



The Re-ECHO

St. Louis Park

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

Thomas Barlow Walker

Thomas Barlow Walker was born in Ohio in 1840. When his father died in 1849, he was forced to go to work to support his family and finance his education. He got a job with the Minneapolis company Fletcher Hulet and traveled all over the Northwest selling grindstones. In 1863, he married Hulet's daughter and they moved to Minneapolis.

In Minneapolis he was employed as a surveyor, and he learned the value of the pine tree stands in Northern Minnesota. With his knowledge and money from Minneapolis businessmen, the firm of Butler, Wells and Walker was formed to invest in the pine forests. With various partners, he became the largest operator in Minnesota. Eventually the Walker family interests were concentrated in the Red River Lumber Company. Lumbering, sale of depleted ore lands, and real estate deals made Walker a millionaire many times over.

One of T. B. Walker's real estate deals was St. Louis Park. He was president of the Minneapolis Land and Investment Company. This company was formed in 1893 with a plan to build an industrial village. Walker publicly stated that the company has no philanthropic objectives and was being established to make a profit for the investors.

Many outlying sites were considered. Walker favored St. Louis Park because he thought that the railroads would help in the development of industry.

The plan was to make the village a factory owned suburb. It was to be modeled after Pullman, Illinois. In Pullman, the Pullman Motor Coach

Company owned the homes, stores, schools, etc. to provide all the necessities for the plant workers.

In 1890, a surveyor was employed to replat St. Louis Park to provide the three zoning regulations for a self sufficient village. The new plat had a provision for deeding the streets, roads and parks to the village while reserving to the Minneapolis Land and Investment Company the right to lay gas, water, underground conduit and mains and the right to operate a street railroad system. Once the plat was approved by the village council, T. B. Walker and the Minneapolis Land and Investment Company started grading road and buying up lots.

Next, they had to find industries for the industrial suburb. The Monitor Manufacturing Company, a producer of grain drills, was persuaded to move to St. Louis Park. Its incentives were free land on which to build the factory and a financial incentive paid for every 25 jobs. The Monitor was the largest employer in St. Louis Park until it burned in the 1930's. Other industries that were enticed to the Park were the Minneapolis Jarless Spring Carriage Company, the Malleable Iron Company, the Shaft-Pierce Shoe Company and the Minneapolis Easterly Harvester Company. Gilbert Walker, a son, ran several of these companies.

Although Walker's interests were not to be philanthropic, his concept of the industrial village made it necessary for his company to provide the village with a great deal of financial help. It donated land for schools and built a streetcar

The Re-ECHO is published quarterly by the St. Louis park Historical Society and is written 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 St. Louis Park High School since 1917.

Robert C. Reiss

(952) 470 1762

rcreiss@aol.com

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line from Minneapolis. Together with Monitor Drill the company built about 100 new homes, store buildings (the brick block) and three hotels.

The depression of 1893 to 1898 brought development to a standstill. Monitor Drill Company shut down for a year and caused the failure of the Easterly Company. T. B. Walker reduced or canceled rents for his tenants. He took over the Easterly Company at some financial loss to himself. He and his wife delivered baskets of groceries to hard pressed workers.

Early in the 20th century, Walker withdrew from business and devoted his time to civic and philanthropic enterprises, especially his growing art collection. He was proud of his collection and had a special room in his home open to the public.

Subsequent additions to his home became

the Walker Art Gallery. He then moved his home from downtown Minneapolis to the current Hennepin Avenue location of the Walker Gallery. He established the Walker Foundation in 1925 to administer the gallery and collections. Two years later, he gave the foundation a substantial permanent endowment.

Walker actively supported the Young Men's Christian Association, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and other philanthropic enterprises. He helped found and financially supported the Minneapolis Public Library system which named a branch after him.

Thomas Barlow Walker died in 1928, survived by five sons and a daughter. He left his mark on Minneapolis and St. Louis Park.

The Methodists

Aldersgate Methodist is not the oldest congregation in St. Louis Park, but it has been meeting since before 1900. It started out as the First Methodist meeting in a building just off Walker Street on Brownlow Avenue at the end of T. B. Walker's street car line. It became known as Walker's Methodist. It met at this location until June of 1925 when a tornado went right down Walker Street which at the time was St. Louis Park's main street. The church was damaged so badly that it had to be torn down.

In 1913, a second group of Methodists was meeting in Brookside and built a little church at 4241 Brookside Ave. It is not clear whether the two churches merged or just started meeting together. However, the bell that was saved from the Brownlow Avenue church was mounted on the Brookside church building. This building was enlarged in 1927 and again in 1934.

The members of the Methodist meeting house who met at Toledo Avenue and

Minnetonka Boulevard combined with Brookside Methodist in 1947. The building on Brookside Avenue became too small. A new home was built at 3857 Wooddale in 1950 and the congregation changed the name to Aldersgate. The bell that had been moved from Brownlow Avenue was moved to the new church. After the Methodists moved from the Brookside building it was acquired by the First Church of Christian Science. It served as a reading room until 1988. At that time, because Christian Science membership had dropped so low, it was decided to close the doors of the reading room.

The Anglican Church of St. Dunstan's had been meeting in the Edina-Morningside Congregational church building and took over the Brookside building. The Anglican Church was part of the Episcopal church but split in 1977. The Anglican Church occupies the building today.

Help!

