



# RE-ECHO

*Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society*

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## THE MIRACULOUS MIRACLE MILE

After World War II people streamed into St. Louis Park in incredible numbers. The Park was an attractive location because of its proximity to Minneapolis and the fact that much of the land had already been platted into blocks and lots and was ready for building. All of those people needed schools, roads, sewers, and not incidentally, places to shop. Shopping Centers sprang up one after another: Texa-Tonka (November 1951), Westwood (September 1954), and Knollwood (August 1955). But the first of the post-war shopping centers was Miracle Mile, which opened on May 5, 1951.

In 1950 the firm of Sheldon-Thomas, Inc. requested a permit to build a 14-store shopping center, estimated to cost around \$1 million. Original plans for the red brick building (since covered over) included a medical center catering to pediatricians. The 154,000 square foot shopping center was touted as the first shopping center of its kind in the Upper Midwest (although Lilac Way Shopping Center, across Excelsior Blvd., was built in 1941). The first phase was bookended by Snyder Drug on the west and Red Owl on the east. (Red Owl burned down in 1973.)

The first store to open on the Mile was Warner Hardware. President Leon C. Warner greeted acting Mayor Torval Jorvig, Chamber of Commerce President Henry Albrecht, and 11,000 shoppers with "1,000 fresh, dainty, beautiful princess Aloha orchids...flown direct here all the way from Hawaii..." reports the *Dispatch*. Over a mile of wire border fence was sold, making good St. Louis Park neighbors, presumably. Stores opened one by one, and the Grand Opening of the shopping center as a whole was held in early November 1951.

The second phase was located at the eastern end. The two-story addition, known as the Excel Building, was built to house five small shops and seven larger stores, with a total floor area of more than 18,000 sq. ft. Original plans (never carried out) called for medical offices and overnight hospital facilities for children on the second floor. The first tenants of the eastern section of Miracle Mile began to open for business in May 1953. They were to include Abdullah's Luncheonette, Juvenile Shoe Store, Anderson Artists Supply and Gift Shop, Mills Sisters Beauty Shop, a pet shop, Del Fabrics, and the New Yorker delicatessen. Not all of these businesses actually occupied the premises, however. The grand opening of the Excel Building was November 15, 1953, and the owners were now listed as Shopping Centers, Inc.

The owners of Miracle Mile also owned similar properties in Rochester, Brainerd, and Milwaukee, all called Miracle Mile. IDS (the holder of the mortgage) bought out the partners in the mid-1950s and sold all four properties to Corrigan Properties, owned by Leo Corrigan, Sr. Corrigan Properties, a privately-held family corporation based in Dallas, was incorporated in 1949. Under Leo Corrigan, Sr.'s leadership it became an international concern, building hotels in Nassau, Hong Kong, etc.

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## TREASURE MAP

Last issue we reported that Gary Hanson had donated a wonderfully preserved old map to the Society. Upon close examination, it appears to date from 1893. That was the height of the boom fueled by T.B. Walker's plan to make the Park into an industrial village. In 1890 he had purchased 1,700 acres of land, platted it, built factories, houses, an office building that still stands, even a church. Unfortunately a financial panic in 1893 dashed his hopes and he moved on to other things. But this map reflects all of his activities, and more. What's best is that much of St. Louis Park is still platted the same way it was in 1890. Since the map gives features and shows exactly what blocks and lots they were on, we can tell where some of the oldest buildings were! Here are some highlights:

- T.B. Walker's Methodist Church was on Brownlow between Lake and First Street. Today that area is part of the property at 6714 Walker Street, built in 1949. For reference, it would be right next to 3384 Brownlow.

### Oak Hill

- The original Oak Hill School was located in the present-day South Oak Hill neighborhood, at the site of the house at 7600 North Street, which was built in 1952. In 1906 a new Oak Hill School opened at Walker and Quebec. <http://www.slphistory.org/history/oakhillschool.asp>
- A church was located at present-day 7425 and 7429 Lake Street, two houses that were built in 1952. We don't know what this church was called (perhaps just Oak Hill Community Church), but we find evidence of it in an 1893 document that boasts that the community has three churches –Walker's Church on Brownlow and Union Congregational on Alabama being the other two.
- A store was located on land that is part of 7515 Lake Street, which was built in 1942.

