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# REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

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Volume 21.4 / Winter 2022

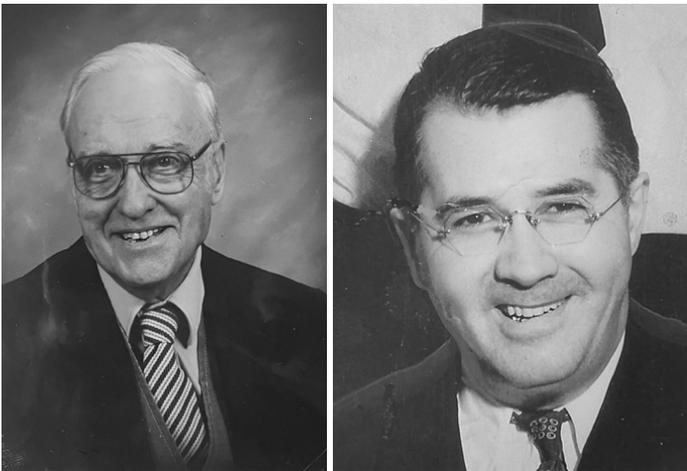
## IN MEMORIAM

The St. Louis Park Historical Society has received gifts in remembrance of loved ones from the following persons:

- From **Bennett Porter** in memory of **Albert Yngve** on 29 October 2022

### Editor's Note:

**Two Irishmen waltzed into the Park in 1941, both Catholic, one a generation younger than the other, one to start a family and other to start a newspaper, one with engine oil in his blood and the other with printers ink. Ed McDevitt and his family and Jimmy Markham and his St. Louis Park Dispatch left indelible impressions on Park history.**



Ed McDevitt and Jimmy Markham

## ENGINE OIL & PRINTER'S INK

### THE MCDEVITTS

Edward Joseph McDevitt and Dolores Kopp were born and raised on farms in rural Chaska, MN in the first third of the 20th century. They found each other and were married in 1939. Children of the Great Depression, they launched their marriage on a shoestring, living in what was then commonly

referred to as a "house-trailer" or "mobile-home," parked just off Lyndale Avenue South near present day Wood Lake Nature Center in Richfield.

In 1941, they sold the 17½ foot trailer, and planted themselves in a real house at 2937 Salem; their daughter Barbara was 8.5 months old. Ed started working for the Great Northern Railway that year as well, a job he kept for thirty-four years. In addition, he continued to do odd jobs and farm work in Chaska; "In my day," Ed said, "any job you could get was a good job." He "laid sod, cut grass, hung storm windows and screens, did painting and plumbing work...I've been about everything under the sun."

The work ethic of the average farm child in those days was, in effect, if you're not sleeping, you had better be working. It was a matter of survival left over from the frontier and heavily reinforced during the Great Depression.

Ed had worked at the sugar beet factory in Chaska through the Depression and became ill there, passing out on the job every few weeks. He was admitted to University of Minnesota hospital and held for observation; due to a medical error, he developed a severe arm infection. That episode likely got him classified 4F shortly thereafter when he went to Fort Snelling for his WWII draft physical.

Ed and Dolores moved to 3393 Brownlow in 1944 because they could not get any building materials to expand their house on Salem due to wartime shortages. He ran his home-grown landscape and gardening business out of an old chicken coop behind his own garage until 1946 when he a built a 20'x40' commercial building right next door at 3389 Brownlow.

Ed later doubled the building's size, adding a second level. He acquired a Schwinn Bicycle franchise, but discount stores undersold him and the franchise was ended. Ed then began selling and repairing Mopeds and Vespas and performing other small engine repair of all kinds. And, he continued to work full-time at the Great Northern Depot while Dolores managed and fed the rapidly expanding family.

The population of St. Louis Park was 7,735 in 1940 and boomed to 43,310 by 1960. Ed and Dolores didn't do it alone, but had 13 children in those years, contributing mightily to the boom. They are: Barb ('40), Wayne ('43), Sharon - D ('44), Gary, ('46), Janice ('47), Patty - D ('49), Dennis ('50), Diane ('52), Ruth ('54), Colleen ('56), stillborn boy ('58), Dean ('60), and Terry ('61).



Ed bought Brookside Hardware in 1957 after the owner went bankrupt; he changed the name to Ed's Hardware and hired an eighty-year-old Swede named John Johnson to run it for him while maintaining his job at the Union Depot. He owned the store for 5 years until Topps and Target changed the retail landscape in the area.

