

Ridge Historical Society

Newsletter

DECEMBER 2000 - JANUARY 2001

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

World War II Exhibit Draws More Media Attention to RHS

by Paul Petrattis, Director

Channel 2 reporter, Burleigh Hines, recently interviewed local veteran Bruce Walker and me for a tape that was aired as part of that station's Veterans' Day feature in early November. The exhibit has also been covered in the local press and on the Channel 19 cable network.

New material loaned for the exhibit continues to come in, including some splendid Merchant Marine material and Manhattan Project documents. It is here in time for the December 10 presentation (at 2:30 p.m.) by local resident, veteran Fred Olivi, and includes a video tape on the atomic bomb and the end of the war with Japan.

Veterans and their families continue to drop in regularly to view the exhibit and, while here, often share their experiences. We're learning as much about the home front as the battlefield.

Back when Martin VanBuren was President, stage coaches from Detroit and wagons from the Wabash Valley traversed the top of our ridge en route to the city of Chicago. The Vincennes Road, as it was called, passed what would become the site of the Driscoll House property near Seeley Ave. Later the Morgans rerouted the road further east to the present location of the modern, well-traveled street of today. About this same time, Horsethief Hollow was cleared out by the militia.

The Vincennes Road and the Morgan family are but two of the topics RHS will be exploring in 2001, as well as delving into our pioneer past.

This responds to those who have requested RHS to assemble a permanent exhibit on the area's history.

Using maps, photographs, models and artifacts, RHS will tell the story of the underground railroad, the glacial and post-glacial history of the area, its fur trade era and the flora and fauna that was part of the everyday life on the Ridge, 150 years ago.

Using research materials assembled for the upcoming pioneer exhibit, I have begun lecturing at South Suburban College with Professor Dave Bartlett's history class, and for the Calumet Heritage

Commission, a bi-state group promoting heritage tourism. The Morgan Park/Beverly area's history of underground railroad activity, combined with documented "stations" in nearby Roseland and Riverdale have served to illuminate a little known chapter in our history.

Similar research in other towns to the south (Blue Island, Homewood, Mokenca, etc.) is putting our portion of Illinois on the map for the first time, just as the National Park Service is assembling a nation-wide underground railroad data base.

We plan to celebrate Illinois Family Heritage Day in June with these other "Vincennes Road towns." Your ideas are solicited—perhaps a pioneer days walk-a-thon; a recreation of the original stage coach route? Let us know your thinking!

DRISCOLL HOUSE REPAIR NEEDS OFFER TAX DEDUCTION OPPORTUNITY

Driscoll House, our most visible asset, is ailing.

Roof repair needs on the south facade are urgent before winter snows begin. Water damage is already obvious in the second floor costumes room. The serious nature of these south facade problems takes precedence over the urgent need for new gutters on the west side of the house. South facade roof repairs are estimated to cost \$8600. Special gifts to meet this are essential.

Thank you for considering this serious plea for your tax deductible financial contribution. For more information or to make a donation, please call Doris Moulton at 239-2377 or Bill Sandstrom at 233-7586.

Calendar of Events

Sunday, December 3	4th Annual Beverly Hills/Morgan Park Parlor Tour
Monday December 4	RHS Board meeting: 4 p.m.
Sunday December 10	General meeting & Program: 2:30 p.m.
Sunday January 7	General Meeting & Program: 2:30p.m.
Monday January 8	RHS Board meeting: 4 p.m.

**HOLIDAY PARLOR TOUR DEC. 3
TO INCLUDE RHS's DRISCOLL HOUSE
"FDR" Impersonator Here to Regale Guests**

Continuing the World War II theme of the current exhibit, Driscoll House will be decorated for a Christmas typical of those war-torn years, and is included in this year's Christmas Parlor Tour, Sunday, December 3. In addition, R. J. Lindsey, a professional historical dramatist, will be at Driscoll House on that December 3 date portraying President Franklin Delano Roosevelt preparing for a fireside chat. In addition, appropriately costumed RHS members will be working in the dining room, making Yuletide decorations.

