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REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

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Editor's Note: We follow the group, "Flashbacks of St. Louis Park" on Facebook, always looking for newsletter content. On July 6, someone posted a 1937 photo of a woman named Rose Elias, graveside at Lakewood Cemetery, with the comment: "I wonder what the back story is?" We adopt the old newspaper adage, "If it bleeds, it leads," and provide some of that back story herein. We also salute The Webb Group, Inc. of 3924 Dakota Avenue South for their new corporate membership and their generous financial contribution to the Society.

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Our 2019 book of Park history, "Places in the Park," we noted that, "We focus on St. Louis Park as a physical place, created by the forces of nature and later by the people who chose to live here and the railroads passing through. The fleshed-out stories of those people, some of whom were pivotal in the creation of today's city, are worth telling, but are beyond the limited scope of this document."

In past ReEchos, we've fleshed out a variety of interesting people who lived here, some, like Society founder Marie Hartmann, for her entire life, others born here but moving on, still others just passing through. That infinitely interesting community of human beings who have occupied various places in the Park might be seen as fish in a river of time, flowing slowly or rapidly through this place. Some ride the fast current, some dwell in the still pools, all are borne along through life, mostly below the surface, but sometimes flashing up for a brief exposure.

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Rose Vifian-Eggers-Steingraber-Brekke-Elias became a village resident in 1932, marrying Park Justice of the Peace Joseph F. Elias. The couple resided at 3020 Monterey, a place owned by Joseph, where his earlier family situation involving a wife and two children had ended in divorce.

Rose flashed to the surface of regional consciousness in July 1937, when she was arrested for slaying Joseph with a pair of sewing scissors. Monday, July 19, 1937, was probably a slow news day at the *Minneapolis Star*, as, clearly, it bled, and it led:



The media quickly established that the alleged perp had been married three times previously and speculated that, just maybe, she had offed her former hubbies as well. That line of attack was abandoned when evidence of three previous divorces was uncovered, but a thrice-divorced woman in 1937 was an object of deep suspicion, as her trial would demonstrate.

TRAVELS AND TRAVAILS OF ROSE

Rose Vifian was born in December 1888 in French-speaking Neuchatel Switzerland and immigrated to the U.S. around 1892. The 1890 U.S. Federal Census shows the family on a farm in Delaware County, Iowa, about five miles north of the town of Monticello and maybe a dozen miles south of Iowa's more recent Field of Dreams. The Census suggests that her father, Edward, had immigrated in 1888, the year of Rose's birth, and mother Caroline, Rose, and brother Charles came along four years later. Daughter May, son Paul, and daughter Eva were born on the Iowa farm. It was a time of great upheaval in Europe. The number of Swiss emigrating to the US in the 1880s equalled the total amount over the previous 70 years.

Iowa death records show that Edward died on 20 November 1905, age 41. The US Federal Census of 1910 showed now-widowed Caroline as head of household, living on Sherman Street in Monticello with daughters Rose (21), May (16), Eva (11), and brother Paul (14). Having apparently lost the farm on Edward's death, son Charles (19) had left home, probably working as a farm hand. Rose was employed as a teacher in a country school.

Rose married John J. Eggers, a local farmer in September 1910, bore him a son, John Edward, in 1912. By 1913, Rose was divorced, living at home in Monticello and again teaching school. She married Gustav Steingraber, a railroad worker from Marshall, MN, in 1917 in Dodge Center, MN. The 1920 U.S. Federal Census shows her living there with Gustav and son Edward. Although we found no record of her divorce from Gustav, Rose married Norman James Brekke (of who-knows-where?) in Blue Earth, MN in October 1926.

Rose next surfaces in the 1929 Minneapolis City Directory, living alone, just off campus of the University of Minnesota. She was presumably studying nursing, as the U.S. Federal Census of 1930 finds her residing at the Glen Lake Sanatorium in Minnetonka as a practical nurse. That Census contains 20 pages of entries for the Sanatorium, listing over 700 tuberculosis patients and over 250 nurses and other staffers living on site and caring for them. (In 1930, Rose's 18-year-old son Edward is living back on the farm with his dad, J.J. Eggers.) In those days, the Como-Harriet streetcar line would have delivered Rose from campus to the Glen Lake stop in 45 minutes. Her divorce from the elusive Norman James Brekke was recorded in February 1930.



