



RE-ECHO

Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

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THE CURIOUS CASE OF BROWNDALE PARK

This is the story of an old, very tight knit community that, according to period maps, seemed to bounce from St. Louis Park to Edina and back again in the early days of the last century. The Browndale Park neighborhood is bounded on the west by Highway 100, the north by Morningside Road, the east by Wooddale Ave., and the south by 44th Street. The border between St. Louis Park and Edina cuts through Browndale Park, and even through some houses; some homeowners pay taxes to both St. Louis Park and Edina.

The land that would become Browndale Park was part of Henry F. Brown's 77-acre "Browndale Farm." Much of northern Edina and southwest SLP sits on land that was once owned by Brown, who raised award-winning cattle and Clydesdale horses.

Here's where the confusion starts. An 1889 map of St. Louis Park shows the future Browndale Park within its Village limits. But nine years later, a map of Edina shows the future Browndale Park within *its* Village limits. A map from 1901 shows the property within St. Louis Park.

Brown sold the future Browndale Park portion of his farm to Frank J. and Florence Mackey in 1909. Frank Mackey was a wealthy investor from Britain – he owned the Leamington and Nicollet Hotels. Mrs. Mackey, an American, was well known as a stylish lady and socialite who entertained lavishly in Minneapolis.

The Mackeys filed the plat of Browndale Park in 1909. This 150-lot addition includes homes on Morningside, 44th, Wooddale, Browndale, Mackey, Brook, Coolidge, Dart, and Glen Place. It was then that the eastern edge of Aurora Ave. (later Highway 100 south of Excelsior Blvd.) was first laid out.

Part of Browndale Park was sold to George B. Dartt in 1913. Dartt sold real estate and had a home in Browndale Park, although on 44th Street and not on the street named for him. For some reason, the second "t" in Dartt Ave. fell off, probably when most of the streets in St. Louis Park were renamed in 1933.

The confusion continues. A variety of maps, from 1913 to 1925, show Browndale Park in both St. Louis Park and Edina. Since the area was part of a larger farm, there wouldn't have been many people living there, so maybe the jurisdiction didn't matter to Henry Brown or subsequent owners. There may not have even been property tax at the time. There was probably only one school district – Pratt School was at Wooddale and Excelsior in St. Louis Park, and Jonathan Grimes of Edina built Wooddale Ave. to take his kids there.

As it turns out, Browndale Park was always part of St. Louis Park. Cartographers may have mistakenly included it in Edina maps because so much of the Browndale Farm was in Edina.

THE BROWDALE PARK/WOODDALE COTERIE

An interesting sidelight to the Browndale Park story is the Browndale Park Coterie, which started in 1917. Membership was open to women who lived on Wooddale Ave. between Morningside Road and 44th Street, and the houses on 43 1/2 Street. An early constitution states its purpose as "to promote sociability, friendliness, and mutual helpfulness."

Club members would discuss books, the arts, travel, religious figures, and world events. Lunch was held in each other's homes or in nearby restaurants such as the Colonial Inn. In the 1920s, the Coterie was a member of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. In the early 1930s, invitations of reciprocity were received from other women's groups, including the Thursday Musical, Ladies of the Roundtable, Phi Mu Lau, and the Linden Hill Study Club.

Despite the apparent confusion as to whether their neighborhood was in the Park or Edina, by 1931 the ladies were sure they were in St. Louis Park when they held a special meeting to pass a resolution urging a recalcitrant Mayor E.F. Martin to run for re-election. (He did and won by a landslide.)

Some time in the late 1960s, the name of the group changed to the Wooddale Coterie. The group survives today, and is family oriented, holding picnics and parties in line with tradition. The group also does volunteer work.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN BROOKSIDE...

What brought the Browndale Park situation to our attention was a flurry of correspondence with independent researcher Daniel Grobani. Although Daniel lives in California, he became intrigued with the intersection of Brookside Ave. and 44th Street on visits here several years ago. With good reason, as there was a lot going on there.

First, there was the 44th Street streetcar, which started in 1905 and made development of the Brookside neighborhoods in both St. Louis Park and Edina possible. It stopped at a little station at 44th and Brookside before rumbling off into the swamp at a breakneck speed all the way to Excelsior. Oldtimers remember a wooden bridge that took automobiles on Brookside Ave. over the streetcar tracks, but we haven't tracked down a picture of it. The streetcar was replaced by buses in 1954.

