



# RE-ECHO

*Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society*

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## PARK'S ALCOA CARE FREE HOUSE

The North Side of St. Louis Park underwent a huge building boom in the two decades after the end of World War II. Other than houses and a few businesses along Minnetonka Blvd. and Wayzata Blvd. (now Highway 394), the area was sparsely populated. The combination of the War's end and racism in Minneapolis against the Jewish community brought a huge influx of new residents to the Park, and the North Side was available for development.

One new area of town was the Westwood Hills neighborhood. The 27-hole Westwood Hills Golf Course had been built by James A. McNulty in 1928. It was roughly bordered by what is now I-394, Highway 169, and Texas Ave. Starting in 1955, the McNulty family began to develop parts of the golf course for high-end homes. Jim McNulty, great-grandson of James A. McNulty, recently sent the Historical Society scans of many pictures of the golf course, ads, and brochures for the new development. Thanks, Jim! See our web page at [www.slphistory.org/history/westwoodhills.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/westwoodhills.asp)

The homes on the newly-platted land in Westwood Hills were deluxe, but one was unique: the \$35,000 Alcoa "Care Free" home, built by the Aluminum Company of America in 1957 at 8000 Westwood Hills Drive. A short article in the July 25, 1957 *Dispatch* indicated that the Westwood Hills Construction Co. would be building a model home that would be ready for inspection in October. There were to be 46 built around the country.

Another article and pictures of the house can be found in the August 8, 1957 issue of the *Dispatch*. The home was designed by Charles M. Goodman and constructed to demonstrate the wonders of aluminum. It was built with post and beam construction and combines decorative and structural aluminum with oak, redwood and cypress. It has a deep purple exterior and bright blue window panels. Walls of floor to ceiling glass are used on each end of the home. A California Style is featured by the use of an open courtyard between the home and car park. There are three bedrooms, three bathrooms, and two fireplaces. See [www.slphistory.org/history/alcoaaluminumhouse.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/alcoaaluminumhouse.asp)

[Another article on November 28, 1957 discusses another such aluminum home that was built for \$58,000 at 2300 Texas Ave., using 7,500 lbs of aluminum. The latter was opened for a six-week public examination on November 24, 1957. We're not sure where this is, as this is not a valid address today. If anyone knows anything about this other house, please let us know.]

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## PARK'S ALCOA HOUSE, Continued

Many passers-by in recent years had expressed concern that this unique home was seemingly abandoned and in disrepair. The home had gone through foreclosure, and its future was looking dim. The house straddles two lots, and many feared that someone would raze the house and divide the lots.

Fortunately, we are glad to report that the house has been sold, and the owners are committed to restoring it. The new owners are Whitney Mares and Robert McChane. Robert's father is an architect and is helping to reconfigure some of the space. Whitney has set up a blog to track their progress: [www.ourcarefreehome.com](http://www.ourcarefreehome.com). We wish them the best of luck and thank them for saving this landmark St. Louis Park property!

## ST. LOUIS PARK'S QUASQUICENTENNIAL

A look at the history books tells us that St. Louis Park was founded in 1886, 125 years ago this November. Let's see what Norman Thomas, the author of the Park's pre-1952 history, has to say about the founding of the village:

On August 24, 1886 three men were making calls at all the homes located in what is today St. Louis Park. These men, Oliver K. Earle, Joseph Hamilton and George E. Goodrich, were taking a census of the residents. They asked the same questions everywhere, age, legal address, etc. That evening when they totaled the results they found that there were 350 persons living in the area.

A few days later they circulated a petition praying that the county commissioners allow the incorporation of a village, describing it as St. Louis Park, and comprising 6,746 acres. A short time later they had the names of 31 landholders who wished to have the village established but no record is given of those who refused to sign the petition.