GLEN LAKE SANATORIUM

Per Wikipedia, the Glen Lake Sanatorium, opened on January 4, 1916, for the treatment of tuberculosis with a capacity of 50 patients, and closed in 1976. It was the fifth of fourteen county sanatoria that opened in Minnesota between 1912 and 1918, and the first to be accredited by the American Medical Association. The sanatorium had its own post office, and the mailing address was Glen Lake Sanatorium, Oak Terrace, Minnesota, until the surrounding area was incorporated into the Village of Minnetonka.

The peak of the tuberculosis epidemic in Hennepin County occurred in 1936 when Sanatorium's patient population exceeded 700, with patients housed in hallways on gurneys and on porches enclosed and transformed into wards. The average stay by a patient at Glen Lake was 538 days.

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

We recently held our Annual Meeting and had a chance to peruse some of the newer donations to our archives. The newest acquisition is a folding card table with advertisements for various SLP businesses on the top surface, which must have been some type of promotional item. We know that Hopkins has many of these as well, so it must have been the hot idea of the time. We also recently acquired a variety of bowling related items from Park Tavern including a pair of toddler bowling shoes, which are both cute and easier to store than an adult pair of shoes! There were many other items including photo albums from the Women's Club, the newest high school yearbooks, and miscellaneous items related to COVID as we work to collect items from recent history.

At the meeting, we also announced the recipient of the first annual Marie Hartmann Award, which recognizes someone who has uniquely contributed to the Historical Society in a way that honors the legacy of Marie Hartmann. Marie was the founder of the Society and was a passionate advocate for the history of our city. She started the Society with the work to preserve the Milwaukee Depot in 1971 and led the Society until her death in 1996. She spent years gathering articles, artifacts, and interviews that form the core of the collection today. I was honored to present the inaugural award to Jeanne Andersen, former Trustee of many years. As many know, Jeanne is the author of most of the content on our website and was an ardent promoter of the Society who wore many hats for us to ensure we stayed active and relevant to the community. Thank you, Jeanne, for your years of dedication to our organization; we are all richer for it!

Be on the lookout for upcoming events as we look to increase our programming efforts. Most recently, Bill Beyer spoke at the Linden Hills History Group where he reviewed some of the stories from the book he authored, *Places In The Park* (available for sale on our website!). We are working on scheduling a few other events as well which will be announced on our Facebook Page, via our email newsletter (if you don't get it, please email us so we can add you to the distribution list), and posted on our website. So stay tuned!

As always, we welcome your ideas or stories to help with this period of rejuvenation – or even better, your involvement in any of our activities.

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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(A video documentary *From Beginning to End: Glen Lake Sanatorium and Oak Terrace Nursing Home* was produced in 1990 as a tribute to the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Sanatorium and can be viewed at the Hennepin History Museum.)

Rose was among the hundred-plus medical staff members living at the Sanatorium, including practical nurses, trained nurses, and student nurses. In true federal Census bureaucratic form, all the nurses were listed as "servants" under the box, "Relation to head of family." Servant or not, there was a Depression going on and nursing as a public employee would have provided a steady and secure income. And, for entertainment, it was only three streetcar stops to the many taverns at 9th Avenue and Excelsior Road in Hopkins.

Perhaps the stresses of caring for an overflow population of seriously ill patients for two years took a toll. Rose was married to Joseph F. Elias, a St. Louis Park Justice of the Peace, in April 1932. They resided at Joseph's house at 3020 Monterey. We don't know if she gave up nursing then.



JOSEPH, JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

Joseph Elias had been elected to five consecutive two-year terms as Justice of the Peace beginning in 1926. Minnesota JPs existed from territorial times in 1849 until the role was abolished by the legislature in 1977. They functioned, in essence, as local small claims courts, allowed by state statute to adjudicate actions arising on contract, for the recovery of money only...for damages for an injury to the person or to real property, for taking, detaining, or injuring personal property, for a penalty given by statute, for an action upon a bond conditioned for the payment of money, all involving amounts less than \$100.

Actions outside JP jurisdiction included causes involving

the title to real estate, false imprisonment, libel, slander, malicious prosecution, criminal conversation, or seduction, or upon a promise to marry or for an action against an executor, administrator, or guardian. The legislature saw fit to make an additional limit on JPs:

No justice of the peace shall hold his office or court in any saloon, nor in any room adjacent to a saloon, or connecting therewith by door or otherwise. Nor shall he hold his office in the same room with a practicing attorney unless such attorney is his law partner...

