

**P1 / FEATURE ARTICLE**

Learn about the Park's firefighters and how they have kept the community safe for 100 years.

**P6 / MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**

Meet Don Schimmel, a 1951 Park High graduate and Historical Society trustee and volunteer since 2005.

**P8 / ARTIST IN RESIDENCE**

Evelyn Raymond was a pioneer artist whose art you have probably seen around the community.

**P11 / NEW TRADITION**

A lighting ceremony at the historic Milwaukee Road Depot brightens up the winter season.



# REecho

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*"Molly"*

Photo by Joan Brinkman

## FIREFIGHTING IN THE PARK: 100 YEARS

BY JEANNE ANDERSEN

Early St. Louis Park was extremely flammable. When T.B. Walker bought 2,000 acres and attempted to sculpt the Village of St. Louis Park into an industrial adjunct to Minneapolis, his medium was wood. And wood burns.

The factories that Walker built in the industrial circle — the center of which is now Highway 7 and Louisiana Avenue — were made of wood. Surrounded by rail spurs, fire was a constant threat; and coupled with the financial panic of 1893, prevented the area from living up to his expectations. Sparks from the railroad set wooden bridges on fire, as well as factories and grain elevators along the rail lines.

The homes Walker built for workers' families were concentrated in south Oak Hill and built on 25-foot lots. Although the concept was supposedly to buy one lot for a house and another for a garden, early maps show them right next to each other

>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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# LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Greetings,

The start of a new year is a good time to reflect, and I am proud of what we have accomplished at the Historical Society this past year.

Last winter, we settled into our new office, rebuilt our website (no small task!), and redesigned our logo. In the spring, we hosted our first Park Antique Parade to which 100 people brought family heirlooms to be appraised. By early summer, we had started selling decommissioned street signs and so far, over 300 have found new lives in homes across the country.

In August, we had 150 people visit us at the Depot to learn more about our city's railroad heritage. This fall, we hosted our first *Historic Connections* program where city leaders joined the Historical Society to discuss how development has shaped and will continue to shape our city. And we ended the year with a new tradition — decorating the Depot in holiday lights for the season.

There is a lot to look forward to in 2016! We'll be hosting a program in February about the history of bars and speakeasies in our city at the Steel Toe Brewing Tap Room. The Antique Parade, Depot open house, and *Historic Connections* programs all will return in 2016 as well.



We also look forward to the challenge of securing a permanent space for a history museum. We hope to find a space that is both appropriately sized and manageable, easily accessible to the public, and will not become a financial burden. We will need to make some decisions soon, as the rent for our current space is significantly increasing. You have generously responded to our fundraising requests, but we would rather this support be put towards a permanent home. We look forward to updating you on our progress!

Thank you for your membership and support this past year. Your financial contributions, volunteer hours and engagement in our work are what inspires and enables us to continue our mission to collect, preserve and share the history of this great city.

With best wishes for a happy new year,

Ted

## CONNECT WITH US

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**Email:** [history@slphis.org](mailto:history@slphis.org)

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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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## MEET OUR NEW TRUSTEE: Jane Hagstrom

BY BONNIE BURTON



Welcome new trustee Jane Hagstrom! Jane was elected to the board this past September at the Society's Annual Meeting. Jane grew up in St. Louis Park in the Westwood Hills neighborhood and is a 1978 graduate of Park High. She is Outreach & Sales Director at TowerLight Senior Community, located on Wooddale Avenue and 36th Street in St. Louis Park.

