



# RE-ECHO

*Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society*

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## GOODBYE TO AL'S BAR

Love it or hate it, Al's Bar has been a bona fide landmark, perched on Excelsior Blvd. and France Ave. at the eastern border of St. Louis Park. Built in 1926, the two-story establishment was originally faced with Chicago red brick (since covered up by stucco). Prohibition was in full force in 1926, so the building was ostensibly a grocery/candy store/café. But in the basement, patrons reveled in drink and cards next to a wonderful fieldstone fireplace.

Al was Al J. Lovass, who bought the place in 1927. Al's friendship with the Sheriff ensured that he and his speakeasy customers were safe from prosecution. Al, of Norwegian descent, and his wife lived above the bar until the 1940s. Al owned the bar until his death in 1952.

Al's had a collection of "character bartenders." Ben Brown remembers: "Gar Case was a song and dance man from the old vaudeville days. He knew every joke and story ever told and liked to share them with his customers. If he started to tell a story he never quit until he finished, regardless of who was waiting for a drink. Another bartender was Knox Delaney. He had a diamond in one of his front teeth and loved to flash a big smile, especially to the ladies, so you could see the diamond."

For many years St. Louis Park was known for its many bars, notably along Excelsior Blvd. and particularly in the mid-1930s with the repeal of prohibition. Now Al's is the only remaining actual "bar" in the City (i.e. it doesn't serve food).

Al's has been a good neighbor, maintaining green space in the area and participating in civic activities such as Parktacular and National Night Out. Co-owner David Payne has been extremely cooperative with his neighbors in the Minikahda Oaks neighborhood, and they have enjoyed an amicable relationship.

Because of its prime location at the threshold of the City, there have been numerous plans to redevelop the site over the years, but none came through – until now. Al's finally has an appointment with the wrecking ball, probably some time this summer. It will be replaced with a new development called the Ellipse on Excelsior. This gateway project will be comprised of a five-story commercial and luxury apartment complex. For information on the new development, see <http://www.ackerberg.com/ellipse/index.html>

See our web site at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/als.asp> for more on Al's Bar.

## THIS 'N' THAT

**ONE STOP SHOPPING FORM:** Wish to become a member of the SLP Historical Society? Donate to the Beehive fund? We have a new form, enclosed with this *Re-Echo*, for readers to use to interact with us. With it you can order a copy of *Something in the Water*, provide summer and winter addresses and your email address. The form also asks you to indicate how you choose to receive the *Re-Echo*. You may continue to get it in the mail, subscribe by email, or opt to read it on our website at <http://www.slphistory.org/reecho/default.asp> In response to our item in the last issue regarding distribution, several people said that they would like to get the *Re-Echo* by email, thus cutting down on paper and effort. Whatever you choose, we strive to distribute the *Re-Echo* as widely as possible to serve the City and its friends.

**BEEHIVE UPDATE:** The City of St. Louis Park is hosting a grand opening of the newly-refurbished SLP Roadside Park on Monday, July 13 at 6 pm. This is the culmination of two years of meetings with the City, the SLP Historical Society, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority, Three Rivers Park District, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Come have a picnic and celebrate our new park with the beloved Beehive barbeque as its centerpiece. **MANY THANKS** to all of you who have donated to this cause and enabled us to present the City with \$10,000 for the restoration of the Beehive. Roadside Park is accessed by the frontage road in front of Nordic Ware at Highway 7.

**DON SWENSON FUND:** When our friend Don Swenson passed away, he designated the SLP Historical Society as recipient of memorials in his name. Around \$3,000 has been received, and we are looking for a suitable project in his honor. One idea is to install plaques around the City on historic buildings. One of our most historic buildings is the Walker Building, built in 1892 (take the road directly in front of the Central building and follow it west to the former "Brick Block," sort of a ghost town downtown.) The Walker Building was the site of the Swenson-Redeem Grocery and Meat Market, owned by Don's father, Nels Swenson. The store was located in the Walker building from 1923 – 1948. (In 1948 it moved across Walker Street to the Hamilton Building, the other component of the "Brick Block," which burned down in 1958.) Our Historic Preservation task force is investigating the options, including obtaining permission to install plaques from the owner of the Walker Building. If you have any other ideas for historic markers or similar projects, please contact Kathy Johnson (email and phone on the back of this newsletter).

**ECHOWAN 1934:** As a follow-up to our last issue under Donations, Don Olson reports that his (now deceased) next-door neighbor, Buzz Anthony, was in the class of 1934 and came up with the name *Re-Echo* for the Depression-reduced version of the *Echowan*. He also solves a mystery when he tells us that there was no yearbook in the year 1933. Now what about 1935??

