



RE-ECHO

Volume 13, No. 1

Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

Issue No. 51

KNOLLWOOD: OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Knollwood Plaza/Mall has been a vital part St. Louis Park since 1955, longer than most of us can remember. Through the years it has undergone many changes, and is now on the threshold of another radical reconfiguration. What started out as a kind of zig-zagged strip mall went under one roof in 1982 and is now poised to return to its outdoor roots. In the meantime, Mall management has been kind enough to share rare, archival photos with the Historical Society. With the help of researcher Mark Toretzky we have amassed a list of over 300 stores that have occupied the site. They are listed on our Web site at www.slphistory.org/history/knollwoodplaza.asp. Of special interest are Emory Anderson's photos of the long-abandoned movie theater, which will be demolished soon. Our thanks to Gary Roehrich and Mike Johnson for taking us on a tour before it is gone forever.

LOHMAN'S DREAM

The story of Knollwood begins with G. Fred Lohman. In 1929 he purchased a farm in western St. Louis Park/eastern Hopkins in anticipation of a westbound highway. Lohman guessed right, and Highway 7 did indeed go through his new property in 1934.

Lohman's dream was to build a shopping center with bridges and stores that would face Minnehaha Creek, which ran through his property. He couldn't get approval for commercial zoning for a section at the eastern edge of the property (where Cub is now) or for the area west of the Creek (where Target now stands). But he pressed on, and was successful in convincing Powers to make the move out to the suburbs - the first leading department store from downtown to build a branch in the suburbs.

Plans for Lohman's Knollwood Plaza Shopping Center were announced in the *Dispatch* on October 22, 1953. The shopping center would accommodate 35 stores, including J.C. Penney (the second in the Twin Cities), Walgreen's, National Tea grocery store, Sears (the first in the suburbs), Kinney's shoe store, Three Sisters, Town and Country Hardware, Johnston Appliance, Fanny Farmer Candy, and would be the "first in this section of the nation with a Woolworth store."

OPENING DAY

Knollwood opened on August 24, 1955. Present were Mayor Russell Fernstrom, Governor Orville Freeman, singer Rosemary Clooney, and Senators Edward Thyne and Hubert Humphrey, who said that he had seen "shopping areas in many parts of the country, but none that equaled Knollwood Plaza for beauty and construction." Five of the Park's "Industrial Firms" placed a half page ad in the

KNOLLWOOD, Continued

Dispatch welcoming the center to the neighborhood. "Kurt-essee Kars" (courtesy cars) ferried customers from one end of the 1/3 mile long shopping center to the other. A 50-year time capsule containing predictions of future lifestyles was buried during the Grand Opening - was it ever opened in 2005?

When it opened the center had 34 stores, 3000 parking spaces, 312,000 square feet, and a price tag of \$7 million. The center was expected to generate 850 jobs. It was the 13th shopping center in suburban Twin Cities, with nine more on the drawing board. Some of the first stores didn't last long, but some lasted for decades.

In 1958 Knollwood became so popular that the St. Louis Park City Council considered a proposal to rename Highway 7 "Knollwood Boulevard" to give the road "glamour appeal."

In the early 1960s Lohman sold the property to Donald Schanedling. With the sale he insisted that the center be called "Lohman's Knollwood Plaza" or Schanedling would owe him \$25,000. Schanedling put up the sign all right, but with the name Lohman in pale yellow lettering on white, so no one could see it. Even Lohman saw the humor in that.

An addition to Knollwood was built in 1973. But times were bad at Knollwood in the '70s; while retail spending in the Twin Cities between 1972 and 1977 rose sharply, sales at Knollwood dropped precipitously. Woolworth's and Sears moved to Ridgedale, which opened in 1974 and became a major competitor. In 1976 management at Knollwood tried to appeal to younger shoppers with the slogan "Knollwood: 21 Years Old and Getting Younger," but signature store Young Quinlan left in January 1978. Despite its hard times, Knollwood at one time advertised that it was "The Suburb's Main Street," which, of course, being in St. Louis Park, it wasn't. But in the days before online shopping, the Mall of America, and even some of the Dales, Knollwood was the place to go for clothes, fabric, and much more.

