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REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

Collect. Preserve. Share.

Volume 19.3 / FALL 2020

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Although we remain locked down by the virus, we embark on a couple of architectural treasure hunts in the Park and beyond. Join us as we search for a boyhood home and some bankrupt banks. Special thanks to Marilyn Braun of the Carver County Historical Society, Merlin Peterson of the Pope County Historical Society, and Richard Hanson and Linda Folstad of the Tower-Soudan Historical Society for sharing information and photos. And to Larry Mayer, for sharing his memories of growing up in the Park.

– Bill Beyer, FAIA

A BRIEF, MEMORABLE ENCOUNTER WITH THE PARK IN 1956

Back in mid-March, as we all started to figure out what a corona virus lockdown would bring, the Society was contacted by Mr. Larry Mayer, currently residing in California. He wrote:

I have a short memoir I would like to share with the community about our short time living in SLP in the mid-1950's. My principal interest is learning where our house was located in present day SLP, if it is underneath a shopping mall or other development project as I suspect. I look forward to visiting SLP in the future, now that I am retired.

I loved living in St. Louis Park where my family lived, as well as in the surrounding area, from 1953-56. My Dad was born and raised in South West Minneapolis below Lake Calhoun. We lived in various places before he moved us back to the Minneapolis area, and we moved a few more times after that. I always felt that, among all the places we lived, SLP would have been the best place to grow up.

For an eight-year old boy in 1956, the transition from a new tract home in nearby Hopkins to an old American Foursquare on 2.5 acres, north of and hard by Hwy. 7 between 38th St. (?) was an exciting time. There was so much to explore! My two younger sisters and I would spend a summer's day in the apple orchard that occupied an acre or more along the highway frontage. We snacked on bitter apples, caught caterpillars, and took naps in the shade on low hanging

branches. We kept a rabbit and a German Shepherd that liked to chase the westbound cars...

I went to Alice Smith Elementary for kindergarten, then St. John the Evangelist Catholic School where George Mikan Jr was a classmate, before transferring to Most Holy Trinity.

Our house was a well worn, 2-1/2 story, Foursquare with white-painted, clapboard siding and high windows on the first floor flanking the front door and large foyer. The back door was the family's primary entrance, through the kitchen, which was the side of the house where Dad would park the family car for easy access to Hwy. 7 for the commute into town.

The backyard faced south and was a good place for a vegetable garden was, which was located in an open area, bordered by a mature weeping willow and a maple tree on one side and a group of birch trees on the far side. Asparagus and rhubarb reappeared every spring in Mom's backyard garden. Our maple tree went unappreciated until the autumn when its leaves showed color before flaming out in a blaze of glory.

The front door, which we considered our back door, faced north and was centered on a high, wide porch which looked far down a slope that ended at the two-lane residential street below. This side of the house represented the quiet, more

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formal, side of the property. I remember the wild blue berries ripening in late July under a heavy canopy of the Norway pines that flanked the western property line.

On Halloween, there was zero trick-or-treat foot traffic as the street below our yard was dark and heavily shaded at night, and the few homes that were there were situated on large lots with long, spooky driveways. Good luck finding treats in that neighborhood...What a great place to grow up, I thought.

As it turned out, Larry only lived in the Park for a year or less, but the vivid memories made him want to know if the place he had lived still existed. We embarked on searches of the internet and Society archival collections to see if we could identify the location of his family's house.

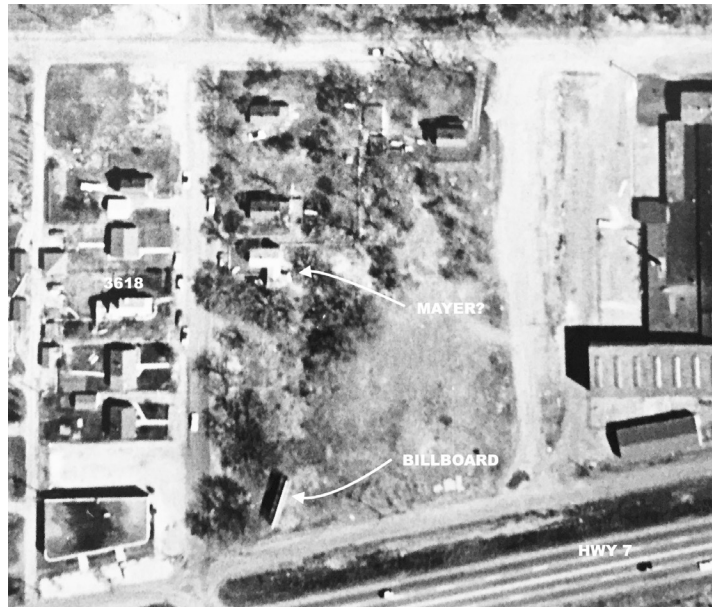
After a few weeks of email exchanges and digging around in Larry's mind, we thought we had found the place. As far as we could tell from historic aerial photos, it appeared to have all the attributes he recalled including a 2.5-acre lot fronting on the north side of Highway 7, plenty of trees, (plausibly including an orchard), and a large billboard along the highway, which Larry had scaled one summer day causing trouble with his elders. The house would have been on the east side of Pennsylvania Avenue, just south of 36th Street, and just up the hill from the Republic Creosote plant and other remnants of Thomas B. Walker's industrial fever dream.