Armed with the petition the trio appeared before the county commissioners when they met Monday, October 4, 1886. With but little discussion the commissioners ordered through County Auditor F. S. McDonald that an election be held and that the bearers of the petition post it, and other exhibits plus a notice of election in five places in the area. Joseph Hamilton later deposed that he had posted the documents on October 15th in various places; near Grave's Corner, on a tree on the Lake Street extension near the A. W. Sweet residence, on a fence opposite the schoolhouse in District 18, on the door of the depot, and on a tree where the Minneapolis and Minnetonka Road intersected the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad.

On the day appointed for the election, November 16, 1886, a crowd of 68 men, and probably some wives who did not have the right to vote, assembled at the Pratt School. Judges of election were Chesley Hamilton, O. K. Earle and George E. Goodrich. When the ballots were collected it was found that 65 persons had voted for incorporation and three had opposed it, and two had not voted. St. Louis Park now existed as a village with the exception of filing the returns and establishing a government.

To celebrate this auspicious event, the Historical Society is hoping to host an event for the fall. This event will likely replace the Ice Cream Social, which was traditionally held in September. Keep an eye on the web site and the *Re-Echo* for information.

## DONATIONS RECEIVED

*The St. Louis Park Historical Society has no museum, only 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.*

Timothy Layeux donated the book *What's Cooking at Methodist: A Collection of our Favorite Recipes*. This cookbook was put out by employees and friends of Methodist Hospital for the benefit of the Cancer Care Center. There is no date, but it appears to be from the 1960s or '70s.

Manny Camilon donated items from the estate of his ex-mother-in-law, Barbara Long. Included were cookbooks from the Rebekah Lodge (1953) and Union Church (1978), Maid of Scandinavia newsletters (1979 and '80), and copies of the Park High Echo newspaper (1951-'54).

Mark Thornsjo donated his absolutely darling Little League cap from the early '60s.

Anne Heller donated a priceless photo of the building that was built in 1914 to house the High School. It is striking in its isolation – only some houses (probably on 35<sup>th</sup> Street) can be seen. Anne says the picture was probably taken in the 1920s, before Highway 7 was built. Central High School was built to the east of this building in 1936. The 1914 structure was razed in 1962 and replaced with the west wing of the Central building. To see this and other pictures, go to our web site at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/central.asp>

Rex L. Pickett, Jr. sent us many wonderful things, starting with a copy of the 1996 Class Reunion book for the Park High Class of 1948. The book was extremely well done and complete – our compliments to the committee! Rex also sent us a series of articles and poems about his life in St. Louis Park. He eloquently described high school life in the late 1940s, told stories of his family, and memorable moments from his life. If only more people were inspired to share their memories like this! Thanks, Rex.

Jim Lewis sent us a bundle of great family photos.

## COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING UPDATE

The Board has been busy fine tuning our Comprehensive Plan. Draft copies were sent to all members in January – many thanks to everyone who shared their comments with us. We met on March 5 to discuss those comments, and will vote on a final version at our next meeting on April 5. The final version will be posted to our web site at <http://www.slphistory.org/about/default.asp>

In the meantime, we have begun to implement some of the items scheduled for 2011. We have come up with a budget for the year and have strengthened our budgeting process. We have also started to assess our needs in terms of physical space.

## VOLUNTEER PUBLICIST NEEDED

One of the strategic goals in our Comprehensive Plan is to define needs that can be met by volunteers. And one role that can definitely be filled by a volunteer is that of publicity chair. Duties would be to publicize Historical Society activities in outlets such as the *Sun-Sailor*, the *Park Perspective*, the web site St. Louis Park Patch (<http://stlouispark.patch.com/>), the City's historical minute segments on its Park Update program (<http://www.stlouispark.org/>), and any other outlets that request information about the Society or Park History. Information needed is available on the Society's web site and from Board members. If you are interested in helping us with this important function, please contact us by email at [history@slphistory.org](mailto:history@slphistory.org).

