

The Re-ECHO

St. Louis Park

A Newsletter for the members of the St. Louis Park Historical Society

Downtown St. Louis Park

The Re-ECHO is published quarterly by the St. Louis park Historical Society and is edited by Robert C. Reiss. Its purpose is to acquaint the members, volunteers and friends on how the activities, programs and resources of the Society are used to preserve the history of St. Louis Park.

The name was inspired by the ECHO newspaper published by and for the students of the St. Louis Park High School since 1917.

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With the building of the Park Commons development St. Louis Park will finally have a true downtown. Excelsior Boulevard will become the area they think about when they refer to St. Louis Park. The street has gone through many changes. Lilac Lane has come and gone and Miracle Mile has provided convenient shopping. With the addition of this "recognized community focal point", with its offices, retail shops, restaurants, townhouse's and condominiums, Park Commons will be an area where people can live, dine, work, shop and enjoy. Excelsior Boulevard today is what T. B. Walker envisioned for St. Louis Park, but his "main" street was to be Walker Street, obviously named after him. It ran (and still does) from the Oak Hill neighborhood to the Center neighborhood (now renamed Elmwood) and include the St. Louis railroad park from which St. Louis Park got its name. Within walking distance of this street were all the necessities people needed. They could work at the Monitor Drill or other manufacturing plants. There was a bank, hardware and grocery store, hotels, churches, schools, a barber shop and best of all, transportation. The streetcar line ended at Walker Street and provided transportation through Uptown to downtown Minneapolis. The 1892 advertisement by the Minneapolis Land and Improvement Co. provides an insight into what was envisioned for St. Louis Park. What was not envisioned for the Park was first the depression of 1890 and then the depression of 1930. The Monitor Drill burned down and production was moved to the Hopkin's plant. Tornadoes wiped out

A 1892 advertisement by Minneapolis Land and Improvement Company.

As Minneapolis has grown.

So will St. Louis Park Grow.

And in the growth and development of St. Louis Park, thousands of people will have better opportunities to make fortunes than was ever offered in Minneapolis. Conservative business men believe that St. Louis Park will have a population of fifty million people in a few years: in fact enough business has already been established to support almost one-fifth of that number. Estimate, if you can, your profits on one or more lots now at a price of \$150-\$500 each and held as an investment until the population shall reach 50,000.

homes and manufacturing plants. All of this limited much expansion. During the time T. B. Walker was making his plans in St. Louis Park, Excelsior Boulevard was a farm service road that developed into a secondary route into Minneapolis. In 1945, the soldiers of WWII started returning, getting married and needed a place to live. Automobiles and the building of Highways 7 and 100 by the WPA, made living in the suburbs feasible. The farms of Brookside were ideal home locations. When St. Louis Park population exploded, Excelsior Boulevard started on its path toward being the Park's "main" street. Now only a few people even know where Walker Street is.

What Time Is It?

When the Laycocks and Hanks first settled in St. Louis Park on their farms along the Minnehaha Creek, they lived their lives by seasons. Days were planned around sunrise and sunset. The exact time of day was relatively unimportant to them. If they even had a clock, it was probably in the kitchen, inaccurate, and had to be wound periodically. Time was so unimportant that most were intentionally set five or ten minutes fast. Railroads were the first to recognize the importance of accurate time. They had been instrumental in passing the Uniform Time Act of 1883 which established the time zones across the United States. The trains were the nation's time keepers. In St. Louis Park everyone lived within the sound of a train whistle and set their clock by them. An accurate pocket watch was the badge of a railroad man. The families of depot agents, Jorvig and Felber, probably still treasure the watches of these men.

When industry came to the Park, knowing the exact time became important. Now the Monitor Drill became the town's time keeper. The seven o'clock start, noon lunch, one o'clock restart and five o'clock quitting time were all signaled by its whistle. When the Monitor burned down, the Creosote plant took over. The volunteer fire department added the nine o'clock curfew.

The "Waiting Station" is a good example of how unconcerned people were about time. This was the name of the building at Walker and Lake Street. The streetcars may have operated on a schedule but the people did not. Because they walked from Oak Hill or the Center to the end of the streetcar line it was difficult to

On Saturday, April 27, 2002 at 10:30 AM, Bob Reiss and Barbara Davis will represent the St. Louis Park Historical Society at a discussion of the book "Something In The Water" at the newly remodeled St. Louis Park Library. The discussion is open to the public and you are invited.

arrive just on time. Therefore the store on this corner was named the "Waiting Station" because it was where they could wait for the next streetcar. Radios caused a big change in the requirement to know the correct time. Radio programs were scheduled to start on the fifteen intervals. Ma Perkins came on at 2:15 PM and Little Orphan Annie at 5:45 PM. If you wanted to listen, it was necessary to turn the radio on at these times. Radios now became the nation's time keeper. It took technology a while to catch up with the need for accurate time. The first half of the century very few people could afford personal watches. Wristwatches were used by the soldiers of World War I to coordinate attacks. By World War II they were still expensive enough to be a popular gift for important events such as graduations. They still needed to be wound and were still not very accurate. It took the space age to bring us inexpensive clocks. But did it bring us clocks! We have and need at least one time keeper in every room and most kitchens have many. We now have "clocks" that keep very accurate time for years, in spite of power failures and even leap year. But even, still when the power fails, how many 12:00 o'clock flashers do you have?

