

Ridge Historical Society

Newsletter

DECEMBER, 1999 – JANUARY, 2000

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From the PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

By Pat McGrail

The first thing that greeted me upon becoming President was Executive Director Mike Stachnik's announcement that he was leaving RHS. What a blow! Mike has gone far beyond his job description and "normal" hours to make RHS the lively and better known community resource that it is today. However he suggested very creative ways to fill this gap, and we are all grateful for his thoughtfulness in this respect.

We have brought on board Paul Petraitis, a photographer and archivist, who has worked with Mike on several projects. You may remember Paul from the program on Pullman that he gave us some time ago. With volunteer help and support from all of you, I am confident that year 2000 will see Ridge Historical Society doing the things we do well—but even better!

Paul Petraitis Becomes RHS Archivist/Curator

Paul Warren Petraitis, a Pullman area resident, has been named Archivist/Curator of Ridge Historical Society, succeeding Mike Stachnik. He assumed the position at the beginning of November, coming to RHS from having been Museum Consultant for the Willie Dixon Foundation, otherwise known as "Blues Heaven". The Dixon Foundation has an educational focus, granting scholarships and helping musicians with their business dealings, (often related to realizing proper royalties for their work). It owns the former Chess Recording Studios building at 2120 S. Michigan Avenue which is now its headquarters.

Petraitis was previously employed by the National Park Service doing research and photography, seeking out historic sites from the Dunes to Blue Island, an area known as the Calumet Heritage Corridor.

For the Historic Pullman Foundation he served as a preservation consultant and to some undefinable degree, as an advocate to owners, recommending that their valuable historic sites and buildings be not compromised by remodeling or alterations. He has had an active role with, and for several years chaired, Pullman's Beman Committee of people in related fields who are active in historical preservation.

His longest tenure was his 16 years with the Chicago



This is not Paul Petraitis but a reproduction of "The Lamplighter", a watercolor by Louise Barwick, painted in 1895. It is one of a number of watercolors by this artist depicting scenes on and around the Ridge as she saw it in that era. The street is identified as Belmont Ave. which we know today as Seeley Avenue. The corner of the house shown at left is currently 10330 Seeley.

Historical Society. He, with Grant Dean, had charge of the Society's map collection, was active in the print room and worked in their dark room with Walter Krutz. He came to that position from having earned a B.S. in Design degree from IIT (1971) in the history of photography. Other employment, pertinent to his new position, were tenures with The Balzekas Museum, The Dutch Heritage Council, Historic North Pullman Corp., South Suburban Genealogical Society, and The Ethnic Cultural Preservation Council.

He and his family have lived in an historic home in Pullman since 1973. That family consists of his wife Carol, their two sons, Adam, age 11 and Eric, 8. Carol is employed by one of Chicago's large advertising agencies.

Paul's extra-curricular interests include giving slide shows on geology and the pioneer era.

Petraitis expresses his pleasure and excitement on becoming associated with the RHS museum collection that is rich in its diversity of subject matter. He finds the Beverly area visually dramatic and hopes to be able to effectively share his excitement and enthusiasm for the history of the Ridge and the South Side in general.

ARCHIVIST PAUL PETRAITIS PONDER'S POTENTIAL FOR HIS NEW POSITION

History as taught in our textbooks is mainly the catalog of a series of big events: wars, elections, changes in technology. On a personal and community level our life is a series of smaller things: family, school, the job. This is why little museums are here—because local events are just as important as national headlines. Little museums, like the Ridge Historical Society, catch what the big ones often miss. Not just local architecture but the people who've lived in these houses.

The Ridge Historical Society wants your help. We're interested in things, not just because they're old; we're interested because everyday objects, photographs, business records, clothes and diaries record who we are and what we think.

The area around the Blue Island ridge is unique in many ways. On the board of the Ridge Historical Society are experts in many fields: architecture, costumes, genealogy, ecology. They have many stories to tell, and, as we go through our collections in the upcoming year we'll share their stories with you through exhibits, publications, events and tours.

I bring as my strong suits geography, photography, map making and the history of the pioneer and Indian eras.

As Executive Director I want to see us simultaneously go further back in our research: how did the glaciers form "the ridge" and our river system? How did the Vincennes Trace, the I-57 of the 1840's, shape our community?

As well as looking at more contemporary topics: the construction of I-57, panic peddling during the late '60's, the growth of East Morgan Park (Chicagoland's oldest outlying African American neighborhood), the National Park Services proposal for the creation of a Calumet Heritage Corridor.

We hope to initiate a lecture series, to begin "partnering" with our local school and build a darkroom here in the RHS basement.

Won't you join us?

--PAUL PETRAITIS, Executive Director

Archivist Stachnik Moves to Isle a la Cache

After more than six years as Archivist/Curator of Ridge Historical Society, Michael Stachnik fulfilled his last day in that position on October 29. He left to become the Coordinator of the Isle a la Cache Museum located in the middle of the DesPlaines River at 135th Street. Isle a la Cache is part of the Will County Forest Preserve District as is the museum bearing its name.