Ed and Dolores were born and raised Roman Catholic. The Catholics were mostly absent from the Park until the mid-1920s when Holy Family church and school were built. Before then, they generally went to Hopkins for church. Most of the Catholics could be found among the Irish who lived in the boggy, peaty north and the west sides of the Park, places that would have suited the Irish heritage of Ed McDevitt just fine.

Holy Family was about half a mile from the McDevitt Home at 2937 Salem. When they moved to 3389 Brownlow they were about a tenth of a mile further away. Because Ed owned an early station wagon, he gave rides to the nuns at Holy Family wherever they needed to go - St. Paul for training, of Wisconsin for transfer. "I've always been tolerant and understanding of other people. If they ask questions about my religion, I answer them, but I don't try to get anyone to believe the way I do. People will learn more through seeing what you do, than by what you say."

The Knights of Columbus (K of C) is a global Catholic fraternal service and mutual benefit society, founded in 1882, with membership limited to "practical" Catholic men. In 1955, Ed became a charter member of K of C Council # 3949 in the Park. He managed the start of charitable Bingo for the group, eventually earning the title "Mr. Bingo," after raising \$300,000 for charity over 20 years. The McDevitt family was voted the Knights of Columbus "Family of the Year" in 1962.

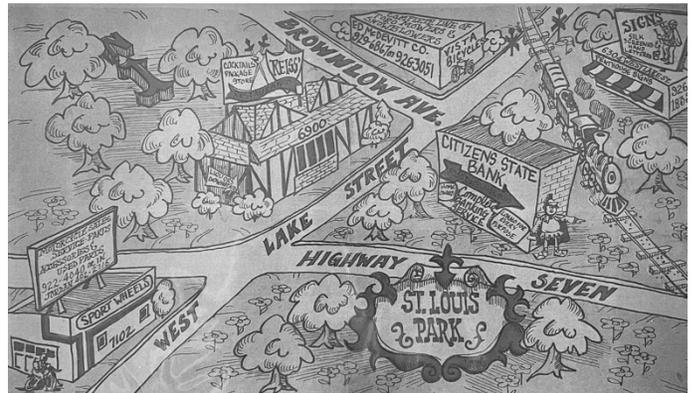
Ed told of taking the whole family out to eat at the White Castle on Lake Street near the Sears store. He ordered a

hundred hamburgers for dining in; the manager hardly believed him, but when the McDevitt Dozen trooped in, they easily consumed the century of sliders.

While Ed was working 80 hours or more every week, Dolores was raising a dozen children, clothing and feeding them, and getting them where they needed to be on time. Twelve full-time jobs, perhaps. She volunteered at Holy Family, and after her children were out of the nest did volunteer babysitting at the Jewish Community Center. After Dolores's death in 1996, Ed said, "I feel very fortunate. I was married to an angel for 55 years, six months and eight days." A working angel.

Farm families were usually large, of necessity; the children were expected to help with the never-ending chores and take over the operation when their parents died. Ed and Dolores's children did work in the repair shop next door to their home on Brownlow but had diverse interests in other areas. When Ed decided to close down his business of 54 years on Brownlow in 1998, *StarTribune* columnist Dick Youngblood profiled him, getting 83-year-old Ed to confess that, "I'm a workaholic, I guess."

Youngblood lamented, "For decades McDevitt has been the place that parts distributors - not to mention the *Star Tribune* Fixit columnist - sent people to find discontinued parts. Need a pinion for a 50-year-old reel-type lawn mower? See Ed McDevitt. Ditto for a sickle-bar for a Jari self-propelled mower from the late 1950s."



Repair shops have gone out of fashion but may be making a comeback. Large families are also out of fashion, but the richness of their contributions to community life cannot be overstated.

14A St. Louis Park Sun/Gallon/Wednesday, Aug. 5, 1998

## Ed McDevitt closes family business after 54 years

Lawn Mower and Moped World in St. Louis Park to close in December.

By Teri Kelsch  
Minneapolis Sun Publication

Ed McDevitt's children truly understand the meaning of "family business." For 54 years, their father has owned and operated Ed McDevitt Lawn Mower and Moped World at 3389 Brownlow Ave. St. Louis Park, adjacent to the house where they all grew up. And at some point, all seven daughters and five sons have worked in the shop.

"My daughters tell me that I'm the kind of man if I say something is going to get done, it's going to get done. The dye has been cast," said McDevitt.

At the age of 83, it's finally the business that's done for Ed. He has sold the building to Stonehenge Design, an engineering company, and is currently in the process of liquidating his merchandise.

