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**DR. FITCH'S
PET HOSPITAL**
5700 West Lake Street

THE PARK'S FIRST VETERINARIANS From Dr. Fitch to Oak Knoll

BY JEANNE ANDERSEN

In the earliest days of the village, farmers most likely acted as their own animal doctors or used the services of neighboring villages, such as Hopkins. But in 1930, Dr. Ernest L. Fitch came to town and served the community for 32 years.

Dr. Fitch was born on February 23, 1891, graduated from Iowa State College in 1916, and served as a veterinarian during World War I. He started his practice in Iowa in 1923 before moving to St. Louis Park. His Pet Hospital was located at 5700 West Lake Street, which was an old house with the capacity of 60 animals. His house was immediately adjacent to the hospital. The address is now an apartment building near the Roller Garden.

Fitch served as village dogcatcher from 1930 to 1940. In 1942 he was a member of the Minnesota State Veterinary Society, and as such predicted that the horse would make a comeback.

Dr. B. Robert Lewis

In 1962 Dr. Fitch sold his practice to Dr. B. Robert Lewis. Born on November 2, 1931, in Wichita, Kansas, Lewis earned a BS in Animal Husbandry from Kansas State University in 1953 and served in the Korean War from 1953 to 1955. In 1958 he earned a BS in Biological Science and in 1960, a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree, also from Kansas State. He practiced in Omaha for two years before moving to St. Louis Park.

“ I like to think that I was one of the first St. Louis Parkites he had met. ”

Paul Linnee remembers the Lewis family’s arrival to town: “I was working at Norm’s Texaco (Lake St. at Salem Ave. next to Kay Motors) one Sunday and this white ’62 Chev with Kansas plates came in, driven by a large black man. It being St. Louis Park, he may have been the first black man I had ever talked to. He was new in town, needed gas and wondered if there was a pet hospital in town. I filled his tank with Fire Chief (regular gas) for about 33.9 cents a gallon, washed his windows, swept out the floor with my whisk broom, and directed him up Lake Street to Fitch’s Pet Hospital, up behind the Pastime Roller Rink. At least in my mind, I like to think that I was one of the first St. Louis Parkites he had met.”

Lewis occupied Fitch’s building until it was demolished in 1968.

Oak Knoll Animal Hospital

Dr. Lewis opened Oak Knoll Animal Hospital in a new building at 7010 Highway 7 on April 26, 1968. The *Minneapolis Spokesman* gave a detailed description of the new facility, whose opening drew 500 well-wishers.

Dr. Lewis became one of St. Louis Park’s most noted civic figures and a true pioneer, as the first African American to serve on a Twin Cities school board and first to be elected to the Minnesota Senate. He was elected to the St. Louis Park School Board in 1966, serving at various times as Treasurer, Chairman and Clerk. On July 31, 1971, he left the Board when he was appointed to the State Board of Education. In 1973 he was elected to the Minnesota State Senate District 41, serving St. Louis Park and part of Golden Valley. He was chairman of the Finance Subcommittee on Health, Welfare and Corrections. He sponsored legislation to aid victims of family violence and authored bills that established and continued funding for a statewide program for battered women and their families. He

co-authored the Family Planning Act of 1978, which would help provide services regardless of income and the Catastrophic Health Insurance legislation which aids families who have a member in a nursing home or have extraordinary medical expenses. He also helped create a psychiatric service for prison inmates.

Dr. Lewis was a founding member of the St. Louis Park Human Relations Council, vice chairman of the St. Louis Park Planning Commission and on the board of the Minneapolis Urban League, which voted him Man of the Year. During a period of ongoing race discussions in the Park the 1970s, Dr. Lewis often acted as a moderator and participant. He was an officer of the



Metropolitan Animal Hospital Association and committee chairman at the Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association. He served as Secretary, Vice President and President of the Metropolitan Animal Hospital Association.

Dr. Lewis died of a sudden heart attack at his Golden Valley home on April 25, 1979, at age 47. His body laid in state at the Minnesota Capitol Rotunda where 500 mourners filed by. He was survived by his wife Margaret Sandberg and teenage children B. Robert Lewis, Jr. and Stacy Joan Lewis.

Oak Knoll Lives On

Oak Knoll Animal Hospital continued after Dr. Lewis’s untimely death. Around 1985 it moved to 7916 Minnetonka Blvd., where it was listed as the Oak Knoll-Texa Tonka Animal Hospital. Around 1996 it moved to 7202 Minnetonka Blvd. And in 2014 it moved to 6315-17 Minnetonka Blvd. (former site of businesses such as Swatez Department Store, Pizza Hut, and Meyer Hardware), taking over the entire building.

2015 ANNUAL MEETING

Everyone is welcome to attend the 2015 annual meeting. We’ll elect Board of Trustees, review this past year’s achievements, share plans for our future and recognize volunteers and donors. Food and beverages will be served.

Tuesday, September 15 at 7pm | The Rec Center, Gallery Room | 3700 Monterey Drive, St. Louis Park, MN

RAILROAD ENTHUSIASTS UNITE

A *Railroad Enthusiasts* group is being formed to research and review several boxes of railroad-related materials that have been stored for years in the Depot.