### Hotels <http://www.slphistory.org/history/hotels.asp>

- The map shows the St. Louis Park Hotel, which was located on the northwest corner of 36<sup>th</sup> and Brunswick, on the railroad tracks. The area is now part of 6363 Highway 7, built in 1978.
- Another hotel is shown on Gorham between Walker and 1<sup>st</sup> Street on the north side. That address today is 3381 Gorham, built in 1958. This may be the Great Northern Hotel.
- Although they are not marked as hotels, there are two buildings drawn in side by side on Brownlow, across from Walker's Church. Photos do show that there were two, two-story buildings there, variously known as Duff's and the Belisle. It was in one of these hotels that George A. Werner probably had his saloon. Today that property is 3387/93 Brownlow, a building built in 1951.

### Factories <http://www.slphistory.org/history/earlybusiness.asp>

Early Park was all about factories, and the map shows just where they were. Walker had platted out an "Industrial Circle" that extended from Walker Street to the railroad tracks. The top of the circle can still be seen today on Walker Street. Some of the factories on the map are:

- Thompson Wagon Co., Minneapolis Jarless Spring Car Co., and the Shaft Pierce Shoe Co. (in the Circle northeast of Lake Street)
- Minneapolis Malleable Iron Works (in the Circle northwest of Lake Street)
- Monitor Drill (by present-day Sam's Club)
- Minneapolis Chair Manufacturing (south of the tracks between Natchez and Princeton)

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## WHERE ART THOU, HISTORICAL SOCIETY?

Many times we get the question, just where is the St. Louis Park Historical Society? The presumption is that we have a museum where people can come and see exhibits, do research, and just hang out and chat about Park history. Unfortunately, this is not exactly the case.

We are actually located at two different sites:

- At Lenox Community Center (Minnetonka Blvd. at Hampshire Ave.) we have our paper files, yearbooks, library, photographs, our computer, and two small display cases. The space is provided to us by the School Board, for which we are extremely grateful. It is accessible, and that is where we hold our office hours, each Thursday morning from 10 to noon. There are down sides, however: the space is in a former lounge with no door, and security is an issue. Our filing cabinets are full and wall space limited. The building is not open on weekends and there is no phone.
- The Historic Milwaukee Road Depot at 37<sup>th</sup> and Brunswick is a City (Parks and Rec)-owned building, and we have had exclusive use of it since it was saved from the wrecking ball and moved to Jorvig Park in 1971. Here we store larger items such as newspapers, school records, and artifacts. The City has maintained the building, recently making many improvements including much-needed air conditioning. We hold our meetings here during the summer months, and have held other events such as ice cream socials here in the past. There are many down sides to the Depot, though. One of the biggest drawbacks is that there is no running water, and we rely on a port-a-potty in the summer. Our storage space is filling up, and is often inadequate for our needs. We have tried to keep the building as an authentic train station for people to tour, so there is no room for other displays - many items that have been donated are stored away in boxes. There is no phone, no internet service, and the building is not entirely handicapped accessible. Although we have 24 hour access to the building, it can be snowed-in during the winter months. We do open it to the public during the summer (June 1 to mid-September) on Saturday afternoons from 1 to 4.

Our dream is to have our own building, specifically designed as a museum, where people could come and take advantage of our resources and enjoy the collection. The building would have very specific requirements regarding light, temperature, humidity, fire control, and security. There would be display space, storage space, room for programming, BATHROOMS, computer access – all the things a first class City History Center should have. We would also like to have the means to pay for at least a part time staff member – right now everything the Historical Society does – Web site, newsletter, research, cataloging, preservation, programming, etc. is all done by dedicated volunteers. We've done a lot with what we have, but there is so much more we can do to spread the word about Park's history.

Fortunately, the folks at Parks and Rec agree, and in the 2013 budget the City Council approved funds to hire an architect to come up with a concept for such a building. There are no guarantees, but we are working with the City and the architect to come up with a proposal.

We'll continue to keep you apprised of the situation, and maybe someday St. Louis Park will have a museum that befits its unique past.

## THIS 'N' THAT

MEMBERSHIPS!! A profound THANK YOU to everyone who has joined the Historical Society this year. Our numbers are up, and we really appreciate your support - and not only financially. We hope that we provide a service to our community, and your membership shows that you appreciate our efforts. It's not too late to join: just go to <http://www.slphistory.org/about/default.asp>, click on Become a Member, print out the form, and send it in with your tax-deductible check for \$20. Again, Thank You so much!

