

TRACKER

*Tracking Our Past and Present
for the Future*



2026 ANNUAL MEETING

On March 1, 2026, The Terrace Park Historical Society held its Annual Meeting at the Community House. Three new officers were voted in - Ann Swenson, Bethany Papacostas and Lauren Johnston, bringing the total number of officers to 14. After the meeting, attendees were treated to a program on 'The Serpent King'.

THE SERPENT KING

Presented by Theresa Leininger-Miller, University of Cincinnati Art History Professor, for the Terrace Park Historical Society 2026 Annual Meeting

LOCATION:

St. Thomas Church
100 Miami Avenue
Terrace Park, Ohio 45174

VISITING HOURS:

Thursdays from 1-4pm

CONTACT AND COMMENTS:

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P.O. Box 3
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WEBSITE:

tphistoricalociety.org

OFFICERS:

President: Laurie Baird
Treasurer: Marcia Moyer
Secretary: Katy Chisom

TRUSTEES:

Susan Rodgers
Sylvia Stirsman
Suzi Ricketts
Ogle Annett
Suzie Gray
Sandy Koehler
Charlotte Pritz
Sue Roberts
Ann Swenson
Bethany Papacostas
Lauren Johnston

TRUSTEES EMERITUS:

Carol C. Cole
Susan Abernethy Frank
Betsy and Bill Holloway
Helen Barnett
Stan Brown

LEGAL ADVISOR:

Steve Holmes

TRACKER EDITOR:

Susan Rodgers



Illustration used courtesy of reporter and children with snakes.
From Cincinnati Commercial-Gazette March 14, 1884.

For those who were not able to attend Professor Leininger-Miller's excellent presentation, we will fill you in on some of the details, as well as quotes from an article she has written for 'Bandwagon Magazine'.

During the late 1800's Leander Millward performed as a snake charmer for the Robinson Circus and was known as 'The Serpent King'. According to John Gilbert Robinson III (1872-1935, known as 'Papa'), Millward was a favorite performer of his father, John Franklin Robinson II (1843-1921, nicknamed 'the Governor').

"Robinson recalled Millward's passion for serpents, claiming that in the 1870s he carried them in his pockets, kept them in his bedroom, and took them to meals with him. When the circus train stopped in deserts,

Millward would explore holes in the ground to pull out rattlesnakes by hand. If bitten, he would twist a tourniquet about his arm or leg and suck the poison from the wound."

In 1884, a reporter from the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette interviewed Millward in his home, " a ten-by-twelve room with a little kitchen attached, where himself, wife, and four children eat, sleep, and drink in the midst of these hideous reptiles. The floor of the room was actually alive with these monsters... in the center of all was a bright little two-and-a-half-year-old baby, about whose tiny arm was coiled a spotted Western coral snake, while in his hands he held a Florida moccasin, whose bite is deadly poison, stroking it affectionately".

The reporter asked Millward's wife whether she was afraid of her husband's pets and she said "No, I have become accustomed to them, think as little about fearing them as you would of many cats. I cannot say that I like them, and at times it is extremely annoying to have them climbing about the tables and beds, but then again, they amuse the children, and by occupying their attention really afford more time for my household work than I might otherwise find."

(Someone please call Child Protective Services!!)

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WOMAN'S CLUB PRESENTATION



On January 19, The Terrace Park Woman's Club visited our facilities for a program on the Robinson Circus, presented by Board Member, Sylvia Stirsman. The event was held in our Gallery, and was one of our most popular and well-attended events ever.

Sylvia told the colorful story of the Robinson Circus and the three generations of John Robinsons who owned and managed the famous traveling show from their headquarters in Terrace Park. The presentation included many historic photographs, including parades, performers and even the structures for housing circus animals on what is now residential streets, such as the Elephant House on Wrenwood Lane.



Elephant House on Wrenwood Lane

After the presentation, members of the Woman's Club stayed to view the gallery and museum, both of which are continually evolving as more artwork and historic items are included in our exhibits.

BUILDING SURVEY RECORDS



Board Member Sandy Koehler has completed a months-long consolidation project of the Building Survey records.

Documentation on Terrace Park houses, which was scattered throughout the archives room, is now organized in a series of binders by street. There are over 50 notebooks, containing photos and other information for every building in Terrace Park. This information is also available online, at TPSurvey.org. Residents who are interested in the history of their homes are welcome to visit and view the collection.

LIFE CHANGING MAGIC



Our archive room has recently had a much-needed upgrade. Board Member Suzi Ricketts arranged for our unsightly open shelves to be enclosed in cabinet doors, transforming the entire room from messy to organized - a much more pleasant environment for our volunteers and visitors.

THE SERPENT KING CONTINUED

Millward also performed at Kohl & Middleton's Dime Museum in Cincinnati. As recorded in an article in the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette, "John Robinson's celebrated Serpent King sits in snaky majesty in a large glass cage, while masses of wriggling monsters coil about his feet and arms and neck. The king snake of the lot is a monster boa constrictor, said to be the largest in the world."

