

St. Louis Park Historical Society
January 6, 2015
Minutes

ATTENDING

President Ted Ekkers; Vice President Bonnie Burton; Treasurer Henry Solmer; Trustees Sue Ainsworth, Jeanne Andersen, Paul Linee, Jeff Liss, John Olson, Jim Robbins; Members Don Schimmel and Mark Toretzky

SECRETARY DUTIES

Secretary duties for January and February. Secretary Claudia Johnston-Madison has submitted her resignation to Ted due to previous obligations. Bonnie moved to accept the resignation, Paul seconded, and the motion was passed.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December 2, 2014 meeting were reviewed. Paul moved that they be approved as written, Bonnie seconded, and the motion was passed.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurers Report was distributed and discussed. We exceeded our membership goal for the year, and despite extraordinary expenses of moving, rent, and equipment purchases, our net loss was only \$1,000. Ted, Bonnie, and Henry will meet to work on a preliminary budget for 2015, and we will discuss at the next board meeting. Bonnie moved to approve the Treasurer's Report, Jim seconded, and the motion was passed.

MEMBERSHIP

Bonnie reported that the membership database is in transition between the old and new computers. Our current PastPerfect database was corrupted on the old computer but Doug and Kathy Johnson worked to move it successfully to our new computer. We will be renewing our membership with AALSC, which will give us a discount to purchase an upgraded version of PastPerfect. Once that happens we will be able to reconcile various databases, and the program will generate thank you letters to donors before January 31. Paul reported that he sent 260 emails to members of the Class of 1964 and added a suggestion that they join the Society.

NEW OFFICE EQUIPMENT

Bonnie, Paul, and Henry went to MicroCenter in December and with the help of Dale Lapakko's son, who is an employee there, they purchased a laptop, printer/scanner/copier, and Microsoft Office software. Paul set everything up in our office.

PRESENTATION OF HISTORY AND GOALS

Jeanne made a presentation about the early history of St. Louis Park and the role of T.B. Walker in platting much of the land and planning a great industrial city. (See summary, Attachment 1.) She urged the Society to spread the word about our unique and interesting history via the press, presentations to civic groups, and possible inclusion in school curriculum. We decided that the first step was to make a basic PowerPoint. Paul volunteered to work with Jeanne to create this, and if it was done in time we could show it at our next meeting. Jim is interested in working with the schools. Jeff will explore working with Scott Smith at Park TV to do a Public Service Announcement.

Jeanne also brought up the urgent matter of finding a permanent place for our collection. While our present office is a fine temporary location, we need a larger space where we can display our artifacts, keep important files that the City is storing for us, hold events, etc. It must be accessible, in an appropriate location in the City, and financially sustainable. Paul suggested that we contact a woman he knows who is an expert in development, aka fundraising. Jeanne mentioned that STEP had actually hired someone to build their capital fund. The board asked Paul to contact his friend and ask her to come to our March meeting.

PROGRAMMING

- Ted is working with a woman who has offered to make a presentation on genealogy. This would be an event open to the public, with special preferences for members.
- Bonnie is working with Joan Brinkman to plan an “Antiques Roadshow” type of event, probably in May. Appraiser Bonnie Lindberg has volunteered her services for this event.
- John McHugh at Community TV has asked us to make a presentation at the brown bag series for City employees. We will use the PowerPoint that Jeanne and Paul will create for this event when it is finalized.

COLLECTIONS/RESEARCH: See Jeanne’s report, Attachment 2.

OLD BUSINESS

Logo: Mark presented several variations on our new logo, which were discussed at length. He and Ted will work on finalizing it, and it will be used on a new brochure, stationery, the website, etc. Our thanks to Mark for all his work on this project.

Website Update: Ted is working with Tony Noterman to update our website. It is now in a test environment and Tony is building pages. Due to the extreme size of the site (5,000+ pages and 3,000+ pictures, with countless hyperlinks), this project will take longer than expected, but will result in a fresher look, more capabilities, and information will be easier to find.