All this will greet the many visitors who will be participating in the fourth annual Holiday Parlor Tour developed by Cindy and Don Fielding, owners of German House, 10924 S. Prospect Ave. Luncheon will be served there from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. on the day of the tour.

Also included in that tour is Cork & Kerry Tavern's renowned holiday display. It was featured in the book "The Best Christmas Decorations in Chicagoland" for its 15,000 lights and more than thirty mechanical displays twirling and rocking throughout the space.

Private homes on the tour will feature Christmas theme collections of needlepoint Santas, elaborate nutcrackers, whimsical snowmen, Spode china and Waterford crystal ornaments. Children will be performing holiday carols.

Reservations are required for the luncheon: (779) 881-1831. Luncheon and the full tour costs \$22 per person; for the tour alone the fee is \$15 and Driscoll House festivities alone may be enjoyed for \$3.

**LOCAL VETERAN TO SHARE EXPERIENCE
of DROPPING ATOMIC BOMB
December 10 Meeting Highlight**

Morgan Park resident, Fred Olivi, co-pilot of "Bock's Car", the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, August 9, 1945, will be the speaker at the RHS December 10 meeting at Driscoll House, beginning at 2:30 p.m.

A 20-year-old resident of Pullman when he enlisted in 1942 to be an Air Corp pilot, Olivi will tell of his experiences during World War II and show a 20-minute film on the loading of both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs into the Enola Gay and Bock's Car, respectively.

Still in the Air Corps in 1947, Olivi was recruited for counterintelligence but opted for reserve status so he could continue flying. From 1948 to 1965 he piloted military planes out of O'Hare Airport. From 1965 to 1972 his reserve assignment was liaison officer for the Air Force Academy in Colorado. He also served from 1950 to 1986 as head of bridge operation and maintenance for the City of Chicago.

Soon after his Air Corps service ended Olivi began

to get speaking invitations; but it was six or seven years before he was permitted to talk about the Nagasaki mission. Since then he has addressed meetings from coast to coast on events detailed in his book, "Decision at Nagasaki: The Mission That Almost Failed."

RECALLING "Christmas at the Bulge"

A slight extension of the holiday season will occur with the Sunday, January 7, 2001 program, immediately following a short business meeting at 2:30 p.m. to which everyone is invited.

Dr. Robert Wirtshafter will tell of his Christmas experience during the Battle of the Bulge. The second half of that program will shift to Christmas on the home front during those war years. Refreshments will follow the program.

AMONG BEVERLY'S ACHIEVERS

One of many interesting elements of the ongoing World War II exhibit at RHS's Driscoll House headquarters is the story of the late Captain George R. Wendt, U.S. Naval Reserve.

A Chicagoan, he was born in 1923 and was a 1943 graduate of the University of Notre Dame. Even before graduation he enlisted in the Officer's Candidate program of the Naval Reserve known



Capt. George Wendt
U.S. Naval Reserve

as V-7. Upon receiving his degree, he returned to the Naval Reserve Midshipman's School, also at Notre Dame, and by 1944 was commissioned Ensign. He was appointed Captain in September 1968.

World War II assignments included amphibious service school, and several roles aboard LSTs operating in the Pacific. As Lt. (jg), Wendt was ordered to the intelligence section of Naval forces in Germany and liaison officer in the port of Le Havre, France. His active duty at that time terminated in July, 1946.

He went on to three terms on the Ninth Naval District Reserve Policy Board and special active duty for a Command Information Bureau known as Operation Inland Seas. He became commanding officer of a Naval Reserve Public Affairs Company. The group won the Public Relations Achievement

Award. Beginning in 1974 he was the commanding officer of a Navy information office in Chicago.

Wendt entered an American Public Relations Society competition and earned for the Navy the "Silver Anvil" award for the outstanding public relations event for that year: the story of Operation Inland Sea. This was a first for the Navy.