There was also the Dan Patch Railway, with stops in Elmwood and Thompson's Store in St. Louis Park, and on Brookside Ave. in Edina, where there was a small station between the tracks and Brookside Ave. near Division Street. No photos of that either, that we know of. Passenger service ended in 1942.

And there was Docken's Store, a fixture at the intersection since at least 1926. The Docken family came to the area in 1895 and built several cottages on the west side of Brookside Ave. to live in and rent out. Family members worked at St. Louis Park businesses such as Monitor Drill and the Lindsay-Greenfield Vehicle Co., and Elizabeth Docken taught at Lincoln School for a time. The store (later owned by the Garners) closed in the mid 1950s and the entire area was razed for the Brookside Court Condominiums in the late '60s.

Daniel is a wizard on the Internet, and atlas maps that he found showed the back-and-forth of Browndale Park. He also noticed that some people were identified as being from "Brookside, Minnesota," as if it were its own village. Early maps show that there was only farmland between the Brookside neighborhood and Elmwood, isolating the area to the extent that the newspaper reported ball games between the "Brookside" and "St. Louis Park" teams. And, Daniel found historic right-of-way maps of Park highways and railroads that have been posted to Mn/DOT's web site <http://gisservices.dot.state.mn.us/geocortex/essentials/web/viewer.aspx?site=rwmm> We have printed some of them out (they are many feet long) and are available for view on Saturday afternoons at the Depot. Our thanks to Daniel - and to our friend Marci Matson at the Edina Historical Society - for providing us with all of these great new resources.

CLASS REUNIONS AND ALL-SCHOOL REUNION

Yes, it's class reunion time again! We will be on the lookout for events planned for this summer and will be posting them to our web site. If you have any information, please contact us and we'll post it.

And don't forget the **all-school reunion** on Saturday, August 25, at the High School from 11-2. This will give you lots of time to have your own class reunion afterwards, so CALL YOUR CLASSMATES (and your kids) now to save the date! Check the reunion web site at www.slppsf.org for all the details.

Alumni from 1956 and before are invited to a pre-reunion open house at *their* High School – now Central - from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. to take a stroll through the halls and visit with fellow alums. After the Central open house, alumni can head over to the Senior High School at 6425 W. 33rd Street, where there will be an alumni talent show beginning at 12:30 in the auditorium. Classes from 1956 and before will have a designated area in the cafeteria at the Senior High to meet up with former classmates.

The St. Louis Park Historical Society will have a table at the event, and we plan to bring a scanner. If you have any photos that you'd like to share with us, but don't want to donate them, this would be a great time to bring them with you and let us scan them for our collection. That way they never leave your sight. Any old photos are welcome, even those that you may not think of as historic. That picture of Aunt Minnie standing in front of her house in the '20s or '30s could be a good record of the history of the house – as well as the history of Aunt Minnie!

THE EDUCATION OF THE COEN BROTHERS

It has come to our attention that Wikipedia currently says that Joel and Ethan Coen graduated from St. Louis Park High School in 1973 and 1976. Well, two of our Board members were in the Class of 1975 at Park, and we know that 1) Ethan was in our class and 2) he didn't graduate from Park. So where did the Coen Brothers get their education?

Their address on Flag would have put them at Cedar Manor Elementary. And sure enough, we have pictures of a pint-sized Joel in a Cedar Manor Student Council scrapbook, in his capacity as student council president in the fall of 1966. Joel was extremely active in the student council, and the Coen home was always teeming with kids, according to an interview with their mother.

Westwood Jr. High would have been next, and Ethan (and his hair) show up in all three of his Westwood yearbooks. Both brothers show up in their respective *Echowans* in their sophomore years; Joel in 1971 and Ethan in 1973. (Although they are about three years apart in age, they were apparently two years apart in school.)

According to a previous iteration of Wikipedia, Joel and Ethan attended Simon's Rock Early College (now Simon's Rock College of Bard) in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Simon's Rock is designed for bright students seeking to start their undergraduate education earlier than normal. Chances are good that they spent their junior and senior years there. If anyone knows first hand if this is true, please feel free to contact us. We'd love to count them as Park High graduates, but they most likely were not.

THIS 'N' THAT

COME JOIN US AT THE DEPOT: Once again this summer we will be opening the Historic Milwaukee Road Depot to the public on Saturdays from 1 to 4 pm. The Depot is located at 37th and Brunswick Ave. Come by to see this restored train depot, take a look at some of our artifacts, and just talk Park history with us. It's just off the bike trail at Wooddale and Hwy. 7.

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS: Due to the change of hosting of our website, our email address has changed. The new address is history@slphis.org. Unfortunately, all of the emails we had received at the previous address have been lost, so if you've contacted us in the past, please get in touch with us again.