According to the Dime Museum manager, "He was absolutely fearless in dealing with the reptiles...He had been bitten several times before, but he always recovered, and it has been his boast that the snake was never born that could kill him."

However, his confidence was finally put to the test. On August 3, 1894, the Cincinnati Post published a story: "A Rattlesnake Sinks its Fangs into Millward, the Charmer, while he was giving an exhibition with the Robinson Circus in Arkansas".

"Previous to his performance with the big snake, King George, Millward showed several smaller reptiles, and then reaching into the box, took out a remarkably fine specimen of rattlesnake. While handling it, the reptile became angry...suddenly, without warning, the snake sank its fangs into the man."

The rattlesnake had bitten Millward on the face, and he was not able to apply a tourniquet as he had previously done with other bites. He passed away the next day.

Professor Leininger-Miller adds the final chapter to this story: "Amazingly, within two months, Millward's fearless widow, Alice, continued the show by performing at Kohl & Middleton's, 'with a large collection of reptiles, including the largest snake in the world and the rattlesnake that killed her husband. Her title then was 'Serpent Queen'."

If you would like to see a video of the Serpent King presentation, you can find it on the Terrace Park Historical Society YouTube Channel at 'Terrace Park (TPHS)', and there is a link on our website on the Circus page.

PRINCESS SOTANKI



The image was provided courtesy of Potter & Potter Auctions

While we are on the subject of snake charmers in the Robinson Circus, we would be remiss not to include Eva Brister, known as 'Princess Sotanki'. She not only performed with snakes, but was also the first black, female lion tamer in America.

Chris Hanlin, in an article for 'Cincinnati Preservation', writes that "Eva and her husband, 'Armmah' performed as 'The Sotankis, Royal Hindoo Wonder Workers.' Gradually, it was Eva, 'Princess Sotanki', who became the headliner, performing illusions including levitation, making a mango tree grow, making a small boy disappear from inside a woven basket, and something called the 'Hindoo popcorn mystery'."

"Princess Sotanki also performed the 'sacred Indian snake dance' during which she handled 'a number of live reptiles of immense size'. Sometimes she called it, the Dance of Death. The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, reviewing Sotanki's snake dance, said that, "The weird music, the solemn chanting, the beautiful costume worn by the princess, together with the gay draping of the Singalese, make a picture which for Oriental picturesqueness would be hard to surpass."

The stories of both Eva and her husband are told in a book by Professor Jacob S. Dorman, "The Princess and the Prophet: The Secret History of Magic, Race, and Black Muslims in America."



CHARLES MEURER SALES RECORDS

0.10	79	Autumn View Looking	
0.10		across Little Miami	\$ 20.00
5.00	80	Autumn Trees Near	
1.00		the River	20.00
0.02	81	Park Bench & Chickens	5.00
0.02	82	Walking Under Trees	5.00
1.00	83	Sketch - Miami Ave Miami	5.00
5.00	84	Churches Easting from Riverside	10.00
0.02	85	Hesperia Gardens - Mich.	15.00
3.00	86	Rose Arbor - Valley of Miami	20.00
0.02	87	Stables of Miami Club House	5.00
0.02	88	Steps, Church, Rose Arbor	10.00
5.00	89	Chickens Sheep in Barnyard	10.00
1.00	90	Miami Ave Chickens (Sketch)	5.00
1.00	91	Chickens in Miami Ave	25.00
5.00	92	Boats on Miami Canal	10.00
1.00	93	Boats on Miami Canal	3.00
1.00	94	Boat Harbor	5.00
1.00	95	Muskegon Lake - Bayou	5.00
0.02	96	Muskegon Lake - Boat	3.00

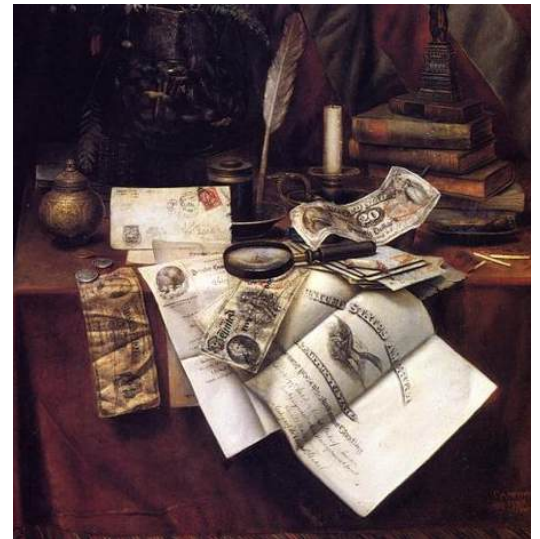
Meurer Notebook

We were recently given a small notebook full of handwritten lists of sales records. It turned out to belong to the daughter of Terrace Park artist Charles Meurer, where she had recorded lists of his paintings and sale prices, probably written around 1952.

Meurer was a sensation in the art world when he arrived in Terrace Park in 1894. His infamous painting, 'My Passport', was seized by the Secret Service on its way to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago because it depicted currency too realistically. He was forced to deface the money to comply with federal regulations.

