



**PARK RIDGE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

# THE LAMPPOST

**March 2014**

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW AND A LOOK AHEAD

The Society announces one of the largest-ever gatherings of Members and guests at the traditional Annual Meeting, which convened on Sunday, November 3, at the Park Ridge Country Club.

As customary, we began the Meeting with a reception, with the amenity of a musical piano interlude provided by Sarah Householder, a Maine South student and Midwest Youth Symphony Orchestra member.



*Nancy Pytel, Ken Mylander, Ruth Olson, Nancy & Jim Frugoli, Mayor David Schmidt*

Following our luncheon business meeting, however, we departed from tradition, and Society Trustees presented an ensemble program to highlight the activities and programs of our 2012-2013 year. Our “year in review” program described not only our programs and events of last year, but also provided updates on our new programs in progress. In addition to our “History on the Move” project, featured topics included:



*Lillian Mallstrom, Marilyn Drury-Katillo, City Clerk Betty Henneman*

- ◆ “Wartime Memories”/Oral History and C54 project
- ◆ Post Office Mural Restoration
- ◆ Library Centennial Display in August/Mimi Stidham’s Merri Mornings Nursery School
- ◆ Brickton Brick Salvage
- ◆ 106 Main Street Display Window
- ◆ Park Ridge Pirsch Pumper return home
- ◆ Touhy Avenue Gatepost Salvage
- ◆ Historic Bike Tour of Park Ridge
- ◆ The Youth Campus Closing & Protection of Historic Materials
- ◆ ‘History on the Move’ – creation of our new home as the Park Ridge History Center in the Solomon Cottage



*Margy Koziol, Missy Machon, Laura Briars*

At the conclusion of this presentation, local historian Milton Nelson spoke for a few moments to introduce his upcoming book *Milestones of Park Ridge History*.



*Milton Nelson*

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## THE YEAR IN REVIEW AND A LOOK AHEAD

*Continued from page 1...*

Society President Paul Adlaf brought the meeting to a close with an overview of the year ahead, emphasizing the continued determination of our carry-over team of Trustees to relocate into the Solomon Cottage, thanks to the inspiration of our own Gary T. Johnson, President of the Chicago History Museum.

During the business meeting, our Members elected the following officers and Trustees for the 2013-2014 fiscal year:

President:	Paul Adlaf
Vice President:	John Murphy
Secretary:	Patricia Adlaf
Treasurer:	Kirke Machon
Trustees:	Jeff Caudill
	Maureen Connelly
	Randy Derifield
	Brian Kidd
	Daniel Koziol
	Brian Lazzaro
	Laurie Pegler
	Nancy Pytel



*Brian Lazzaro, John Murphy, Ralph Bishop, Gus Zahareas*



*Ken Mylander and Nancy Pytel*



*Pat Adlaf, Bonnie and John Morell*

Please enjoy the gallery of Annual Meeting photos presented here. You can find many more on our website, [www.pennyville.org](http://www.pennyville.org).



*Cindy & John Bennett; Ted Sigg and sister Lisa*



*Kirke Machon, Randy & Conni Derifield*

*contributed by Paul Adlaf*

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESERVES TOUHY AVENUE GATEPOST

Over 100 years ago, the 16-acre parcel of land bounded by Touhy Avenue, Washington Street, Northwest Highway, and the houses on the west side of Berry Parkway was owned by an order of Catholic nuns, the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent DePaul, whose summer home was on the property.

The Sisters of the Daughters of Charity opened the first Saint Vincent's Asylum, or Orphanage, in 1881 at 1100 North Orleans in Chicago. They provided 91 years of service to unwed or poor mothers and their children, to abandoned children, and to thousands of adoptive families, before closing their St. Vincent's Orphanage at 721 N. LaSalle Street in Chicago in 1972.

For years, the Society has responded to questions about the unusual 'monument' on Touhy Avenue at Berry Parkway: a concrete gatepost, the only remnant remaining of those summer home years. A gravel lane led from the home, or convent, to Touhy Avenue, and was bounded by the gate there. Several other orders of nuns owned this property beginning in the 1950s.

The gatepost stood on the property of the adjoining Advocate Heath Care offices. When the Society became aware of the pending sale of this land, it acted to preserve the gatepost as an important artifact of Park Ridge history. Thanks to Julie Mitchell of Advocate Health Care in Park Ridge, 205 W. Touhy Avenue, for acknowledging the significance of the gatepost and allowing the Society to remove and preserve it for future display. Also salvaged was a small remnant of the iron fence which surrounded the property and which was attached to the gatepost.