Jane is interested in the history of the Park, loves to volunteer and was looking for an organization to share her skills with. She's creative and friendly, and some of you may know her as the advertising manager for the Society's newsletter, the *ReEcho*. She likes to connect with people through storytelling and we look forward to her participation with the St. Louis Park Historical Society through public speaking, event planning, and her marketing work with our newsletter committee. If you see her friendly face around town, please say hello!

and when one went up in smoke, it was inevitable that several others went with it. It is nothing less than extraordinary that we still have about 50 of these 1890-era homes remaining. Then, there were the big hotels built for single men who came to work in the factories. News of fantastic infernos made Minneapolis papers. One of these was the burning of the Great Northern Hotel in 1912. For some reason, the reaction to the fire by hotel guests was the defenestration of valuables—throwing items out of windows. A contemporary news account is worth reading:

“Mrs. L.C. Sprague, proprietress of the hotel, asleep when the fire was discovered, refused to get up, believing it was not serious. Later she was carried out in her night attire by Fire Chief Joseph Williams...Many persons narrowly escaped injury when a big chimney fell. The hotel had fifty rooms and was full of guests. Thirty-five [who] were at breakfast...ran upstairs and roused the sleeping guests...These articles were tossed from second and third story windows:

- One piano, which was shattered beyond repair when it struck.
- One big refrigerator, which suffered a similar fate.
- One chair, which struck William Chase, 14 years old, and broke his arm.
- One water pitcher, which struck Howard Bradford, 17 years old, on the head, inflicting a severe scalp wound and knocking him down.”

In 1963, Pete Williams recalled what his father, Fire Chief Joe Williams, told him about the fire: “There was so much confusion that firemen threw mirrors out the windows and carried mattresses that could have been thrown out the windows down the stairs.”

Even the buildings made of brick were vulnerable. The Walker Building, still gracing the old commercial district of Walker Street today, was decimated by fire in 1917 and the eastern portion was only built back to one story. Facing the Walker Building was the Hamilton block, another brick building, which met its demise by fire in 1958.

And finally, there was the north side, which was almost completely unoccupied before World War II. When not plagued by grass fires—on a single day during the Dust Bowl, there were 49 such fires in one day—there was the peat, which had a tendency to spontaneously combust. John Yngve eloquently describes the Peat Fire of 1936:

“Suddenly, south of Cedar Lake Road, southeast of Eliot School, a grass fire started. The wind blew, the fire spread, moving northerly across the open fields north of Cedar Lake Road and then spread to the 40 acres of peat swamp that was very dry. The fire truck arrived with its small tanks of water, and people

came with buckets and gunny sacks which they soaked to slap out the grass fire, but it could not easily be stopped, and so the efforts were to stop the fire from reaching homes, saving the homes which were at risk.

The fire swept north, speeded by winds from the southwest across the swamp, leaving the dry peat burning and then across Superior [Wayzata] Blvd. on to the Lawrence M. Larson farm at Cedar Lake Road and Texas. Then the gun club, and then easterly on the north side of the boulevard, where it was finally stopped by the railroad tracks, leaving behind two huge 40 acre peat fires burning on both sides of Superior Blvd., with no hope of extinguishing it. It burned for hours, days, months,

and finally into the next year, burning even through the winter below the snow, finally stopping, leaving behind fine peat ash which filled the homes with dust and leaving a smell which took years to leave.”

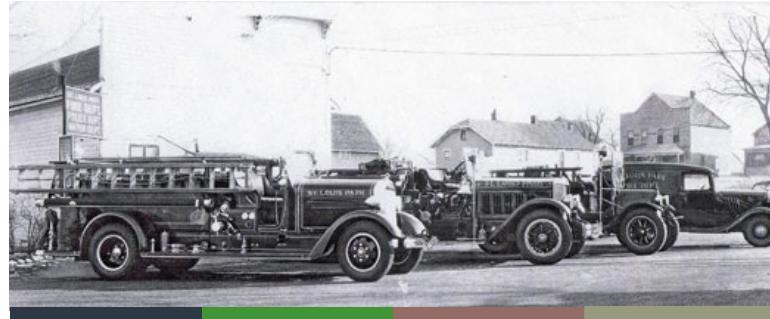
In the face of all this danger by fire, the heroes of the

village were not politicians, clubmen, business owners, or large landowners—they were the brave men of the volunteer fire department. Struggling to drive to fires on unpaved, unplowed roads, carrying primitive firefighting equipment, and clad in uniforms that were inadequate to keep out the cold, these volunteers constantly and willingly, risked their lives for the sake of the safety of their community.

