



RE-ECHO

Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

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WELCOME TO SKUNK HOLLOW

Skunk Hollow is a colorful (and historical) name for the Oxford Industrial district of St. Louis Park. It is located north of Methodist Hospital, east of Meadowbrook Road, south of the old Milwaukee Road/Mpls. and St. Louis tracks and west of the old Dan Patch tracks. It consists exclusively of industrial buildings, except for two duplexes on Cambridge Ave. as one enters the area from the east. These two buildings were built in 1898 according to the city, a good 50 years before the industrial buildings in Skunk Hollow were conceived of. Legend has it that they gave Skunk Hollow their name, after families of skunks were found living in them. Today they are known as Murphy's Ridge Townhomes and consist of four condos.

Many of the buildings in Skunk Hollow were built by a man named Allen Garrison. The land was originally a swamp, and at one time it was offered for sale (and refused) for \$100. Garrison must have had quite a bit of vision and optimism that the project would work. He built many buildings in the Park in the 1950s, after the Korean War building supply embargo ended and in the midst of a booming St. Louis Park hungry for space to launch businesses. We hear that as soon as one of his buildings was finished, Garrison would throw a wild party for everyone – electricians, HVAC men, etc. – who worked on it.

One of the pioneers of the area was John R. Smith. Smith had a business called Gopher Motor Rebuilding, which had outgrown its space in Minneapolis. Smith bought 6327 Cambridge from Garrison for his business. Soon he needed more space, and bought 6401 Cambridge; he used part of that building and leased part to a company called Magnetic Controls. He must have seen the potential for the area, as he bought two more buildings from Garrison. He also bought the old Cambridge Brick Co., located across from the Skunk Houses, which had made concrete blocks, to store engine blocks. The brick company was eventually demolished, and new industrial buildings designed by John Smith's architect son John, Jr. were built in 1977. Now the Smith holdings on Cambridge are known as the [Cambridge Business Center](#), buildings 1-6 (Motto: Small Space for Small Business). The Smith family also has a property on Oxford and an award-winning building at Louisiana and 27th Street as well. John Smith's son Bill has managed the property and its 200 tenants since 1976. Bill also operates his own business, Warehouse Winery, at 6415 Cambridge (www.warehousewinery.com).

At the end of Cambridge, take a right at Edgewood and you'll come to a building that was originally the Cambridge Café. In 1967, this was the odd location of the "TV's Hullabaloo Teen Scene" night club, evidently a franchise owned by a Barbara Jacoby. That short-lived endeavor was replaced by

the “Purple Cigar,” owned by Arnie Sagarski. Despite the fact that big-time local bands played there, it too ended quickly, in about 1968. More information about these fun spots can be found at www.jeanneandersen.net/musichighlights.html

Travel down Edgewood to Oxford and take a look to your right and you’ll see a steep hill with railroad tracks at the top. We think that before the railroad came, the hill was not so steep, Oxford went through, and that’s how the Monitor houses, originally built in the swamp in the 1890s, were hauled to higher ground. Monitor houses were 12 homes built by the Monitor Drill Co., probably for its managers. There are four left, on Colorado Ave. between Oxford and Goodrich. More information on the Monitor houses can be found at www.slphistory.org/history/monitorhouses.asp

There are many industrial buildings on Oxford, on either side of Louisiana Ave. (Louisiana wasn’t extended down from 32nd Street to Excelsior Blvd. until the Creosote Plant was shut down in the early 1970s.) The City’s new municipal building is located west of Louisiana. And at the end of Oxford, Meadowbrook Road turns to the left to meet up with Excelsior Blvd.

We hope you’ve enjoyed your tour of Skunk Hollow. If you have any additional information or corrections, please contact us at history@slphistory.org. Many thanks to Bill and John Smith for their stories.

OTHER INDUSTRIAL AREAS

St. Louis Park has other industrial areas scattered around town as well. One of them has no historic nickname as far as we know, but is in the area around Republic and Gorham Streets, by Reddy Rents. Those buildings by and large were built in the mid-to late ‘50s and early ‘60s. Builders were the Clarence K. Brothers, but we have no information on that company.

Louisiana Ave. has some commercial and industrial space, near the post office, that was built in the ‘50s. Down 27th Street are some large industrial buildings, including one for NAPA Auto Parts. At the end of 27th Street is 27 West, the award-winning building designed by John Smith as noted above. Shooting west off of Louisiana Ave. south of Oxford is Louisiana Circle, with two large buildings built by Allen Garrison. They, and the building just north of them on Louisiana Ave., were built in 1960-61. All three now belong to Methodist Hospital. One of these buildings started off as Kendaco, Inc., distributor of coin-operated laundry equipment. Another was the home of Burn-Zol, Inc., which sold commercial incinerators.