Saloons and attorneys were apparently incompatible with justice, and although drunk and disorderly conduct was not specifically listed as a covered offense, one might believe that JPs saw lots of such crimes.

ARREST AND TRIAL

From an account compiled by Jeanne Andersen on the Society's website:

Mrs. Rose Elias was arrested after killing her husband with a pair of scissors during a Saturday night quarrel... Mrs. Elias had her husband arrested for assault the previous June, and he did the same the following October. Mrs. Elias pleaded self-defense, but the deathbed statement given by her husband won her a conviction.

Inadmissible was testimony from Joe Elias's former wife, Mrs. William Mitchell, who was prepared to say that Rose had told her two years ago that she would use an ice pick on Joe if he assaulted her. Another judge, William R. Reilley, was prepared to testify that Joe had told him that Rose had "beaten him on the head with a rolling pin."

Emmett F. Haskin, Hopkins pharmacist, was the man sitting with Rose at the beer parlor when Joe came to pick up Rose and testified that Joe was in an angry mood. Three drunks that were seen before Joe in night court also testified that Joe was drunk and didn't give them a chance to make a plea before fining them.

After 30 hours of deliberation, the jury found her guilty on October 15. On October 19, she was sentenced to 5 - 20 years in state prison... On May 6, 1938, Rose's request for a new trial was denied in District Court. On May 9, 1938, her lawyer filed for a appeal in the Minnesota Supreme Court.

On April 21, 1939, the Minnesota Supreme Court (State v. Elias, 205 Minn. 156, 285 N.W. 475 (1939)) granted Rose a new trial after it disallowed Joseph's testimony... only permissible in court if the person knew he was dying, and Joseph had made statements about getting a divorce when he got out of there... The Court also cited other errors made

by the Prosecution...Based on the Supreme Court decision, the lower court judge nollod the original indictment, ruling that it would not be prosecuted again. Rose was released from Shakopee on May 18, 1939.

The prosecution opened arguments with the notion that Rose was, "...a woman with experience in the ways of life... She is 48 years old and has been married four times. She is a nurse accustomed to dealing with sick and injured men... Her story was made up as fast as she could talk."

Rose's lawyer was Kleve Flakne, who had served as Mayor of St. Louis Park from 1932 to 1933. As Mayor, Flakne likely knew Joseph as an elected JP, and both Eliases as neighbors, living just five blocks away in the Park. Kleve must have believed in Rose's innocence; she lacked funds for an appeal of her conviction, so Kleve funded it himself. He was perhaps influenced by the support she had from her son Edward who attended the trial, and of a former patient at Glen Lake, Mrs. Pearl Grinolds, who appeared as a character witness.



In their written opinion on the appeal of Rose's conviction, the MN Supremes were more than a little stern and pointed:

Numerous other errors are assigned. Those most seriously pressed have to do with alleged acts of misconduct on the part of the prosecutors. Particular objection is registered

against prejudicial statements contained in the opening statement to the jury. We have already referred to the most objectionable of these statements. We deem it sufficient to say that in some respects the prosecutor's conduct verged on the border line. Often this results from an excess of zeal rather than from a desire to do a defendant an injustice. Much discretion is left to the trial court as to what is improper by way of argument. We trust that the court will require a more tempered opening statement and closing argument in the event of a new trial. Reversed and new trial granted.

A clinical psychologist we know offered some thoughts on Rose's unusual life story:

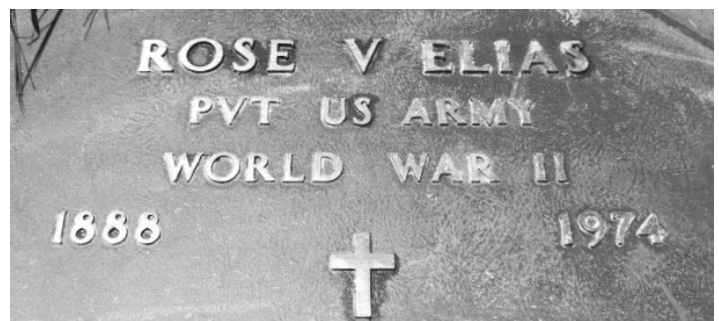
Three percent of men and women marry three times. Elizabeth Taylor -- who had seven husbands -- is an outlier. The most commonly reported major contributors to divorce are lack of commitment, infidelity, and conflict/arguing... most common 'final straw' reasons are infidelity, domestic violence, and substance use. More participants blamed their partners than blamed themselves for the divorce.

