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## ST. LOUIS PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT FOR CY 2015

### SUMMARY:

2015 was an incredibly productive year for the Historical Society. In every area we have grown by leaps and bounds, becoming more and more of an asset to the community. In turn, the people of St. Louis Park have continued to support us and help us reach our goals. Our ultimate goal remains the establishment of a destination St. Louis Park History Center where we can display archives, make research materials available, and provide an environment where people can come and share their stories of life in the Park.

### I. ABOUT THE SOCIETY

#### VISION STATEMENT:

The St. Louis Park Historical Society is a welcoming, energetic organization; connected with the City; offering relevant programming for the community and schools; where current, former, and future residents can learn and reminisce about the history of St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

#### GOALS FOR 2015:

- Shore up organizational discipline
- Create a Programming Committee and execute regular and diverse programming
- Strengthen our ties and outreach with the City's business, media, and civic leaders
- Ensure that we are financially sound
- Assess the feasibility of a significant capital campaign

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

The Board meets once each month at the Society's office. At our Annual Meeting on September 15, the makeup of our Board stayed essentially the same with two changes:

President: Ted Ekkers

Vice President: Bonnie Burton

Secretary: Jeanne Andersen (formerly a Trustee)

Treasurer: Henry Solmer

Trustees:

Sue Ainsworth

Jane Hagstrom (replacing Jeff Liss)

Robert Jorvig

Dale Lapakko

Paul Linnee

John Olson

James Robbins

There are currently two vacancies for Trustees.

## **MEMBERSHIP:**

Despite the increase in membership dues from \$20 per individual and \$30 per family to \$25 and \$35 respectively that was implemented in October 2014, the membership base increased from approximately 215 paid members at the beginning of 2015 to approximately 275 paid members at year end. The increase in membership is attributed to improved member retention via quarterly renewal reminder mailings sent to expired members.

In addition, corporate membership categories were established and the organization now has several corporate memberships contributing between \$100 and \$500+ each. There will be continued emphasis in 2016 on further outreach and development of corporate memberships.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Everyone connected to the Historical Society is a volunteer; there is no paid staff. Including the Board of Directors, we had over 30 volunteers who contributed over 3,500 hours in meetings, research, programming, design, photographic work, fundraising, customer service, administrative, and many other tasks that keep our organization running. We hope to engage even more volunteers in the coming year.

## **LOCATION:**

Our office space at 3546 Dakota has had many benefits over our previous space at Lenox Community Center.

- Access to the office at all times
- Greater security
- Room for office equipment, additional file cabinets
- Space for researchers to spread out

However, there are two serious drawbacks:

- The office is on the second floor with no elevator.
- The rent, while below market rate, is still more than our annual member dues bring in. Therefore, ongoing fundraising activities will be required.

Therefore, we find it our first priority to find a space where we can establish a permanent museum that meets our physical needs and that is affordable and sustainable.

On March 3, professional fundraiser Katy Nelson spoke to the Board and suggested that we hire a consultant to evaluate the viability of a capital campaign. Trustee Paul Linnee carried out an informal 17-question survey via email and Facebook and received positive support, although this may not reflect the larger population of potential donors.

On March 18 the Board held a visioning session and set the following goals for our facility:

- We will be a welcoming, full-fledged museum;
- We will be a vibrant place where people want to gather;
- We will have extensive programming that connects with many different audiences;
- We will have youth-focused programming integrated into the community;
- We will carry on our legacy of research and continuous learning;
- We will be recognized as a leader in the community and recognize those who made our vision a reality.

In October we set up a committee to research possible sites. Once we find a suitable property we intend to conduct a capital campaign to raise the necessary funds. Given our increased presence in the community over the last year, we are optimistic that this will be an achievable goal.