**ST. LOUIS PARK: A STORY OF A VILLAGE:** In 1952, a U of M student named Norman Thomas wrote a history of St. Louis Park. It is an extremely detailed account of the then-village, taken from civic and corporation documents, most of which were lost or destroyed when the Village became a City in 1955. The unpublished 300+ page monograph starts with the settlement of the area, and details the dreams and realities of village life through the years up until 1952. This is a very important work, and the Society has decided to make it available to the public by posting it to our web site. This has required scanning each typewritten page into the computer, and we are still in the process of doing this. Look for it at [www.slphistory.org/history/normanthonmas.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/normanthonmas.asp)

## DONATIONS RECEIVED

*Than you to everyone who brought us donations since the last Re-ECHO.*

Some accidentally unidentified but wonderful person donated programs, news clippings, patches, buttons, etc. from **Robin Hood Days!** This five year City festival was held from 1967 to 1971. Sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, Robin Hood Days was an elaborate undertaking, replete with archery contests, the Maid Marian (Miss SLP) coronation, and men in tights. For more information about Robin Hood Days, go to our web site at [www.slphistory.org/history/robinhooddays.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/robinhooddays.asp)

Tim Dahl, son of former Park mayor and Police Captain **James Dahl**, donated his father's police uniform. Although the Society does not currently have a museum, we optimistically accepted the donation in the event we obtain

display space in the future. Tom also allowed us to scan a picture of his father, which can be seen at

[www.slphistory.org/history/dahljames.asp](http://www.slphistory.org/history/dahljames.asp)

Roland Larson donated a 1958 Echowan.

Chris Olson donated gardening competition ribbons of his grandmother, Helene Larpenteur Olson.

Dr. June Horton Gable sent us photographs, news clippings, church programs, her St. Louis Park memoir, and other items.

*We apologize if we left anyone out. Thank you again for your generous donations!*

Phone directories needed: 1943, 46, 48, 50-55, 57, 59, 60. 2002-2005.

## MORE ECHOWANS

Our intrepid Trustee Don Schimmel has found us another great batch of Echowans from the High School. We want to express our appreciation to Ellen George, Chief of the St. Louis Park High School Media Center, for her generosity in arranging for us to receive several editions of the SLP High School yearbook that we did not have in our collection, as follows: 1966, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1975, and 1977. Thank you, Ellen!

As a result, our library now includes nearly all volumes of the Echowan that have been published, beginning in 1929. The volumes we do not have are as follows: (1933, 1935,) 1972, 1973, 1974, 2003, 2006, 2007, and 2008. We have put an order in for the upcoming 2009 edition.

We understand that an Echowan was not issued in 1933, and we are uncertain if a yearbook was issued in 1935 (the High School does not have a copy for either year.)

If you have an Echowan that you would like to donate to our library, regardless of the year issued, we would love to add it to our collection. Although we are most in need of the volumes specified above, we also appreciate receiving any volume for our collection. Thank you for thinking of us.

## SOMETHING IN THE WATER

We are quickly coming to the end of our supply of books, and are working on a reprint. Connie Swenson has loaned us the original, and we are investigating the best way to reprint it. Feel free to place an order if you'd like to buy the book, and we will get one to you as soon as we can.

## 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 (37<sup>th</sup> 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

To contact us by phone, call 952-924-2550, leave a message, and someone will return the call. Our email address is **history@slphistory.org**.

You may also contact a member of our Board:

President: John Olson. 952-929-6156  
jrocnrw@juno.com  
Vice President: Robert Jorvig. 952-938-6553  
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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 SLP High School since 1917.

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We hope you will take advantage of our "One-Stop-Shopping" form, included in this issue, especially to indicate your Re-Echo distribution option. With such a large mailing list, any issues that can be sent by email or viewed on our web site would save on time and effort. Regardless of your preference, we strive to get the news of the Society to everyone who expresses an interest.

## 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.

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**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 the Historical Society: enclosed is \$**\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **I wish to donate to the Restoration of the Beehive Fund: enclosed is \$**\_\_\_\_\_

**All membership and Beehive donations are tax-deductible.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I wish to purchase a copy of *Something in the Water*: enclosed is \$20.**

**Total amount enclosed: \$**\_\_\_\_\_

**Re-Echo 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](http://www.slphistory.org/reecho/default.asp)

\_\_\_\_\_ **I do not wish to receive the Re-Echo.**

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3700 Monterey Drive  
St. Louis Park, MN 55416-2671

**Our email:** [history@slphistory.org](mailto:history@slphistory.org)

KJ BR JA MC FR