Rose more than likely had developmental "attachment" issues, along with unresolved childhood traumas caused by chaos in the house, domestic violence, death of a loved one, emotional sexual or physical abuse, or stress caused by poverty. People sometimes make the same mistakes and marry the same kind of person again.

Losing her father at birth for four years when he left the family for America, and at his death also losing the family's farm-home and livelihood, might have resulted in multiple stresses. Her mother died in 1925; her will left Rose \$100, her granddaughter Vera got a gold watch, and her remaining children and grandchildren got her personal effects and clothing, which amounted to not very much.

After Rose's acquittal in 1939 and moving to Oklahoma City to live near her son, the entire world was turned upside down by WWII. She enlisted in the U.S. Army as a Private and served from 1943-44, presumably as a nurse. She never remarried.

The 1950 Federal Census shows her living with her son, John Edward Eggers, in Houston, Texas. Rose died of congestive heart failure and pneumonia there in 1974, outliving her son by nine years. A modest headstone features her military service.



"CAST OUT THE PEST"

Ruth Elias's stint at the Glen Lake Sanatorium from 1930 to 1932 came not long after the City of Minneapolis Quarantine Hospital, located in the Park and popularly known as the "Pest House," closed. (Ruth and Joseph's home at 3020 Monterey was a mere block west of the place.) Our marvelous website features the exhaustive research on the topic done by Jeanne Andersen.

Larger cities around the state had gotten into the habit of dumping their "undesirables" anywhere convenient, but always beyond their own city limits. In 1883, before the Park became a village, Minneapolis purchased 8.7 acres in then-Minneapolis Township for a "quarantine station." Charles Hanke, whose farm was just south of the property, and future village mayor Joseph Hamilton protested the move without success.



Hanke's farm had been used as a Hennepin County poor farm before he purchased it in 1864, but the county bought a half square mile of land in further-out Hopkins for a much larger operation.

By 1886, the Park became a Village, but the Pest House was a done deal, featuring a building 22 x 32 feet with stone foundation and brick cellar, to accommodate about twenty patients. A stable large enough to keep one pair of horses with room for ambulance was included. A "Potter's Field" (an ancient Biblical reference) for the burial of unlucky patients that didn't survive their illnesses was located on the south part of the site, bordering the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad tracks.

The M&StL's new track had encroached on the burial area and there was much concern that, in the event of a heavy rain, some of the coffins could be exposed to view.

After 1886, the big-city-next-door's dumping of smallpox and cholera patients did not sit well with the new village leaders, and they spent the next three decades fighting to rid the town of the scourge. But not before the hospital complex was expanded to nine buildings. It was finally closed in 1918. From our website:

In a classic show of hindsight, on December 5, 1892, the Village Council passed an ordinance prohibiting "the erection or maintenance of hospitals or pesthouses within St. Louis Park for the treatment, harboring, or care of persons sick from infectious or contagious diseases and prohibiting the sending, bringing or coming into [SLP] of persons so afflicted." In reporting the ordinance in an article called "Cast Out the Pest," the Minneapolis Tribune revealed that "a plan was on foot to take that part of St. Louis Park into the city limits during the next session of the legislature, but this cannot be done without the consent of the people of St. Louis Park." Meanwhile, Alderman Gray rejected the protestations of St. Louis Park. "We were there first, and if the village did not want the quarantine within their limits they could have left it out when they incorporated."



From the July 7, 1899 Minneapolis Tribune:

After the luxurious feast, and while the dark Havanas were distilling a seductive fragrance, the committee strolled across the grassy plat that separates the superintendent's home from the hospital. They found the wards of the long, one-story building, veritable bowers of luxury and delight. Instead of a place to be shunned and avoided, the visitors thought it would pay one to court the smallpox or scarlet fever for the privilege of spending a few weeks at the attractive

>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

resort. The newly painted walls, the light, airy rooms, the clean white beds, the smooth, hard floor, the beautiful grounds, the fine old shade trees – everything about the place was delightful. "I wish I had the smallpox," exclaimed one of the committee, as he exhaled a cloud of blue smoke, "just for the privilege of coming out here and spending a few weeks."