KNOLLWOOD PLAZA BECOMES KNOLLWOOD MALL

On June 19, 1978, owner United National Corp. paid \$750,000 for the Park Knoll School site. A week later, United sold Knollwood, and General Growth Management Corporation and General Growth Development Corporation became responsible for management and development of the center. Renovations included the demolition of Park Knoll, which became a Montgomery Ward Store, now Cub.

After building Wards, forming an indoor mall, and adding space for 75 new shops, Knollwood Plaza became Knollwood Mall in the fall of 1980. Many (but not all) of the stores now faced in instead of out. Stores surrounded a center court with a 200-foot skylight and a bronze ceiling. Brick planters were added for ambiance. A translucent plastic called Kal-Wall was used in the ceiling-roof portion of the entrances to allow light in but keep heat out. The floor area was expanded from 250,000 to 500,000 square feet. A specialty boutique section was opened in the space formerly occupied by Young-Quinlan. The mall remained open through the entire remodeling project.

A Celebrity Opening Benefit featuring boxer Scott LeDoux on behalf of the American Cancer Society was held on October 7, 1980. The official ribbon cutting was held on October 8, attended by Mayor Phyllis McQuaid, State Senator Irv Stern, State Representative Elliot Rothenberg, and Skip Humphrey. Activities included jazzercise demonstrations, performances by Harlem Globetrotter Hallie Bryant, and a challenge by Marie "Scooter" DeLorme of the Minnesota Fillies of the ill-fated Women's Professional Basketball League. For \$10 you could take her on in a game of Horse, and if you beat her you won \$100; \$50,000 was raised for the Cancer Society.

In 1994 the building that had begun as Powers, then Donaldson's, and finally Carson Pirie Scott, was torn down to make way for Kohl's. In 1995-96 the Mall was remodeled and reconfigured, with a new facade, stores, and entrance. Applebee's came in at this time.

Continued on Page 7

DONATIONS

The Historical Society is extremely grateful for all of the generous donations we have received since the last *Re-Echo*. This We can't wait to get our own museum so we can display these – and so many of our other artifacts – so that everyone can see them!

Marilyn Heltzer sent us a document that her late husband, Councilman Jim Heltzer, had put out in about 1970-71. Entitled “Municipal Report to the People, it was a great point-in-time look at the Park and the issues the council was facing then. Jim gave his unvarnished opinion, especially about electricity rates from NSP. When Jim retired they moved to Beltrami County where he served to the Board of Commissioners.

Mark Toretzky continues to find great artifacts and newspaper ads that help us pinpoint the lifetimes of businesses. One fun thing was a paper bag from a pre-Zayre Shoppers City!

Randy Kirihara very generously donated his Westwood Jr. High Westwinds newspapers and a 1974 Echowan. A bonus was that the Westwinds included both of the Coen Brothers, on the honor roll, of course!

Bob Erickson donated two framed collages of caricatures of faculty from Central Jr. High drawn by Math and Art teacher Jack Tibbs. Emory Anderson took pictures of them and posted them on the “Flashbacks of St. Louis Park” Facebook page to great response.

Myron Biros came by with two Parkette letters, four “Orange Crush” patches, and the original Parkettes and Fan Club Inc. Articles of Incorporation. What wonderful things people find in their basements!

Joel Swanson donated his Park Knoll Memory Book from 1977-76 and a photo of himself with a Park Knoll jug. Where is that jug now?

Ted Meland sent in a DVD containing two films: Park National Little League, 1972, and Boy Scout Troop 282 Canoe Trip 1978.

