

Ridge Historical Society

Newsletter

JUNE - JULY 2000

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JUNE 4 PROGRAM RECALLS WORLD WAR II AT HOME AND ON THE FRONT

Ed Rooney, native Southsider and longtime Chicago journalist, will be the featured speaker at the RHS June 4 meeting, addressing the sacrifice and commitment to duty at home that helped the Allied Force emerge victorious from World War II. With United States forces fighting on two continents much depended on that support from people back on the job here in the States.

Rooney's service as a medic took him from Iran to the Anzio beachhead, to the armed forces' newspaper: the "Stars & Stripes". Returning home he worked for the *Southtown Economist*, the City News Bureau and the *Chicago Daily News*. From 1978 to 1993 he was a fulltime journalism professor at Loyola University. Now retired, he is active in the Kiwanis Club of Beverly Area Golden K.

The 20-minute program and a question-and-answer period will follow a short business meeting at 2:30 p.m., Sunday, June 4. The program is a prelude to the RHS World War II exhibit, "From the Home Front to the Battlefield" which opens June 11.

RHS World War II Exhibit Highlights Items from Local Vets

by Paul Petraitis, Executive Director & Exhibit Curator.

How did Chicago find out about the attack on Pearl Harbor, Sunday December 7, 1941?

Some were at Soldiers' Field watching football; others were coming home from church.

The outbreak of war ended our midwest isolationism and catapulted our young men and women into a new world of international conflict.

Here at home industry retooled and households knuckled down with rations, war bond drives and victory gardens.

This summer Ridge Historical Society looks at World War II from the battlefield to the homefront, with an ongoing schedule of exhibits and programs.

Our Storytellers oral history program, spearheaded by Kate Eaton and Sue Delves, will turn to live war stories of more than a dozen local vets, from induction to homecoming. But text alone does not an exhibit make. You've got to have the Stuff! And because

Veterans Urge Display of Flag

World War II veterans participating in the RHS Storytellers Project urge local residents to fly the flag of the United States, especially on holidays, including June 14 which is Flag Day. Daily display of the flag is an even better idea, according to the veterans, who know what it means to put their lives at risk defending the nation it represents.

many of our storytellers are consummate collectors, we have the stuff!

Period magazines, V-mail, cartoons, official and personal photographs, ships' logs, models, ceremonial swords, maps, propaganda items, ration recipes, flags and much more.

In addition to material from the RHS collections, major contributions to the exhibit include those from veterans:

Bruce Walker (Naval Air Force, Pacific theater), **Les Harkness** (Army Air Corps, Alaskan and China fronts), **Cliff Hullinger** (Army Air Corps, Africa and Italy); **Bob "Doc" Wirtshafter** (Battle of the Bulge followed by an assignment in counter intelligence, Normandy); and **Steve Lewellyn**, AAF pilot shot down over Germany, May, 1944. He was a P.O.W. until Patton's army liberated his prison, April 28, 1945.

Joan Schechner, in the Army Nurse Corp. in the Pacific, including Saipan and Iwo Jimo and other locations.

Through Summer and Fall months RHS will be scheduling panel discussions led by its team of veterans, related to action in the Pacific, European and other theaters of the war. There will be handouts available including recommended reading lists, available World War II videos, as well as a WW II timeline.

Another display will relate to the work of Beverly resident, the late Bob Thayer, who was in charge of development of the Radio Proximity (VT) Fuse. Still another will include a paper mache relief model of Oahu by veteran Peter Volay.

Those attracted to this exhibit are encouraged to bring their family young people to learn of the war and the sacrifices made by these veterans in the defense of our nation against some very serious enemies.

"The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten".

Tribune Writer Addresses RHS About His Book on Otto Kerner

Bill Barnhart, a *Chicago Tribune* editorial person and co-author of a book, *Kerner: The Conflict of Intangible Rights*, addressed the April meeting of Ridge Historical Society on the life of Illinois' governor of the 1960s.

Kerner preceded his terms as Governor as a County Judge who oversaw elections and reformed adoption procedures in Illinois. He was not a consummate politician (as was Anton Cermak who invented Chicago's "Democratic Machine") but he beat Stratton by a half million votes and won again in 1964, running against Chuck Percy. In 1967 he was appointed by President Johnson to head what became widely known as the Kerner Commission formed to address racial outbreaks that had been occurring. That report which placed responsibility on white citizens infuriated President Johnson but he later appointed Kerner to the Court of Appeals. Jake Arvey had President Truman appoint Kerner U.S. Attorney for Chicago.

Militarily, Kerner went from membership in the Illinois National Guard to the regular army as an aid to General Westmoreland.

Kerner was eventually indicted for "bribery, fraud, conspiracy and tax evasion." The charge was that he had "defrauded the people of Illinois of their intangible right to honest and faithful service by government officials." He blundered in choosing Washington attorneys and by being too loquacious when on trial and served seven months in prison. Although he had never been part of the political machine, he was tarred as a symbol of its corruption.