The gatepost removal project was a success in large part due to the combined efforts of Board Member Kirke Machon, who facilitated its removal and relocation, and the Litgen Concrete & Coring Company and Emerald Landscape Contractors, who provided removal and moving services despite the cold wintry mid-December weather. The gatepost is estimated to weigh close to 3,000 pounds!

The nuns' property in Park Ridge became known familiarly as "St. Vincent's Asylum" in recognition of the nun's mission. No orphans were actually cared for in Park Ridge, except for one year, in 1930, due to delay in completion of the new orphanage on LaSalle Street upon collapse of the stock market the year prior and depletion of the nuns' finances.

The property was also known as "The Villa," in recognition of the Italianate architecture of the nuns' modest convent. Long-time Park Ridge residents recall days of ice-skating at "The Villa," when the grounds close to Touhy Avenue flooded during wintertime.

The Sisters of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent DePaul trace their heritage to Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first American-born saint, who founded the American Daughters of Charity in the early 1800s.



*The gatepost as it stood for many years*



*Jeff Caudill, Kirke Machon and Daniel Koziol look over the worksite*



*Kirke Machon steadies the iron fencepost remnant while it is cut away from the gatepost*



*Emerald Landscape crew guides gatepost onto pallet*

*contributed by Paul Adlaf*

## WARTIME MEMORIES PROJECT UPDATE

One of the biggest initiatives of the Society in 2013 and 2014 is the “Wartime Memories” oral history project, documenting the stories of Maine High School students during World War II. Special focus is given to the year 1945 when students at Maine sold over \$500,000 in war bonds to “purchase” a C54 Skymaster military aircraft manufactured at the Douglas Aircraft Plant at Mannheim & Higgins Roads.



To kick off the project, alumni of Maine classes from '45-'48 were invited to share their memories at a “Wartime Reunion” at Maine East High School on Saturday, May 18, 2013. Alumni recalled how food and gasoline were rationed; that women joined the workforce at an unprecedented rate when their husbands enlisted; that police, firefighters and teachers were paid in scrip; how fatalities of former students prompted school assemblies; and how students helped support their families by working part-time after school. Numerous alumni recalled many of their parents working at the Douglas plant during the wartime years. “My Mom was very proud of her work. Her supervisor said her rivets were the best he’d ever seen,” recalled one of the alumni.



Guest Bob Machon with Trustee John Murphy



Maine South HS Principal Shawn Messmer, Society Trustees Laurie Pegler, John Murphy, Paul Adlaf

For this project, current students at Maine High Schools are interviewing WWII-era alumni to record their stories. Society volunteers John Murphy and Laurie Pegler are leading the effort.

Here’s a peek into some of the oral histories personally recorded thus far:

**Ralph Bishop, Class of 1945:** Ralph told us that prior to the war his family was on hard times and kept their house only because the man who held the note (hardware store owner, John Roloff) allowed them to pay only the interest due. The war changed their fortunes in large ways and small. His father got a job in the tool section at the Douglas plant. After war was declared, the government allowed only one spare tire per car. His father had a 1928 LaSalle and his extra spare tires were confiscated. Ralph worked during high school and was able to receive a “B” ration card (“A” being the standard low allotment cards) because he worked at a defense plant, the Busse Buick garage on Northwest Highway, assembling tool kits for the Army signal corp. He was paid the princely sum of 40¢ per hour!

**Robert Lins, Class of 1945:** Robert lived on Gillick Street in Park Ridge during the war. He found out about the war on Sunday afternoon, December 7, 1941, while his family was listening to the Chicago Bears vs. Chicago Cardinals football game on the radio. The game was interrupted to announce that the Japanese were bombing Pearl Harbor. At first he didn’t feel afraid because the war was overseas, but he found it increasingly hard to focus on his studies. One day in 1944 he ditched school with a friend, hitchhiked downtown and joined the Marines. He called his father, who was furious because he himself had served in combat in France during World War I.

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## WARTIME MEMORIES PROJECT UPDATE

Clinton and Dorothy (Findall) West, both, Class of 1945: Although they both graduated from Maine they didn't date in high school. Clinton's family moved to Des Plaines during the war because his father was an ace aircraft mechanic and was able to get work at the Douglas plant. It was rumored his father was a test pilot but Clinton isn't sure that was true. During the war, Dorothy worked for an export firm in Chicago. Part of her job was to screen job applicants against a list of known Nazi sympathizers. Several did apply, so she turned their information over to her supervisor. She remembers the pandemonium of VE day. Her office emptied to join in a massive party on Madison Street in Chicago.