## II. ACTIVITIES

### SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

- We hold office hours at our Dakota office each Saturday afternoon from 1 to 4 pm. Visitors are able to look at Society holdings such as newspapers, yearbooks, photographs, files, directories, and other resources. We had an average of 4-6 visitors each week.
- On June 20 we had a table at the 2015 Parktacular Expo to provide information about the history of St. Louis Park and to promote the Historical Society. We had approximately 50-100 visitors
- On August 4 the Society had a table at the Minikahda Neighborhood Association's National Night Out party. Neighbors were quite interested in the aerial photographs and plat maps that were displayed. We engaged about 50 people.
- On December 8 three members of our Board served as volunteer judges at the High School's History Day competition.
- In April Trustee James Robbins taught six classes about entrepreneurship in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as part of the Junior Achievement Program at the Middle School. There were 30 participating students.
- On February 4 we had a table of photos and information about the history of Highway 100 at a Community Forum at the AAA Building where Mn/DOT explained plans for the upcoming reconstruction of the highway.
- We assisted Fire Chief Steve Koering regarding the start of St. Louis Park's Fire Department, providing documentation and memoirs from our files. Trustee Jeanne Andersen contributed to his article about the Department's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the October issue of *Park Perspective*, the City's newsletter. We also loaned the Fire Department a fireman's coat and whistle for display at Fire Station #1.
- On November 3 Trustee James Robbins participated in the Kids Voting Program, in collaboration with the League of Women Voters. The program is designed to teach elementary school children the importance of voting in elections.
- In June the Society assisted the Park Ambassadors program:
  - President Ted Ekkers helped the Parktacular committee put together a Treasure hunt for Ambassador candidates. 20 people participated on June 13.
  - Artifacts were loaned to the committee for display at the Ambassadors' coronation on June 20.
  - Assistance was provided to the committee in locating former royalty.

### PROGRAMS

In 2015 we formed a committee to develop interesting and fun programs to educate Park's citizens on the community's history, relate it to the present, and stimulate further interest. Those activities include:

- On August 30 we hosted an Open House at the Historic Milwaukee Road Depot with informational sessions on the importance of railroads to the history of St. Louis Park and demonstrations of the telegraph equipment that the station agents used to communicate with each other. With the help of publicity in the *StarTribune* and *Sun Sailor*, the event attracted approximately 150 people. The event was also featured in the September 3 edition of the City's "Life in the Park" weekly cable TV show.
- On April 11 guest speaker Mary Wickersham gave a presentation about researching family history. Attendance: 20
- On October 13 we hosted the first of our Historic Connections programs: "How Development Shapes Our City." Panel members were Greg Hunt of the City's Economic Development

Department, Carl Robertson of the City's Planning Commission, Robb Bader of Bader Development, and Brad Bakken of Citizens' Independent Bank. After a presentation about the history of development in the Park by Society President Ted Ekkers, Mayor Jeff Jacobs acted as moderator for a lively and instructive discussion of how past practices interact with future plans to shape the city. We received publicity for this event in the Sun Sailor, and despite many competing events that evening, we had an audience of about 30 people.

- On November 14 we held a workshop called "Your Family Stuff, Your Family Story," where professional archivist Kathy Spence Johnson described methods of preserving family mementos and worked with participants who brought in their items to share. Attendance: 10
- On December 5 we held our first Depot Lighting Ceremony, to make Jorvig Park and the Depot more festive. The lights were donated by President Ted Ekkers, and installed on the Depot by City staff. At 5:30 pm the switch was flipped and the crowd of about 50 people enjoyed the sight, along with cold weather refreshments. The lights are on a timer in accordance with the wishes of the Elmwood neighborhood. We received publicity before and after this event from the Sun Sailor.

#### **SPEAKERS BUREAU:**

- On March 30 we made a presentation about the Society and Park history to the St. Louis Park Rotary Club. Attendance: 30
- On May 26 a presentation was made to a troop of Boy Scouts, which they could use in furtherance of earning a merit badge. Attendance: 10
- On March 10 we made a presentation to the Bronx Park Neighborhood Association about the history of the city and the neighborhood. Attendance: 20
- On November 19 we made a presentation to the Men's Club at Westwood Lutheran Church about the history of the city. Attendance: 25
- On December 16 we spoke to two classrooms of second graders at Susan Lindgren School about the history of the city and the school. Attendance: 80
- On June 11 we gave a presentation about St. Louis Park history at the Towerlight Senior Living Community. Attendance: 20
- On August 18 Trustee Dale Lapakko answered the call from Discover St. Louis Park to lead a bus tour around the city. Attendance: 20

#### **WEBSITE:**

Our website has been updated from an obsolete program to a web-based WordPress platform that can be accessed by more than just one person. With nearly 1,400 pages and over 3,000 photos, it continues to be one of, if not the most complete and useful historical society website in the state. It is used constantly by City staff, the media, businesses, and others in search of information on St. Louis Park places, people, and almost any other topic imaginable.

In addition, the new site has features that allow us to offer merchandise online, such as our book *Something in the Water* and our street signs. Memberships can also be paid for online as well.