A bucket brigade started as early as 1893, mostly made up of employees of the Monitor Drill Co. The village made occasional attempts to organize a fire department; in fact, the *St. Louis Park Herald* newspaper tells us that on August 19, 1915, the Commercial Club held a mass meeting to organize a volunteer fire department. 25 men volunteered, and it was expected that at least 40 would eventually volunteer. The state fire inspector and state commissioner were also present at this meeting. The department was officially organized on September 2, 1915, at a meeting at the high school. This date is considered the official beginning of the fire department in St. Louis Park.

Through the years, conditions improved and with the advent of a village-wide water system in 1930, the fire department was able to buy a new red and yellow pumper truck named ‘Molly’ for \$13,500. The truck was made in Elmira, New York, in 1928 and shipped to St. Louis Park by boxcar. Molly could pump 1,000 gallons of water per minute.

There is more information about fires and firefighting at [slphistory.org/fire](http://slphistory.org/fire). Today, fire station #1 on Wooddale Avenue is a veritable museum of the Park’s firefighting history and houses photos, uniforms, the original fire pole, and Molly, the 1928 truck, which is fully restored and running! We thank those brave volunteers of the past for acts of heroism in the face of limited resources, and the firefighters of today who value their history and carry on the tradition of keeping our community safe.



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# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Donald K. Schimmel

BY BONNIE BURTON

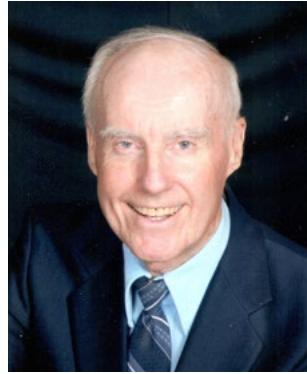
The word that may best describe Don is loquacious. Don is a talker; a charming conversationalist with hundreds of wonderful stories to share. He is the grandson of German and Irish immigrants, including a grandfather who established a piano factory in Faribault, MN, where Don was born in 1933, during the Great Depression. His father was an accountant, his mother a teacher, and due to economic times, the family frequently moved. Eventually Don's family moved to St. Louis Park in 1947 when he was 14 years old. They bought a home at Kentucky and 31st, where they lived for many years.

Don loved athletics and participated in track and football while in high school, but he says his real love is basketball, which he discovered almost by accident. Don and a friend decided to tour their neighborhood one night: they wanted to investigate bright lights they saw by the high school, about a mile away from their home. To their delight, they discovered an outdoor-lit basketball court at the home of Francis Bradley, a classmate and a gifted athlete. Many of their friends were playing basketball and the boys were awestruck by the sight.

It turned out to be a real life-changer for Don. Having found his passion, Don said he could not get enough of it. He was hooked! He practiced and played basketball constantly and was thrilled to become good enough to make the junior varsity team at Park.

That passion for basketball carries over to this day. Eighteen years retired, Don is interested in athletic statistics and developed a project to collect all the St. Louis Park boys' high school basketball team photos, and verify and archive statistics from the 1920s until present day. He started this process with score books he received from the family of beloved St. Louis Park Coach Lloyd Holm, for the period 1949 to 1975. Don has nearly completed the boys' portion of the project through 1994, and he has plans to collect and archive the girls' basketball records next.

Don attended the University of Minnesota, with thoughts of becoming an architect, but life had other plans: he was drafted into the army during the Korean conflict. Eventually he returned to college, where he earned a degree in Industrial Relations and subsequently accepted a position with the Minneapolis VA Medical



Center. He traveled in his work with the VA and spent time in Chicago, where he met his wife Barb; and Washington D.C., where they lived for several years. During that time, Don tells me he made it a point to try to remember the names of their 3,000+ employees! Eventually, Don and Barb longed for home and they moved back to Minnesota. He retired from the VA in 1997, after nearly 40 years of service.

