



RE-ECHO

Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

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LIVING THROUGH CHANGE

Although it sometimes seems that technology is changing too fast to keep up with, can you imagine what it would have been like to be born in St. Louis Park in 1900? Things like electricity, telephones, automobiles, and indoor plumbing would have come into being seemingly all at once. Let's explore what you might have experienced, all before World War II.

First of all, you would have been born either at home or in a hospital in Minneapolis, as there were no hospitals in the suburbs. Your family would have probably lived in one of five distinct neighborhoods: Center (south of Hwy 7, north of Excelsior, west of Wooddale, east of Louisiana), North Side (collections of houses along Cedar Lake Road and Wayzata Blvd.), Oak Hill (west of the Creosote factory, either side of Highway 7), Fern Hill (by City Hall), or Manhattan Park (31st and France). If you lived in Oak Hill you may have lived in a "Walker House," a funny two-story house with the front door on the side. Plumbing was on the outside, of course.

At five, there were four schools you could attend: North Side, Fern Hill, Oak Hill, and Lincoln in the Center neighborhood. Going to school meant a lot of walking, although you may have been driven in a horse-drawn sleigh in the wintertime. There were two churches: T.B. Walker's Methodist Church on Brownlow, and Union Congregational. You might have had a bicycle, as they were all the rage, although improved roads were almost nonexistent.

At age 11, electric lights were available for your home for the first time. The village replaced the 24 gasoline lamps that had lighted streets since 1899. If your family could afford it, you could also get a telephone installed in your home for the first time that same year.

We know from Esther Johnson's diary that the games that children played in 1912 included: Last Couple Out, Farmer in the Dell, Cat and Rat, Drop the Handkerchief, Spin the Platter, Marching to Jerusalem, Tug of War, London Bridge, Judge and Jury, and "Kittenball," an early form of softball.

When you were 14, the new high school was built on Walker Street. (That building was replaced by the western wing of the Central building.) The next year you may have attended the new Brookside Community Church. (The first residents moved into the Brookside neighborhood when you were about 7.) You and your family probably attended the band concerts held at what is now Jorvig Park.

When you were 17, your family could have purchased its first automobile; evidence of Park's first gas station appears during that year. If you were a boy, you might have gone to war in France during World War I.

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THIS 'N' THAT

WESTLING HOUSE: On October 30, members of the Historical Society were invited to inspect the Westling House after it had been remodeled by the owners, Peter Knaeble and Matt Pavek. The place looked great! It was a wonderful combination of updated and rustic. Some of the hardwood floors had been discovered under three layers of carpet, tile, and linoleum. The address has been changed from 8550 Minnetonka Blvd. to 2950 Aquila Ave. to reflect the fact that the driveway is off of Aquila. In the course of their cleaning out the barn, Peter and Matt found a metal sign and architectural drawings of the houses that the Westlings designed for the Aquila/Boone neighborhood. They donated the sign and these drawings to the Historical Society, and we are looking forward to driving around the neighborhood and matching the drawings to the houses. If you're looking to buy a piece of history, the house (originally built in 1874), as well as the other three lots made from the property, is for sale.

SOMETHING IN THE WATER: We have finished digitizing the book and it on its way to the printer. If you would like to order a copy, use the "One Stop Shopping" form included in this issue. Thanks a bunch to Doug Johnson for all of his work, especially the scanning of every picture! The book is a collection of memoirs of people who grew up "before the war" in St. Louis Park. It sells for \$20 including U.S. postage.

DON SWENSON'S FILES were sent to us by Connie, and we have been going through them, integrating them into our own files. Much of the material appears in Don's Book, "Something in the Water," but there are some anecdotes that didn't. One is precious; seems there was a girl from the country that was staying with a family in St. Louis Park while going to nursing school. One day she just had to ask what that horrible smell was. The answer was "Why that's the Creosote Plant." Perplexed, she went out in the garden, scratched and sniffed, and after awhile she came back and asked, "Which one is the creosote plant?"

CENTURY HOUSE PROJECT: The Board is continuing to discuss this project and how it will be run. Homes will have to be at least 100 years old and still have the essential character of the original house. What that entails exactly will still need to be determined. Our count is that there are 96 homes in the Park that were built before 1910 (28 in 1890 alone). The list is on our web site at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/oldestbuildings.asp> We have pictures of them all in binders at Lenox. The Historical Society will provide a plaque to place on eligible homes; the homeowner will pay \$100 of the cost and the Historical Society will pay the rest. We hope to have this program up and running by the time the next *Re-Echo* comes out.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION TASK FORCE: Kathy Johnson, Will O'Keefe, and Nancy Rose attended a Grants workshop for Minnesota Legacy funds. They have suggested using any grant money received for a housing inventory, possibly starting with the "Westling neighborhood," using the blueprints and building plans as a starting point. Will has volunteered to help with the research, documents and plans that need to be submitted to apply for the grant in March 2010. The Board voted to create an unpaid internship for Will so he can put this work on his resume.