There are many other streets and areas that support industrial space in the Park – how many can you name? We in the Park are fortunate to have a good tax base and room for small businesses to set up shop and grow.

To document these buildings, the Historical Society has been scanning pictures on file at the Tax Assessor’s Office – the City apparently took pictures of every existing building in 1960, and there are some older ones that go back earlier (but only as far back as 1954). We are also taking pictures of the buildings as they are in 2010. We will be posting these photos to our website in the coming months. A list of the streets we’ve documented or are in the process of documenting can be found at www.slphistory.org/history/historichouses.asp.

THIS 'N' THAT

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK: Look for the “St. Louis Park Historical Society” page on Facebook for updates on our activities, etc. Another fun Facebook page (not sponsored by the Historical Society) is “You know you’re from St. Louis Park if...” On this page you can read people’s recollections of places like Sol’s Superette, Roger’s Gas Station, and the apparently very popular arcade at Knollwood. Add your memories too!

ANNUAL MEETING AND NEW BOARD MEMBERS: At our annual meeting (stretched out over several months), the Board has amended our bylaws to clarify that the term of a Trustee is for three years. We also changed the number of Trustees on the Board from “three to five” to “up to nine.” Bob Jorvig stepped down as Vice President for health reasons and Barb Reiss was elected to be our new VP. Bob was elected to fill Barb’s place as Trustee.

We also added two new Trustees: Sue Ainsworth is a local artist who has worked with the Society on several projects, mostly focusing on our oldest buildings. Madison White is a junior at Park High, serving as our school liaison. Maddie has also worked with Kathy Johnson cataloging blueprints of houses in the Aquila area that were found in the Westling barn. We welcome our new Board members!

WALKING TOUR A SUCCESS: On October 16, our intrepid Secretary Kathy Johnson led about a dozen participants on a walking tour of the Elmwood neighborhood. This is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the Park, and Kathy pointed out about a dozen houses, telling stories about people who had lived in them. The high point was a tour of the famed “Hamilton House,” home of Joseph Hamilton, who was one of Park’s founders and its first Mayor. Owner Karen Flatten is selling the house, and agreed to let us see the inside of this elegant three-story home. That third story was accessed by a narrow staircase with tiny stairs, going up to an attic that showed every one of its 100+ years – a wonderful find for history buffs. One of our goals for next year is to hold another walking tour, either again in Elmwood, or in the Brookside neighborhood where there are also many older homes. Thanks to Sue Ainsworth for working on this project with Kathy.

BRIEF BIO OF BOB HULL PUBLISHED: SLP Historical Society member David Hughes has completed a mini-biography of Park native Robert "Bob" Booth Hull (1918-1962). Sixty years ago, Hull and others founded the Mattachine Society, a crucial gay civil rights organization in Los Angeles. Hughes received valuable information from SLP Historical Society members and other Park residents, several of whom are credited in the bio, published by The Hull Family Association, a surname organization. Hughes is finishing research on a book-length study of Hull and other neglected figures of the Mattachine Society. The mini-bio is at www.bob-hull.com/home Remember Bob Hull? Contact David at 303.355.2032 or info@bob-hull.com

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS AVAILABLE: Know someone who is from St. Louis Park or is interested in Park history? For \$20 you can buy them a gift membership. This thoughtful gift is 100 percent tax deductible and helps support the work of the Historical Society. Another gift idea is the SLP Historical Society polo shirt, beautifully embroidered on the back, available for \$35.

PRESENTATION ON MINNETONKA BLVD. IN THE WORKS: Fred Anderson and Rollie Troup of the Class of 1965 have proposed that they and the Historical Society work together to create a presentation about Minnetonka Blvd. The HS will provide pictures and work with Fred and Rollie on a script that travels down the street and conjures up memories of businesses no longer there. Take a look at our web page to jog your memory of this important street! www.slphistory.org/history/mtkablvd.asp

MINIKAHADA OAKS AND THE SIMONS FAMILY

St. Louis Park is a city of neighborhoods, and one of the most unusual is Minikahda Oaks. Accessible only by France Ave. at Excelsior Blvd., it is bounded by the Minikahda Golf Course on the east, Excelsior Blvd. on the south (actually the new Ellipse project), and Bass Lake to the west. Keith Simons grew up in the area, and has shared some clippings and pictures that give us an idea of what it was like to grow up there in the 1940s and '50s.

Like 'most other neighborhoods in the postwar baby boom, Minikahda Oaks was teeming with children – an article from the '40s says that there were 80 kids in the 55 houses. The moms formed a Mothers Club “because we thought if we knew each other better, we would be more tolerant of each other’s children.” There was also a men’s civic club, which worked to procure a playground for the area. Neighborhood activities included an Easter Egg Hunt, 4th of July Parade, and coordinated holiday decorations. The article highlighted other activities as well; one family cooked Sunday dinner in their fireplace, one family made puppets, and until TV came along, one family rented movies to show to neighborhood teenagers.

