



# RE-ECHO

*Newsletter of the St. Louis Park Historical Society*

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## **Robert C. Reiss**

**1923 - 2006**

*With heavy hearts, we dedicate this issue of his beloved Re-ECHO to Bob Reiss. The following tribute was written by Bob's friend Don Swenson, just days after Bob's passing.*

The founder and editor of the Re-ECHO, Bob Reiss, had a talent for describing Park's history in a concise, interesting and often humorous way. He grew up at the "turn-around" for the streetcar line (Lake Street, Walker St. and Brownlow Ave.) where his parents operated a business initially called "The Waiting Station." During the 1930s depression years, Bob and his three brothers helped their dad and mom as they struggled through stages of being a friendly tavern and then a café. By the 1960s, Bob's brothers Dick and Jim had developed the business into Reiss's, a well-known restaurant and supper club.

After Bob's Navy service in World War II, he attended the University of Minnesota and received a degree in electrical engineering. In business he used his considerable talents and outgoing personality in engineering sales. He didn't return to the family business, but he never lost track of his St. Louis Park roots.

In the late 1990s, Bob joined a small but dedicated group that was determined to promote the fledgling Historical Society. He became active in the group's functions, helped to write the early history of St. Louis Park in the book called *Something in the Water*, and promoted sales and distribution of the publication. He came up with the idea for the Re-ECHO newsletter and soon was in contact with "old-timers" who were sending him comments that he translated into interesting articles about early years in the Park.

Bob Reiss and Barbara Davis had a great deal in common. They both grew up in The Park, they were members of Union Congregational church, and both were widowed. Their marriage was a fortunate event for the Historical Society. They spent countless volunteer hours together as they helped to improve the organization. With other board members they persisted in supplementing the Depot location with a practical and more visible spot at the Lenox Community Center.

With Bob's passing we've lost a great historical resource. His legacy, however, is a strengthened Historical Society - to a large extent because he served with distinction as the first editor of the Re-ECHO.

# Old St. Louis Park

*By Robert C. Reiss*

The City of St. Louis Park has approved the building of a 78,000 sq. ft. office/showroom on Lake Street just south of Highway 7. This building is being built on the “ruins” of the original Village.

In T.B. Walker’s original Plan, formulated in the early 1890’s, Walker Street was to be the main street. The streetcar line from Minneapolis terminated at Walker and Lake Street. At that time, Highway 7 and the nearby Dan Patch Railroad did not exist. Walker’s dream for the Park was that it was to be a company town with company ownership of the jobs, homes and retail stores.

The Monitor Drill Company was the first manufacturing plant to provide the jobs for the town. It was built on the site of this new building. The company had moved from Horicon, Wisconsin, with 25 families. When Monitor moved to the Park, it built 18 homes for its workers. Because they were built in a swamp they had to be moved: some to Oak Hill and some to the Centre (Elmwood) area. Walker’s dream for a company town died with the Crash of 1893. Nevertheless, Monitor was a major employer until 1929, when the plant burned to the ground and all of the manufacturing was moved to Hopkins.

In 1934, the vacant site was taken over by the National Lead Company. National Lead removed impurities from lead plates, car batteries, and lead containers and poured it into 5x24 inch “pigs.” About 40 people were employed until the plant ceased operations in 1981. In 1983, the site was declared a federally-designated Superfund site. The water was to be cleaned up and monitored, and the plant site was capped with asphalt.

The Golden brothers applied for a permit for a junk yard (“Golden Auto Parts”) on a 4-1/2 acre site on the front part of the National Lead property in 1963 (now the pawn shop on Highway 7 at Louisiana). They fenced an area for about 75 cars. The Golden’s closed the lot on November 24, 1982. An adjacent site to this property is now an Excel Energy substation. An area of the substation was donated and built into a Little League baseball field by the St. Louis Park Lion’s Club, but was only used for a year before it had to be abandoned for high levels of lead.

The new development calls for further remediation of the affected site, but dirt will not be moved, as that would cause a worse hazard. Thus the old becomes new and the area is revitalized for future generations.

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## Our New Treasurer

*We are pleased to announce that we have a new Treasurer! Her name is Megan Crosby, and here’s her story:*

Let’s see, interesting information about me... I was born in Wisconsin but have lived in Minnesota pretty much my whole life. My family moved to St. Louis Park when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I went to St. Louis Park High School. During most of my high school and college days, I worked at the Target by Knollwood Mall, which is where I met my husband. After going to college in Iowa for a year, I transferred to Bethel University in St. Paul. I graduated in December of 2005 with a degree in Business/Accounting. Since then, I have worked as a Grant Accountant at the Minneapolis Medical

Research Foundation, which is the research branch of Hennepin County Medical Center. My husband and I got married in July of 2004. We live in St. Louis Park with our two feline sons, Howie and Scamper. You can find us at the St. Louis Park Petsmart every Saturday morning, taking care of the cats for the animal shelter that has cats for adoption there.