Sadly, if our site identification proved to be correct, Larry's SLP home had been wiped off the land along with its neighbors around 1970 to make way for the construction of the Helix Apartments.

Larry's dad had been engaged in an addition and renovation to create a new kitchen for his old "Foursquare." Which is where we began to run into problems. With the large bulk of its housing stock dating from after World War II, the Park is home to precious few foursquare-style houses, while south Minneapolis is littered with them.

If we had been correct on the site, it seemed that Larry's house was likely to have been a much more modest dwelling, and probably an original "Walker House," built in the mid 1890s as worker housing for the factories of the Monitor Drill, and other manufacturing concerns located a few hundred yards to the east. It appears to show up as such on an 1895 plat of the area. Finally, Larry described our research process and conclusions:

Once we knew where the house was located, [Bill] would ask me architectural questions, almost expecting me to go back in time with a video camera to reveal the secrets he was looking for. I mentally crawled around the interior of a dank, dark basement searching for evidence of walled off doorways and staircases. I surveyed the interior of the third floor, or was it the attic, or the second floor, trying to locate a staircase, or was there more than one staircase?... I was mentally exhausted. That's when I fully appreciated how fallible and unreliable memory can be.



In 1895, a smattering of Walker houses on 25-foot lots show up in easy walking distance to employment opportunities just down the hill. An aerial photo from 1960 shows a Walker house with a south-side addition on a large lot fronting Hwy 7, with the requisite tree clusters and the large billboard facing westbound traffic. In my site reconnaissance trips for Larry, I discovered a serendipitous treasure - 3618 Pennsylvania, just across the street, perhaps one of the most pristine survivors of the workers houses that Thomas B. Walker built in the 1890s. Who knew?



LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear members,

It's school time again, and this year will be one to remember. Having one child in the middle school and another at Susan Lindgren elementary school gives me a good perspective from which to witness these historic times for our schools. The school administration has done an admirable job adapting to the ever-changing requirements and expectations for distance learning models. On top of those changes, this was the first year with new school start times and most of the school buildings are in some phase of construction. The middle school has a new library space and classrooms with great natural light. Susan Lindgren classrooms have all new furniture allowing them to better adapt to different learning needs, which will be much appreciated this year. St. Louis Park schools has a proud history, and I am personally confident that our teachers and administrators will rise to this new challenge to ensure all our children receive a quality education.

Elsewhere in the city, we continue to see change and progress. The new Westwood Hills Nature Center is now open offering a fully accessible building, multi-purpose rooms that allow for various events and programs, and great access to the trails and grounds. Over Labor Day weekend, the freight rail bridge over Highway 100 was moved north about 50 feet to its new location to accommodate the SWLRT line. In August, the new headquarters for Bridgewater Bank opened at Excelsior and Monterey Drive featuring public spaces and a new restaurant. And in July, the Texa-Tonka Shopping Center was re-opened after a significant renovation to return it to its mid-century modern glory days as a bustling St. Louis Park commercial center.

Speaking of revitalization, I also want to take this opportunity to welcome our newest Board members who bring a diverse set of experience and skills to the organization. Mary Lou Nemanic is a newer resident to St. Louis Park, but has devoted her professional life to historical preservation as a scholar, researcher, author of several books, and a producer for Documentary America. Steve Woodbury is a 1964 graduate from SLP high school and had a distinguished career in broadcasting, founding and managing several iconic radio stations in the Twin Cities, and also serves on the board of the Pavek Museum. Lynne Carper, a 1963 graduate of SLP high school who will serve as Vice President of our Organization, has held volunteer leadership positions with his Neighborhood Association, the SLP Planning Commission, and the Charter Commission. We are grateful for their interest in serving in leadership roles and are excited for the ideas and energy they bring to our organization.

