



Left: The exterior of the original Hough Street School (Image used with permission from Ken Munson). Right: Interior of Hough School Auditorium during a Town Warming. Below: A Review article on Barrington's low illiteracy rate (Courtesy of Kate Mills at the Barrington Area Library). Note: The Review is online at the Barrington Area Library, with issues from 1889 until 1939, that are publicly accessible.

Milestones in Barrington's Civic and Cultural Journey

BARRINGTON WAS in the boonies, an outpost of hay and horses, so went long-held perceptions of our town and its surrounding countryside. But a study of the original Barrington Review newspapers tells a different story.

That story is one of civic, political, educational, social, and cultural progress pursued by a growing community of varied backgrounds and origins. Arnett C. Lines wrote in his History of Barrington that they grasped the plow of good government and had done a masterful job in the townships and then brought their experience to village government, bringing experience from their lives in the East. Barrington's illiteracy ranking showed the lowest percentage in the State of Illinois, as reported in printed local news on Nov. 18, 1931.

Barrington celebrated a milestone in its civic and cultural journey in 1939, with the inaugural Town Warming series. For 14 nights in January, nationally recognized thought leaders in politics, civics, world affairs, science, religion, and culture made their way to Barrington to offer its citizens their non-parochial overview of the world condition from their various disciplinary perspectives.

In 1939, Barrington, with literacy levels above the national average, would have been well-positioned to host a civic event such as a Town Warming. High literacy often correlated with strong civic engagement, organizational capacity, and an appreciation for public ceremonies that fostered community identity. A Town Warming would not only serve as a social gathering but also as a symbolic celebration of local values, progress, and cohesion—an opportunity for residents to come together, exchange ideas, and reinforce a sense of shared purpose.

The Barrington Review of January 5, 1939, explained it to the

3,000 or so residents: "It has been conceived and developed by group representatives of this community. The meetings will be held nightly in the high school auditorium which was an addition to the Hough Street Public School built the previous year. Admission is free and everyone in the community will be given an opportunity to hear some of the outstanding leaders of American thought."

The Review reported: Over 14 nights, 15,825 people attended the meetings. They came from Chicago and collar counties as far away as Waukegan, the North Shore, and Western Springs. The Chicago and Northwestern Railway, and poor roads, were their transportation. A 12-inch snowfall was no deterrent. The speeches were all recorded verbatim in a series of bound volumes that survived and, in 2017, provided inspiration to Karen Darch, then Village President and Patty Dowd Schmitz, then Village Events Manager, for a revival.

On Saturday, February 3, 2018, the ballroom in Barrington's White House was filled to begin a new chapter in Barrington's cultural history. The keynote speakers were Wendy and Henry Paulson.

Today's Town Warming is held annually. During Covid the entire program was transmitted via Zoom. One notable difference between 1939 and now: overflow crowds gathered to listen to loudspeakers in nearby churches. The speakers visited them afterwards. Today, attend in person, or watch the entire day online from elsewhere!

This year's event is on Saturday, February 7, and in this 250th year since the Declaration of Independence. The keynote speaker is Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the distinguished historian and host of "Finding Your Roots" on PBS. His topic will be "We the People: Exploring Our Roots." He will be here in person, a landmark occasion in Barrington's always interesting cultural journey. [U](#)