THE TUNNEL HAS BEEN FOUND!! Longtime residents may remember the (in)famous tunnel that was built in 1937 to take students under Highway 7 at Wooddale Ave. While some remember it being fun to traverse, others remember it full of graffiti and... let's just say it smelled bad. At some point it was blocked off, and from then on became somewhat of an urban myth. We found it strange that Mn/DOT didn't find it when they built the Wooddale overpass, but now it turns out that they did! Jay Koski from Mn/DOT told us about it and did us one better and sent us pictures. They're posted to our web site at www.slphistory.org/history/highway7.asp. Do you remember the tunnel or when it was closed? Do you recall exactly where it was, i.e., what part of Central it was directly across from?

GOODBYE TO ELIOT SCHOOL: A new agreement has been reached to sell Eliot Elementary School. The building is slated to be torn down and redeveloped into apartments. We requested permission to go inside and take some pictures, but it's been so vandalized that it's unsafe. It's a sad end to a school that had its beginnings in 1885 as the North Side School. The present building is actually the third on the site, and dates back to 1926. If anyone knows where the name Eliot comes from, please let us know. www.slphistory.org/history/eliotschool.asp

CONGRATULATIONS, MADDIE! Our youngest Board member, Madison White, has graduated with honors from Park High, and is headed to the very prestigious Smith College in the fall. Despite her heavy course load, Maddie has participated in almost every meeting and event and has contributed a valuable perspective to our group. She may speak softly, but we respect her opinions and appreciate her voice in our discussions. Thanks for your participation, Maddie, and best of luck in the future!

OAK HILL SCHOOL MYSTERY STILL UNSOLVED: Thanks to everyone who called or wrote to tell us whether Oak Hill School faced Quebec or Walker Street. Most of you said Quebec, but one or two said Walker. When we looked at our photos again, we discovered a picture from an early yearbook that shows Oak Hill School in 1925. It clearly shows two buildings, one facing one street and one facing the other. All subsequent photos only show the one building. Did one of the buildings burn down at some point? We will bring the photos to the All-Class Reunion and hope that someone can set us straight once and for all. You can also see them on our web site at www.slphistory.org/history/oakhillschool.asp

TRIBUTE TO BOB DYLAN RETURNS to Wolfe Park on Saturday, July 28 at 6:30 PM. There will be another show at the Maple Grove Town Green on July 25 as well. This event has had a spectacular turnout since it began in 2008. A revolving list of the Twin Cities' most accomplished musicians come to play and sing their favorite Dylan songs and really put on a great show. The event is free, but get there early because the Amphitheater fills up fast. There will be free parking at the Rec Center. The show is sponsored by SLP Parks and Rec, and raises awareness for the Guitars for Vets Program: guitars4vets.org/

THIS 'N' THAT, Continued

BUHLER CORP. FOUND: Several people remembered this building, located in the northwest corner of the Park, just south of Highway 394 and east of Highway 169. See our web site at www.slphistory.org/history/wb8925.asp for Keith Meland's explanation of how this building ended up in St. Louis Park. Joe Hautman sent us an aerial photo from 1971 with the building circled and told us "the building to the east of Buhler was the Carriage House motel and bowling alley, which must have provided some of the inspiration for the bowling scenes in the Coen Brothers' movie 'The Big Lebowski.' I lived on Flag Ave. where the Coen brothers grew up. My brothers and I used to 'borrow' wooden pallets that were piled behind the Buhler building and use them to make forts in the woods." Don't worry, Joe - the statute of limitations has expired!

BETTY? BETSY?: A new *St. Louis Park Magazine* is in the works for the fall. It will be distributed free to 10,000 homes in the 55416 and 55426 zip codes. The Historical Society has been asked to contribute, and we're looking for interesting photos to publish. One of them is of a woman sitting in the Highway 100/Highway 7 Roadside Park, in front of the Peavy-Haglin Grain Elevator in 1953 (before it became the Nordic Ware tower). Trouble is, we don't remember her name. The photo is posted at www.slphistory.org/history/lilacparknew.asp If you know this woman, or better yet ARE this woman, please contact us! Also, if anyone has a good picture of the Robin Hood Flour grain elevator, we'd love to share it.

KIDDIE TALENT SHOW: Does anyone remember or have any clippings from a 1958 kiddie talent show at the Park Theater? Mark Johnson says it was emceed by *Minneapolis Tribune* columnist Will Jones, with accompanist Jeanne Arland Peterson. In addition to Mark's 13-year-old turn as a ventriloquist, acts included Barbara Hasselberg (a future Miss Minnesota) and Stan Freese, who became music director at Disneyland.