With Park pride,

Ted

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Founded in 1971, the St. Louis Park Historical Society collects, preserves and shares the history of St. Louis Park. The *ReEcho: Park History Today* is an official publication of the Society.

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THE HUNT FOR BANKRUPT BANKS

In 1915, Minneapolis real estate promoter Roy Quimby came to the Park and opened the St. Louis Park State Bank. In February 1919, the state Superintendent of Banks closed it, along with a dozen others, including: Augusta State Bank, Chanhassen State Bank, Farmers' State Bank Cologne, Farmers' State Bank Frontenac, Farmers' State Bank Long Siding, Marine Mills State Bank, Farmers' State Bank New Prairie, Farmers' State Bank Skyberg, People's State Bank St. Bonifacius, Hamel State Bank, Merchants' and Miners' State Bank Tower, and Waconia State Bank.

Roy Quimby died at age 37 just days before he would have been called as a witness at the District Court's biggest bank fraud trial ever. The Park's bank never reopened. We are aware of no extant written accounts of the farmers, businesses or pensioners who lost their savings. When the books were sorted out a couple of years after the bank's closure, the Village itself recorded a modest loss of \$20.07. Norman Thomas, in his unpublished 1951 manuscript on Park history, noted:

Quimby had 155 shares of stock while the afore named had five each with thirteen others holding either one or two shares each. In May they announced that \$20,000 in capital had been secured and that the State Bank would build a building. In the following month the structure was erected on a lot west of the high school. Within the next six months, the village council had designated the new bank as the official depository of public funds which previously had been left with Minneapolis banks.



The Park's elegant bank building also served as the village post office. The post office moved out in 1937 and the building later housed a snack shop for students. The building was gone by 1960.

After discovering the photo of the Park's lost bank in the Society's collections, I thought I had seen a similar building elsewhere. A road trip to Frontenac last year confirmed my suspicions; a vacant building on Hwy 61 was a perfect match. The hunt was on!

Subsequent searches on Google Maps turned up clues to bank remains in the ghost towns of Long Siding and Augusta, the still-functioning Security State Bank of Marine, and the bank-converted-to-library in St. Bonifacius. Road trips got me

some photos of the survivors and confirmed the absence of those that were lost.

Of the thirteen bankrupt banks, remnants of six still exist in some form. Another six survive in photos. The thirteenth – in Waconia – seems to have disappeared and avoided the camera all these years.

At least ten of the Quimby banks were based on a standardized plan about 22 feet wide with almost identical Greek Revival façades. Their architraves featured pairs of festoons bracketed by rosettes; their frieze elements were anchored by small cartouches at each end with the bank's name centered; all were topped by pediments with cornices, dentils and large cartouches calling out each bank's year of birth. All the elaborate classical details, including the central pair of Ionic column capitals, were pressed tin. Fluted columns and pilasters were wood.



Entablature (1), Architrave (5), Frieze (4), Pediment (3), Ionic Column Capital (6). Pressed tin details were easily duplicated in branding the later banks.

Surviving scraps of five of the prototype banks today hide in plain sight – two in historic river towns, two in Minnesota ghost towns, one on the western prairie, now a library. Six more survive only in photos. The bank at Cologne was an outlier, a remodeling of a house into a bank done before the prototype design was established. Roy Quimby could hit St. Louis Park, Chanhassen, Augusta and Cologne on a day trip riding the Milwaukee Road from downtown Minneapolis, but it took real resolve and multiple train transfers to get to Tower, MN to commence fleecing the local miners and merchants.

Evidence of nearly identical bank buildings got me looking on the ground in all the banking locations and eventually turned up photos of those that were lost. Those searches enlisted the help of local historical societies across the state. I thank the Minnesota Historical Society photo archives for a couple of elusive photos of Hamel and Skyberg banks. Despite the fine collection of photos at the Carver County Historical Society's website, and several searches on the ground, evidence of Waconia's prototype bank building has not been found. Yet.

Descending the rabbit-hole of the Quimby banks story led beyond the Park to a statewide tour of discovery involving the rich and varied stories of many Minnesota places. History threads lead where they will, enriching us all.

