



RE-ECHO

Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

Volume 10 No. 4

Issue No. 43

COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN ST. LOUIS PARK

The following is a summary of an article first published in the Community Education Journal in May 1973, and was written by Tom O'Meara and Merle Segal.

It's almost impossible to believe now, but before 1971 there was no such thing as Community Education in St. Louis Park. The schools were locked up tight after classes were over, and teenagers hung out at the public library or at drug stores for lack of better places to go. Even the Coen Brothers famously hung out at Mike Zoss Drug at Texa-Tonka Shopping Center after school.

In December 1969, the Superintendent of Schools and a School Board member attended a conference for the "Lighted Schools" program called by the Governor. In October 1970, thirteen representatives of the School Board, City Council, and other organizations went to Flint, Michigan to see community education in action.

In January 1971, a contract between the City Council and the School Board was signed establishing community education in the Park. A Community Education Advisory Committee, headed by Merle Segal, had the responsibility to implement the program. The Committee was made up of school and city officials. In addition, a Community Education Advisory Council, headed by Thomas P. O'Meara, was formed, consisting of representatives of churches, police, Boy Scouts, Garden clubs, service organizations, senior citizens, unions, teachers, and interested citizens. Shirley Landstom made up the remaining part of what O'Meara calls the "Terrific Trio," which worked almost full time on the project. The contract also called for the formation of Neighborhood Councils to design and help direct community school activity.

After another trip to Flint, this time by members of the Advisory Committee, the task was to publicize the notion of community education with a series of meetings that featured a panel discussion and a showing of the film "To Touch a Child." A huge effort was made to advertise the meetings in every known media. At the meetings, participants signed up to teach classes and people expressed their interest in taking classes as well.

The coordinator of the Advisory Committee, Larry Decker, was hired in August. When the office was opened, hundreds of applications poured in, courses were suggested, and instructors volunteered their services. A city-wide fundraising campaign was initiated to inform businesses of the benefits of community education.

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In his cover letter, O'Meara writes, "Although 40 years doesn't seem to me to be historical, it is important to our history in that it was just 40 years ago that Community Education was born in St. Louis Park." We owe a debt of thanks to the people who saw this need and worked so hard to provide all of the community education classes and activities that today we may take for granted.

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COMMUNITY EDUCATION, Continued

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125th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION A SUCCESS

A BIG THANKS to everyone who attended our 125th Anniversary Celebration at Wolfe Park on October 16. Despite chilly, windy conditions it was a successful event, bringing together four former mayors: Cam Andre, Phyllis McQuaid, Lyle Hanks, and Gail Dorfman. Paul Howard spoke on behalf of his father, Frank, who had recently passed away. The program also featured remarks from Senator Amy Klobuchar, a former Park resident. Senator Al Franken, a St. Louis Park native, really wished he could come but sent a letter and a flag that had been flown over the U.S. Capitol. The St. Louis Park High School Chamber Orchestra was excellent, and the play "St. Louis Park: A Journey Through Time," performed by the Harmony Theatre Company and School, was very entertaining and informative. The Harmony kids knew all their lines, and Mayor Jacobs did a fine job playing himself! Arne Fogel was an excellent master of ceremonies as well. We heartily thank everyone who made the day possible, including a host of city employees who went above and beyond over and over again to help the Historical Society carry out the program.

Thanks also to our other contributors, especially Nordic Ware, which provided mini Bundt pans and mix, and Byerly's, who baked the over 300 little Bundt cakes for our guests. Starbucks at Excelsior and Grand provided coffee, CVS at E&G donated water, and Arts and Flowers on Excelsior Blvd. gave us a centerpiece and two pumpkins. Scott Crosbie designed our invitation flier, and Eric Lichtenberg designed the program and the signs.

The program was recorded by the city's community TV crew, and is being shown on Channels 15, 16, and 17.

DONATIONS RECEIVED

The St. Louis Park Historical Society has no museum, only administrative space at Lenox and limited storage space at the Historic Depot. Until we find a suitable space to display donations, we will accept them as we have room to store them. We thank all donors for sharing their interesting information and artifacts.

John C. Meyer III donated a copy of his memoir, *Don't Tell Douglas!*

Betty Kirtland donated *Echowan* yearbooks from the years 1936-1939. We appreciate any and all donations of yearbooks. Even if we already have a copy, it is good to have more.

Doug Johnson donated three aerial photographs of the Republic Creosoting plant (digital files and prints) that he obtained from www.historicaerials.com

**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/renew my membership;** enclosed is \$ _____
(membership is on a calendar year basis)

All membership donations are tax-deductible.

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

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____

Re-Echo Delivery 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**

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

Mail to: St. Louis Park Historical Society
3700 Monterey Drive
St. Louis Park, MN 55416-2671

Our email: history@slphistory.org

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A PERSONAL REQUEST FOR MEMBERS

The board had a meeting recently, where we discussed the Comprehensive Plan we devised last year and how we have progressed on reaching our 2011 goals. One of the goals was to increase our membership from last year, and sadly to say, we did not meet that goal. One reason, we think, is that a membership in the St. Louis Park Historical Society does not get you anything that nonmembers get. We don't have a museum that might charge a reduced or free admission (admission to the Depot on summer Saturdays is free). We don't offer a discount on any of our merchandise, which consists of the *Something in the Water* book, an SLPHS shirt, 100th Anniversary plates from 1986 (which at this point we're giving away), stationery and postcards, and some wooden toys. So what could we offer as an incentive to pay a \$20 membership, other than the fulfillment that comes with helping to preserve St. Louis Park history?