Gordon and Delora Simons and their four boys lived at 3304 France Ave., which was a magnet for the neighborhood kids, no doubt partly due to the fact that their back yard was a basketball court in the summer and an ice rink in the winter. The boys went to Brookside School and belonged to Cub Scout Den 4, Pack 202. The family menagerie consisted of, at various times, a dog, cat, parrot, pony, turtle, newts, a red faced ape, and a kinkajou named Andrew Jackson that escaped once in 1958 and bit a golf course groundskeeper.

One of the most unusual things the Simons family did was buy an old school bus, retrofit it into an RV, and “head west,” no real route in mind other than to go to California and back before the boys had to be back at school. This was in 1946, before the interstates, and it must have been quite an adventure! Thanks to Keith Simons for sharing this slice of Park life with us.

MESHULAN RIKLIS

On Vallacher Avenue, the Riklis family had a neat little rambler. Meshulan Riklis taught Hebrew at Talmad Torah Academy here in St. Louis Park. Riklis eventually left SLP and in time, became prominent in the management of numerous large publicly held corporations. Particularly noteworthy was his rise to CEO of the Rapid-American Corporation, a holding company comprising many firms with household names. In the mid-1980s, Riklis was recognized as the highest paid executive in the US at about \$970,000. Ultimately Riklis and his wife, Pia Zadora, the operatic soprano, moved to Beverly Hills and bought the mansion formerly owned by Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford - the home known by all the tour guides as Pickfair. Pickfair is, without a doubt, one of the most well known homes in the US. We wonder if Riklis, while living in Pickfair, recalled his earlier days in the modest little rambler on Vallacher Avenue, just off Excelsior Boulevard.

Al Olson

DONATIONS RECEIVED

The St. Louis Park Historical Society has no museum, just administrative space at Lenox and limited storage space at the Historic Depot. Until we find a suitable space to display donations, we will accept them as we have room to store them. We thank all donors for sharing their interesting information and artifacts.

Many thanks to Wendy Knoll, who works for the school district and made sure that, during the redistribution of teachers and schools this fall, we got a set of yearbooks from Aquila. All of a sudden our collection of yearbooks has had a big boost, and we thank all of our contributors. Does anyone have a cache from Westwood/SLP Jr. High?

Fireman Dave Koefod brought a donation with him to our Ice Cream Social in September – a lantern that had been used in the interior of a railroad caboose. It fits in well with the railroad artifacts we keep at the Depot.

Sara Edwards gave us a sign that her husband found while insulating an attic in a Park home. It's from Homecoming 1963, when the slogan was "Tucka Tonka Team Away!" It shows the mighty Park Oriole stuffing a poor soul from Minnetonka in a drawer. The poster was signed M. Sellhorn; our yearbooks and directories do not reveal who this person is.

Paul Thompson brought by two copies of an LP of songs sung by the Oriolians, conducted by Wayne

Balch. The record, on the Paul A. Schmitt Music Co. label, contained "The Battle Hymn of the Republic (baritone soloist, Gale DeVere), "The Peasant and His Oxen," and "Oh Sing Your Songs." There's no indication of when the record was made – was anybody in Re-Echo land a member of the Oriolians?

Keith Simons brought in a 1946 Homecoming button with the slogan "Derail de Robins" featuring a very beat-up and dejected avian football player. He also brought us an issue of the *Echo* from 1958 and a copy of the class of '58 commencement program. See separate article about the materials he shared with us about the Minikahda Oaks neighborhood.

Elaine Spiegel donated an aerial photograph taken in 1981 that shows Susan Lindgren School looking north toward Excelsior Blvd. Features on the photo that no longer exist are the water tower at Excelsior and Highway 100 and the grain elevator at Highway 7 that was replaced by apartments.

Nancy Ott-Pinckaers generously donated a box of items that had belonged to her mother-in-law, Mitzi Rogers Pinckaers, daughter of St. Louis Park legend Lydia Rogers. Lydia put out the city directory from 1933 to 1960, was the only woman on the Park Businessman's Club, ran her own business from her Excelsior Blvd. house. Included in the treasure trove were directories from 1940 and 1945, four Echowans, materials from the Park High Class of 1940, and other items belonging to Lydia and Mitzi.