*Also attending,  
Mr. & Mrs. Norman Olson, class of 1945*

*contributed by John Murphy*

## OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT THROUGH THE YEARS

On Sunday, February 2, 2014, Society Life Member Ralph Bishop, Captain (ret.) in the Park Ridge Fire Department, presented his pictorial history of the Department through the years. Captain Bishop entered the fire service in 1950, joining his father, Ralph, and brother, Emmett, in a career dedicated to protecting our citizens and property from fire damage.

Starting in 1873, when the Village of Park Ridge installed its first primitive water distribution system, firefighters have been a fixture in our community.

Beginning from those early days, Captain Bishop identified the major milestones in Fire Department history, spanning our progression from a time of just two volunteer firefighters to the day when volunteers were no longer needed and the Department was staffed entirely by professionals in the 1970s.

Every piece of firefighting equipment ever used in our Department was displayed during Ralph's slide presentation, from a simple hose reel wagon, to a Chevrolet panel truck (which served as an ambulance for a brief time), to the high-technology ladder trucks now in service. He especially recalls fire runs on the Department's 1924 Pirsch pumper early in his career, the rig which the Historical Society is working to return to our community as a mobile museum.



*Ralph Bishop holding one of the first Park Ridge fire hoses  
from the 1870's*

Ralph covered the fire signal systems used throughout the years, beginning with a steam-powered whistle at the Village Hall, to special telephone alerting systems for the firefighters installed while the Department operated out of the Meacham Avenue station, to the ten or so call boxes which were located throughout the community.

Our speaker's presentation included photos of fires fought during his career in the Department, and a selection of fire helmets and firemen's badges in service over the years, some of which can be seen in the above image.

## RESTORED POST OFFICE MURAL ON DISPLAY AT THE PARK RIDGE

A long-awaited dream of former Maine East history teacher and one of the founding-fathers of the Park Ridge Historical Society, the late R. Paul Carlson, was realized in late February, 2013 when the fully-restored former Park Ridge Post Office mural, "Indians Cede the Land," was unveiled and dedicated at the Park Ridge Public Library.

The 74-year-old mural was painted by Chicago-born artist George Melville Smith, one of the roughly 1,700 pieces of artwork commissioned for display in federal buildings (mostly Post Offices) by the U.S. Treasury Department under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs. The 6' by 20' mural was featured prominently on a high wall above the "Postmaster" doorway sign until District 64 purchased the former post office building at 164 South Prospect in 1970. With the aid of two students, Tom Musolf and Debbie Milling, Mr. Carlson removed the mural, saving it for its eventual return to the Park Ridge citizenry. The artwork remained in his home for 38 years, and upon his death in 2008, his family donated it to the Park Ridge Library. It took another 4 years - and a special joint committee of library and historical society trustees sponsoring a community-wide campaign - to raise the \$38,000 needed to fully restore the mural for permanent public display on the second floor of the Park Ridge Library.

On February 22, 2013, a private dedication was held at the library featuring a special program on the history of the mural and its initial public "unveiling." In addition to the Mayor, several representatives from the Library and Historical Society, guest speakers included Frances Hagemann, a Native American scholar and lecturer of Ojibwe ancestry; historian Mary Emma Thompson, author of several books on the New Deal Public Art Programs; and Tom Patterson, Mr. Carlson's stepson, who spoke movingly about the joint legacy represented by his stepfather's gift to the present - and future - generations of our community. A similar program was held the following afternoon for the public.

The Mural Restoration Committee was selected by the Park Ridge Public Library as the recipient of its 2013 Library Award. Members of the committee: Paul Adlaf, Anthony Borrelli, Jeff Caudill, Patricia Lofthouse, John Murphy, Nancy Pytel, and Richard Van Metre, were honored for their extraordinary service to the library by the Library Board of Trustees at its meeting on April 16, 2013. Gratitude is also expressed to Parma Conservation, Ltd. for its excellent work in restoring the mural and to Philip Kralovec of Shaker Furniture and Handworks in Park Ridge, who created the replica door frame bearing the word "postmaster" to add to the authenticity of the mural's display.