Among the many good things Kerner did for Illinois was put forth the effort which made this state home to the Fermi Lab. He supported President Johnson on conduct of the Vietnam War.

Kerner's wife was a Cermak, a strong woman who was of great help to him, although an alcoholic.

Born in 1908, died in 1976, educated at Brown University and in Cambridge, England, Otto Kerner's life is an interesting saga. The book is available at Books on Walden.

Local Residence Work of Famed Architect

The work of one of the nation's most celebrated architects is represented on the Ridge by a single house of his design. The architect is John O. Merrill, best known as a partner of the firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. The house illustrated, designed in 1927, is at 207 W. 101st Street, built in that year for Benjamin F. Clarke who had been a fraternity brother of John Merrill when both attended the University of Wisconsin.

Merrill left U. of W. in 1917 to serve as a Captain in the Coastal Artillery Corps, following which he completed his education at MIT, being awarded a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1921. He joined the Chicago architectural firm of Granger & Bollenbacher and by 1927 became an associate of that partnership.

The depression reduced that firm's activities and

Calendar of Events

Sunday, June 4

General Meeting and Program 2:30 p.m.
Ed Rooney, Speaker [see Page 1]

Mondays, June 5 and July 10

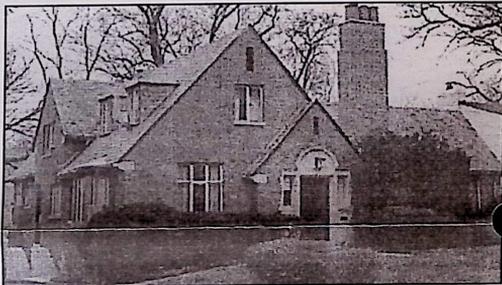
Ridge Historical Society Board Meetings, 4 p.m.

Sunday, June 11

World War II Exhibit opens: regular hours 2 to 5 p.m.
Several veterans will be interpreting their part of the exhibit. Come and meet them!

Sunday, July 16

Panel discussion, 2 p.m. titled
"ETO" (European Theater of Operations)
Three veterans will discuss their experiences
Limited Seating



from 1934 to 1939 he served as a staff architect, and later chief architect for the midwestern states of the Federal Housing Administration. In that same year he became a partner with two of his Tavern Club friends, Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings.

For three years during World War II Merrill lived in Oak Ridge, Tenn. where his firm was commissioned to design not only the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, but also construction of a small city for workers at the lab.

Following the war the Skidmore firm designed the Fort Hamilton Veterans' Administration Hospital in Brooklyn, with Merrill in charge. He was chosen to direct revisions to the Chicago Building Code from 1947 to 1949 and then, from 1950 to 1954, developed the permanent facilities for the U.S. Army and Air Force on Okinawa.

In 1968 John Merrill received the coveted American Institute of Architects Honor Award for his design of the Chicago Civic Center. He retired to Colorado Springs in 1958 and died there on June 10, 1975.

RHS Solicits Ideas from Internet Users

To enhance procedures already in place, the RHS Archives Committee is investigating systems used by other research organizations and museums. Internet users who encounter good ideas on this subject are requested to contact RHSLatwedtv.net.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Pat McGrail

I am both excited and pleased with the ongoing activity of a number of RHS Board members in locating, describing provenance and cataloging all the items in our collection. If you can imagine listing every item in your own household, you may understand the enormous undertaking that this is. At the same time, a program/exhibit committee is selecting memorabilia relating to our World War II exhibit opening in June.

Out on the grounds three Master Gardener candidates have offered to restore some of our garden areas, primarily the edge of the driveway to Longwood and the open space behind our neighbor's garage to the south. These volunteers are Carol Belshaw, Norine Beirne and Joyce Glynn.

How lucky we are to have such interest in and dedication to Ridge Historical Society!

Storytellers' Field Trip Taps Memories at Washington & Jane Smith Home

Participants in The Storytellers Project, who meet each Wednesday and Thursday morning at 9:30 in Driscoll House, recently made a field trip to Washington & Jane Smith Home. Their objective was to talk to World War II veterans and their families.

Board members Kate Eaton and Eileen Klees were prepared with a list of questions designed to stir memories and start conversations. Startling tales of luck, bravery and personal hardship came forth along with familiar wartime lore. Residents told of flying bombing missions over Germany, falling

through passing along information she overheard as German prisoners discussed upcoming bombing raids.

A woman whose husband served on the USS Pensacola, recalled making bomb caps, and travelling to California with her young son in an effort to find where her husband was.

Another veteran worked on his father's farm in Iowa before joining the Army Air Force and flying 35 missions over Germany. He declared that his best memory of the war was meeting his future wife in London, adding that he still recalled the harrowing paper work and long wait after the war before she could join him in the United States.

