

Membership fees are the bread and butter of Ridge Historical Society. A renewal envelope was enclosed in the last issue of the Newsletter. Please send yours to RHS, with your check, as soon as possible.

Ridge Historical Society

Newsletter

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2000

10621 SEELEY AVENUE • CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60643 • (773) 881-1675 • Pat McGrail, President • (773) 238-6196

LOOKING to the FUTURE

Reorganization is underway to help Ridge Historical Society become stronger and more forward looking. Board member Cindy Fielding is in charge of reviewing the current structure of the organization and suggesting improvements. One of her goals is to create a one-to five-year plan for the future of RHS.

She began gathering information last summer by interviewing 16 board members. The interviews included discussion of policies, goals and skills that could be put to better use by RHS.

She met twice with former executive director, Michael Stachnik, and once with Paul Petraitis, the current director. Stachnik provided insights into the RHS archives and collections and ventured thoughts on uses of Driscoll House, as well as details of his involvement and activities while executive director.

Cindy Fielding's meeting with Paul Petraitis included information on his background and experience and his understanding of, and expectations for, RHS.

From this and other basic information, Fielding developed a needs assessment, addressing RHS finances, policies, future exhibits, committee and staff responsibilities.

Participants at the November, 1999 board meeting had the opportunity to sign up for membership on a variety of committees that will define and execute plans for continued improvement of RHS. Thus, responsibility that has previously been carried by one or two RHS members or officers will be spread more evenly throughout the membership. At board meetings and general meetings committee chairs will touch base with each other. Everyone will become aware of what everyone else is doing.

Fielding identifies the current status of the project as the "get busy" phase. Committees are meeting and selecting their respective chairpeople. Agenda for the remainder of year 2000 are being discussed. With board member Jim Smenos, Fielding and the executive committee are developing job descriptions for staff, docents and volunteers. Three different archiving committees are taking inventory at Driscoll House.

The near future products of this project include:

+Creation of a "skills profile sheets" by board officers and committee chair.

+A firmed-up Calendar of Events for year 2000.

+A year-in-review annual report for 1999.

+A "central information station" that will be constantly on display, listing the schedule of meetings and events.

+A binder in the first floor office that includes minutes for all board and committee meetings.

Members are invited to submit their ideas at this time of planning for the future. Call Kate Eaton, (773) 233-9806, who will direct it to the appropriate committee for attention. All members are also invited to attend the committee meetings.

From the PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE by Pat McGrail

HAPPY NEW YEAR! And all good wishes for this year 2000!

Grateful thanks to Nancy Peecher for organizing the *Caroling Caroling* Christmas tree exhibit. She coordinated the setting up of fourteen trees by garden,



civic, art and charitable organizations— each with a Christmas song theme. Each tree was a work of art and we appreciate all of the community participation.

Thanks also to Doris Moulton for arranging all the decorating and painting that was done just prior to installing the above exhibit. What a difference fresh paint can make! And board members rolled up their

sleeves for the final touch — a good housecleaning. Many Thanks.

Do you have a list of EVERYTHING in your house? That's what we are doing at RHS in a project of cataloging all of our archival papers, museum objects and costumes. You can be part of this if you wish. The Archival Committee works on Mondays at 12:00 noon, Costume Committee on Tuesdays at 9:00 a.m. and Museum Committee on Thursdays at 4:00 p.m. Stop in and help, or call RHS at 773-881-1675 if you have questions.

Annual Meeting Program Features

The Hows and Whys of Documenting History

Those who have not yet become acquainted with Ridge Historical's new Executive Director, Paul Petraitis, will have an excellent opportunity to do so at the RHS Annual Meeting and Dinner, Friday evening, February 11. It will be he who presents the program of the evening, following a brief meeting led by new President Pat McGrail.

The Petraitis presentation will be a slide program titled "Documenting the Past" centering on the basic human urge to record and preserve the happenings of the century in which they live. He will focus on the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century.

Slides shown will be drawn not only from his own collection, but those from the archives of the late Gary Sauermann and Dr. German.

Hors D'oeuvres will be served at 5:30 with dinner at 6:30 p.m., followed immediately by the program. Charge for the dinner and program is \$20. Reservations can be made by enclosing payment with the coupon clipped from the enclosed sheet. An alternative is by telephone to RHS (773-881-1675) followed by your check mailed to Ridge Historical Society at the address shown on the cover of this magazine or the coupon enclosed.