Inger Blomquist and Erik Nilsson sent us a book all the way from Sweden that contained information about Park's Carlstrom family. It's in Swedish, but fortunately we have a translator.

Barb Person donated documents generated by the League of Women Voters about city issues. The League is an important part of Park history and we are fortunate to have many archival documents.

Manny Camilon searches the world for St. Louis Park artifacts and comes up with beauts! One day he came in with a huge bag of matchbooks from Park businesses that can be scanned and put on our web site. Other fun items are a Lilac Way Shoe Store shoehorn, a Knollwood Sears yardstick, a pill box from Methodist Hospital from 1963, and a list of employees at the Ambassador Hotel from 1963. Keep looking, Manny!

Cindi Thompson gave us a page from an 1893 atlas, complete with the mystical “Beebe's Outlots.” Must figure out what that is.

'70s CELEBRATION A SUCCESS

Thanks to everyone who came out to see the Milwaukee Road Depot all decked out like a 1970s living room. It was mighty cozy; we may just keep it that way! Despite the cold a lot of folks came out, and we had the opportunity to talk to many people, some who had lived in the Park for many years. Two of the major families represented were the Williams and the Moldestads and we were delighted to make contact with them! In talking to people we got some important tips: one about the scrapbooks at Knollwood, and another about Park Jeep. It seems that Park Jeep moved to Burnsville but has photos of its original dealership on Highway 7 across from Central on display. We contacted them, only to find that they were digitizing those photos and were happy to share them with us! Thanks again to the nearly 100 folks who braved the cold to visit us.

PEOPLE WE'D LIKE TO KNOW BETTER

Jake Nilva: In the 1960 directory was mentioned the Jake Henry Nilva Post 722 of the Jewish War Veterans of St. Louis Park (started in 1958?). Who was Jake Nilva? In the October 1941 issue of *Automatic Age Magazine* there is a picture of the Mayflower Novelty Company, represented by Nilva, Morris Roisner, Sam Taran and Herman Paster signing a substantial order for Wurlitzer “automatic phonographs and related music equipment” with Wurlitzer’s district manager. These guys may have been gangsters. Further investigation uncovered a book about American POWs who were beheaded by the Japanese during World War II. We have the book if anyone wants to put this all together and write a page for our web site.

Theodore Buteau: Ted’s daughter Lynn wrote to see if we knew anything about her father, who lived at 4022 Salem Ave. in the 1950s. Research is difficult because census takers were particularly creative when spelling his name. Lynn said that she had always thought that the name was French, but was apparently Russian Jewish instead.

Betty Ann McCall was a professional accordion player, and had accordion schools on two different sites on Excelsior Blvd. from at least 1953 to 1958. She is often pictured in issues of the *St. Louis Park Dispatch*, leading accordion bands and winning awards. In 1959 we learned that she was a runner up in the Miss Minnesota contest, and in the early 1960s she toured with Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians. Did she ever live in the Park? What was her birth name? Where was she from? Whatever happened to her? Check out what we do know about her at www.slphistory.org/history/mccallbettyann.asp

Nancy Potter is an artist, and may be local since her works have been found at local sales. Does anyone know if she has any St. Louis Park connections?

Suzanne Cargill: One extraordinary lady we did learn about from the folks on the Flashbacks of St. Louis Park Facebook page – and especially Laurie Simmons – is Suzanne Cargill. Many Parkites remember taking piano lessons at her home on 29th and Hampshire Ave. and hearing her stories. Suzanne was a classical pianist in France, and performed with her sister Marcelle. During the Nazi occupation she and her husband were beaten, and she had to watch him die in the street. Her hands were permanently damaged in the attack. She came to America after the war, and her piano lessons doubled as history lessons to her small charges. Laurel became especially close to her in her later years, and remembered that she loved to watch “Hogan’s Heroes” and laugh and laugh at how dumb the Nazis were. Our web page on Suzanne is www.slphistory.org/history/cargillsuzanne.asp