Updates are made to the website on a regular basis. Major additions this year include:

- Expanded history of the Dan Patch Railroad
- Expanded page on Race, Creed and Color
- Identification and photos of men from St. Louis Park who died in the Viet Nam war
- Updated pages on the St. Louis Park and Como-Hopkins streetcar lines, in conjunction with Aaron Isaacs of the Streetcar Museum
- Extensive research and information on the life of T.B. Walker
- The surprisingly lurid history of the St. Louis Park State Bank, 1915-1919

## COMMUNICATIONS:

- We published two issues of *Re-Echo* newsletter; copies were mailed to members and the digital version was posted on our website. These issues were printed in color for the first time.
- We send an on-line monthly newsletter called “Park History Today” to all interested parties via email. Featured items include upcoming events and additions or updates to our website. At the end of the year we had 365 subscribers.
- Jeanne Andersen contributed six “Last Glance” articles and photos to the *St. Louis Park Magazine*. The Society was also represented on the magazine’s advisory board.
- Members of the Society were frequent contributors to “Flashbacks of St. Louis Park” Facebook page. This page is not sponsored by the Society but has 7,000+ members who post photos and memories of growing up in the Park. The Society provides links to our website pages and also gleans photos and information to add to our website.
- We maintained our own Facebook page, which has over 1,000 followers.
- We maintained a Twitter account with 99 followers.
- Information taken from our website or contributed by the Society was cited at least monthly in articles written by Seth Rowe for the *SLP Sun-Sailor*.
- The *Guide to St. Louis Park*, issued in September by the publishers of the *Sun-Sailor*, included a prominently-placed page on the Historical Society, and a new page on distinguished people who came from St. Louis Park, both written and bylined by Jeanne Andersen.
- We published Park High Class reunion information on our website.
- Stories about the Society and about city history have appeared in at least two neighborhood newsletters.

## FUNDRAISERS:

Park’s Antique Parade: On May 16 we inaugurated our first antique appraisal event, called “Park’s Antique Parade.” This is an event put on by many historical societies in the area, in which a professional appraiser is hired to evaluate antiques brought in by participants who have made a donation to the Historical Society. Our appraisal company was Midwest Appraisers, Inc., owned by Bonnie Lindberg, who is a St. Louis Park High graduate, Park resident, and daughter of Elayne Lindberg who owned Elayne Galleries on Excelsior Blvd. for many years. Bonnie and her partners evaluated over 100 items in the space of three hours; people brought up to three items each and described how they came to have the item and what they knew about it. The event was held in the High School cafeteria, and the School District waived the usual fee. Discover St. Louis Park sponsored the event with a \$1,000 donation, and local businesses provided all of the refreshments. Park TV recorded the event, put video together with stills of the participants, and broadcast the program on Channel 16. The event was a huge success, and we had to start a waiting list in the event we did it again. Attendance: 100. Net profit: \$2,000.

Street Sign Sales: Following the lead of the Golden Valley Historical Society, in April we approached the City’s street department about whether, instead of recycling old metal street signs, we could have them to sell as a fundraiser. State law requires that all city street signs be reflectorized, which meant that all of the signs in the city had to be replaced. City staff and the City Council approved of the plan, and approximately 560 signs were delivered to the Depot in May. Thanks to publicity via Facebook, our website, the *StarTribune*, and the *Sun-Sailor*, by the end of the year we had sold approximately 365 signs to 215 donors, 80 percent of whom were non-members of the Society. Another 300 signs were delivered at the end of December. This represents the last of them – the City was three fourths done with the project before we got involved, and the new signs are expected to last 20 years. This has been incredibly successful, not only as a collaboration with the City and a much needed moneymaker, but as a way of spreading goodwill to people who have great memories of living in St. Louis Park. Net 2015 profit: \$7,666.

Yearbook Sales: In order to raise funds, create more storage space at the Depot, and provide Park High alumni with happy memories, the Board will sell the Society’s excess Echowan yearbooks. Each book in

our collection has been carefully evaluated and numbered. The best copy of each year was designated to be stored at the Depot, and the second-best copy at our office. Any additional copies will be put up for sale. Six books were sold in 2015. In addition, the High School has agreed to provide their excess copies to the Society with the understanding that they will be sold as a fundraiser. Books will be sold online and sales will begin in 2016 as soon as the contributions from the High School are evaluated and inventoried. Net profit: \$300.