In private life the late George Wendt was in real estate, was a director of Beverly Bank and an officer and director of several other firms in this community. He was on the Board of Lay Directors of Little Company of Mary Hospital, the Past Commander of Beverly Hills Post Amvets, Chairman of the Trustees of a boy's high school and a trustee of a girl's high school, and of Beverly Art Center. He also gave leadership to several organizations of Naval organizations such as the Navy League and the Chicago Commandery of the Naval Order of the U.S. and was largely responsible for keeping alive the observance of the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

RHS BOARD ACTIONS and MUSINGS from the November 6 meeting

The next annual dinner for members and guests will be held in February, 2001, with a Valentine's Day theme similar to this year's annual dinner.

House & Grounds Committee co-chairs, Doris Moulton and Bill Sandstrom are currently addressing urgent roof repairs for Driscoll House. Estimates from three sources resulted in the job being awarded at an \$8600 cost. Lead-coated copper will repair and replace the crumbling gutter box and downspout. Part of the cost will have to come from the principal of the endowment fund. Not included are gutters on the west facade which the contractor found to be almost as defective.

RHS by-laws call for the **Nominating Committee** to be composed of three Board members and two non-Board members. They will work with Board members Eileen Klees, Walt Kelly and Linda Lamberty. This committee is charged to assemble a slate of five officers and eight board members. All RHS officers and half the board stand for election every year. To volunteer to serve on the Nominating Committee as a non-Board member, call Eileen Klees at 238-4221.

The **Bylaws Committee** will soon be ready to mail a proposed up-dated version, and a copy of the existing bylaws, to Board members for comparison. A special meeting may be called to consider the proposed changes. The Committee sought and received input from local and statewide associations with expertise in governance of not-for-profit organizations.

Dave Daruszka, chair of the **Planning Committee** reported completion of research on grant potentials for RHS. This information is now at Driscoll House and available to all members. Dave also reported a planned future meeting with Linda Lamberty and Harold Wolff to discuss a fee structure for staff services to individuals who seek RHS help on research projects.

The **Archives Committee** has been planning training sessions for docents and for others, on accessioning. Co-chair Eileen Klees reported the purchase of PastPerfect computer software for accessioning and other RHS needs. Harold Wolff was hired by the Board as the new RHS registrar, working with the PastPerfect software to update RHS records.

The **Objects Committee**, which has requested a name change to **Artifacts Committee**, has been down in the furnace room and up to the third floor cedar closet, cataloging as it makes its way through the house. Chair Doris Moulton says the committee will contact an art expert soon to review the Society's collection of paintings and help determine its value.

The **Costumes Committee** reports good progress mending and numbering 176 items with (to quote Chair Pat McGrail) "only thousands more to go."

And finally, the Board was informed by Doris Moulton that an instruction session is being planned for members who use the second floor copy machine for RHS business, with time and date to be announced.

The next Board meeting is scheduled Monday, Dec. 4 at 4 p.m.

—by Kate Eaton

**SPECIAL ATTENTION IS DIRECTED
TO THE COSTS OF THE REPAIR NEEDS
OF DRISCOLL HOUSE AS REPORTED
IN THE ADJOINING COLUMN
and the need for members and friends
to direct special gifts to RHS
to help meet the special costs.**

SIGNIFICANCE OF UNIFORMS MAKES INTERESTING MEETING TOPIC

The program for the November 12 RHS meeting featured Steve Zang, a collector and historian of military uniforms. Examples from his collection are part of the current display at RHS, and during his address he exhibited and explained a wide variety, detailing the source of the pieces and the significance of their insignia. His collection dates from when he started during sixth grade.

Also interesting was a personal flag of the type given to Japanese soldiers by their families when they departed for service. The example Mr. Zang has is stained by blood and dirt and has occasional holes, eaten by insects. Still another interesting item is a Japanese pilot's heated flight suit with a heavy lining that plugged into the electrical system of the plane being flown.

RHS ACQUIRES ADDED OFFICIAL STATUS

Ridge Historical Society has recently been notified that it is now designated a "Delegate Agency of the City of Chicago." This recognizes the Society as an authentic source of information about individual historic homes in the area and what it means to live in an Historic District.

The designation was encouraged by Alderman Ginger Rugai and the Department of Housing of the City.

DATED MATERIAL — FIRST CLASS MAIL

*Ridge
Historical
Society*

NewsLetter

Elmer H. Johnson, Editor

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