The World War II exhibit, opening June 11 at RHS will feature many similar stories of great interest. Until then the Storytellers Project continues, and the Society wants to hear from all veterans and their families who are willing to share their memories with RHS and with the community through the exhibit. To participate, call RHS at (773) 881-1675 and leave a message. Your call will be returned promptly.

—by Kate Eaton

Ridge Historical Society at Work

RHS reorganization committees continue their progress in identifying problem areas and are pushing ahead with their respective agendas.

THE ARCHIVES COMMITTEE, has encountered computer problems that have temporarily slowed its ability to organize materials under a new cataloging system. The committee is currently focusing on bringing order to the archives room and to miscellaneous documents that have not been integrated into any of the three cataloging systems with which the committee is working. Meanwhile, board member Dave Daruszka and co-chair Eileen Klees are addressing the computer problems.

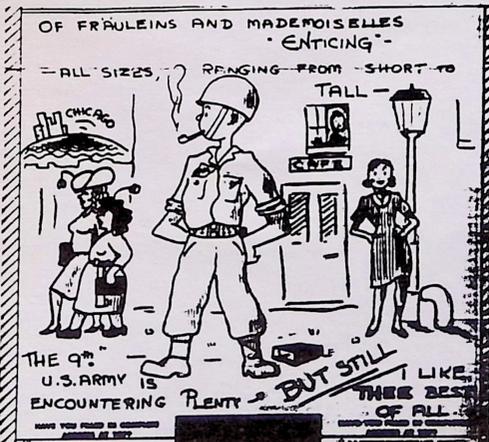
THE COSTUMES COMMITTEE continues mending items and sewing in labels. Chairman Pat McGrail recently attended a seminar on maintaining costumes collections. Julie DeHaan has become registrar for the Costumes Committee.

THE OBJECTS COMMITTEE, according to Chair Doris Moulton, has completed its inventories of the collection's household objects, communications equipment and toys. It is currently working with the Society's collection of military memorabilia.

THE PLANNING COMMITTEE is gathering information on potential funding sources, and Chair Dave Daruszka is preparing a printout that outlines the committee's progress to date. Next, the committee plans to focus on outreach and membership.

THE HOUSING COMMITTEE has spent \$1400 to date correcting some of the many plumbing problems at Driscoll House. Co-chair Doris Moulton reports estimates for fixing the flagpole are \$600 and replacing the worn out copy machine, \$2500.

RHS president Pat McGrail will be working with three master gardener candidates from the University



Cartoon by Bob "Doc" Wirtshafer

love while writing to servicemen, working in munitions factories and helping European civilians contact relatives in the States.

One veteran, who served as an interpreter during the war, told of saving the lives of an entire village

DATED MATERIAL — FIRST CLASS MAIL

of Illinois extension services on planning and planting landscaping improvements on Driscoll House property.

THE PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE is reviewing potential funding sources and local printers. Chairman Grace Kuikman reports appointment of a website subcommittee which met with Beverly resident Jim McGreal of JMC Studios. He is a professional website designer who helped the committee reserve a domain name (ridgehistoricalsociety.org).

"When our website is up and going," said Kuikman, "our world-class housing can be seen by the whole world. People occupying Walter Burley Griffin houses in Australia will be able to check out the Walter Burley Griffin houses in our neighborhood."

— by Kate Eaton

MEMORIAL GIFTS HONOR "BUD" LANE

Numerous friends and relatives of the late Bud Lane have chosen to honor his memory and recognize his steadfast interest in Ridge Historical Society by making contributions to this organization in his honor. Up to the time of publication such gifts have been received from the following:

Mabel Holdsworth
Joan Wynne Murphy
Pat McGrail
Lois Grayton
Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Delves

Mary Ellen & Betty Samuels
Jack Jones
Raymond & Diane Anderson
Mr. & Mrs. Fred Haw
Bob & Marilyn Stone

Kent & Linda Lamberty
Peg & Wendell Kapustiak & Family
Hazel Green School
Roger & Betty Benasutti
Judy & R.P. Anderson
Tom & Gayle Ellingson
Robert C. & Carla Lane
Clifford & Louise Hullinger
Rosemarie Lebensorger
Genevieve Graf

Joan Strueck
JoAnn Fitzgerald
Mike & Julie DeHaan
Kay J. Parkinson
Linda Jakubowski
Jean Lane Shannon
Russ & Lois Agrimson
Kevin & Catherine Gilfether
Kasey Miller
William & Marie Sandstrom

Girl Scouts Featured in RHS Exhibit

The Girl Scout exhibit reported previously as being "in progress" is now on display on the first floor until the June 4 meeting. Thereafter it will continue to be on display but move downstairs to the meeting room.

Senior Scouts Michele O'Connor and Susan Brenner each earn the Girl Scout Gold Award for putting this display together.

Featured are a history of Scout and leader uniforms, many handbooks and songsheets and other Scout memorabilia from throughout many years. Michele and Susan will act as guides when other troops visit the collection.