Girl Scouts Developing Exhibit

Michele O'Connor and Susan Brenner have accepted leadership roles in developing an exhibit at Ridge Historical Society that illuminates the history of the Girl Scout movement and, in particular, of Girl Scouting in Beverly/Morgan Park. There are 20 troops in the Beverly Service Unit, plus more troops in the Morgan Park Service Unit. Some of the historic material they plan to use comes from Girl Scouts, Inc., from Girl Scouts of Chicago and some from a previous exhibit shown several years ago.

It is part of their individual effort to earn the Girl Scout Gold Award which requires at least 50 hours of community service. Michele and Susan will also act as guides when visiting troops tour the exhibit.

In addition they are serving under the direction of Linda Lamberty in indexing new RHS exhibit materials as they enter the collection. Both girls are members of Troop 931 which meets in Christ the King Church.



RHS Docents are principally considered as hosts or hostesses during Thursday and Sunday hours when the house is open for viewing by the interested public attracted by the flag at the entrance. Many, like Eileen Klees shown here, often fulfill needed tasks between the times they are being gracious to visitors.

History-minded Price Family Files Featured at February 6 Meeting

by Kate Eaton

Driscoll House will ring with voices from the past at the program for the next general membership meeting, Sunday, February 6 at 2:30 p.m. Based on documents from the RHS archives, a program of first-hand recollections of life around 1900 will be offered.

Some of the documents used as source material for this program are from John P. Mansfield whose family lived in the shadow of Morgan Park Academy's Blake Hall around 1910. We will also hear from Louise Barwick whose recollections date back to 1895.

Background material includes a 1908 article from the *Real Estate and Building Journal* that described the "wonderous natural charms" of living on the Blue Island Ridge. There are also the reminiscences of Thomas Scott Miller, a 1905 graduate of Morgan Park Academy. Dating back to 1908 is the *Childhood Recollections of Lillis, Allen, Owen and John Price*.

This program of first-hand accounts of our community as it was a century ago should have something of interest for all who attend. It has been quite a while since a general membership meeting and these excerpts from the meticulous Price family file will attract as many members as possible to the February 6 meeting.

OWEN: "I recall one evening — or maybe it was a Sunday afternoon — when Dad, stretched out on the sofa napping, scared us all into fits by rising up with a war whoop and grabbing his pant leg, shaking out a little mouse which he had squeezed to a pulp!"

ALLEN: (I remember) "Professor Gunderson, a beardy man who taught at some Scandinavian institution (Norwegian Department of the Baptist Seminary), his plump wife, and his six children, all of whom retained a foreign flavor. We had a family joke about Mrs. Gunderson shouting out the back door 'Ben-n-ny,

come in and eat. Your father, he's on the table, and Henry, he's all et."

JOHN: "Across Morgan Avenue there were at least seven houses on our block: at Crescent and Morgan, the Cresseys; next, the Russells, a big place; then the Frehrenkemps, the Roys and the Putzes; then the loors in early years, and a house at Western and Morgan."

LILLIS: "You crossed a lot to (get to the) school next to the loors. Mr. loor later became very wealthy building hearses in Grand Rapids, I think."

OWEN: "Miss Stella Clissold, who died in 1907, was my first love. Mother used to let me go over there occasionally for overnight visits, and I remember how embarrassed I was when offered an unbroken soft-boiled egg in an egg cup for breakfast, not knowing how to handle the pesky thing; and how awed I was to see the neat way Mr. Clissold nipped off the top of his egg with a sort of pronged scissors so the innards could be salted and buttered and delicately spooned out with a little spoon. We weren't so fancy at our house."



Community organizations often find Driscoll House (Ridge Historical Society's headquarters) an ideal location to hold one of their special events. This photograph by Jutta Hayes shows RHS's Executive Director, Paul Petraitis (left) entertaining Alderman Ginger Rugai and Willie Winters, Executive Director of Beverly Area Planning Association, when that organization held its Christmas party there

Personal Storywriting Seminar

Beginning Wednesday, March 8 at 9:30 a.m. there will be a weekly, personal experience storywriting seminar on World War II. Whether you were on the battlefield or the homefront, it will be a structured opportunity to record your impressions and experiences from that era.