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FARMERS' STATE BANK FRONTENAC

Frontenac's bank is actually in Frontenac Station, its flashy 1915 cartouche intact. The structure is currently vacant but still prominently fronts on Highway 61. The busy rail line across the highway runs freight and Amtrak's Empire Builder between St. Paul and Chicago, and continues to shake the foundations of town buildings, as diners at the Whistle Stop Café down the road can attest.



FARMERS STATE BANK LONG SIDING

Established as a logging community four miles north of Princeton near the Rum River, Long Siding lived and died by its railroad as well. The Elk River to Milaca line of the Great Northern had been a shortcut to Duluth after 1886, but a shorter cut was built further east in 1899; rail service declined from there. The town today approaches ghostly status, saved by a single lively tavern, at least before the COVID-19 shutdowns. Missing its name, its columns and pilasters, and its date-of-birth cartouche, the floating entablature remains.



AUGUSTA STATE BANK

Established in 1861 as Oberles Corners and renamed in 1883, Augusta is listed by the Carver County Historical Society as a ghost town. It's about halfway between Chanhassen and Cologne on the old Hastings and Dakota Railroad which had rolled into town in 1876. The rail route was straightened in 1913 after being taken over by the Milwaukee Road, leaving the town unserved. The Post Office closed in 1911, so it appeared to make little sense to open a bank there in 1915. The former bank's pediment peeks over an enclosed residential front porch, the barely recognizable Greek Revival façade buried to its dentils in stucco.



MARINE MILLS STATE BANK

Marine on St. Croix, originally named Marine Mills, has its Quimby original bank-front facing the village square and still operates as a bank, but the new main entrance is in an addition around the corner. Its façade differs slightly from the others, the pressed metal Ionic column capitals and date-of-birth cartouche are gone, and its frieze element appears proportionally squattier. With only 12 dentils, it also appears slightly narrower than the others.

PEOPLE'S STATE BANK ST. BONIFACIUS

The original 1916 bank was converted to a library in 1931, donated to the Village by local landowners Mr. and Mrs. Edward C. Gale. It served without running water, indoor toilets, or central heat until 1987. The library was renovated in 1988 and again in 2006. It survives today, missing its central Ionic columns as part of the Hennepin County Library system. The St. Bonifacius Historical Society occupies the lower level. A fresh paint job highlights the architectural detail. The pediment and cornice appear to project further toward the street than some of the earlier examples.



FARMERS' STATE BANK COLOGNE

The Quimby bank in Cologne might have eluded me had I not luckily made contact with Ms. Marcia Tellers of that city's historical society. She met me in the town in June to point out the most unlikely building and sold me a copy of the society's centennial book that included photos of the place. It appears that the Cologne project of May 1914 was not a prototype, but the remodeling of an existing double-wide house. A new tin sub-cornice and frieze wrapped the south and east sides, and a winged roof-cornice with dentils was slapped on to distinguish the commercial half from the residential half. The upper roofline closely matched the architectural detail of one of the bank's founders, the owner of the Pfluegar Livery Stable and very likely owner of the double-wide house. The building is still a residence, clumsily re-clad with vinyl siding, a small scrap of the tin sub-cornice still visible, hanging on the side.



HAMEL STATE BANK

The first of the now-ghostly bank buildings was in Hamel, MN, a town that exists today in name only, although it survives as a postal address. The original village straddled the boundary between Plymouth and Medina townships and did not survive as its own political entity. A 1930 photo from Minnesota Historical Society collections shows a Quimby prototype plan with hints of Greek Revival detail, but we don't know if this was the original from 1913 or a later replacement. It's gone now.



CHANHASSEN STATE BANK

Every building that existed in 1945 on County Road 16/78th Street, Chanhasseen's main drag, is gone, replaced by various exemplars of suburban sprawl. But a telling photo survives from the city's 1966 "Frontier Days" booklet.



FARMERS STATE BANK OF NEW PRAIRIE

There once was a hamlet named New Prairie, in a township named New Prairie, in Pope County, between the tiny burg of Cyrus, and the larger burg of Starbuck. All three were Northern Pacific railroad towns, but New Prairie was a flag stop, and just barely that. According to local historians, the population of the hamlet topped-out at 21 souls, and declined from there. As of 1993, there was only one building left in the town, a house belonging to the original founders.