POST OFFICE PUZZLER SOLVED!

Thanks to everyone who called or wrote to help us with the confusion over Christy's Post Office. As you recall, Ed Christy built the Post Office building on Dakota Ave., on the same block as his gas station (at Lake and Wooddale) in 1952. Then in 1958, the Ibberson Co. built their building on the same block, facing Wooddale. Some sleuthing at the tax assessor's office found that after the Post Office moved to Louisiana Ave. in 1966, Christy turned the 1952 building into offices, hosting a barber shop, taxidermist, and Tom's Stereo Sales. In 1971, Christy added a car wash to the end of the building.

That makes three buildings on the block, right? Problem was, county records only show two: the old gas station, and the now abandoned Ibberson building. It turns out that in 1979, Ibberson bought the 1952 building from Christy, and built a connector that made the two buildings into one. Was it just a coincidence that they lined up exactly? And it's all still there, although sadly boarded up and vacant. If you look carefully you can still see where the loading bays of the post office were, and the taller section that was the car wash. Many thanks to Mr. Walt Hanson, former President of Ibberson, for finally setting the record straight. Mr. Hanson also told us that the company moved into their new building on Halloween, 1958. The glass hadn't been installed yet, however, and they had to post a guard to make sure that no pranks were pulled to damage the new building. For new and old pictures of the building, see our web site at www.slphistory.org/history/dakota3425.asp

DONATIONS

Tim Layeux, a frequent donor of cool stuff, gave us a ceramic trivet given out by Boulevard Furniture on the occasion of its 30th anniversary. It has all the earmarks of the perfect donation: the name of the company, a picture of the building, dates, and it's small enough to fit in our display case at Lenox. Plus the business isn't there anymore, and that makes the artifact even more valuable. Thanks, Tim!

Lynn Wallin came across some old *Echo* and *Westwinds* newspapers from the 1960s. We have a very limited collection of *Echos*, so these are very welcome.

Margaret Strobel sent us six buttons from Park High and Westwood dating to the late 1950s and early '60s. Those homecoming buttons could be brutal: one says "Orioles Fly, Robins Die" with a picture of a very sick looking Robbinsdale Robin on it.

Scott Czanstkowski of Village Treasures in Montrose sent us a Robin Hood Days wooden token from 1969. We love Robin Hood Days!

Emory Anderson sent us a goldmine! A disk of 700+ photos he had taken around the Park dating from the 1960s to today. The collection is a literal look back in history to see places that have changed beyond recognition, as well as a few places that haven't changed at all. Emory has a talent for photographing large buildings without the result being too small to see. Many of the photos have been posted to our web site. This is a fantastic gift to the Historical Society and to the people of St. Louis Park who have fond memories of places that are not around anymore. As a matter of fact, Emory grew up on Vernon Ave. at 43 ½ Street, but don't go looking for his house, because it got carted off to make way for the expansion of Highway 100 in 1967. Sometimes you can't go home again, but fortunately we have pictures!

Danny Amis emailed us great photos of the Cooper Theater and the Ambassador Hotel.

BRIAN'S FUND HONORS PARKITE

Brian's Fund is an award named in honor of Brian Thornsjo, who graduated from St. Louis Park High School in 1973. Brian was an inspirational young man who had special needs. Brian faced many daily challenges, but he inspired those around him by persevering and doing amazing things en-route to becoming a self-sufficient and outstanding citizen. Although he spent most of his school years in Special Education, he went on to Vocational/Technical College and became self-sufficient in the working world. He always believed that one more effort, and another day, would bring success and happiness. Sadly, Brian's life was cut short by cancer at the age of 25.

In his honor, friends and family started Brian's Fund, raising money through small donations and a generous donation by Associated Bank. The Fund gives a stipend to a deserving graduating senior who has lived through, persevered, and overcome a disability to make way into the real world. The Thornsjo family works with the Counseling Office at the High School to choose the recipient of each award. The award is not given every year – only when there is a recipient who shares many of the same qualities as Brian exemplified. This year, Jason Lian has been chosen as the recipient of Brian's Fund.

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:
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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

Thanks so much for the great response to our last issue. The reason we have a mailing list of over 800 people is so we can ask questions to fill in gaps and answer the many inquiries we get. If you have any burning questions, don't hesitate to contact us and if we can't answer them we'll put them in the *Re-Echo*.

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.