RECIPES WANTED: This request came in almost a year ago, lost in a file. Does anyone have the Lincoln Del chocolate cream pie recipe? Gloria Rice avers that it was the best pie in the history of pies! We've also received requests for Palm Bakery recipes, and we may have some of those.

DONATIONS RECEIVED

The Historical Society will gladly accept donations of materials pertinent to St. Louis Park History as we have the capacity.

Some unidentified person left us an orange and black megaphone at Lenox one day. We would love to know the story behind it! Is it from the '20s? Or just a prop from the '70s? We hope

the donor comes forward and lets us know more about this intriguing artifact!

David Cross donated a book for new kindergarten parents from 1952.

LIVING THROUGH CHANGE, CONT'D

At age 18, you were scared to death of catching the Spanish Flu, a worldwide pandemic.

At 20, just when you neared legal age, prohibition hit. Liquor could be had, though, and you might have frequented Excelsior Blvd.'s "chicken shacks" on occasion.

Indoor plumbing was starting to be available when you were 24 years old.

In your mid 20s, when you are ready to start your own family, additional churches First Lutheran Church, St. Luke's, Holy Family, and North Side Sunday School were organized.

To get to your job in Minneapolis, you used the Greyhound Bus down Superior (Wayzata) Blvd. (North Side), T.B. Walker's streetcar up Lake Street, or the 44th Street streetcar (Brookside and Browndale).

Also during your 20s, radio broke upon the scene, and you may have used your crystal set to listen to early stations WLAG (which became WCCO), WDGY, and WAMD, which became KSTP.

When you were 27, natural gas was first available to you to heat your home, replacing coal and oil.

You were 29 when the stock market crashed, leading to the Great Depression. If you worked at the Creosote factory you might have been laid off or your hours cut. Monitor Drill moved to Hopkins at the same time.

At age 30, your kids may be ready to go to school. Depending on where you lived, the choices were Brookside, Eliot (formerly North Side), Lenox, Fern Hill, and Oak Hill. A Model T bus served the whole village until the mid 1930s when an increased school population merited the first fleet of buses. Also at 30, your house may have been connected to the village's new sewer system. Water was still obtained from Minneapolis – early attempts to drill for water in the Park rendered too much creosote.

On April 4, 1933, you could have your first legal drink, as 3.2 beer was adjudged to be "non-intoxicating." Prohibition was officially repealed and hard liquor approved for sale by the village in December 1934. Bars popped up overnight, especially on Excelsior Blvd.

Highway 7 was built when you were 34, Highway 100 when you were 39.

Today many of us wouldn't be able to function without a computer in one form or another; just imagine being without indoor plumbing or a phone. 110 years is not really so long ago. Even though we still haven't perfected the jet pack, we've surely come a long way.

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 Mondays and Thursdays from 10 to noon, and by appointment. Our mailing address is:
3700 Monterey Drive
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Our email address is
history@slphistory.org.

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

President: John Olson. 952-929-6156
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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

It's time again for our annual membership drive, and our new goal is to sign up 400 members this year – that's just 1 percent of the Park's population. We can do it! Membership is on a calendar year basis, so please sign up or renew now. (If you sent in a membership in October-December of 2009, that will count as a membership for 2010.) St. Louis Park history is fascinating, so come and help us spread the 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.

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 2010. Membership dues are only \$20. We do not get any kind of 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!

You can also share your time as a volunteer:

- **Planning special events**
- **Video interviews**
- **Cataloging the collection**
- **Historical research**

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 team! We encourage you to come to our meetings and find your niche.

GOALS FOR 2010

- **Create walking tour(s) of historic homes**
- **Present Century Home plaques to owners of houses that are 100+ years old**
- **Convert our VHS videos to DVD and catalog the collection**
- **Update videos to identify the pictures and places shown**
- **Enhance the Historic Depot**
- **Tape interviews with longtime and notable Parkites, to be shown on Community TV**
- **Obtain funding through public or private grants**
- **Sign up 400 members**
- **Long term: Find additional/alternate space which is available 24/7 and has room to display artifacts and store the collection.**

**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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