Over a 60 year career, he produced paintings in two distinctive styles. One was the extremely detailed 'trompe-l'oeil' technique of extreme lifelike realism and the other was impressionistic scenes of pastoral scenes, many in the Terrace Park area, as well as riversides, portraits and city scapes.

Among his favorite subjects were sheep and cows, with occasional chickens included. The notebook includes titles like 'Sheep in the Barnyard', 'Sheep in a meadow', 'Sheep on a Hillside', 'Sheep at Sunset', 'Sheep at the Doorstep'.



My Passport

There are 23 paintings of sheep listed, along with and 10 paintings of cows, and numerous paintings of chickens, including several that also contained sheep. The prices for most of these paintings were between \$5 and \$10, whereas the 'trompe-l'oeil' works commanded much higher prices and must have taken far more time to complete.

You are invited to visit our Gallery or our website to learn more about Charles Meurer and his artwork.



Paintings in the Cincinnati Art Museum



Our gallery boasts one of his pastoral scenes with cows, a gift to us from past Terrace Park resident Virginia Fenton.

TERRACE PARK VILLAGE DIRECTORY SAGA



The Village Directory is a time-honored tradition in our village, dating back to 1959. The first edition was created by Terrace Realty, Inc. as a greeting card for the holidays that year. The following year, a second directory was published by E.J. Garrison of Nationwide Insurance. In 1962, the Terrace Park Volunteer Fire and EMS Departments took on the task and produced a directory every other year until 2015, when the Terrace Park Historical Society assumed the responsibility.

To make the process easier to manage, we made the decision to remove advertisements. Volunteers reached out to residents in an effort to obtain accurate information, and a new Directory was published in 2015. Since then, we have faced three challenges in producing the Directory. The first has been to obtain accurate information for the listings, and this year, we requested residents to use our website to update their listing information.

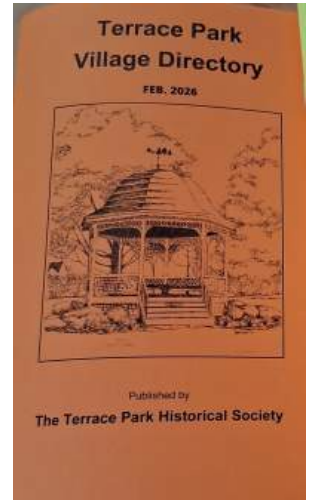
The results were excellent - over 800 listings were updated.

The second challenge was providing a way for residents to pre-order directories. This year, we included an online order option on our website, along with the option to confirm or update a listing. This was a also a success, with over 100 online pre-orders.

The final challenge was to convert all the names, addresses and phone numbers into a properly formatted, printed booklet. Many hours of proof reading, correcting and adjusting go into creating the final document, which is then sent to our loyal and tireless printer, Chad Martin, at 'Addressed For Success' (who also printed this newsletter).

Directories will be available for sale at our offices and at the Village Office.

We would like to thank Village residents for helping to streamline our Directory update process this year. If anyone has a suggestion for improvement, please let us know.



HOW TO DONATE TO THE TPHS ENDOWMENT FUND



The Terrace Park Historical Society is the beneficiary of an endowment fund, held with the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, which will provide annual benefits to the Historical Society in perpetuity. Gifts to the Fund can be sent to:

Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Attention: Laura Menge
720 E. Pete Rose Way, Suite 120 Cincinnati, OH 45202

You may also make an online donation at this address: www.gcfdn.org. Select 'Give Now' at the upper right of the page, then enter 'Terrace Park Historical Society Fund' in the 'Search Funds' box.

A link to The Greater Cincinnati Foundation can be found on our website: tphistoricalsociety.org. All gifts to the Fund are irrevocable. If you have any questions regarding gifts to the Fund please contact us at (513) 248-1777 or tphistoricalsociety@gmail.com. Gifts to the Fund are charitable contributions and are generally tax deductible. You should consult with your own tax advisor as to the specific tax impact for your situation.

Terrace Park Historical Society
100 Miami Avenue
Terrace Park, Ohio 45174

MEMBERSHIP

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our members for their support.

To our Lifetime members - Thank you for your very generous contributions - you have already donated substantially to our organization. To our other members - We hope that you will continue to find our work worthwhile. You can use the following form to join or renew your membership through December 2026. For online membership, visit tphistoricalsociety.org/membership.

Membership Form - Mail to: The Terrace Park Historical Society, P.O. Box 3, Terrace Park, Ohio 45174

Yes! I want to support the Terrace Park Historical Society with a 2026 membership. Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation for the following membership level:

Corporate/Patron(\$100) Heritage(\$50) Family(\$25) Individual (\$15)

Lifetime (\$1000 Payable over 4 years) Donation

Your Name: _____ (As you would like it to appear in our records)

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Email address: _____ (We send very few, and only important email notices)

Thank you - we appreciate your help!

The Terrace Park Historical Society is recognized as a nonprofit organization by the IRS, IRS Code: Section 501(c)(3)

Tax Identification Number: 51093908