



The Re-ECHO

St. Louis Park

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

Skippy Field 50 years of Happy Memories

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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Two thousand and two is the fiftieth anniversary of Skippy Field and Little League in St. Louis Park. Thousands of kids have heard the familiar cry "P-l-a-y B-a-l-l" at Skippy Field since 1952. A lot of happy memories for the kids and also for mothers, dads and the families. Little League was started in 1939 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. In 1951, a group of men from St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Edina and Minnetonka formed the first Little League in Minnesota. These four each agreed to field one team from their suburb. That year, all the games were played at a Hopkins playground. For 1952, "Shorty" Dale was instrumental in arranging to lease the land for what is now called Skippy Field from the village. He persuaded the Skippy Peanut Butter company (which was then located in St. Louis Park) to fund the building of the ball field. The field was named for company and was completed for the 1952 season. By 1955, the St. Louis Park Little League had expanded to eight teams. Skippy Field and the other baseball fields in St. Louis Park are currently owned and maintained by the Recreation and Parks Department of the City of St. Louis Park but the operation of the league is completely run by volunteers. Every year hundreds of coaches and team managers eagerly agree to spend many summer nights and Saturdays at the ball field. Another important part of Little League are the team sponsors. Each team is sponsored by a local business or corporation who agreed to supply the uniforms and equipment for

Volunteers are still needed by the St. Louis Park Historical Society to help inventory and index the historical documents that are stored in the Depot. .

Coordinator for this project is Lori Lawilczek. If you would like to volunteer for this project, please e-mail Lori at Lawilczek @ aol.com or call (952) 924 2550.

"their" team. Many companies have had teams that played at Skippy but two of these will also celebrate their fiftieth year. Miracle Mile and Citizens Bank have been continuous sponsors since 1952.

In 1959, a minor league diamond was added to Skippy Field. This diamond

Elmer "Shorty" Dale was a tireless advocate of sports in St. Louis Park and particularly sports for kids. During the depression when there were no funds for any recreation, he organized village teams. After WW II, he was active as Chairman of the Recreational Commission for the Village of St. Louis Park and was a strong advocate of the new city charter. He believed that St. Louis Park needed a Park Board with taxing ability to provide adequate facilities for recreation. "Shorty" was instrumental in establishing the Little League and getting them a place to play. He managed Legion baseball, he coached and umpired and was a member of the Northwest Umpires Association. He was also active in Midget football.

Skippy Field

was dedicated and named for "Shorty" Dale for his contribution to St. Louis Park athletics. In later years, when the diamonds were repositioned the plaque and the name seemed to have been lost. As part of the anniversary celebration it is planned to honor "Shorty" again for his contribution. Currently teams are being organized,

schedules set and sponsors recruited for the St. Louis Park Little League season. Once this work is done there will be time to plan a celebration. It is hoped that this celebration will include "Shorty" Dale's family, a reunion of all the kids and volunteers that played at Skippy and honor the sponsors. See you there.

In Search of: The Colonial Inn

Many longtime St. Louis Park residents have fond memories of a little restaurant on Excelsior Blvd. called the Colonial Inn. It was a dignified eatery run by Mrs. Clara W. Smith and her husband. The Smiths ran the establishment from 1933 to 1959, although the restaurant, located at 4301 Excelsior, was actually started by others in about 1924. Mrs. Smith turned it into an elegant, formal restaurant/tea room decorated with priceless antiques. Every year the Smiths would close down the Inn for a time and go looking for new antiques.

In the 1940's, the restaurant was described by former busboy, Phil Davis as "a place where a family might go on rare occasions for a special anniversary dinner. Park High juniors and seniors would be seen there in formal attire for a dinner before the prom." In 1938, Sunday dinners were advertised for 65 cents.

In 1936, Mrs. Smith developed her own recipe for French salad dressing, and it was so popular she started a side business manufacturing and selling her creation. By 1955, Mrs. Smith had also begun selling her baked goods at the Colonial Inn Bakery at Miracle Mile. In 1959, Mrs. Smith sold all her properties except the salad dressing business. She retired to Florida in 1962 and

passed away in 1964.

But what happened to the Colonial Inn itself?

New information (well, an article from the Trib from 1963) has come to light to solve this mystery. The building that was the Colonial Inn housed the Western Barbeque from 1959 to 1962. In May of 1962, it was to be uprooted to make way

for a gas station (to add to the 40+ gas stations on Excelsior Blvd.). Mr. Howard Berge happened to see it from across the street and decided that it would be perfect for a home. A couple of months later he bought it and had it moved to a lot on the shore of Long Lake in Orono. Berge made extensive alterations transforming it

into a "rustic, Scaninavian-modern chalet."

The fate of this Inn/house is unknown 38 years later, but our search continues. The Colonial Inn was an institution on the Excelsior Blvd., and there are many Parkites, past and present who have happy memories of the atmosphere and pot pies served up by Mrs. Smith. Please feel free to share your memories with the St. Louis Park Historical Society.

Many thanks to Terri Siderakos, the keeper of the flame of the Colonial Inn, for the information in this article.

Article written by Jeanne Anderson
(dcrow@erols.com)

A promotional flier describes the Colonial Inn:

Treasured antiques grace the interiors. The crystal chandelier in the Colonial dining room once looked down on gay occasions in a southern home. The amethyst chandelier in the Amethyst dining room forms the motif for the antique glass of the same shade which fills the shelves in the bay windows.

