His interest expanded to learning how to grow flowers. Soon he became well known in the flower industry of Chicago and was the first President of the Chicago Flower Growers Association and President of the Chicago Florist Club.

In 1905 John and Ida came to Downers Grove with his son Frank and nephew Rudolph Ellsworth. They opened the Wellworth Farm greenhouses on Belmont on several acres of land where they raised roses. In 1914 he bought the Foote greenhouses on Forest Avenue and after rebuilding them, added a retail store.

In 1909 Ida died and John was left with 5 children. Ida's sister Anna came to help and John and Anna were married in 1910.

John was interested in the affairs of Downers Grove. He was one of the organizers of the First National Bank and was on its first Board of Directors. John also served as chairman of the local council of defense during World War I. Of his 5 children, three sons served in the First World War. John Kidwell was elected the first Mayor of Downers Grove in 1917 and served for 6 years.

When John wasn't working he loved to fish. Patient and uncomplaining he enjoyed waiting for the next fish even if none came.

John died in November of 1932 after an operation and was buried in Mount Hope Cemetery. He was remembered as a kindly man always seeing the best side of everyone. John's second wife Anna passed away in 1936 and is buried next to him.

We remember our first Mayor John F. Kidwell for being an important contributor to the growth and prosperity of Downers Grove.

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## Historic Home Program

Research continues on 9 applications for Historic Home status. Due to the closure at the DuPage County campus caused by the Shelter In Place order, access to research files has been limited. As soon as these resources are available again, we will be able to complete many of these files and award the Historic Home plaques.

## Taking a Walk? Walk Back in History!

The COVID-19 pandemic has found many of us out walking around...for our health, and our sanity. Here are a few must-see sites in Downers Grove:

### Main Street Cemetery

Located in downtown DG on Main Street. While



you are there, log into [www.mainstreetcemetery.com](http://www.mainstreetcemetery.com) and read (or listen to) the compelling stories about our how our early pioneers settled the town.

### Pierce Downer Burial Site -

#### 4516 Linscott

It's OK to walk up the driveway of the nearby home to get to this important and historic site in Downers Grove. Operated by the Park District, it is the final resting place of Pierce Downer and a number of his family members.



### The mural at the Post Office

Chicago Railroad Center-of-the-Nation Mural; painted in 1940 by Elizabeth Tracy (Oil on Canvas) as part of the New Deal Era Fine Arts project.



## 1846 Blodgett House - Update

Public tours inside the 1846 Blodgett House started on Saturday, December 14, 2019. Thanks to community-wide support the 1846 Blodgett House, it has come a long way during the past decade, well beyond its initial journey from Randall Street onto the Park District's Museum Campus. Substantial progress toward completion of the building's interior has been achieved this year as a result of two major grants. The house now looks really great as described on the Park District's website

Come to look around inside the 1846 Blodgett House located on the Downers Grove Museum campus at 831 Maple Avenue. Regular monthly tours are once again being offered. The next Saturday afternoon tour is scheduled on June 27th with additional tours the last Saturday of the month during July and August. Attendance is quite limited so please sign up for your tour in advance on the Park District's registration page.

Written By Gordon Goodman



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## Upcoming Events - Save the Date!

All events/schedules are subject to change based on the most current Covid-19 state guidelines. We will update you in this newsletter and on our website at [www.downersgrovehistory.org](http://www.downersgrovehistory.org) as we near these events.

### Montrew Dunham Award - Dr. Floyd Mizener, honoree

July 25th, 10am

Location/attendance limit TBD

### Carol Wandschneider - Celebration of Life

September 19th

10am - Church services; doors open at 9am for meet and greet at St. Andrews Church, 1125 Franklin Street, Downers Grove

4pm - Celebration of Life at the Downers Grove Museum, 831 Maple Avenue

### History on Tap

November 12th; 5:30pm start

More pubs, more trivia, lots of fun and camaraderie! Ticket sales will open in September...keep watch on our website!



## Make a Difference in Downers Grove

It's true that you can volunteer, have fun, and not feel like you have a second job. The Historical Society meets once a month in our mission to promote Downers Grove history, although not in a text book, slide show, boring kind of way. We're looking for fresh new ideas that will excite a younger audience about the history all around them. To be more specific, we are looking for people like you who have talents in the following areas:

- Writing
- Social Media
- Public Relations
- Interviewing
- Photography
- Passion for History
- Leadership

You really can make a difference! Hurry up and reach out to our fearless leader Liz Chalberg at 630-660-6767, or feel free to send her an email at [president@downersgrovehistory.org](mailto:president@downersgrovehistory.org).

We look forward to hearing from you!

[www.downersgrovehistory.org](http://www.downersgrovehistory.org)

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