NEW BUSINESS

New Office Hours: It was decided that our office hours would change from Thursday mornings to Saturday afternoons from 1 to 4 pm. The weekday hours carried over from when Lenox was not open during the weekend, but it makes better sense to be open when people are not at work or in school. Jeanne has volunteered to be at the office each Saturday, and other Board members are encouraged to come as well to welcome guests and help them find materials. Jeanne will post the new hours on the website and Facebook. She will also come this Thursday, January 8, to catch anyone who doesn't get the news. We hope this change will allow more people to visit and for us to provide better service to the community.

Bader Redevelopment Update: Bader Development, who did the Ellipse Project at the old Al's Bar site, contacted the Society regarding its proposal to redevelop the block at Highway 7 and France Ave. This block includes the round white ASAP building, the Militaria building, and three properties in the Manhattan Park neighborhood. This project is in its very early stages. Ted passed around preliminary plans provided by Claudia Johnston-Madison, who is on the Planning Commission.

Annual Report: Our Bylaws require that we send an Annual Report to the Minnesota Historical Society each year. Our MHS liaison, David Grabitske, said that there is no set format, and it should be sent to his attention. Jeanne will write a draft and send around to present and past Board members for additions and corrections.

Webmail Requests:

- We received a request for help on a project to find pictures of men from St. Louis Park who died in the Viet Nam War. Jeanne will call to find out more specifics.
- We received a request from Junior Achievement for volunteers to present a curriculum to students. Jim expressed interest and Ted will forward the request to him.

Office Space: Manny Camilon donated two display cases to the Society on January 3, 2015. Sue and Henry met him and his son at the office and Henry paid them \$100 to move them here from Norwood-Young America. All of our current furniture is dedicated to documents and research materials, so these will be a great way to bring in some of our artifacts from the Depot and display them. We thank Manny for this very generous donation.

T.B. WALKER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ST. LOUIS PARK

Thomas Barlow (T.B.) Walker was born in Xenia, Ohio, in 1840. His parents had traveled west from New York, and soon afterwards his father died of cholera while preparing to join a wagon train west. Thomas finished college at age 19, and after hearing a glowing description of Minneapolis, he proceeded there in 1862. Within an hour of arriving he was hired as a deputy surveyor of pine lands in the north. As a result he knew the location of good timber close to water transportation, and in 1868 he went into the lumber business. He formed the Red River Lumber Company and made a vast fortune logging the timber.

Back in 1863, in Ohio, he had married his college classmate and boss's daughter, Harriet Granger Hulet (b. 1841), and despite the time he spent up north while she made their home in Minneapolis, the couple had eight children. He returned to Minneapolis around 1881, determined to build up his adopted city.

Walker's first strategy was to build up the industrial base in St. Paul. Said Walker, "St. Paul had the wholesale trade, the retail trade, the railroads and the banks. We tried five years to arrange an amicable interest in building up the industries of both cities." They had a false start when the Minneapolis men tried to work with their counterparts in St. Paul to lure a factory from the east to merge with a Minneapolis plant, but were double crossed when St. Paul ended up with both the eastern and the Minneapolis factories. Another story is that the Minneapolis contingent put considerable funds into the Midway area, only to have it annexed by arch rival St. Paul.

It was at that point that the Businessman's Union was formed, on March 31, 1883. Walker was its President for all 15 years of its existence. The group chose the area west of Minneapolis for their industrial site, in order to prevent any possibility of annexation by St. Paul. The area's borders were Minnetonka Road on the north and Excelsior Road on the south. Walker said that "some of the men in the union who liked changes made a social club of it, in the Guaranty Loan Building. This practically closed out the Business Union."

THE MINNEAPOLIS LAND AND INVESTMENT CO.

In 1886 a smaller group formed the Minneapolis Land and Investment Company: "gentlemen whose energy and influence have been felt in the growth of Minneapolis." TB Walker was again President. Others included:

Thomas Lowry

Henry F. Brown

Calvin G. Goodrich

Charles Pillsbury

Louis Menage (local promoter and developer - eventually went broke and fled to Guatemala)

In 1890 the company bought up 1,700 acres of land between Minnetonka and Excelsior Boulevards in St. Louis Park from farmers, an area so large that it took two years to replat the land. (Several plats had been filed right after incorporation in 1886, and the replat was called "Rearrangement of St. Louis Park," a name it holds today.)