"I've gotten to the age where I gotta start having some fun now," said McDevitt. "I think it's time."

**Business boom**  
Ed McDevitt grew up on a farm in

(Left to right) Dennis, Ed and Wayne McDevitt have mopeds that are waiting for repair, waiting to be picked up by owners and waiting to be sold.

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# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

This season we held the 8<sup>th</sup> annual holiday lighting of the Depot. We had another nice intimate gathering and were joined again by our friends at the SLP Ambassador Program who served hot chocolate. Each year brings us a different version of Minnesota weather for the event, and this year it was particularly cold but otherwise a clear and calm night. It is always touching to see that small historic building with its snow-capped roof and large windows lit up at night. We have some nice photos from that night on our FaceBook page.

In programming news, we recently set a date for an informative talk by Board member Mary Lou Nemanic and her husband Doug Nemanic titled "Documenting Everyday Life" where they will share about their fascinating career as documentarians and provide ideas and instruction for how any of us can document our everyday life. That will be held on Monday March 20<sup>th</sup> at 6pm and is offered through SLP Community Education so registration and a small fee will be required to participate.

I will close this letter with some passages about wintertime in St. Louis Park from our book *Something In The Water*, which is always available for sale on our website:

*In the winter, we kids virtually lived in Minikahda Golf Course sliding, skiing, and skating. During the blizzard on Armistice Day in 1940, I directed traffic from the top of the bridge over Excelsior Blvd at Minikahda Golf Course. The blizzard had drifted snow on the road and closed it down to one lane. I got thank you waves from many drivers for my help. Later in the day dozens of cars got buried there and the road was closed. What an unforgettable day! - John Reid Jr*

*Neighborhood memories include a lot of activity related to the Allen family's Pastime Arena which was just a few blocks away. In the winter, one horse cutters would drive by our house with folks dressed up with big hats and bright scarves. Reminds me of Christmas cards- also of Mr. Kenny at Lake Street and Minnetonka Blvd. We pulled our sled to his corner, purchased our Christmas tree and hauled it home. There were also sleigh ride parties which could be heard coming and going because of the festive bells on the horses. - Shirley Lewis Thwing (c. 1930s)*

*My first childhood experience on ice skates was at the high school rink just south of the high school. When Highway 7 was constructed, the athletic field and, in the winter, its skating rink were moved west of the high school. By the time I was in Junior High we were playing hockey closer to home at Berdan's pasture on 28<sup>th</sup> street. We would play until dark and then walk home by streetlight in our floppy 4-buckle overshoes. - Harry Allen (c. 1930s)*

Warm wishes from the Park,  
Ted

## CONNECT WITH US

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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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## JAMES LEONE MARKHAM

A.J. Liebling, well-known writer for the *New Yorker* once wrote: "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." From his earliest days, James Leone Markham was determined to own one, and to thoroughly exercise that freedom.

Born in Alma City, MN, in 1897 Jim Markham allegedly never forgave his mother for that middle name. As a high schooler he became correspondent for the *Mankato Free Press*. Demonstrating his entrepreneurial chops, he later became that paper's owner and publisher, selling it in 1923.

At the University of Minnesota Jim was part of the first journalism classes held on the main campus, and was news editor for the *Minnesota Daily*. He quit his studies at the university in his senior year of 1917 to join the Army as an officer in the artillery for World War I, a path also followed by Harry Truman.

After the war, Jim and his wife Florence moved briefly to Arizona in hopes of easing his acute and debilitating arthritis, but it didn't work. They moved back to Minnesota, and, with the help of Florence's grocery money savings, in 1928 bought the *Hennepin County Review* of Hopkins, MN, which had once been a right-wing, Klan-connected rag.

Markham set out to transform the soul of the newspaper and to make it the leading asset of his adopted village, which still carried the legal name, "West Minneapolis," but was about to finally and formally adopt its fifty-plus-year nickname of Hopkins.

Taking over the paper in mid-1928, the paper carried the front-page banner: "HENNEPIN COUNTY'S GREATEST RURAL WEEKLY NEWSPAPER," and Markham's introduction to readers set out his goals:

*We are glad to be here. Happy to return to the intriguing pots of printer's ink after a four years' absence, and eager to carve out for ourselves a place that will be useful in the Hopkins community. Under the new publishing there will be but one policy. That will be to deliver into the homes each week the newsiest, cleanest and most serviceable weekly newspaper in a community of Hopkins' size.*

Markham spoke directly to his readers in a weekly column – "The Grumble Seat" – back in the days when everyone got the pun. He believed in civic engagement. Editorially, he wanted you to vote but didn't care who you voted for. One of his last editorials from his perch on "The Grumble Seat" included this: "Politics is your business. Politics is your country. Politics is your future. Politics is your welfare. It is you."