An article from the December 30, 1914 Minneapolis Journal reported:

St. Louis Park citizens are demanding that Minneapolis discontinue its smallpox quarantine hospital and adjoining pauper burial place in that village on the ground that the hospital is a health menace, as homes are being built near it, and that the burial place is not properly conducted and licensed as required by law... Burt H. Carpenter is chairman of the St. Louis Park Commercial Club committee appointed to protest to the city council. That bodies have been buried two and three feet deep and in long trenches and left uncovered in the potter's field in other winters and other charges were made by committeemen...

A longer article on the same day in the Minneapolis Morning Tribune had more graphic details:

Later the practice was begun of burying the pauper dead in the same plat of ground without consulting the village officials. Several hundred bodies have been buried there, it is said, without so much as a notification to the village health department. For the last two or three years it has been the practice, according to the commercial club members, for long trenches to be dug for the graves. When a body is buried it is incased in a rough pine box and paced in the trench beside the coffin of the last pauper. In Summer the coffins are well covered with earth, but in Winter the coffins near the unused end of the trench are covered very lightly. Sometimes, after a windy day, the surface covering of earth is blown away, according to the protestors, and as many as two or three coffins lying near the end of the trench are exposed.

The contagious hospital is located near the streetcar line. Often residents of the village say, convalescent patients discharged from the place take the cars while their faces are still scarred from disease and their clothing is heavy with the odor of formaldehyde. While not perhaps in a condition to spread disease the appearance of such patients, the villagers say, is sufficient to ensue a near panic.

"Potter's Field Fight Won by St. Louis Park" read the

headline on July 8. The Board of Charities and Corrections agreed informally to take immediate steps to remove the hospital and discontinue as soon as possible burying the city's poor on the grounds. They discussed building their own crematorium at Hopewell Hospital, which they estimated would cost about \$6,000 and thought they could get about \$5,000 for the Pest House property.



The Pest House buildings were not occupied for healthcare purposes after 1918 and stood vacant until around 1930, when they probably burned, although records are spotty. In 1955, the part of the property south of Highway 7, which had stood empty for many years, was developed into the Reinhard Brothers Building. In 1988, renovation work at the Diamond Hill Center at 4301 Highway 7 yielded human remains. Assistant State Archaeologist Barbara O'Connell determined that the remains consisted of two jaw bones belonging to a male in his late 20s or early 30s and a bone fragment from an infant's leg.

These days, when faced with a deadly virus we mask-up and quarantine in our own homes. And, while cumulative U.S. Covid deaths have passed a million, Minnesota's deaths per 100,000 are 27% lower; about the same as France, but still twice as high as Canada.





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DISPATCH LOOKBACK

The editors of the St. Louis Park Dispatch were skeptical of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at its creation in August 1949. Imagine how their heads would have exploded over seventy years later upon seeing the NATO flag displayed alongside the Nazi flag in Kiev, Ukraine.



What Will It Lead To?

The Atlantic Pact has been signed, and for the first time the United States finds itself committed to a foreign military alliance.

Next comes the drive for the billions with which to finance the armies of those impotent little countries overseas who have "joined" us in a common defense against possible European aggression (Russian aggression).

The drastic new policy was conceived, and the nation virtually committed to it, without consultation with the Senate, whose constitutional privilege it is to approve all treaties. Then the talk was that acceptance of the Pact would not necessarily obligate the USA to provide more billions for arms for Europe.

Now that the Pact has been signed, the assumption is we must, of course, send over the sinews of war which, as everyone knows, means U. S. billions.

Time will tell, whether all this has been a wise move. We are not expert in foreign affairs, from our seat here in our cubby hole, but there is enough of the alarmist in us to be very fearful of what all this will lead to.

Business has been declining, and as it declines further there will come the growing inclination of Congress to go slow in appropriating further funds for European "defense." Yet Congress probably will be black-jacked into doing so. The chances are good that we will yet send more billions and billions to Europe to be wasted on the so-called cold war.

There is no danger of war with Russia, no more than there is danger of war with Abyssinia, if that little place is still on the map. But to keep the fear alive is to keep certain kinds of business booming, and to help stave off the day of business reckoning on the home front. It is entirely possible that we will find ourselves pumping billions into Europe on the faked up excuse that we must do it for defense, when as a matter of fact we will be doing it simply to keep the wheels turning in certain of the huge factories at home.

At the risk of being glared at as a possible subversive, we should like to record that this whole business of the Atlantic Pact, and the subsequent billions for arms to Europe, looks like bad business, over the long run, to us.