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Chicago Tribune

$4.00 | SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026 | CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

With funding tight thanks in part to a technicality, supporters of Chicago's unofficially oldest house fight to sustain its place in Norwood Park history

A HOME STRETCH

Above: The exterior of the historic Noble-Seymour-Crippen house in Chicago's Norwood Park neighborhood on Oct. 3. **Top:** Mike Matray, left, looks around the entryway as docent Padraic Power gives a tour inside the house. CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS

By Allison Kiehl
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Tucked away in the quiet, residential Norwood Park neighborhood, lies one of Chicago's most historic buildings. The Noble-Seymour-Crippen house, a two-story, white-paneled home, sits atop a 1.7-acre property on the Northwest Side. A white wooden sign that reads "Norwood Park Historical Society" may be passersby only indication that the stately home is not residential.

The Noble-Seymour-Crippen house is recognized as one of the oldest buildings in Chicagoland, and is home to the Norwood Park Historical Society, a local history museum and event space. But it's not officially the oldest — an important distinction when it comes to funding.

That title from the City of Chicago goes to the Clarke-Ford House, finished in 1836 on the Near South Side. Built three years earlier in 1833, the Noble-Seymour-Crippen house was initially founded in then-unincorporated

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Teacher, witness stopped shooter

'Heroic' pair ended rampage in Oregon that left four dead

By Haven Daley, Alanna Durkin Richer and Eric Tucker
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEND, Ore. — A teacher threw her phone at the teenage gunman who killed four people at an Oregon elementary school, then tackled and fought with him — likely saving lives before he was shot by a father who followed him into the building, police said Friday.

Bend police Chief Mike Krantz called the teacher's actions "heroic" during a news conference and said she was not injured. He identified the attacker as 16-year-old Griffin John II, a former student at the school, and said all of the victims were shot in the same classroom.

Authorities said John had been a special needs student at Silver Rail Elementary and had attacked a classroom with special needs students. He fired as many as 15 shots from a 12-gauge shotgun and had about 44 rounds remaining when he was killed, Krantz said.

"Everyone wants to know why, including us," he said. "We may never get that full answer, but we want it."

The police chief added that police are also still trying to determine how the shooter obtained the shotgun.

The attacker's mother, Shaunta Nickerson, told reporters outside her apartment near the school that if she could have done something to prevent the shooting, she would have.

"I miss my boy," Nickerson said, sobbing and crying, according to The New York Times and CNN. "I'm so sorry, I wish I could have done something. I'm sorry for their loss."

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By **ALLISON KIEHL** | akiehl@chicagotribune.com | Chicago Tribune
PUBLISHED: October 17, 2026 at 5:00 AM CDT

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That title from the City of Chicago goes to the Clarke-Ford House, finished in 1836 on the Near South Side. Built three years earlier in 1833, the Noble-Seymour-Crippen house was initially founded in then-unincorporated Cook County and therefore is recognized by the Federal Register of Historic Places as the "oldest house within the present city limits."

That technicality makes getting financial support from the city and state more difficult, said Art Krumrey, interim president of the Norwood Park Historical Society. Instead, fundraising and donations keep the historic home financially afloat.

And with only three years of reserve funds in the bank, the Norwood Park Historical Society's wallet is running dry.

It takes about $95,000 a year to maintain the Noble-Seymour-Crippen house, money that covers everything from snow removal services in the winter to utility bills to annual website domain expenses. Beyond the normal, the old house sometimes incurs hefty maintenance expenses. In 2025, the Norwood Park Historical Society had to replace the home's roof, which set them back about $22,000.

An old photo of the historic Noble-Seymour-Crippen house with a Newark Avenue street sign are seen on display at the NSC house in Chicago's Norwood Park on Oct. 3, 2026. (Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune)

Ideally, Krumrey said the organization would like to have five years of reserves in its bank to set aside funds to restore the home's historic windows and repair the fence. But the path to get there is difficult.

"My ultimate goal would be to get enough attention, enough fundraising, so that we could actually get a part-time staffer to help run our organization, because right now, we're all volunteers," Krumrey said. "It's wonderful to be all-volunteer, but it really taxes the volunteers."

Because the Clarke-Ford house is recognized as Chicago's oldest, the Norwood Park Historical Society does not get any regular City of Chicago funding, the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events confirmed.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources also does not financially support the Noble-Seymour-Crippen house in any way, according to Illinois Department of Natural Resources spokesperson Brandon Damm. Tax documents show that the majority of income for the Norwood Park Historical Society comes from donations and fundraising.

Additionally, grant money has been little and far between for the Norwood Park Historical Society. Krumrey said this is partially because the house is "perceived as being in a well-to-do area of Norwood Park."

The historical society received a $25,000 grant in 2022, according to Krumrey and tax records. Before then, the last major influx of grant money came in 1998 — just after the Historic Society bought the home from the Crippen family. The money was used to repair the home and restore it to its condition circa 1920, when indoor electricity and plumbing were added.

Looking to the future, the Norwood Park Historical Society hopes the path to generating more income is by becoming more of a tourist destination in Chicago. The historic home, beyond its first-floor community space, has a four-room museum on the second floor that gives visitors insight into the history of the home and transports them into older versions of the encompassing neighborhood. The museum currently gets about 12-15 visitors per week, Krumrey said.

The house and surrounding Norwood Park area share a connection to Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable, as well as Native American history. Mark Noble Sr. and family, who built the wooden home with lumber from their Bickerdike-

Noble Sawmill, were once tenants in DuSable's home. Additionally, the land was once a portage for Native Americans. The Noble-Seymour-Crippen would go on to be occupied by a member of Chicago's Trade Board and the founding members of Norwood Park Baptist Church.

"There's a lot of hidden, little interesting things in Norwood Park that we want to bring to the table," Krumrey said. "We're trying to get enough docents to get on the architecture tour, which is a challenge because the Chicago Architecture Foundation is a great organization, but they want us to provide the docent for neighborhood tours."

Docent Linda Horwitz, left, gives a tour of the historic Noble-Seymour-Crippen house to Alyssa Argent, Mathew Aguinaga and Gloria Rosado, right, in Chicago's Norwood Park on Oct. 3, 2026. (Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune)

In September, the nonprofit hosted a "Stems and Steins" event that raised about $18,000, according to Krumrey. Around 150 attendees mingled on the Noble-Seymour-Crippen house's lush front lawn, sipping donated wine and beer samples in support of the historical society. Aptly named, music from local band 'Not Dead Yet' resonated from speakers near the historic home's front door.

"I don't want it to go away because they don't have enough money," said Mary Beth Rooney, 72, who attended the festival with her husband, Mike. "People need to see this sort of thing, need to understand it, need to know the history around it. It would be dumbing down the area if we lost it," Mike said.

The exterior of the historic Noble-Seymour-Crippen house in Chicago's Norwood Park on Oct. 3, 2026. (Chris Sweda/Chicago Tribune)

The home's next fundraising endeavor, Fall-O-Ween Fest, is set to happen from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Oct. 24. Krumrey expects that the October event could exceed the amount of money raised the month previous.

The Norwood Park Historical Society continues on its quest to preserve the Noble-Seymour-Crippen house, as it first did nearly four decades ago.

"We don't have a plan B," Krumrey said. "We do have enough reserves for a couple of years, but if those reserves dry up, we'd probably have to look for a merger or something. Right now, we've been able to get enough momentum with this fundraiser, and if we sustain it, I'm optimistic."