The *Hennepin County Review* was primarily a Hopkins paper but was the newspaper of record for the Park and Edina and the best source of local information until Markham launched the *St. Louis Park Dispatch* to assume that role in 1941. His timing wasn't the best; a year after he bought the *Review*, the Great Depression came along, and a mere week after launching the *Dispatch*, World War II finally became real for Americans.

So, the *Dispatch* skinned-down to four or eight pages to save newsprint and shouldered its responsibility for supporting the war effort and the post-war recovery above all else for the next 4-7 years until returning service members began to reestablish their lives and start families.

After the war, Markham's views on war in general evolved, and his editorials got focused on peace. In 1949, he was skeptical of the need for NATO, and noted editorially under the headline, "Just a Reminder:"

*The Dispatch has developed a habit of putting quotes around the term "post war." This is done just to remind the editor that not a day has passed since World War II supposedly ended a little over three years ago without some human dying in conflict somewhere in this embattled world to which "peace" has allegedly come.*

Markham always supported the troops, even as he became more anti-war. As early as 1954 he warned against getting involved in the French debacle in Indochina/Vietnam.

In 1952 Markham bought the Suburban Press of Golden Valley but his crippling arthritis finally wore him down and in 1954 he retired and sold his mini-small-town press-empire to John Tilton of Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, who owned a similar mini-empire of suburban newspapers around Philadelphia. Tilton immediately changed the paper's format from Tabloid, 11"x 17", to Broadsheet, 15" x 23.75".

Markham's name stayed on the *Dispatch* masthead as Associate Editor and he reprised his "Grumble Seat" column for a few years, but the editorial style began a rightward shift.



Markham was a mainstream Democrat and his editorial voice leaned left, although in the 1930s, Minnesota's governor Floyd B. Olson was a bit too radical for him. He knew and admired Hubert H. Humphrey and supported him in his 1960 run against Jack Kennedy for the Democratic presidential nomination. In a letter to Hubert dated September 2, 1961, Markham wrote:

*"Now that you are out of the presidential race, I have an idea for you. I may decide to expound upon it in another letter to you at an early date. I believe that you should devote yourself, almost totally, henceforth, to the business of PEACE. Get in there and d talk and talk – and write and write – and make yourself a regular gadfly on the subject. We are heading in a bad direction, and fast...I believe*

you could make a tremendous contribution to your country as the one great champion of peace in the remaining years."

The Markham sense of humor showed up early on. While informing *Dispatch* readers of upcoming abbreviated news coverage, made necessary by the realities of scheduling a 24/7/365 operation to allow his employees reasonable time off, he admitted to missing the news event of the year, the end of WWII.

## Note To Readers

Next week, the crew of The St. Louis Park Dispatch is going on vacation. Going fishing, as they say.

Next week's *Dispatch* will go to the readers as usual, on next Friday morning. But it will be printed on this coming Saturday, in abbreviated form, necessarily. We ask of our faithful readers their forbearance. There will be little news in next week's paper, and what there is will be stale news.

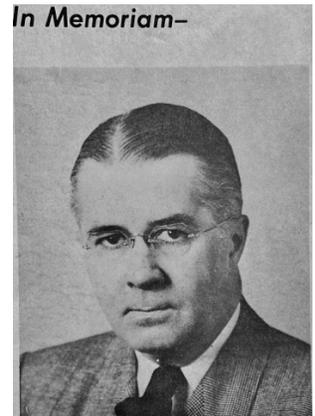
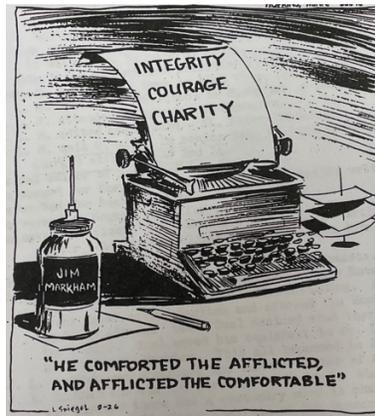
This action is taken by the management as a means of providing the mechanical employees with at least half of their annual vacation time without a burdensome disruption of the business. It was tried for the first time last summer, successfully . . . except for the embarrassing circumstance that the war against Japan ended while we all were away fishing! We pray and trust that the Park will not burn down while we are "out of business" the coming week.

handicaps that would have crushed ordinary men. Jim Markham lived a rich and useful life. His friends, fiercely loyal, will never forget him.