STRATEGIC PLANNING CONTINUES

By the time this *Re-Echo* hits the streets, the Board and other interested members will have met four times to put together a strategic plan for the St. Louis Park Historical Society. We started with our Mission Statement, which is actually the first item in our Bylaws (online at <http://www.slphistory.org/about/default.asp>) Then we worked up our Vision Statement, which was in the last *Re-Echo* and also available at the same address online. Next we went through our goals, both long and short term, prioritized them, and laid out actions we need to take to achieve them. (As we have done in previous years, we have laid out our overall goals for this coming year in the membership insert in this issue of the *Re-Echo*.) Once we have a draft strategic plan, we will take it to key people in the City and in the community for review, and then make it widely available for comment. When it is finalized, we feel we will be in the position to take on the actions needed to achieve our goals, including major long term goals such as finding a permanent home, hiring staff, presenting programs, etc. None of this would have been possible without the help and wisdom of Laura Hillman, who has literally brought us into her home and led us through the steps. Laura has vast experience in nonprofits, and she has brought structure to our discussions. Thanks, Laura, for all your contributions to this process!

WHO WE ARE

The St. Louis Park Historical Society was founded in 1971 to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of the City of St. Louis Park, Minnesota. The archives of the Society are located in the Historic Depot in Jorvig Park (37th and Brunswick) and at the Lenox Community Center (6715 Minnetonka Blvd.). Office hours at the Lenox site are Thursdays from 10 to noon, and by appointment. Our mailing address is:

3700 Monterey Drive
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

We do not have a central phone number, but you may contact a member of our Board:

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ABOUT THE RE-ECHO

The Re-Echo is published quarterly by the St. Louis Park Historical Society. Its purpose is to share information about the City's history and the Society's activities. The Re-Echo was started by Robert C. Reiss. The name was inspired by the *Echo* newspaper, which has been published by and for the students of St. Louis Park High School since 1917.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

More names of our "production staff" that we didn't thank last issue are Arlene Jackson and Lola Sletten. Also, it's Lois Thorn, not Ruth, that helps us 'most every time. We apologize for the error and should know better since she belongs to the Lois Club!

JOIN US!

The St. Louis Park Historical Society is a nonprofit organization and is wholly dependent on membership dues and donations for its operating costs, including the cost of mailing the Re-Echo. You don't have to be a member to receive the Re-Echo, but we need new members, especially active ones. Meetings are at 7pm on the first Tuesday of the month, and are open to all. They are held at Lenox Community Center October-May and at the Historic Depot June-September.

Our email address is

history@slphistory.org

The St. Louis Park Historical Society Invites You To Renew or Become a Member Now

Membership in the St. Louis Park Historical Society is on a calendar year basis, so it's time for everyone to send in your membership for 2011. Membership dues are only \$20. We do not get financial support from the City, County, or State, and we rely on memberships for operating expenses such as website and email, mailing of the Re-Echo, and office supplies. Won't you help us out and sign up today?

Your financial support is not the only way to contribute - we want your stories! We encourage you to write down some of the experiences you've had along the way. Younger generations can't imagine what life was like before Miracle Mile and Texa Tonka. Were you there? Tell us about it!

And, of course, we need active members to attend our meetings and pursue projects of your choosing. Our board members study such topics as railroads, old houses, and the history of the St. Louis Park basketball teams! We encourage you to come to our meetings and find your niche.

GOALS FOR 2011

- **Identify needs that can be filled by volunteers and recruit new volunteers to fill those needs.**
- **Increase our membership to 240 members by creating promotional materials and pursuing publicity opportunities.**
- **Locate a facility conducive to appropriate storage and exhibition of our permanent collection, as well as one that offers adequate space for programming and administration.**
- **Strengthen our budgeting and reporting processes.**
- **Organize one walking tour.**
- **Obtain funding through public or private grants and pursue other fundraising opportunities.**
- **Strengthen connections with the City, schools, community organizations, and the community at large.**
- **Continue ongoing projects such as the Re-Echo, web site, oral histories, century houses, transfer of videos to digital, and presentations to groups.**

**ST. LOUIS PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ONE-STOP-SHOPPING FORM**

Annual Individual/Family Membership: \$20

**Business and Individual Benefactor Member Donation:
\$50, \$75, \$100 or other amount**

Name(s): _____

Address _____

Email address: _____

During winter months from _____ **to** _____ **:**

Address _____

Check all that apply:

_____ **I wish to join/renew my membership;** enclosed is \$ _____
(membership is on a calendar year basis)

All membership donations are tax-deductible.

_____ **I wish to purchase a copy of *Something in the Water*; enclosed is \$20.**

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____

Re-Echo Delivery Options:

_____ **I wish to continue to receive the Re-Echo through the mail.**

_____ **I wish to receive the Re-Echo via E-mail.**

_____ **I will read the Re-Echo on the SLPHS web site at**
www.slphistory.org/reecho/default.asp

_____ **I do not wish to receive the Re-Echo.**

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