Those who were youngsters, war brides and/or workers for the war effort have stories to share as well as those who were in the Armed Forces. Younger persons will be writing the tales they have heard from elders. Prospective participants should indicate their interest by mail to RHS or by calling (773) 881-1675. There will be a nominal fee and several people will be involved with helping to inspire your stories. More details will be in local newspapers as well the next *Newsletter* and announced at the February meeting of RHS.

The May/June exhibit at Ridge Historical Society is also to be centered on World War II, particularly as it related to families living on the Ridge.

Calendar of Events

February 6

Centennial Exhibit Opens

February 6

General Meeting & Program: 2:30 p.m.

February 7

Ridge Historical Society Board Meeting: 4 p.m.

February 11

Annual Holiday Dinner & Program: 6:30 p.m.
Hors D'oeuvres: 5:30 p.m.

March 6

Ridge Historical Society Board Meeting: 4 p.m.

March 8

Family Stories Program
with particular interest in World War II stories

FROM the DIRECTOR'S DESK
by Paul Petraitis

VOICE MAIL — It's Here!

To better serve callers who have questions about their homes, local history, genealogy, or the RHS calendar of upcoming events, the new RHS Ameritech Voice Mail system, announced in the last issue, is now in operation.

Calls go to Voice Mail when there is no one present to answer, or when the RHS line is busy. The general mail box will take the message or the caller has other options:

If you have a message for an RHS board member (especially one who doesn't have an answering machine), **PRESS 1** and leave your message.

If you want to get in touch with me or have a question about the events calendar, **PRESS 2**.

All research questions: architectural, historical or geographical, will properly go to the RHS research team if the caller will **PRESS 3**.

Board members can check their own messages on this system from their home phones. It's almost like having a secretary.

GET to KNOW RHS — *Intimately*

Elsewhere in this issue is an article about the restructuring and reorganization of Ridge Historical Society. Archiving committees are reviewing the RHS collections of costumes, artifacts, documents and memorabilia that are the essence of the RHS collections. All members are invited to participate in this crucial phase of the effort which can be tremendously interesting. There will never be a better way to see the RHS collections or to know the organization inside out.

To participate, call Kate Eaton at 773-233-9806 and she will connect you with the committee working in the area of your greatest interest.

Mrs. John Mackle
18402 Pinewood Lane
Timley Park IL 60477

10621 SEELEY AVENUE
Chicago 60643

Newsletter
Elmer H. Johnson, Editor
**Ridge
Historical
Society**



DATED MATERIAL — FIRST CLASS MAIL

The Hopkinson/Platt House

Undoubtedly one of the best known historic houses of the Ridge is the Hopkinson house, also known as the Platt-house. The structure stands on three separate foundations, one of which belonged to a small farmhouse built about 1840.

The house we see there today was built in 1871 and was first occupied by William Hopkinson and his English bride. Hopkinson had bought the land from the Blue Island Land and Building Co. The Barnards and the Wilcoxes are said to have been the only occupants of the area until 1871 when six houses were built, of which the Hopkinson house was one.

The Hopkinsons were renowned for their hospitality and made their home a kind of community center where their farmer friends gathered in their leisure hours. Plays were staged on the third floor. Hopkinson was chairman of the first Morgan Park town council.

A great, century-old oak tree standing in the back yard until the 1980s, was known as the Council Oak — the legend being that it had been the meeting place for Indians.

The Platt house name came from occupancy by Dr. Robert and Harriet Platt from 1925 to 1979, Dr. Platt being a University of Chicago professor of geography. After his death Mrs. Platt boarded as many as 116 students, usually from foreign countries.

The property is unique extending west to the middle of the block, behind the neighbors' back yards.



Landscape architect Jens Jensen originally designed the grounds.

Succeeding occupants were the Zeis family from Germany who started Ridge Country Club on the west lawn. Next the Lee family came from a Southern state in the 1890s. The Lee daughters married Horton boys — founders of Chicago Bridge and Iron Works.

The Lees were followed by families named Goller and Nichols, and in 1924 the house became home to the newly-wed Dr. and Mrs. Robert S. Platt. Later, as a widow, Mrs. Platt sheltered unwanted children and rootless adults. Following the Hungarian revolt she took in five Hungarian refugees.

Thus, on Drew Street, is a significant landmark, made so by its many remarkable occupants.