BOB'S SNACK SHOP FOUND! This hamburger joint was advertised in the *Echos* of the 1950s as "across the street from the high school," (Central) but where was that exactly? After much scratching of heads, we think we know the answer. There was a complex of buildings at Wooddale and Highway 7 that had businesses like the Park Bus Co., Seirup's Ford dealership, and Leslie's Appliances. A photo of the latter showed the end of a sign that said "K SHOP" to the east of Leslie's. Has to be it! Re-examining the addresses, now we're sure of it. And thanks to Don Schimmel, we have a perfectly wonderful picture of Bob, his staff, and happy customers inside the tiny place. See our Web page at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/hwy76033.asp>

LOUISIANA AVE: Another perplexment concerned ads from the '50s for businesses on Louisiana that didn't compute. On today's map, the addresses would have put a building right in the Creosote Plant. A trip to City Hall and much help from Aaron in Inspections revealed the answer: before Louisiana was put through the Creosote Plant in about 1980, it veered southeast to Lake Street. That stretch was renamed Library Lane. So the buildings that in the '50s were on Louisiana are now on Library Lane. We dug deeper into the history of Louisiana, which was built in many sections. See our Web page at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/louisianaave.asp> to see what we've come up with.

ECHO INVENTORY: With all of the donations we've been receiving of *Echo* student newspapers, it became fruitful to make an inventory of the issues we have. This is posted as a spreadsheet on our Web page at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/echo.asp> We are woefully bereft of issues from the early-to-mid '60s and really from the late '70s on. If you have any of your *Echos* you want to part with but can't throw out, please consider donating them to the Society. They are a priceless resource, not only in terms of student life, but the ads place businesses at specific addresses at specific times.

2013 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS AWARD: This year's winner is globe-trotting journalist Susan Linnee, from the Class of 1960. At Park High Susan showed an early interest in journalism, working on the *Echo* staff all three years. She also was interested in foreign affairs, representing Park as an exchange student to France. Susan has worked all over the world, especially in Africa, for the Associated Press. Read about her stellar career at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/linneesusan.asp> Susan will make her way back to St. Louis Park from her home in Nairobi to address the Senior Class at Commencement in June. Two fun facts about Susan: her uncle E.A. Linnee was a Justice of the Peace in the Park for sixteen years. Also, she is a cousin of our own Bob Jorvig!

QUEEN DARLENE: Another outstanding Park Alum (and 1960 grad) is Darlene Anderson. Darlene was a world class golfer, winning tournaments starting at the age of 12. She was also very active in school, participating in the Glee Club, Girl Scouts, Blue Tri, student government, the lead in the Senior class play, the Parkettes (and a Lakerette in 1958), AND she was chosen Orchid Queen at the Tropical Canteen three (or was it four?) times. In 1961 she was chosen Miss St. Louis Park, but didn't hold the title long, as she was chosen Aquatennial Princess soon afterwards. She made her career as an architect, and in 2008 was inducted into the Minnesota PGA/Minnesota Golf Association Hall of Fame. For more on Darlene, see <http://www.slphistory.org/history/andersondarlene.asp>

THE WESTWOOD HILLS NATURE CENTER has a new Web site: [www.westwoodhillsnaturecenter.org](http://www.westwoodhillsnaturecenter.org). Manager Mark Oestreich invites everyone to visit the site and like the Center on Facebook. Believe it or not, spring is coming, and the Nature Center is the perfect place to see it arrive.

## THIS 'N' THAT, Continued

SLP MAGAZINE: Have you been getting your copy? They are sent out on a random basis, but SLP residents can get a free subscription by going to their Web site at [www.slpmag.com](http://www.slpmag.com) Subscriptions out of the city are \$24. Be sure to check out the “Last Glance” feature contributed by the St. Louis Park Historical Society. The magazine just revealed the winners of the “Best of SLP” contest, and presentations will be made at an event at the Doubletree on June 19. Tickets are \$15 – see the magazine’s Web site for details.

MYSTERY PHOTO IDENTIFIED: We mentioned a few issues back that we had found a photo in our archives of some officials standing in the middle of a street cutting a ribbon. Not knowing where the photo came from or what location it depicted, we posted it to the “Flashbacks of St. Louis Park” Facebook page, which has 5,200 members. Numerous guesses were made and disproved, and six months went by with no resolution. One woman did recognize her grandfather, L.P. Pederson, who was a Hennepin County Engineer in the ‘60s, indicating that it was a County road. Another clue was a campaign sign for a State Senator who was elected in 1966. His district included Crystal, Golden Valley, and Robbinsdale, but not St. Louis Park. Finally we sent the photo in an email to public officials in Crystal, Golden Valley, and Robbinsdale. Within hours we heard from Richard McCoy, City Engineer in Robbinsdale, who identified the site as County Road 9 (42<sup>nd</sup> Street No.) at approximately the New Hope/Crystal boundary looking east. Almost simultaneously, one of the Flashbacks participants came up with the same answer. Mr. McCoy sent the photo to the folks in New Hope, and City Clerk Valerie Leone found City Council minutes from 1966 saying the ribbon cutting ceremony for the opening of CR 9 would be held October 31, 1966, at 2:30 pm at the intersection of Louisiana Ave and 42<sup>nd</sup>. Mystery solved! And although the photo turned up not to be in the Park, all the guessers were very happy that the location had been found, and many of them went up and took a look (and photos) for themselves. The 8 x 10 has now been sent to its new home in Crystal, and the Flashbacks crew is working on a new mystery photo!