The bank was sold and dismantled in 1946, in frugal, rural Minnesota fashion by Wendell “Windy” Peterson and his new bride, Donna. They lived in the bank’s 7-foot by 9-foot vault while slowly taking the building apart to salvage its lumber, a scarce commodity after WWII. The couple hauled their building materials 23 miles over mostly dirt roads to the minutely larger town of Terrace, MN, where they built their dream house facing the mill pond on the East Branch of the Chippewa River.



Wendell and Donna Peterson in front of the Farmers State Bank of New Prairie. They lived in the vault while salvaging the lumber and windows from the bank, which they used to build their home in Terrace. The bank’s leaded glass transoms made for unique and mighty fine kitchen windows.

FARMERS STATE BANK OF SKYBERG

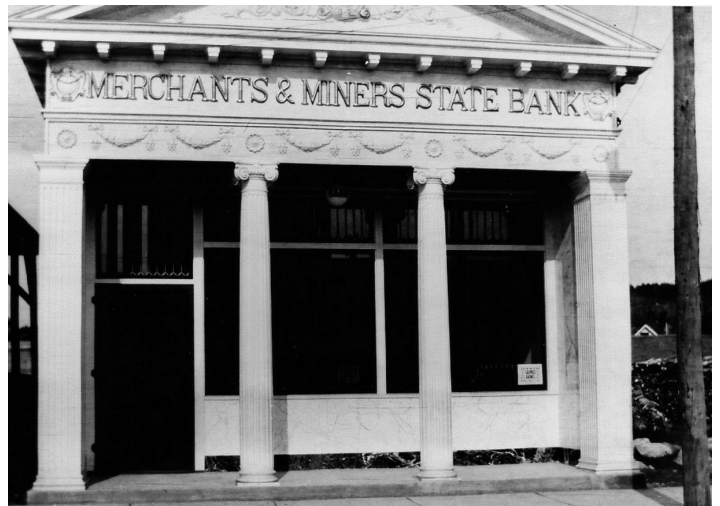
The Village of Skyberg, just south of Kenyon, was established in 1879 with a general store and a post office, and a railroad running along Highway 56 on its east flank, with a depot and a grain elevator operating as late as the late 1940s. Roy W. Meyer, in his book, *The Ghost Towns & Discontinued Post Offices of Goodhue County*, noted, “when the state bank examiner closed the bank in February 1919, Skyberg received a shock from which it never fully recovered.”

The bank later reopened and rebranded as the Security State Bank. The building survived until 1972, when the West Concord Volunteer Fire Department burned it to the ground in a training exercise. The 1970 MHS photo above shows the building in an advanced state of decay. Almost all evidence of the former town is gone.



MERCHANTS & MINERS STATE BANK OF TOWER

My last discovery was the now-lost bank in Tower, MN. Mr. Richard Hanson of the Tower-Soudan Historical Society helpfully dug up this photo from its collections, but we have no stories to go along with it. Yet.





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PARK HISTORY TODAY

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DISPATCH LOOK-BACK

We look back to May 7, 1948, when the Dispatch editors took to echoing a piece from the Park High student newspaper, the Echo. We hereby re-echo the Editors' echo of the Echo, which makes perfect sense in these stir-crazy Covid days.

And speaking of stir-crazy, citizens of the Park must have been Covid-level bored about a month later to reach for some foolish entertainment: "LAUGHS - SPILLS - THRILLS will be the order of the day when two picked teams of St. Louis Park softball players ride live, tricky, trained donkeys in the comedy show of the baseball year."

Must We Have War?

From the days of hand-to-hand combat with primitive weapons, warfare has evolved the present innovations of mass murder and wholesale devastation as demonstrated so effectively by atomic and bacteriological weapons. Like the legendary sword of Damocles, the threat of a bloody slaughter such as the world has never seen is poised over our heads.

Yet, in spite of the looming threat of total destruction, the world's leaders falter, her statesmen blunder and her politicians speak glibly of a third world war as though such conflict were inevitable. War is not inevitable unless we believe it to be so. But men everywhere, lost in a reverie of smug self-complacency or blinded by fierce hatred and unreasoning fear, are headed, one again, for the terrible chaos and utter futility of war.

Mankind must recover faith in itself and its ability to meet and conquer the problems confronting the world today. Only if men make an earnest attempt to know and understand one another, to appreciate the motives, ideals, cultures and problems of those of other nations can we rouse ourselves from the apathy that is dragging us into the abyss of war and achieve a healthy and just peace.—**St. Louis Park Echo.**