As happens every year or so, someone suggests that we make the *Re-Echo* available only to members. And every time this idea is floated, I argue that we keep the newsletter available to anyone who wants it. As editor, I feel strongly that the *Re-Echo* is our voice to the community, telling anyone who is interested about the activities of the Society. I also include some history, in concert with our web site. The hope is that readers will connect with activities or stories and in turn share their stories with us. We do get a slow but steady stream of email from folks who have fond memories of growing up in St. Louis Park, and their memories provide material for the web site and stories in the *Re-Echo* that we might not have heard otherwise.

But I also realize that memberships are our only source of income, and if we want to keep going (and keep producing the *Re-Echo*), we need to

somehow convince our readers to become members. Something is wrong when we have a mailing list of almost 1,000 people and yet only a little over 100 of them join us each year. Fortunately, the City prints the newsletter for free; otherwise, we could not afford such a large list. And we send it by bulk mail, which reduces the mailing cost considerably. Collating and folding and preparing them for mailing is done by a group of wonderful volunteers, and we again could not do it without their help. But we've had other expenses, including renovations to the Depot, which we shared with the City, and the City's 125th Anniversary celebration.

So this is my personal plea, as editor of the *Re-Echo*, to please consider becoming a member of the Society this year. We work on a calendar year basis, so all existing memberships are up for renewal in January. We know times are tough and many of you are on fixed incomes, but every little bit helps. There are other ways to help as well, including planned giving and targeted memorials. A membership form is included in this newsletter and is also on our web site under About the Society (<http://www.slphistory.org/about/default.asp/>) Become a Member. All donations are fully tax deductible. You can also use the form to order a copy of *Something in the Water*, our book of memoirs by people who grew up in the Park in the 1930s. And there is space to indicate how (or even if) you wish to receive the *Re-Echo*. You do not have to become a member in order to specify your preference, and it does not hurt my feelings if you wish to be taken off the list!

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Let's make this a banner year for memberships!

Jeanne Andersen

MEMORIES OF FERN HILL SCHOOL

Every week we get inquiries over our web mail (history@slphistory.org), some asking for information, some providing it. John Carlton-Foss sent us his memories of Fern Hill School:

During the summer of I believe it would be 1950, I watched the construction of the school almost every day, walking there from 2712 Joppa Avenue. I thought it was the real Fern Hill School because the bulldozers and earth movers tore down a hill and used the material to fill in the swamp where the playground came to be. It all started with the bulldozer or two knocking down all the trees. Then the earth movers went in great ellipses to carry the soil to the low land. I attended kindergarten there during the first year it was in operation. Orlando Paske was the Principal. Miss Vegdahl was my first grade teacher. Miss Borders my second grade teacher. And so on. More recently it became a Hebrew School. Maybe we can dig up my childhood friends and add their recollections.

I always wondered what might be the history of the abutting "old haunted house" at about 28th and Lynn on the south side of the street. It was two stories and fairly large, perhaps four good sized bedrooms upstairs, although I did not have the courage of my friends to climb the rickety stairs to actually see. There was a large entryway before you got to the stairs. On the left of the entryway was the large entrance to a living room. There was a rock lined storage cellar built into the back of the hill behind the haunted house. I think the house was burned by the fire department somewhere around in the 1970s.

Then there was Paul, who used to farm on a plot behind what was then called the home for elderly people on Minnetonka Blvd. [Star of Bethlehem]. He had an old car that he would drive slowly through the neighborhoods to sell his vegetables, which he would put on the running boards and in the wheel wells next to the engine. Then one summer, probably about 1955, he stopped coming. We were told that the police had taken away his driver's license. Around 1978 or so I looked for his plot of land, and it was mostly built on, but maybe there was some of it remaining. I wonder what happened to him.

CUB SCOUT MEMORIES

Mark Toretsky is a frequent contributor to our knowledge, researching the North Side in general and the Westwood, Texa-Tonka, and Knollwood Shopping Centers in particular. Here's a memoir about his Cub Scout days:

Troop 252 was predominately Jewish; however, it was open to any boy who wanted to join. We had non-Jewish boys who would start our campfires on Saturdays so we could cook our meals. We kept kosher, which meant having to bring two patrol boxes of cooking utensils, one for dairy meals and the other for meat meals. We always brought a Torah on camping trips and held services on Shabbat (Saturday) mornings. Many times boys and leaders from other troops (if we were on a camporee) would stop by our campsite and observe our services.

The troop's equipment was stored in a room in the basement of the JCC. We had to carry the equipment up a flight of steel stairs that was at an angle of 80 to 85 degrees to the floor. This made it a little challenging when we had to carry the patrol boxes up or down from the troop room. Troop 252 sadly and unfortunately disbanded during the summer of 1983.

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 (37th 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. Our mailing address is:
3700 Monterey Drive
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Our Web Site is www.slphistory.org
Our email address is history@slphistory.org

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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 St. Louis Park High School since 1917.

About This Issue

In our last *Re-Echo* we attempted to list the folks at the City who help the Society, but we neglected to mention a very important person. Without Reg Dunlap working his magic to merge these pages into one (ye olde editor isn't so smart), we wouldn't be able to post it to the web. Thanks, Reg, for your technical and other support!

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.