Our Friendly Neighborhood Gangsters: Thanks to the popularity of the new book *Augie’s Secrets* by Neal Karlen, people are getting acquainted with local gangsters such as Kid Cann and Tommy Banks. Contrary to suburban myth, there is no evidence that Kid Cann, nee Isadore Blumenfeld, ever lived in St. Louis Park, but his brother, Yiddy Bloom, lived Glenhurst and Sunset Blvd., and other brother Harry Bloom lived at 25th and France. They were listed in our phone books as proprietors of liquor stores, but that was after a career as bootleggers. They continued to get into trouble, and eventually they all ended their days in Florida. They divided their liquor territory with Tommy Banks, another gangster who is not as well known and harder to research. Tommy couldn’t hold a liquor license but controlled McCarthy’s Bar and Restaurant, which was located north of Highway 12 but technically in St. Louis Park. Thanks to Meredith McCarthy, whose brother Keith ostensibly owned the place, we have one of Tommy Banks’ hats! Wayne Elliot Klayman is helping with further research on these characters. Our Web page on the Blumenfelds is <http://www.slphistory.org/history/kidcann.asp>

STORIES FROM THE CLASS OF '43

19 members of the Class of 1943 got together for their annual reunion last September. Here are some of their stories, as told to and hurriedly jotted down by your roving reporter, Jeanne Andersen. Any misunderstandings are entirely my fault!

THE HEDRENS OF MORNINGSIDE: Although the Hedrens were originally from New Ulm, growing up they lived in two places in Morningside. Because of that they had the choice of which high school to go to. Future Hitchcock actress Nathalie “Tippi” chose to go to Southwest, while her sister Patty went to Park.

JULIA ROBERTS’S uncle lived in St. Louis Park, and she was seen at his funeral. Don’t know who he was, though.

LOVERS’ LANE in the early ‘40s was described as “on Texas Ave. before the bridge.” This must have been pretty remote, since there wasn’t much built up north of Minnetonka Blvd. until after the War.

GRADUATION TO WAR: As 1943 was right in the middle of World War II, every able-bodied young man was expected to transition from high school directly into the service. Boys had the opportunity to enlist in the branch of service of their choice before they turned 18, or they would be drafted when they were eligible. Some remember that there were few boys at graduation, as they had already gone to war.

JACK AND HANK’S GLIDER: In their senior year shop class, Jack Hagen and Hank Liljiquist built a training glider, built to military specifications. It was inspected by government officials as they built it and had to be true to 1/32 of an inch. When they first took it out it went into a ditch; where it went eventually they never found out.

ANOTHER CLASS REUNION: So imagine you’re Vernon Kruse, and you’ve been captured by the Germans, somewhere in Europe. They’re marching you somewhere, and another line of prisoners is marching the other direction. Who do you see passing you but Jerry Jerome, your old classmate! If they weren’t fast friends before, they were now! The Germans even allowed them to be bunked together. The story continues to be told 70 years later! Both made it back home, although they’re both gone now.

WESTLING BLUEPRINT PROJECT

In 2008 Peter Knaeble, developer of the Westling House and barn property on Minnetonka Blvd. and Aquila Ave., donated the blueprints and drawings of builder Richard Westling to the St Louis Park Historical Society.

Mr. Westling and his family purchased the home and surrounding acreage in 1942. This house is the oldest house in St. Louis Park, built in 1874. In the 1950s and ‘60s Westling subdivided some of the land and built 65 houses on Aquila and Boone Avenues and 28th and 29th Streets. The houses were custom built. The blueprints are of some of these and other buildings.

Kathy Spence Johnson and Madison White researched the blueprints and compared them to photographs of the homes on Aquila and Boone Avenues and 28th and 29th Streets. They were able to match many of the blueprints to current homes.