A new on-line Post Office mural exhibit features our own "Indians Cede the Land." Visit: [www.postalmuseum.si.edu/indiansatthepostoffice/about.html](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/indiansatthepostoffice/about.html). The exhibit, entitled "Indians at the Post Office," is a collaboration between the U.S. Postal System, the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum, and the National Museum of the American Indian. Eight separate Native Themes were identified among the 400+ Post Office murals featuring American Indians created during the New Deal era. Twenty-four of those murals were selected for the exhibit, and "Indians Cede the Land" is one of three selected to illustrate the theme of "Treaties."

*contributed by Nancy Pytel*



Below:  
2013 Library Award  
Recipients John Murphy,  
Paul Adlaf, Pat Lofthouse,  
Dr. Anthony Borelli,  
Jeff Caudill, Nancy Pytel,  
Richard Van Metre.  
Also pictured is Margaret  
Harrison, Library Board  
President (3rd from left)  
and Janet Van De Carr,  
Library Executive Di-



## ROBERT CWIAK, ARCHITECT OF MANY PARK RIDGE BUILDINGS

In the summer of 2013, the residence at 229 Courtland was demolished to allow the construction of a new Police Department building and to expand the City Hall parking lot. This house was constructed in 1957 by Robert Cwiak as a residence for his family and for his architectural office.

Mr. Cwiak began his career in the early 1950's with several architectural firms in Chicago. When he moved to Park Ridge in 1957, he started a solo practice that lasted through the post-World War Two building boom into the mid-1970s. When he moved here Park Ridge was largely undeveloped and had an ideal location with good access to expressways and commuter rail connections to downtown Chicago. Mr. Cwiak worked with real estate developers, who found this area a prime location for development.

By the mid 1970's the large tracts of vacant land had been developed and the demand for architectural services diminished. Mr. Cwiak took a job with the City of Chicago Bureau of Architecture and worked there for eighteen years. This job required the Cwiaks to move into the City of Chicago and he and his wife moved to the Edison Park neighborhood. Upon his retirement he relocated to Arkansas.

Mr. Cwiak's architectural practice while in Park Ridge produced a wide variety of structures. He designed many single family homes, mostly ranch style. He did commercial buildings including retail along Higgins Road and in South Park along Devon Avenue and offices along Busse and Northwest Highways. The two previous railroad commuter stations in Uptown and at Dee Road were his projects. The Uptown station may be his most prominent commission, and features a flat roof and sign pylon with script "Park Ridge." A photograph of this new station, taken from Summit Avenue, illustrates these features and also its proximity to the prior depot. He also did some two-unit buildings (2-flats) along Northwest Highway.

But his most notable commissions may have been the many multiple family residences he designed. While most of these were located along the main streets of Park Ridge, Touhy Avenue and Busse Highway, they were also located along Vine Avenue, near Uptown and Clifton Avenue.

Most of his multiple family buildings are characterized by three distinctive features. First, they have open entrances and exterior stairs. Most of these buildings have below grade, or partially below grade enclosed parking and finally, the buildings have masonry screen walls in a wide variety of designs to hide the stairs. An example of a Cwiak designed unit on Touhy Avenue accompanies this article. A few of these buildings also had courtyards or lawn areas.

Other than his Uptown commuter station, most of us would not recognize his buildings. They tend to fit into their surroundings; they are "contextual" as an architect or planner might say. His buildings are "background" buildings in Park Ridge. They make up part of the character of our town, but they do stand out as significant architecture. We should, however, remember Robert Cwiak as an architect who designed many buildings in Park Ridge, which have made it a better community.



*Cwiak house: Former home/office on Courtland (recently demolished)*



*Cwiak RR station: With view of old depot from 1800's next to it*



*Cwiak Apartments: A multiple family residence on Touhy Avenue*

*contributed by Randy Derifield*

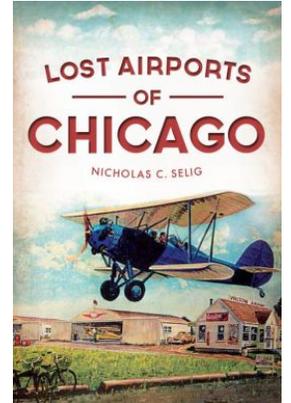
## April Meeting

Another Historical Society speaking program is coming this April,  
and will be presented at the Summit of Uptown on

**Wednesday evening, April 16, 2014.**

Nicholas Selig, author of “Lost Airports of Chicago,” will take us back in time  
to visit the history of the many small airfields and airstrips located along the  
Des Plaines River long before O’Hare International Airport.

More information is available on our website [www.pennyville.org](http://www.pennyville.org).



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