The museum brochure includes photographs of canoes on the river and other desirable surroundings, as well as of the attractive museum building. As this is written, Mike and his family are seeking a new home convenient to that location.

His successor at Ridge Historical Society is Paul W. Petraitis (see accompanying article) who commends the splendid condition in which he has found the collection and the archives as a result of Mike Stachnik's tenure.

Ridge Revels in Holiday Traditions

by Kate Eaton

The traditions of the holidays are here again, and they seem as timeless and inevitable as the seasons. But are they?

Beverly Hills/Morgan Park has seen the rise and demise of some especially nice holiday traditions. One that many of us recall is Handel's "Messiah" sung annually by the Euterpean Oratorio Chorus.

RHS files from 1934 reveal that the Euterpeans were "organized during the holidays of 1900." Originally a double male quartet, the group grew to 17 members before its first public performance in July, 1901.

The original driving force behind the Euterpeans was the "vigorous and untiring enthusiasm" of Edward T. Clissold, conductor. The accompanist was Frank Melville Bronson, teacher at Morgan Park Military Academy and a "genius at the piano." Thirty-five years later their jobs were assumed by Mark Hallett, Minister of Music at Morgan Park Baptist Church, who led the chorus for at least 15 years. Hallett was at the helm when the group celebrated its golden anniversary.

In the 1930's, the Euterpeans joined forces with the mostly female Choral Union and the stage was set for an expanded "Messiah" with a chorus of about 100 singers. The combined group also presented Haydn's "Creation" and Mendelssohn's "Elijah."

The success of the Euterpeans eventually spread beyond the Ridge and the group performed at the 1933 World's Fair (the Century of Progress), the Chicago Tribune's Music Festival at Soldier Field and on radio with a one-hour presentation of the "Messiah." Most of the Euterpeans' performances were free to the public and hosted by local churches.

Another Yuletide tradition of bygone days is the professional recital in private homes. RHS archives record an excellent example of this type of entertainment, a "Candle-light Musical Tea" hosted by Crescendo Musical Club at the home of J. R. MacGregor, 9914 Longwood Drive, in 1927. The featured artist was an Australian violinist, Ernest Toy, who performed with his wife, Eva Leslie Toy as accompanist, and soprano Marie Doyle Fox. Their two-hour program included excerpts from works by Mozart, Rachmaninoff and Verdi.

The Crescendo Club and the Euterpeans also participated in Christmas celebrations at Ridge Park. A 1939 account of the events at the park speaks of a week-long "ceaseless round of parties, entertainments, luncheons and dances." Among the annual participants were the American Legion, the Radio Club, troops of Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, the Brainerd, Morgan Park and Beverly Hills women's clubs, the Morgan Park Glee Club, the Ridge Civic Orchestra and the Bethany

Union Choruses. The event survives today in modified form as "Christmas in the Park" sponsored by Beverly Ridge Homeowners. This year's party, at 7:30 p.m., December 15, will feature a puppet show, caroling, Santa Claus and, weather permitting, a sleigh ride.

Depression era festivities at local churches included a children's carol service and candlelight service at St. John the Divine Lutheran Church, a combined choirs Candlelight Service featuring organ and harp at Morgan Park Baptist Church (for 1999, Dec. 19) and a rooftop display of Santa and his reindeer at Morgan Park Presbyterian Church. Residents also could enjoy Christmas pageants at Mt. Greenwood M.E. Church and Bethany Union Church, or a "living pictures" program with scripture and musical accompaniment at St. Paul's Union Church.

Perhaps one Christmas tradition that will never change is gift giving.

Compared to 1999 prices they were all exceptional values: \$9.75 for women's dresses, \$8 for a permanent wave, \$1 for two pairs of sheer chiffon hose. But perhaps the biggest bargain was "seven delightful days of swimming, fishing, exploration and glorious adventure on the Gulf of Mexico for \$48." The Southtown Economist Travel Bureau offered this and other exotic late-December trips (including \$79.95 to Florida and Havana, and a \$70 trip for five days in Bermuda), all expenses paid, Chicago to Chicago. The first leg of the trip was on the "Mighty Monarch of the Rails," the Illinois Central's Biloxi Special.

A 1933 article with the headline "How the Ridge Observes Christmas" concludes with a bit of wisdom that will always be in season. It reads, "Mrs. Pauline F. Palmer, 1735 W 96th Street, makes the sensible suggestion that everyone write 'Merry Christmas' instead of 'Merry Xmas' contending that the X indicates an unknown quantity, which is quite inappropriate and meaningless." Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

NEW SOPHISTICATION for RHS

by Eileen Klees

RHS will be on the internet sooner rather than later. I bought a digital camera so that our new curator, Paul Petraitis, will be able to photograph our collections and make them available to online visitors. RHS has to have an Internet presence to be considered for grant money and it is my goal to have that happen by the end of the first quarter, 2000.

We will also be replacing our telephone answering machine with voice mail which will better handle the growing volume of calls. It enables callers to leave messages when the line is busy and of course, offers a message concerning RHS programs and events.

Harold Wolff, Linda Lamberty and I are developing a program to respond to people inquiring about genealogy in the history of their house. The service will be offered for a fee, based on the scope of the services desired. Fees will support RHS programs and the continued services of Harold Wolff whose contribution to our knowledge of the area housing is priceless.