After it became clear that the Historical Society could not keep most of the more than 100 blueprints and drawing due to lack of storage space, the Historical Society contacted the Northwest Architectural Archive at the University of Minnesota. www.lib.umn.edu/scr/bm/naa

The Archive did not have many midcentury blueprints and drawings of St. Louis Park and staff said they would be glad to have them. The St Louis Park Historical Society has retained about 40 blueprints and drawing of the houses identified and hopes to have them on display sometime in the future.

MORE FAMILY BUSINESSES

First, a correction from the last issue.

VESCIO'S: This should have said that Fred Vescio and his mother Charlotte opened Vescio's in St. Louis Park in 1983. Fred and his youngest son Jon are the hands-on operators of Vescio's Cucina.

Now here are a few more of the many intergenerational businesses in the Park.

ACE SUPPLY: This venerable Skunk Hollow company started as Ace Manufacturing in 1958 by Dewey Martin and Stan Knutson. In 1968 Martin's share was bought by Herman Hasselbring, and when Knutson died in 1970 Hasselbring took on the other portion. The company is a HVAC wholesaler, selling heating and air conditioning parts to such local companies as Vogt and Cronstrom's. In 1977 Herman's son Bruce graduated from college and joined the firm, which had only eight employees at the time. Also working in the company were Herman's brother and brother-in-law. Eventually three sons of Bruce – John, Matt, and Tim – joined the firm. In about 1983-84 the company's name was changed to Ace Supply, as it never actually manufactured products. The company now employs over 50 people and has been a long-time supporter of the Historical Society.

BOHN WELDING: This company started in a two-stall garage at 5909 Goodrich Ave. in 1949 by Richard Joseph Bohn, Sr. and his son, Richard Jr. Richard Jr.'s son Rick started working there off and on when he was age 13 or 14, and took over the business when he was 20. Rick's son Ethan has been working there for the last seven years. The Bohns have been in St. Louis Park for decades – Rick says that the family lived in a farm house where the Dairy Queen on Excelsior Blvd. is now.

ELAYNE GALLERIES/APPRaisal SPECIALISTS MIDWEST: Elayne Lindberg ran Elayne Galleries from 1971 to 1994 in St. Louis Park. Her daughter Bonnie worked with her and continued the business until 2001. Bonnie is now a well-respected independent appraiser in the Twin Cities. Bonnie studied with the International Society of Appraisers and co-created the Kare Collectibles segment on KARE-11 TV. Bonnie volunteers her time at "Treasures Uncovered" events, which are like the "Antique Roadshow" program on PBS. Bonnie has volunteered to do a show for the SLP Historical Society; if anyone is interested in organizing one, please let us know.

SHOTWELL CO.: Loyal SLPHS member Arnie Bloomquist sent in the history of the Shotwell Company, which was founded in Fargo to make auto fenders, radiators, etc. by Horace J. Shotwell. The company came to Minneapolis in 1893 near Dunwoody, and then to 5721 W. 36th Street in the Park in 1956. By then it had become a job shop metal fabricator making parts for others to use in their products. Arnie Bloomquist bought the company in 1973 and his son Mike came into the business in 1987. Mike is now the responsible person. In 1991 the company moved to 2200 Florida Ave. and put in an addition in 1998. Modern equipment makes the company a recognized producer of quality aluminum, stainless and steel parts, competitive priced, of top quality for a host of local customers.

LOFFHAGEN AND SON INSURANCE: The Loffhagens represent four generations of insurance agents! Frank began with State Farm in the 1920s as they pioneered auto insurance. Frank's son Gordon became a State Farm agent in Minneapolis in 1947. Gordon's son Greg started as an independent in 1976, and in 1979 Gordon and Greg purchased the building at 4801 Excelsior Blvd. and went into business together as Loffhagen and son. The building had been a flower shop, Chinese restaurant, donut shop and dry cleaner. Greg noted that when they first opened the building, people would stop by and ask about their dry cleaning! Greg and Gordon operated Loffhagen and Son Insurance until Gordon retired in 1997 after 50 years. Greg now runs the business, lately assisted by his daughter, Mary Neill.