**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](http://www.slphistory.org/reecho/default.asp)**

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

**Mail to:** St. Louis Park Historical Society  
3700 Monterey Drive  
St. Louis Park, MN 55416-2671

**Our email:** [history@slphistory.org](mailto:history@slphistory.org)

**KJ JA MC FR**

## THIS 'N' THAT

**OFFICE HOUR CHANGE:** The Historical Society has temporarily moved our Thursday office hours at Lenox Community Center from 10 until noon to 1 until 3 pm. This change will be in effect until April 21, when hours will go back to the morning. We are also available by appointment.

**CARS FOR PARKTACULAR:** We would like to participate in the Parktacular Grande Day Parade this year, which will take place on June 18. To do so, we will need at least one classic car, or a great idea for a float. If you have a car or a creative idea, please let us know!

**DEPOT UPGRADES:** The City's Park and Rec Department is planning to make major improvements to the Historic Depot, to take place in late summer or early fall. The scope of the improvements will depend on the funds available – a grant is being requested from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, based on the fact that the Depot is on the National Register of Historic Places. Minimum improvements will include a new furnace, insulation, a new smoke alarm system, and restoration of the sliding door to the baggage room. The wish list also includes new siding and a ceiling, sheet rock, and paint in the baggage room. The Historical Society, which uses the Depot for storage and display of artifacts in the summer, has been asked to contribute to the cost. Contributions from our members and *Re-Echo* readers would enable us to help make these needed improvements to our 124-year-old building. Thanks!

**MEMBERSHIP TIME:** Just a reminder that membership to the Historical Society is on a calendar year basis, so if you haven't sent in your membership dues yet, please see the "One Stop Shopping" form in this issue of the *Re-Echo*. If you have already sent in your dues this year, thanks!

**SLP HISTORICAL SOCIETY GOES GREEN:** To ease the burden on our hard working Secretary and cut down on paper, the Society will no longer mail out hard copies of the monthly minutes and agendas. Instead, as always, they will be available on our web site at [www.slphistory.org/about/default.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/about/default.asp) We thank the City for their help in printing and mailing these documents in the past.

**ORIOLIANS MYSTERY SOLVED:** Loyal reader Al Pooler sent us pages from the 1946 St. Louis Park *Echowan* that tell us about the 72-member Oriolian choir. We learn that "numerous records were made during the year by Dick Jamison. Professional records were made at Schmitt's Music Company and then sold to students." We have at least one of these records in our collection. Thanks, Al!

**PLANNED GIVING AND TARGETED MEMORIALS:** Two ways you can help the Historical Society continue to grow and provide service to the community is to remember the Society in your will or by specifying that memorials be targeted to us by your family. Two of our programs – saving the beehive and placing plaques on historic buildings – were funded in part by memorials targeted by the families of active members of the Society, Bob Reiss and Don Swenson. These kinds of funds greatly increase our ability to contribute to the City, and will help us to achieve the ambitious goals outlined in our upcoming Comprehensive Plan.

**RECENT WEB ADDITIONS:** Information continues to be added to our web site. Info about immigration laws and trends has been added to our page on Race, Creed, and Color. Much of it was gleaned from an article in *Minnesota History* magazine and the MHS web site. Old and new pictures of Oxford Street have been posted, completing the section on Skunk Hollow. Stores of the Westwood Hills Shopping Center, gleaned from articles provided by Mark Toretzky, have been listed. We've also taken a stab at listing the stores that have been located at Knollwood Plaza/Mall. To find all of these web pages, go to [www.slphistory.org/history/index.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/index.asp)

## 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 (37<sup>th</sup> 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:

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We do not have a central phone number, but our email address is [history@slphistory.org](mailto:history@slphistory.org).

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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

Often we get suggestions that we include pictures in the Re-Echo. We don't mainly because the Re-Echo is photocopied, not printed per se, and pictures wouldn't come out looking their best. Also, we would rather you go to our web site where we can post as many pictures as we want to, in color. Third, our Re-Echo staff is not versed in any publications software and just scrapes by in Word.

## 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.