In 1956, Earl Ainsworth gave the City Council framed pictures of all the former mayors of St. Louis Park including one of Mr. Hamilton. These pictures were approximately 11 x 17 x 20 inches in size. All of these pictures were stored in the City Hall print shop until 1971. At

that point they disappeared and have not been seen since. It is assumed that someone borrowed them for an exhibit and they were never got returned. Does anyone know anything that would help us find them? They would be hard or may be impossible to replace.

Thomas L. Friedman

Thomas Friedman, the world renowned author and journalist, was born on July 20, 1953 and graduated from St. Louis Park High School. In an article that he wrote for the New York Times, he said his St. Louis Park High School journalism teacher Hattie Steinberg, (who also supervised the publication of the school Echo) had made a very important difference in his life. He took her journalism course in 1969 and never needed or taken another journalism course.

Friedman joined the New York Times in 1981 as a financial reporter specializing in OPEC and oil related news and later served as the Chief Diplomatic, Chief White House, and International Economic correspondents. He is a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner and has travel thousands of miles reporting on the Middle East conflict, the end of the Cold War, and US domestic and foreign policy, international economics and the worldwide impact of the terrorist threat. His Foreign Affairs Column, which appears twice a week in the Times, is syndicated to 700 other newspapers worldwide.

Friedman is the author of "From Beirut to Jerusalem," which won both the

National Book and Overseas Press Club Awards in 1989 and was on The New York Times Bestseller list for nearly 12 months. Friedman also wrote "The Lexus and the Olive Tree," which was one of 1999 best selling business books, and winner of the 2000 Overseas Press Club Award for the best non-fiction book on foreign policy. His most recent book, "Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World after September 11," consists of columns Friedman published about September 11 as well as a diary of his private experiences and reflections during his reporting on the post-September 11 world traveling from Afghanistan to Israel to Europe to Indonesia to Saudi Arabia.

Friedman graduated summa cum laude from Brandeis University with a degree in Mediterranean Studies and received a Masters degree in Modern Middle East Studies from Oxford. He served as a visiting professor at Harvard University and has been awarded honorary degrees from several universities. He lives in Bethesda, MD with his wife, Ann and their two daughters.

[Most of the above biographical information was provided by Thomas Friedman's office at The New York Times.]

The Old Parsonage

In 1940 Joe Billman's Lilac Way Funeral Home opened at Excelsior and Wooddale at Highway 100 in a building that was originally the 1886 parsonage of the Union Congregational Church. (The church had moved to 37th and Alabama in 1893).

For many years before 1940, the parsonage was rented by the Friegang family. The Friegangs had moved to the Park shortly after the last of their five children was born in 1919. They had a truck farm on a large parcel of land stretching south along Wooddale from Excelsior. Ferris Keyt remembers that the "Friegang boys were older and had constructed an extensive series of tunnels that my mother did her best to keep me out of." A former resident describes the home as having four large bedrooms upstairs and a fancy staircase.

The site of the Parsonage purchased by Joe Billman included the land that is now the Most Holy trinity's parking lot. This he sold to the church in 1944.

During the renovation and expansion of the Parsonage, the labor union came down on a local carpenter, Walter Beach, for working on Sunday. After he was fired he went home, got his shotgun, returned to the scene and let a shot fly. He failed to hit anyone but was hauled off to jail. Had his aim been better it might have been an inauspicious beginning for a funeral home.

Billman's Park Mortuary was an expansion of Billman's Mortuary at 2121 Nicollet Avenue. In 1945, Joe advertised "finer funerals for less" and "It is better to KNOW US and not NEED US than to NEED US and not KNOW US." He sponsored a radio program of Bible

The Old Parsonage cont'd

dramas on WLOL. Joe ran the establishment with his son John. After WW II, John attended the mortuary science program at the University of Minnesota and was a well known Gopher football player.

In 1953 ground was broken next door for a new building. The first building had been just a chapel. The new facility was the full-service Park Funeral Home with John Billman as director. The building was prominently displayed on the cover of the St. Louis Park directory. After moving into the new building, Joe Billman turned the old building into La Miracle Dining which opened in December 1953. The restaurant changed to the Char Broiler Cafe in 1957. The next year it became the Blossom Diner (aka Phil's Diner.)

The building became the Wooddale Professional Building when Billman added space for 15 businesses. Over the years it housed doctors, a barber shop, beauty shop, a printer, a rental business

and a number of other companies. The tenant with the longest tenure was Chiropractor Glenn Braatz. Elayne Galleries located there in 1969. Elayne eventually moved farther west on Excelsior Boulevard.

As years went on, the city found more and more code violations in the old building. By May of 1988 it was no longer tenable and it was demolished. Gearty-Delmore's current facility was built on the site soon after.

Note: This article was researched and written by Jeanne Andersen, who was recently confronted by the police for taking picture of old homes. Jeanne is a member of The St. Louis Park Historical Society and maintains a web site on St. Louis Park History. Visit at WWW.Jeanneandersen.com

Memories and pictures of Park history are welcome and may keep her out of jail. Contact Jeanne at Jeanneandersen@comcast.net or 612-396-6292.

This and That

Happy Birthday!!

Irene Sewall celebrated her 100th birthday on November 6th 2004. She has lived in St. Louis Park for 80 years, 50 on Cambridge Street. One of her various jobs was for Reiss's cafe. She took up painting at age 65.

She raised five daughters and two sons. She is currently in the Park Plaza Center. Her health is good but she needs a wheelchair.

The St. Louis Park Historical Society meets the first Tuesday of every month. The next meeting dates are:

December 6 2004

January 4, 2005

February 1, 2005

You are invited to attend.

The Re-ECHO
5109 Stoney Bridge Court
Minnetonka MN 55345