### NEW IN OUR LIBRARY:

- *Good Chemistry: The Story of P.C. Reilly and Reilly Industries, Celebrating 100 Years 1896-1996*, by Bill Beck (1996). We’ve been working on our web page about the Creosote Plant and the possible health effects of creosote in the water. Scott Anderson, the City’s Utilities Superintendent, forwarded our page for review to a consultant, who provided us with notes. Scott loaned us a copy of this book and we were able to purchase our own copy for a very nominal price. Like it or not, the Creosote Plant is part of our history! <http://www.slphistory.org/history/creosote.asp>
- *Three Blue Crosses: Dr. Norman Sterrie, an Autobiography*, Edited by Al Zdon. Two copies of this book were sent to us by Harold Sand, a friend of Dr. Sterrie. Dr. Sterrie was a very early member of the staff of the St. Louis Park Medical Center, joining in 1953. He became a member of the Board of Trustees of Park Nicollet, and President of the Clinic. His specialty was pediatric allergies. He retired in 1986 and died in 2008. The book focuses mostly on his experiences as a Navy pilot during World War II.
- *The Rockwell Heist: The Extraordinary Theft of Seven Norman Rockwell Paintings and a Phony Renoir – and the 20-year Chase For Their Recovery from the Midwest Through Europe and South America*, by Bruce Rubenstein (2013). On February 16, 1978, up to 500 people came to the gallery to see the largest show of Norman Rockwell's painting ever held in a private gallery. The location was Elayne Galleries, 6111 Excelsior Blvd. in St. Louis Park. That night, four burglars (including comedian Louie Anderson’s brother) broke in and stole the paintings. Most of them ended up in a Brazilian farm house, and payments had to be made to get them back, as Brazilian law did not recognize the concept of surrendering stolen property. The return of the paintings was the result of the perseverance of the Lindberg family, especially Elayne’s daughter Bonnie. Read about Elayne Galleries at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/elaynegalleries.asp>, and better yet, read the book!

RE-ECHO CHANGES: With this issue we have hired Do-Good Mailing Service to distribute our newsletter, saving us a lot of work and aggravation with Post Office regulations. Oh what a relief it is!

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## MIRACLE MILE, Continued

When Leo Corrigan, Sr. passed away in 1975 the family business was reorganized and properties were distributed between the families of his son Leo, Jr. and his daughter Louise Corrigan Jordan. Corrigan Properties was renamed Intercity Investments Properties, Inc., and Louise Jordan's son Burt became President in 1983. Although based in Dallas, Mr. Jordan takes a personal interest in the management and health of Miracle Mile.

On our Web site we have listed as many of the stores that we could find, along with photos and ads. Any additions or corrections to this list are appreciated. The link is <http://www.slphistory.org/history/miraclemiletenants.asp> Some of the most memorable stores of the past include:

Braun's women's wear	Don Leary's Records
Fox's Men's and Boys' Wear	Friendship Shop
W.T. Grant	Haugland's for the Young
Keefe's Men's Wear	Niemeyer's TV and Records
Ostlund Jewelers	Pink Pony
Swiss Chalet Buffet	Village Cleaners
Walbom's Ladies' Apparel	Whitehall Men's Clothier

Miracle Mile has made a great contribution to the economy of St. Louis Park for 62 years. It has also been a good neighbor, sponsoring Little League teams for over 50 years. And Mr. Jordan has been a great supporter of the Historical Society. In the face of competition from indoor malls, it's still so very convenient to "Park at the door of your favorite store!"

## TREASURE MAP, Continued

Other Features:

- The 80 acres that would become the Creosote Plant was in four sections:
  - The north half was owned by the West Mpls. Land & Investment Co.
  - The middle was platted into blocks and lots
  - The southeast section (10 acres) was occupied by the Esterly Harvester Co. It would later expand to 36 acres for a sugar beet refinery.
  - The southwestern section was platted into blocks and lots.
- The map also shows great chunks of land that were not platted, including an area bounded by Minnetonka, Pennsylvania, 32<sup>nd</sup>, and Texas that belonged to Margaret Cain. Another large portion belonged to the West Minneapolis Land and Investment Co. This is odd, because Walker's Syndicate was simply called the Minneapolis Land and Investment Co.; West Minneapolis was Hopkins. Perhaps an error on the map?