If you're interested in joining this group, please contact us at history@slphis.org or 952-583-9893 and leave a message. This is an important topic in our city's history, and we thank participants John Olson, Doug Johnson, Doug Hodgdon, and others for taking it on!

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Greetings,

I hope you've been enjoying summer! My family and I moved to the Park 10 years ago this summer and together we have experienced all kinds of new things—restaurants, businesses, concerts, and parks—it reminds us why we love it here. (We've also discovered new ways to get around the Park given the extent and duration of construction!) The Historical Society, too, also continues to experience new things. I want to share a bit about what we've been up to since spring.

More than 230 families recently purchased decommissioned city street signs—keepsakes to celebrate their St. Louis Park roots. Over \$7,500 funds were raised and are critical to meeting our operating costs which have more than doubled this year when we had to find and rent a new space to house our activities and collections. If you purchased a street sign, we hope you love it and thank you for your donation!

We're also fortunate to receive \$13,000 in grants from the Minnesota Legacy Fund to acquire a microfilm reader and the newspaper reels to fill in years missing from our current print collection. This will greatly improve our access to local St. Louis Park newspapers from over the past 70 years! A special thanks to Jeanne Andersen who navigated the grant-writing process and met with various vendors to select the right machine.

We've also been busy planning new programs. I'm most excited about a program titled *Historic Connections*, which will feature a moderated panel of experts who will explore topics past and present. Our first program will be on Tuesday evening October 13—watch our website and monthly emails for details on the location and featured panelists. We hope you will join us for what should be an interesting and informative consideration of a topic that affects every one of us.

As a member, please consider finding an additional way to support the Historical Society. Perhaps you have an interesting story, photo or memento to add to our collection. If you have time or talent to share, we probably have a project that needs you! We're also considering candidates for an open seat on our Board of Trustees and welcome those interested in shaping the Society's next chapter. Please reach out to me or any board member to learn more about these opportunities.

Thank you for your support—I hope to see you at a Society event soon!

Warmest regards,

Ted Ekkers

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

June/July 2015

Lynn Bartlett	Margaret Maunder
Robert Betcher	Bill MacMillan
Judy Daniels	Mary McClendon
John Froom	Jan McElfish
Gail & Bruce Girard	Joanna & Paul McPeek
Beth Graff	Michael P. Mullen, CPA
Patty Iverson	Mary Raabe
Gerald Jacobson, Jr.	Sandra Razieli
Maureen & Jim Johnson	Thomas Seim
Marcy Joseph	Diane Sewall
Mark Lapakko	Jane & Andrew Townsend

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Aug. 30 Depot Open House, 1-4pm
Jorvig Park, 6210 W. 37th St.
- Sept. 15 SLPHS Annual Meeting, 7pm
The Rec Center Gallery Room
- Sept. 19 Class of 1975 Reunion
[Visit Facebook Group page](#)
- Oct. 6 SLPHS Monthly Board Meeting, 7pm
- Oct. 13 *Historic Connections* Event, 7pm
SLP High School, Room C350
- Nov. 4 SLPHS Monthly Board Meeting, 7pm
- Nov. 14 Family Archiving Workshop, 2pm
- Dec. 1 SLPHS Monthly Board Meeting, 7pm

Unless noted, events take place at 3546 Dakota Ave. S., Suite C

Founded in 1971, the St. Louis Park Historical Society collects, preserves and shares the history of St. Louis Park. The *ReEcho* is an official publication of the Society.

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Judy Bartholome Burton

BY BONNIE BURTON

My aunt Judy might have been called a ‘hockey brat’ because her family frequently moved—her father Earl Bartholome played professional hockey with the Minneapolis Millers, Rochester Cardinals, and Cleveland Barons. He was inducted into the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame in 1977.



Judy’s family eventually settled in St. Louis Park in 1946, when she was 12 years old. They lived at 4140 Brunswick; their home has since been demolished.

Because the family moved around a lot, Judy learned to reach out and make new friends. When she started at St. Louis Park High school, Judy became active in everything from the *Echow* yearbook to the Rockettes, a dance line group that was the precursor to the Parkettes. She was also a Homecoming Queen attendant in her senior year.

Judy and high school sweetheart, Robert ‘Bob’ Burton soon married after graduating together from St. Louis Park High in 1951. They enjoyed 36 years of marriage together, most of them happy, many while living in St. Louis Park. Sadly, Judy was widowed at a young age, when Bob suffered a massive heart attack at the age of 55.

Judy liked to stay busy and often worked two jobs, just because she could! She has four sons, six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Despite life’s ups and downs, Judy says she’s grateful for each day she is blessed to be here.

Nowadays, at 82 years young, Judy enjoys playing bridge, swimming, and get-togethers with friends. She is on the planning committee for the St. Louis Park High School 65th reunion in 2016. Other members of the planning committee are Ron Johnson, Anne Sanders Maeder, Class President Kingsley Ondich, and Don Schimmel.

Class of 1951 – Stay tuned for details!