### **III. OUR COLLECTION**

#### **ARTIFACT DONATIONS:**

- Almost 2,000 physical artifacts were donated to the Society. An inventory summarizing these donations is attached.
- Included was a collection of over 370 promotional items from Park businesses, donated by local collector Fred Mutchler on July 7. Using many items from the Mutchler collection, in August volunteer Kathy Spence Johnson filled our two display cases in our office with items representing businesses and schools.
- Over half of the year's artifact donations consist of slides or photographs received from the City of St. Louis Park. These have all been digitized and are now available either at our office, on our website, or both. These include:
  - Approximately 800-900 photos of commercial and multifamily buildings from the City Assessor
  - Approximately 30 photos of Excelsior Blvd. from 1981 from the Planning Dept.
  - 385 slides from the Community Development Dept.
- On February 13 we received hundreds of plat books, loose plat maps, and aerial photographs from the City's Engineering Department. The City had digitized these items for their use and provided us with the hard copies. These have proved to be of great interest to members of the community.
- In February we received a significant donation of photos and two scrapbooks from the Ambassador Motor Hotel (1961-1991). We were able to sell a scan of one of these photos, which later appeared in the book *Minnesota Modern: Architecture and Life at Midcentury*, by Larry Millett.
- On November 7 we obtained a window that came from Mark Tucker's seven-story tree house that he had just dismantled.

#### **EQUIPMENT DONATIONS**

- On February 13 we received eight banks of flat files from the City's Engineering Department. Five of the files are in our office to house the plats and aerials the City also donated, and three are at the Depot to protect documents and oversized photographs, etc.
- In the hopes of receiving grants for a microfilm reader and microfilm of our newspapers, we obtained a microfilm cabinet at no cost from the Sherburne County Historical Society. Three volunteers traveled to the site to pick it up, and City staff later brought it up the stairs to our office.

#### **NEWSPAPERS**

- On May 28 we were awarded a Minnesota Legacy grant of \$10,000 to purchase a digital microfilm reader and computer, contributing \$234 of our own funds to complete the purchase. The machine was installed on August 22.
- On August 12 we were awarded a Minnesota Legacy grant of \$2,997 to purchase 37 reels of microfilm. Between our bound copies and the microfilm, we now have complete sets of the following newspapers:

- *The St. Louis Park Dispatch*
  - *The St. Louis Park Herald*
  - *The Spirit of St. Louis Park*
  - *The St. Louis Park Forum*
- In 2016 we plan to apply for another grant to purchase 42 additional reels of microfilm to fill out our collection of:
    - *The St. Louis Park Sun*
    - *The St. Louis Park Sailor*
    - *The St. Louis Park Sun-Sailor*

## **ARTIFACT PRESERVATION**

- Using his own equipment, volunteer David Kopperl scanned over 800 class photos from Ethel Baston, Peter Hobart, Susan Lindgren, and Cedar Manor Elementary Schools. Over the past two years Mr. Kopperl has scanned approximately 1,200 of these school photos.
- With the receipt of the flat files from the City, we were able to take delicate paper artifacts out of potentially harmful glass frames and other mountings and place them flat, separated by glassine, as instructed by Diana Clise at the Midwest Art Conservation Center.

## **DEACSESSIONS**

- Among the Mutchler collection were many Park High Homecoming buttons. We made an inventory of these buttons and contacted the High School to investigate its holdings. The Athletic Director had a framed array of buttons in his office, but three were missing and research revealed that some were out of order. We were able to provide him with the missing buttons and a spreadsheet with each year, opposing team, slogan, and date of game.
- The collection of plat maps and aerials received from the City included areas in Minnetonka, Golden Valley, and Minneapolis. These were given to the cities in first two jurisdictions and to the Borchert Library at the University of Minnesota.
- In preparation for the sale of *Echowan* yearbooks, we compared inventories with the Media Center at the High School and provided them with 12 copies. One was an extremely rare 1934 issue that they did not have previously.
- Stored away in our Historic Milwaukee Road Depot were several boxes of railroad-related materials. Three of those boxes turned out to be extremely old records from the Minneapolis Railway Transfer Company. Having determined that this company did not operate in St. Louis Park, these records were offered to the Minnesota Transportation Museum and the City of Minneapolis. They were given to the latter as they responded first.

## **IV. COLLABORATIONS**

### **CITY OF ST. LOUIS PARK**

The City has been invaluable to us in 2015, as always, but this year it has gone above and beyond! We were fortunate that we obtained a larger space at the same time that City Hall was undergoing a renovation, so that we could accept all of the flat files, maps, aerials, and other photos. Not only did City staff provide the materials, but they hauled most of it up 21 stairs to our office!

- We are especially grateful to the City Council and City staff for allowing us to sell their used street signs as a fundraiser. This project was extremely successful and gave us some much needed breathing room in our budget as we continue to seek a permanent solution to our space needs.