What's Happening

The St. Louis Park Historical Society participated in the Children First Ice Cream Social which was held on Saturday, May 11 at Wolfe Park.

On April 27, at the St. Louis Park Library, Bob and Barbara Davis Reiss read from the book "Something In The Water" and discussed this history of St. Louis Park.

The National Genealogical Society held it's 2002 national conference in Milwaukee on May 15-18, 2002.

The spring 2002 issue of "American Heritage of Invention and Technology" includes an article on the building of the Peavey-Haglin elevator in St. Louis Park.

On Thursday, June 13, 2002, Parktacular will hold its 2002 Senior Dinner and Program, "Swing into Summer" at the Holiday Inn, St. Louis Park. For more information call 952 918 6444.

The St. Louis Park Historical Society meets at the Depot in Jorvig Park at 7:00 PM the second Tuesday of each month.

Peavey-Haglin Elevator

The Peavey-Haglin Elevator (now used to advertise Nordicware) is the last remnant of the St. Louis Park industrial era. Prior to 1899, all grain elevators were squarish wooden structures. Frank Peavey and Charles Haglin, a trained architect and builder, decided to build a tubular elevator of solid concrete as an experiment to learn if it was practical to store grain in a concrete structure of this shape. It had not been done before and it was thought that it might explode or at least crack when grain was drawn off. For construction, round forms were built with steel rings for braces and concrete poured into these forms. When the concrete had set, the forms were pulled up and another layer poured. It was twenty feet in diameter and in 1899, was built to a height of sixty eight feet. At the bottom, the walls were twelve inches thick tapering to eight inches at the top. Using a bucket elevator, the tube was filled with grain harvested in 1899. The grain was left through the winter.

In the spring, the grain was tested, found to be in excellent shape and had fewer rodent and insect problems. When they pulled the lever to let the grain out, the spectators stood well clear but the grain began to flow out and the elevator remained intact.

This tower was eventually built to a height of one hundred and twenty five feet and never used for grain storage again but it set the standard for elevator design and construction. It dramatically changed grain storage and handling. Peavey and Haglin immediately started work on a terminal in Duluth with 53 silos, one hundred and ten feet tall and 33 feet across. Peavey went on to utilize this elevator design to build a prosperous grain company. St. Louis Park was the home of several of this type of elevator including the Commander Elevator which continued in operation until the late 1970's.

The Peavey-Haglin Elevator is St. Louis Park's only listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Become a member of the St. Louis Park Historical Society. Membership for individuals is \$20.00 or families are \$25.00.

To make a donation send your membership application and your check to:

The St. Louis Park Historical Society
3700 Monterey Drive
St. Louis Park MN 55416

"Something in the Water"

This book provides a unique insight into the history of St. Louis Park prior to 1945. 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:

Robert C. Reiss
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5109 Stoney Bridge Court
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Doc Brown's Barber Shop

Doc Brown was a barber in St. Louis Park and there is an existing picture showing him cutting hair in 1903. In the 1920's and 30's he ran a unconventional barber shop in the Walker Building. The barber shop incorporated a cigar/confectionary store and pool hall.

On July 25, 1925 a tornado came through and destroyed the barbershop. A wall clock was blown off the wall and smashed. It looked like a hopeless wreck. Someone printed the time and date on the face when it was stopped by the tornado. The clock hung on the wall for a while until Doc took it apart and washed the works in kerosene and put it back on the wall. It started to run and continued running for many years. In front of the shop was a barber pole that was bolted to the side walk. It was a tall pole with a revolving barber pole enclosed in glass. Every morning after arriving at the shop it had to be wound so it would revolve. The shop closed at 7:00 PM and Doc did not want it revolving after that. By trial and error he found the right formula. By winding the barber pole seven and a half times, it would stop completely by 7:00

O'clock.

Doc had a live alligator that lived in his shop. Apparently a customer caught this alligator in Florida and sent it to him as a joke. Doc did not know what to do with it, so he fixed a spot for it in his front window where it lived for thirteen years. Everybody who lived in the Park in the 1930's knew about Doc's alligator.

No one seems to remember what happened to the alligator but we have recently heard rumors that it may still be alive. If it had escaped it could be possible because alligators live 50-60 years. We would like to find this former resident. We do not know if he (or she) decided to try to get back to Florida. If so, it might still be on the way, or it might have just found its way to one of the lakes, such as Minnetonka. We need your help. Please report any alligator sighting. Do not forget that alligators can grow up to a foot a year so you could be looking for something substantial.

We also need any personal information you might have on this alligator. Does it have a name? Is it a he or she and how do you tell? We need this information to make sure we have the right alligator when we find him.

Elmwood Study

Robert Jorvig has been selected to serve as the St. Louis Park Historical Society's representative on the Elmwood Community Advisory Committee. This committee will work with the City of St. Louis Park and Hennepin County to develop a long range vision for the future land use/transportation scenario for the industrial/commercial

neighborhood generally west of Highway 100, east of Alabama, south of Highway 7 and including Jorvig Park. The study will be conducted over the next six months with a final report being made in the fall of 2002. Residents, business and property owners will be provided the opportunity and are encouraged to contribute to this study.

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