Seconds are not a small enough increment to measure how fast things happen today. Now things happen in nanoseconds. Accurate time is so important that we thought our world was going to stop functioning on Y2K because our computers were not going to be able to know what time it was.

Thank You Nordic Ware

Along with their 2002 business membership dues, Nordic Ware included a contribution for to provide a light for our flag at the Depot. A good idea and we are grateful.

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed by the St. Louis Park Historical Society to help inventory and index the historical documents that are stored in the Depot. Anyone who is interested in St. Louis Park history would find this project very rewarding. Documents and photographs in process will be brought to the City Hall where they will be inventoried, and then they will be returned to the Depot. The time required to complete this inventory will depend on the number and enthusiasm of the volunteers.

Cindy Reichert, SLP City Clerk, has previous experience with systems for

cataloging and filing collections. Her office is interested in the needs of the Society and has volunteered to help. While the inventory is being completed, she will help the Historical Society explore the option of a card catalog, computer data base or another system for indexing.

Once this process is completed, the SLP Historical Society can assess the value of its collection to the community and determine standards for future collection. Coordinator for this project is Lori Wilczek. If you would like to volunteer for this project, please e-mail Lori at Lawilczek@aol.com or call (952) 924 2550.

Highway 100 Parks

Highway 100, which was to be a highway belt line around the Twin Cities, was built through St. Louis Park between 1935 and 1940 as a project of the Public Works Administration. Federal funding to build public projects put unemployed people to work. Highway 7 and 100 were two projects that benefited St. Louis Park.

The State of Minnesota established the Roadside Development Division in 1932. Its main objective was to increase the recreational qualities and enjoyment of the state's highway. The funding to build Highway 100 required that a

small percentage of the money be used for roadside improvements.

The improvements chosen for Highway 100 were stopping points for the traveling public where they could stop and enjoy the scenery or picnic. Two of these stopping points were located in St. Louis Park. They are still in place but are not very accessible.

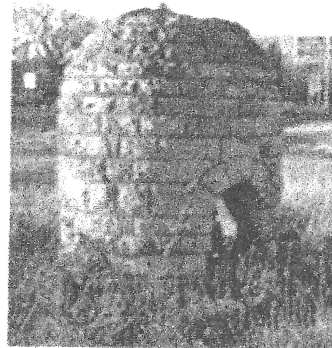
Lilac Park is located between Minnetonka Boulevard and 28th Street. Access to it is from Toledo Avenue which serves as the "on" ramp to Highway 100. The second park is unnamed and is in the southeast corner of the intersection of Highway 100 and 7. Access is from the service road off Highway 7.

These parks were designed by the Minnesota Central Design office of the National Park Service. The stone structures were fashioned by unemployed masons from limestone cut along the Minnesota River near the Mendota

Bridge. Construction of this type requires skilled labor and without the "make work" atmosphere of a depression is no longer feasible. The parks include stone picnic tables, council rings and benches, rectangular fireplaces and Lilac Park includes a unique beehive cooker.

The parks have survived previous changes to

Highway 100 but now major changes for the park areas are being planned. The section of Highway 100, from Robbinsdale to Highway 394, is currently under major reconstruction and changes south of Highway 394 are in the planning stage. The Minnesota Department of Transportation has been made aware of the historical significance of these parks but are faced with a difficult task. Since the significance is in the workmanship and location, they can not be moved. MDOT is saying that they are working to save the structures but do not know if they will be able to provide access to them.



Something in the Water

"I thought I knew pretty much all about the Park in the '20s and '30s but those personal histories in the book have proven me wrong"

"Wow! What a great book about St. Louis Park"

"----this book sure helped my foggy mind relive people, places and events-----"

"The book brought back memories of lying in bed on a cold winter night and hearing those steam whistles from the trains. I loved that"

These are just a few of the positive comments readers have made about "Something in the Water", a book Don Swenson has published about St. Louis Park prior to 1945.

This book is a collection of articles and interviews with St. Louis Park alumni. They are the memories of the people who lived this history. The collection provides a unique insight into what life was like then and how it differs from today.

Don Swenson is member of the St.

Louis Park Historical Society and was a 1943 graduate of St. Louis Park High School. His father was a partner in the Swenson and Redeen grocery store which was located in the Walker Building on St. Louis Park's first "main" street. It was one of a few charge and delivery grocery stores in the Park. It was a family business with Don and his brother, Clayton, taking a very active part. By clerking and delivery, Don met most of the residents of the Park at that time. These friendships have served him well in the writing of this book.

The book is being made available to the libraries of the St. Louis Park Schools and the Hennepin County Library. It is available from the St. Louis Park Historical Society for \$18.00 plus \$2.00 for handling. Send your name, and address along with a check for \$20.00 to:

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The Society

The St. Louis Park Historical Society meets in the SLP City Hall at 7:00 PM the second Tuesday of each month. The next meeting dates are:

February 12

March 12

April 14

You are invited to attend.

Become a member of the St. Louis Park Historical Society. Individual membership is \$20.00 or for families is \$25.00 per year.

To join send your membership application and check to:

The St. Louis Park Historical Society
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