In 1892 the Minneapolis Land and Investment Company filed a plat of 12,000 lots on their 1,700 acres. An advertising map from the time shows a completely zoned and platted town: the Industrial Circle was "in the marsh," the commercial street was called Broadway (now Walker), and the rest was residential or undeveloped

The Industrial Circle was a tilted oblong between the railroad tracks and Walker Street, Monitor and Taft Avenues. The Industrial Circle remains today; the top of the circle is the curve in Walker Street. The intersection of Highway 7 and Louisiana is at the center of the site, with South Oak Pond a reminder that it was indeed "in the marsh."

Worker housing was built in an area that is now known as South Oak Hill, southwest of the Industrial Circle. Residential lots were as small as 22 feet; supposedly builders would build houses on every other lot and leave room for gardens. Walker built about 60 so-called Walker Houses from 1890 to 1898. These two-story, narrow houses were notable for having no front doors. Many of them burned or were moved over the years, but there are still quite a few in their original locations.

Downtown was a one-block commercial district on Broadway (renamed Walker Street in 1933). Walker and Joseph Hamilton built large buildings (only Walker's remains) and in the storefronts one could find stores, a barber shop, and other commercial concerns. Walker's activities during this time were prodigious, with factories that occupied the Industrial Circle, the streetcar line that he built from the center of the Village to Minneapolis, the Walker/Syndicate Building/Brick Block commercial building, his Methodist Church, and the hotels he built for workers and builders of the factories. Village Roadmaster Daniel J. Falvey graded the roads.

But before Walker's plan could come to full fruition, came the Financial Panic of 1893. Businesses failed, lots owned by the Minneapolis Land and Investment Company went unbought, and the partners bailed out by assigning their interests to Walker. Walker could be seen giving out food during the Depression, but people shied away from him and even despised him. By 1913 he still owned about 600-700 of his 1,700 acres, which put him in a spot: the land was worth less than what he had paid for it, not to mention the money he had put out to build the factories, and he was obligated to pay taxes on it as well. He moved on to the Pacific coast to continue his lumbering business, and he was forced to use proceeds of that endeavor to pay off the costs of his unsold land. Real estate man Erling Shurson, officed in the Brick Block, handled the last of the sales. By 1948 practically all of the St. Louis Park lots owned by the Walkers had been sold or forfeited for taxes.

Thus, in the space of about 12 years, Walker's dreams of an industrial town evaporated, and it would be another 50 years until the Park would approximate the industrial and residential magnet he had envisioned so many years ago.

COLLECTION/RESEARCH/WEBSITE REPORT

Jeanne Andersen

January 6, 2015

Collection:

- Gave Volunteer Fire Department Meeting Minutes to the Fire Department (and got a tour!)
- Sold scan of Leaning Post photo
- Richard Novak transcribed 1959 and 1960 Echowanes (audio yearbooks on LP) into digital files.
- Received an offer of some original tiles from McDonald's, and also (hopefully) old photos and clippings.
- Wish to do research into writing Legacy grant application for digital microfilm reader and reels of the *Dispatch*, *Sun*, etc. Have requested info from person who wrote grant for Ridgedale Library.

Research/Website:

- Found articles in the *Minnetonka Record* on the building of Highway 7 in 1934! SLP didn't have a paper then, and the *Record* reporter was especially interested in all State highway projects.
- Posted very short silent film on the dedication of Ethel Baston School that was transferred from film to digital file for us by the Pavek Museum.
- *Minnesota History Magazine* published a story on pre-stressed concrete that included information about Westwood Shopping Center and a panorama photo by Emory Anderson.
- Met with City engineer Erick Francis to share information about the history of Bass Lake and the City's efforts to restore it

Miscellaneous:

- Got @240 likes on photo of Leaning Post at Lilac Way Shopping Center
- Met with members of Hopkins Historical Society to explain a bit of history of the Park and share ideas for our mutual benefit.
- Met with a developer who has obtained contracts to purchase a city block for redevelopment. Project is at an early stage but he wanted to touch base about whether buildings to be demolished are historic.