Brenda Ueland, was a Minnesota writer's writer promoted by Markham with "Minnesota Eyewitness," a weekly spread of many column inches back in the early 1950s when radical feminism was not much noticed. On Markham's passing, Ueland wrote in the *Askov American*:

*Such a likeable man. Such candor, such bite, such vitriolic impatience with imperfection; such pained self-understanding that he is irritable; such a regretful wish to be kind, to do some good.*

He did good, and his good work left the St. Louis Park Historical Society with a treasury of bound copies and microfilm of the *Dispatch* from 1941 to 1968. We are forever grateful for that window on Park, and world, history.



The *Dispatch* ran a home-grown editorial cartoon on Markham's passing,

## DID YOU KNOW?

...that St. Louis Park was where, in 1897, Minnesota's sugar beet industry was founded? The original site of that operation straddles the present-day Louisiana Avenue just west of Park Tavern and just north of the Walker Street roundabout; it was originally the site of the Esterly Manufacturing Company complex, built in 1892. The Society received a gift of historic photos documenting the sugar beet operation from Mr. Vincent Gordon. Our state has led the nation in sugar beet production for the past 30 years.



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The masthead changed in 1954, reflecting the new ownership.

His health finally failed him in 1963 at age 66; his obituary in the 9/26/63 *Dispatch* noted:

*Jim Markham lived a generation in almost constant pain...and waged a constant struggle to keep from burdening his friends with his agony. And he was able to surmount the obstacle of a pain-wracked, tortured body to maintain a mind brilliantly alert and an encompassing grasp of public affairs...He was a free-swinging editor of the old school whose devastating logic and rapier-like writing style concealed the broad vein of native Irish humor which lay beneath the surface...Sustained by an angelic wife who cared for him through a host of hair-raising illness, he kept his spirits high despite*



Ed and Dolores McDevitt launched their marriage in a house trailer before moving to more permanent quarters in the Park. Below the large McDevitt clan posed in front of their church, Holy Family, on Lake Street. Bottom left, Ed was well-known around the town and was elected to serve as Senior Royalty for the 1976 national Centennial celebrations with SLPHS founder, Marie Hartmann. Bottom center, Ed poses in front of the family's second home at 3393 Brownlow, now gone. Bottom right, the local Knights of Columbus named its Bingo Hall after Ed, but the national organization later decided to get out of the building-owning business. All photos from the McDevitt family albums, courtesy of number-nine-child, Ruth McDevitt Tourville.



Runners-up for Honorary King and Queen are Edward McDevitt and Marie Hartmann.



### New KC Hall opens in St. Louis Park

A New Knights Of Columbus Bingo Hall opened its doors in October. The Hall, located at 6900 Oxford Avenue in St. Louis Park, features a complete dining and gaming facility. Hall director Ed McDevitt says the new facility has many features including Bar and food concessions, Hard cards and pull tabs, ample parking and two separate halls for group rental.

"We're just now getting our operations up and running," said McDevitt. "We think we have a very nice hall here and we think some people find out we're here they'll give us a try."

The hall currently sponsors Bingo on six nights. Aside from their own nights the KC hall also sponsors The Rotary Club, Good Shepherd, and the Hearing Soc. of MN.

Bingo is played from 7:00 pm to 11:00 pm every night except Saturdays.





Above, at the *Hennepin County Review*, it was all hands on deck to compose and edit in the typesetting area; a scene certainly matched weekly at the *Dispatch*. Markham is at center in the pinstripe pants. Below left, Marian Stepanek deburrs a metal advertising plate so stray metal bits don't create unwanted marks on the newsprint. Below right, a printer monitors the finished product rolling off the press. All photos courtesy of the Hopkins Historical Society.





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## DISPATCH LOOKBACK

The Markham-owned small-town press weighed-in regularly on national and world events and as well as local politics. The editorial cartoon was ever present on the opinion pages, borrowed often from the larger papers such as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and later from the National Weekly News Service. He had an eye for art and for social justice. On Markham's death in 1963, Cecil B. Newman, founder and editor of the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, serving the Twin Cities Black community, wrote:

*James L. Markham, one of God's noblemen, is dead...His trenchant editorials were a landmark in Minnesota journalism for a quarter of a century. He was one of the first Minnesota editors who could see clearly the justice of the Negro's cry for justice and first class citizenship...Goodbye Jim! You were a credit to man.*