Don is a restless, intelligent spirit and he likes to keep busy. His interest in people and willingness to serve, led him to the St. Louis Park Historical Society in 2005, where he has been a trustee and volunteer for many years. Don still often attends the monthly Historical Society board meetings as a member. He listens intently to potentially boring discussions of fundraising, membership, and minutes, offering his opinion when asked, and generally serving as an elder statesman. We on the Board are grateful for his interest and support.

Don is a 1951 graduate of St. Louis Park High School, where he was voted the friendliest person in the class! He is on the planning committee for the 65th year class reunion, scheduled for 2016. True to his nature, he has compiled his fellow classmates' names and information, including their parents' names, into a master database. As might be expected with advanced age, there are members who have passed on; Don continues his research by locating obituaries of his former classmates. Other members of the 65th reunion planning committee include Judy Bartholome Burton, Ron Johnson, Anne Sanders Maeder, and Class President Kingsley Ondich.

At 82 years young, Don and Barb have two children and six grandchildren, with whom they enjoy spending time. Don is also an ardent collector of phonograph records, open-reel magnetic sound tapes, VHS and Betamax tapes, CDs, and DVDs. Barb claims they need an addition to their home to house their collection!

## MYSTERY PHOTO



Hmm.... What could have been going on in 1975 that made it necessary for St. Louis Park to have a detective agency? I will refrain from speculation about the increasing bedroom community and the peak of the baby boom. We know almost nothing about this business, so if anyone knows who owned it, anyone who worked there, or what kinds of jobs they did, we'd love to hear about it. In the meantime, for all you detectives out there, where was this building located? Not many clues in the picture, and the building is long gone, so this might be a real mystery. **Send your best answers to [slphs.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slphs.newsletter@gmail.com)!**

This photo comes from a new cache of commercial and apartment shots the City Assessor's office generously provided to the Historical Society, and we're thrilled to get them. Many thanks to Emory Anderson for scanning over 800 photos in one week!



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# EVELYN RAYMOND: Pioneer Artist

BY KATHY SPENCE JOHNSON

St. Louis Park has its share of famous people in politics, movies, sports and the arts. Someone you might not know, but whose work you have seen, was also a resident of St. Louis Park.

Evelyn Raymond was born in Duluth in 1908. Her interest in art started at an early age and after graduating from Duluth Central High School, she won a scholarship to attend the Minneapolis School of Art in Minneapolis in 1928. This is what we now know as the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

While attending school, she decided that sculpture was her medium. In 1929, the school went through internal conflicts and her favorite professors were fired. She and 25 of her fellow students left school and started the Minneapolis Art Student League and hired one of the professors to teach them sculpture.

Her mother's health deteriorated in 1930 and she had to leave school to take care of her siblings, but she returned to her craft in 1939.

Evelyn was hired as a Work Projects Administration (WPA) art instructor, but not before having to prove she could create sculpture. For this test, she created a sculpture called *Erg*, named for a unit of energy, which is today in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. This sculpture, which is part human and part machine, is an example of Modernism.

Evelyn taught art for the WPA, earning \$75 per month, through the Walker Art Center School from 1939 to 1950. During this time, she was given the opportunity to create the kind of sculptures she is best known for: bas-relief.

In 1941, she was commissioned to create a large bas-relief sculpture for the football stadium in International Falls. When traveling there with seventeen workers in January, they had to wait three weeks to pour the cement because the weather was always below zero.

In 1943, Evelyn and several other women created the Minnesota Sculpture Group to stimulate interest in creative sculpture. Evelyn was one of the original Charter signers of this group in 1951. In 1959, the Sculpture Group changed its name to the Society of Minnesota Sculptors. This group is still active today providing a platform for artists to interact and exchange

ideas, helping members present their work, and helping expand market opportunities for Minnesota sculptors.