- The City’s Community TV Department has always provided us with wonderful services. This past year they recorded our Antiques Parade event for broadcast on Channel 16, promoted our events on “Life in the Park,” found a way to decode an antiquated zip drive, and provide us with DVDs of community events for our archives.
- As always, the City has taken care of the Historic Milwaukee Road Depot, located in Jorvig Park. Staff has ensured that the heating and air conditioning is in order, the walk from the street is shoveled, and the baggage door opened to allow the street signs to be loaded. The Historical Society has had sole use of the Depot since 1970 and we do not take it for granted! This year staff even strung our holiday lights for us.
- We are also in appreciation of our mailbox at the Rec Center. Since we are not at our office every day, this is an essential service for us. It also allows City staff to receive large objects on our behalf. The extended hours at the Rec Center are extremely convenient and we have a great working relationship with Caroline Voss and the rest of the staff.

In turn, we work to assist the City as much as possible.

- We worked with Fire Chief Koering to determine that 1915 was the year that the SLP Fire Department officially began. We also provided artifacts display at Fire Station #1. (See above under Service to the Community.)
- We also worked with Water Resources Manager Erick Francis to research the history of Bass Lake.
- City staffers often make use of the information on our website, and refer citizens with history questions to us.

We anticipate further collaboration as the City Assessor stores its retired records (including photos) on the homes of St. Louis Park for us until we find room to keep them. City Hall is also holding lateral files in which to house these files. Many people come in to our office hoping to find information about the history of their houses, and these files would be infinitely helpful to them in this research. We hope that we will be able to take custody of these files soon and be able to help people who are increasingly interested in the history of their homes and their community.

## **ST. LOUIS PARK SCHOOLS**

We had several interactions with the schools this year, including:

- Participation of three Board members as judges on the High School’s History Day
- The School District’s donation of the High School Cafeteria for our Antiques Parade fundraising event
- The swap of *Echowen* yearbooks between the Society and the High School Media Center
- Completion of the school’s collection of Homecoming buttons
- Participation in the Middle School’s Junior Achievement Program

## **DISCOVER ST. LOUIS PARK**

- Discover SLP, our convention and tourism bureau, sponsored our Antiques Parade event with \$1,000, enabling us to pay the appraiser and make a profit.
- Members of the Discover SLP Board have also provided us with valuable advice about how best to garner support in the city.
- On August 18 we provided a tour guide for a group as requested by Discover SLP.



## **THE ST. LOUIS PARK BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

Donors of refreshments or gift cards for our Antiques Parade event include:

- Nelson's
- Jennings' Liquors
- Honey & Rye Bakehouse
- Byerly's
- Cub Foods
- CVS

Nordic Ware has been consistently helpful to us throughout the years. This year in particular it provided us with gift cards for their outlet store in the amount equal to the donation people gave to the Society during the GiveMN fundraising event.

Bader Development contacted us about the historic significance of the Hoffman-Callan/ASAP building. We actually learned some interesting history about it from Robb Bader, and subsequently interviewed the Jay Hoffman, the son of the man who had the building built. Bader demolished the building, but provided us with photographs, a history of the building that it had commissioned, and even blueprints of the building.

Local businessman Curt Rahman is our landlord, and since October 2014, has leased our office space to us at well below retail cost. Mr. Rahman is extremely civic minded and has been extremely responsive to any and all of our needs.

## **THE FAITH COMMUNITY**

- History presentation at the Westwood Lutheran Church
- Presentation of a Century Plaque to St. Dunstan's Anglican Church

## **OTHER HENNEPIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETIES**

St. Louis Park participated in an initiative to bring staff and volunteers from west metro historical societies together and discuss common issues. St. Louis Park Board members attended all three of these meetings:

- February 28: Hennepin History Museum
- June 27: Hopkins Historical Society
- October 24: Edina Historical Society (Grange building)

We also work closely with neighboring Historical Societies, particularly Hopkins, Edina, and Golden Valley, on topics of common concern.

## **THE MEDIA**

- We have an ongoing relationship with Seth Rowe, Community Editor at the St. Louis Park *Sun Sailor*. He promotes and covers events, and prints each meeting and Saturday office hours session in the weekly calendar. We also collaborate with the paper on the annual St. Louis Park guide.
- John Reinan, writer for the West Metro section of the *Star Tribune*, has taken a great interest in the history of St. Louis Park, and has written about the City starting with his article "Honoring the Past, but Looking to the Future," published on February 18. He and his colleagues have helped to publicize events and especially our street sign fundraiser, which has brought the project to the attention of St. Louis Park natives who now live literally around the country.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

2015 saw a tremendous amount of growth for the St. Louis Park Historical Society, and we are confident that our activities will continue to expand so that we can provide service to the community in more and better ways.