## Write Your Own Story!

If you’ve got an interesting story or memory that you’d like to share, please by all means write it down and send it in. Did you waitress at El Patio? Were you in a play with the SLP Community Theater? Is a character in a Coen Bros. movie named after you? Now’s the time to write your stories down – for your family and for us!



.... Is on the air!

The long awaited St. Louis Park Historical Society web site has been launched! Everything you could possibly want to know about St. Louis Park history is there: people, businesses, mayors, entertainment, transportation – even a list of every Miss St. Louis Park! The pages are linked, so if you come to an interesting reference that's in blue, just click on it to get more information. There are literally hundreds of pages, so pace yourself!

The text of the site has been posted, although more information is added every day. Our next task is to insert pictures to illustrate the information. We will use the pictures in the collection, but are in dire need of others – if you have a picture of historical significance to St. Louis Park, please let us know.

The reason that this is a web site and not a book is that it's not finished. You will notice that there are

several disclaimers as to the accuracy of the information. The info came from many, many sources, starting with the *St. Louis Park Dispatch* newspaper. Then there are phone directories, histories written by organizations and churches, websites galore, tax records, inspection records, Village/City Council minutes, Police and Fire Department scrapbooks – the list goes on and on. And, of course, we have interviewed many people, sometimes formally, sometimes just at Bunny's. People remember different things differently, so there's plenty of room for error. The beauty of the web site is that at any time you can click on "contact us" and find our address, phone number, and a special email set up ([history@slphistory.org](mailto:history@slphistory.org)) to send your comments, additions, and corrections. As you can see, this is very much a work in progress. We need you to help us continue the search for historical St. Louis Park. Thank you!

## Not the Parkettes but the Pomperettes

*The Historical Society has been visited by Bob Patrin, who developed a St. Louis Park-related dance team. See the complete story in the Fall issue of Hennepin History newsletter. Here's how Bob Reiss wrote it up:*

In 1955, there were few cheerleader/dance line opportunities for girls. Roosevelt High was the only high school with a dance team in Minneapolis. Bob Patrin, a soldier returning to the University of Minnesota, had observed girls performing at a football game at Berkeley. He wanted to organize something similar for the Minnesota Gophers.

As a student coach at Minnesota, Patrin had access to Ike Armstrong, the athletic director. At first Armstrong was opposed to short skirted co-eds appearing on the sidelines for football games. He relented after seeing films of west coast performances, and he signed a contract with Patrin to provide cheerleader/dancers for the 1955 football game – with the restriction that the girls' skirts reached below the knees and that they wear sweaters.

The first recruit was a former Parkette who was attending the U. She recruited her friends, so most of the first Pomperettes were former Parkettes. Patrin was not able to get ready for the 1955 football season, so the first performances were for basketball and hockey teams in 1956. Even then there were problems: the Minnesota Band did not like the distraction and it was difficult to get them to play the girls' music. But group thrived and made a trip to the Rose Bowl in 1962.

The Pomperettes and the Parkettes found themselves in competition with each other for performances. Both performed at various times for the Lakers. When the Vikings came to town in 1961, Patrin formed the Vi-Queens, with some SLP members, and the girls performed for the team for two years. Although the Vikings wanted to continue the contract, Patrin could not provide the girls, nor did he have adequate practice room. The Parkettes were able to provide what was needed and became the Vikings' cheerleaders for several years. Both the Pomperettes and the Vi-Queens ended their run in 1963.

## Who We Are

The St. Louis Park Historical Society was founded in 1971 to record and preserve the history of St. Louis Park. The archives of the Society are located in the Historic Depot in Jorvig Park (37<sup>th</sup> and Brunswick) and at the Lenox Community Center (6715 Minnetonka Blvd.). Office hours at the Lenox site are Mondays and Thursdays from 10 to noon, and by appointment. Our mailing address is:

3700 Monterey Drive  
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

To contact us by phone, you can call 952-924-2550 (note corrected number). Leave a message, and someone will return the call. Our email address is [history@slphistory.org](mailto:history@slphistory.org). You may also contact a member of our board of directors:

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Join us on our web site at  
[www.slphistory.org](http://www.slphistory.org).

## About the Re-ECHO

The Re-ECHO is published quarterly by the St. Louis Park Historical Society. Its purpose is to share information about the City's history and the Society's activities. The Re-ECHO was started by Robert C. Reiss. The name was inspired by the ECHO newspaper, which has been published by and for the students of SLP High School since 1917.

## Fun Facts

## Join Us!

The St. Louis Park Historical Society is a nonprofit organization and is wholly dependent on membership dues and donations for its operating costs, including the cost of mailing the Re-ECHO. You don't have to be a member to receive the Re-ECHO, but we really need new members, and are looking for people to become active in the Society. Meetings are on the first Tuesday of every month, and are open to everyone. They are held at Lenox Community Center October-May and at the Historic Depot June-September.

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**The Re-Echo**  
**St. Louis Park Historical Society**  
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**St. Louis Park, MN 55416**