In 1949, she was commissioned to create a sculpture for the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Edina. Before I knew anything about Evelyn, I had passed this church many times and admired this sculpture. I suspect you have, too. At the time it was installed it was considered the "largest piece of sculpture on a wall in Minnesota."

Evelyn created a piece for the Mutual Service Insurance Company in 1959 named *The Family*, which depicts a large male figure leaning protectively over a family, symbolizing the protection by insurance. When Mutual Service Insurance moved from its building on University Avenue in Minneapolis to a more modern building in Arden Hills, the sculpture was relocated to the field house at the University of St. Thomas.

Her most famous sculpture is a bronze of Maria Stanford, an 1880 faculty member of the University of Minnesota who

taught Rhetoric, Elocution and Art History. Maria was born in Connecticut in 1836 and loved education. She was teaching in a country school by age 16, became principal and superintendent of schools in Pennsylvania, and later a professor at Swarthmore College. She taught at the University of Minnesota and died in 1920 at the age of 83. That year, the University of Minnesota held a memorial convocation in her honor. Maria Stanford was called "the best loved woman of the North Star State."

Each state in the Union is permitted two statues in the National Statuary Hall on the U.S. Capitol Grounds. *Maria*, by Evelyn Raymond, is one of Minnesota's statues, and was the first statue of a woman placed there. In addition, Evelyn was the first woman sculptor to be represented. It was commissioned in 1958, in celebration of Minnesota's centennial.



## Closer to Home

From the 1950s until her death in 1998, Evelyn lived and worked from her home at 4501 West 38th Street, which is now the corner occupied by Trader Joe's. She taught classes here while making commissioned art. She commented that her students were primarily women, which she attributed to the



"Celebration of Peace"

fact that her classes were taught in the morning, when mostly women could attend. And she felt that women had a better feel for sculpture than men.

In 1953, she was commissioned to create a group of sculptures for St. George's Episcopal Church in St. Louis Park. She designed a victory cross, crucifix, and sconces. An article was written about the pieces in *The Living Church*, a national Episcopal publication, and there was some controversy over their modern forms. The church later sold one of the pieces and retains the others.

Evelyn's final sculpture was *Celebration of Peace*, a 28-foot stainless column circled by abstract representations of birds, which she felt were displaced by the building of Wolfe Park. It is located outside the entrance of the St. Louis Park Recreation Center.

Evelyn Raymond was one of the pioneer women artists in our state. In fact, she is among the artists represented in the book, *Pioneer Modernists: Minnesota's First Generation of Women Artists*, by Julie L'Enfant. St. Louis Park is fortunate to have many pieces of art on display around town. Next time you drive by one of these many art pieces, give a nod to Evelyn for her groundbreaking work.



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# HISTORIC DEPOT LIGHTING CEREMONY

BY BONNIE BURTON

The St. Louis Park Historical Society held its first annual lighting ceremony on December 5 at the historic Milwaukee Road Depot in Jorvig Park, at 37th Street and Brunswick Avenue in St. Louis Park. There was an old-fashioned feel in the air, with the Depot windows glowing and welcoming those who approached in the dark night.

We had many first time visitors to the Depot and many from the Elmwood neighborhood who walked to the event. Families in the neighborhood expressed appreciation that the Depot and Jorvig Park would be well-lit for evening walks.

The ceremony took place at twilight to the delight of 50-60 guests who enjoyed cozy refreshments of hot chocolate and cookies. The lights were donated by a Historical Society member and installed by the city of St. Louis Park public works department. Discover St. Louis Park sponsored the event.

We hope to make the Depot Lighting an annual event! The lights will be on display through the winter season.



Photo by Emory Anderson

## NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS: August – December 2015

Welcome new and renewing members! Many of you contributed to the St. Louis Park Historical Society during the GiveMN campaign in November, and we are so grateful for your generosity and support!

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