More information about these and other business can be found at www.slphistory.org/history/businesses.asp

KNOLLWOOD, Continued

A TRADITION OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Knollwood has always had a spirited community life, with myriad events that bring people together for more than shopping.

- A 1956 Automobile Exhibit featured new cars from 13 car dealers. Cars on display included a VW sedan, DeSoto, Golden Hawk Studebaker, Mercury Phaeton, Nash Cross Country Rambler, and a Pontiac Starchief.
- Knollwood's second and third anniversaries were celebrated with square dances hosted by David Stone of KSTP's Sunset Valley Barn Dance, and an appearance by singer and disc jockey Texas Bill Strength.
- The 1958 anniversary was celebrated with street vendors, an art exhibit, a model airplane contest, style shows hosted by WCCO's Jan Werner, store windows with live mannequins, a kiddie revue emceed by Will Jones, and an antique car meet featuring Calvin Coolidge's 1928 Lincoln. Knollwood store managers were applauded for having their own Civil Defense unit while builders [Ecklund & Swedlund](#) "managed the construction of a model home and gave it away in the parking lot of the Knollwood Mall shopping center in St. Louis Park to promote 'new' neighborhoods around the metro area. At the time, this was the largest retail giveaway in Minnesota's history." The house cost \$18,700, and was on display starting in September, with Mrs. Minnesota acting as official hostess. The drawing was held on December 23, and it was promised to be ready for move-in on January 1, 1959. It was moved to the Woodlawn Hills subdivision in Minnetonka, off of Highway 7.
- At the 1963 barbeque contest more than 1,000 pounds of prime roast beef were prepared by 33 amateur chefs in front of each store. For the kids there was a "mutt" contest, with prizes awarded to the ugliest mutt, the mutt with the most spots, and the mutt with the best trick or costume. A "colossal outdoor carnival" was also planned for the Monday before.
- Among the plans for the 15th anniversary in 1970 were three daily stage shows featuring Miss Mexico (Sloan Simpson) and Mexican musicians and dancers. Miss Mexico was slated to pick the winner of a free trip to Mexico.
- In 1980 a Fathers' Day Hole-in-One Putting Contest sponsored by Total Sports awarded the first prize trophy and golf shirt to Charles Gravett of Golden Valley. There were 150 participants!
- Some girls of a certain age remember when Tony Geary (soap opera heartthrob) came to visit on January 10, 1981. (Jackie Zeman was there too.) 6,000 fans showed up for afternoon interview sessions in the Wards Court. That evening there was a private reception that included entertainment, dancing, and a photo session emceed by WWTC disc jockey B.J. Crocker; Geary sold photos and kisses, all to raise money for the American Cancer Society.
- The Mall Walkers and Joggers Club was formed on May 14, 1981, headed by Forest Larson.
- 65 kids ages 2 to 16 participated in a Cartwheel-a-Thon in February 1982.
- On May 1, 1982, Knollwood hosted an armwrestling contest sanctioned by the World Professional Armwrestling Association and sponsored by High Life Beer. There were five mens' divisions and two women's - the event drew 80 contestants.
- Many other events have been held over the years, including sports card shows, art exhibits, fashion shows, and civic events.

2014 REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

Rouse Properties, the owner of the site, is on the verge of a major redevelopment project. The interior will be demolished and replaced by approximately five "Junior Box" stores about the size of Old Navy. The crazy-quilt parking lot will be redesigned and a three-store building will be built at the corner of Aquila Ave. and Highway 7. Demolition of the inside is scheduled to start in March 2014. In one form or another, Knollwood has been and will continue to be a vital part of our lives here in St. Louis Park; we wish it every success!

The Re-Echo
St. Louis Park Historical Society
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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 (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.

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