It's sad to see that so many of the original buildings in the Park are gone. But there are still many older homes in our community; a list of those 100 years or older can be found at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/oldestbuildings.asp> Those Park residents who own houses that are 100 years old or more are encouraged to participate in our Century Home program, where the Historical Society helps pay for a plaque that recognizes your home's importance. See details of the program at <http://www.slphistory.org/about/CenturyHouse.asp>

## DONATIONS

**Ted Meland** came across the official scrapbook of Boy Scout Troop 379, which was based out of Aquila School from about 1973 to 1988. Seeing as how the scrapbook was missing for years and Ted lives in Arizona, the find is somewhat of a mystery. Nevertheless, Ted arranged for the very large, wood-covered scrapbook to be delivered to the Historical Society, for which we are very grateful. It is well put together and very complete, with photos of the boys, the actual charters, pictures of trips, and information about the 10 Eagle Scouts that the troop produced. Ted also provided a digital copy of the scrapbook, and a copy of the home movies that were taken on the trips, etc. Truly a wonderful donation!

**David Krueger** sent us the most marvelous keepsake: a coin purse with the name George A. Werner on it. The bottom is leather, in excellent condition. The top is metal, with an old-time car embossed on it. With the metal side up, it can be opened and used as a purse. Inside the top is George Werner's name, printed. Turn the purse upside down and it looks like a cabbie's hat. David is a descendant of the Gus Nelson family, who lived in the Park in the early 1900s. We knew that George Werner owned a saloon, and we did a little more digging. It appears that his saloon was located on Brownlow Ave., across from T.B. Walker's Methodist Church (see article on the 1893 map in this issue). Although Village Council minutes indicate that he had a liquor license until 1915, our super sleuth Kathy Spence Johnson found three pieces of evidence that he died in 1913 (despite family lore that when Prohibition came he went out west never to be heard from again). That would make this little trinket at least 100 years old! Now did it belong to George, or was it a bit of merchandising that he gave out to promote his business? Whatever the answer, this item is just

priceless to us, and we are so grateful to David for sharing it. Read more about the Werners at <http://www.slphistory.org/history/wernerfamily.asp>. Oh, and we discovered that two of the Werner boys married two of the Rice girls, so we did a little research on Civil War veteran Nelson Rice as well: <http://www.slphistory.org/history/ricefamily.asp>

On the heels of the donation of *Echo* newspapers by Sue Damm Hill, **Laurel Epstein Ray** also donated her collection, dating from 1950 to 1952. These are particularly important because so many commercial buildings were built in 1949 and 1950, and ads in those issues tell us who the original tenants were. Laurel also donated many other keepsakes from her high school years, including programs from class plays, Homecoming, Commencement, Glee Club, and sports events. There were some great photos of the 1950 Homecoming Queen, and the constitution of the Pep Club. Plus there was the program from the 1951 Miss St. Louis Park Coronation, and we Love Miss St. Louis Park! Laurel is a frequent contributor on the "Flashbacks of St. Louis Park" Facebook page, and provides a great 1950s perspective to the discussions.

**Tom Olson** did something really special. Someone on "Flashbacks" spotted a 1960 "Echowane" audio (LP) yearbook on ebay and suggested we buy it. When we said we have no budget for acquisitions, Tom jumped in and bought it for us! The Echowane was started in 1959 by Senior Bruce Steubing, who went around recording events throughout the year. We do not have a copy of the '59 record, but the next year the process was repeated, and that's the record that Tom bought for us. Perhaps in the future we can make a digital recording of it and make it available to people. Thanks, Tom, for showing your Park spirit!

## GOING DOWN, GOING UP

St. Louis Park land is very valuable, and redevelopment is constant these days:

- Most Holy Trinity Church has closed, and a developer wants to turn the site into a townhouse community of six buildings with six units each.
- The Skippy Peanut Butter/McGarvey Coffee building has been empty for some time and there is now a proposal on the table to build apartments and a mixed-use building.
- Goodwill wants to build a facility on the grounds of L.A. Fitness (the former Ford dealer) at Highway 100 and 36<sup>th</sup> Street. The two businesses would coexist.

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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 Thursdays from 10 to noon, and by appointment.

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