Kate Eaton and I switched Board positions at my request. I am not sure I will be a very good secretary, but I am sure Kate will be a great Program Director.

RHS Becomes Festive for the Holidays

Driscoll House will light up the holidays with its December exhibit of community-decorated holiday trees. A visit to this colorful exhibit is a feature of the third annual Community Holiday Parlor Tour, Sunday, December 5 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The tour begins at the Dr. German House and includes five other stops.

Trees in the RHS exhibit, titled "Caroling! Caroling!", are decorated by community organizations using a carol as their theme. Visits to Ridge Historical Society to see the trees are encouraged through December and until January 7, during usual RHS hours (2 to 5 p.m., Thursdays and Sundays) or by arrangement during RHS office hours, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily. Groups are welcome to schedule a specific time by calling 881-1675.

Participating groups include Bethany Union Church, Beverly Ridge Home Owners Association, the Garden Club of Morgan Park, Morgan Park Juniors, Beverly Improvement Association, Beverly Hills Juniors, the Infant Welfare Juniors, Morgan Park United Methodist Church and Beverly Art Center.

Nancy Peecher and Lorraine Stanton are coordinating the December 5 Holiday Parlor Tour. Combination luncheon-tour tickets are \$20, or tour only for \$12. These reservations can be made by calling the German House, 445-0460.

Ridge Historical Society members enter free to the "Caroling! Caroling!" Christmas tree exhibit. Visitors pay \$2.

Cindy Fielding Developing Five Year Plan

In anticipation of a shift in presidents and a transition period between Archivist/Curators, the Board of Ridge Historical Society engaged Cindy Fielding to devote one day a week for six months to the Society as a consultant. The good fortune of filling both positions soon after they were vacated did not alter the tenure of Ms. Fielding in her consultant role.

As stated by Past-president Delves, Cindy's assignment is to objectively examine the organization, propose a five-year plan and put the suggested structure for RHS on paper. It would describe the recommended role of Board members, officers and staff.

Part of the objective in assembling and organizing this information is to facilitate solicitation of grants from various funding sources. The finished product will help all concerned, including Board members and candidates, to clarify their understanding of the organization.

Sue Delves put her thinking on the need for such a review of the organization this way. "This presidency marks an unofficial line between the Good Old Days of 100% volunteer activity and the future with paid staff. The first step was taken when Edna White identified Michael Stachnik as someone who could come in and organize the archives and gave us \$2000 to accomplish the task. The rest is part of our history."

Sunday, Dec. 5
Visit RHS on the Parlor Tour
Monday, Dec. 6
RHS Board Meeting, 4 p.m.
Evening, by Beverly Hills Juniors
St. Nicholas Day Children's Party,

WHAT'S AHEAD at RHS

10621 SEELEY AVENUE
CHICAGO 60643

Elmer H. Johnson, Editor

NewsLetter
Ridge
Historical
Society

DATED MATERIAL — FIRST CLASS MAIL

RECOLLECTIONS on a 50th WEDDING ANNIVERSARY: November 15, 1898

Charles Oliver Howe and Mary Faxon Howe

"Among the things for which we bless Almighty God, hardly one is greater than this: that we have been permitted to live in this century that is now drawing to a close. This wonderful, glorious, blessed nineteenth century.

This Century has brought us so much into the houses we live in, Instead of the flint & the tinder box, we now have the friction match, we turn on the gas, we touch the electric button. Instead of the wide open fireplace with its swinging crane, the little tin oven on the hearth, or the big brick oven beside it, we have our cooking range that lets us boil and broil, & toast & bake & fry all at once & so nicely. Oh Yes. There are ten thousand little conveniences from the patent egg beater to the wonderful sewing machine, and all have come to us since Grandpa was a baby. But dear me; when we go out and around, we find the world full of the wonderful new inventions & discoveries, steamboats, railroads, telegraph, telephones and the like, without limit almost.

Why! do you know, if in those early days Aunt Annie had been living in Japan & Grandma had desired to ask her some question, this is about the way she would have gotten about it. First she would have gotten out

her foolscap paper. Next she would have sharpened her goose quill— we hadn't any steel pens then— after writing her letter she would fold it after the fashion of those days (they hadn't any envelopes). She must light a candle so as to warm the end of her stick of red sealing wax and then she must daub a little on her letter so as to seal it up tightly, she would write



Mr. and Mrs. Charles Oliver Howe
on their Golden Wedding Anniversary

the address, sprinkle a little black sand to prevent blotting, take it up to the postmaster, pay 25 or 50 cents postage & then just go about her business for a whole year before she would even thinking of looking for an answer.

Well, children, what would she do today if she wanted to hear from Annie in a real hurry? Why, she would go into Chicago, send her message by cable and then perhaps go down to 59 Dearborn St., stay there an hour or two and she would go back to the office the cable co. and expect to find an answer from Miss Annie. Her message had traveled some 10,000 miles or more and Aunt Annie's reply had traveled some 10,000 miles or more in just this little short hour or two she had been waiting."