

# Ridge Historical Society

# Newsletter

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2001

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

## World War II Programs Continue their Appeal

World War II-focused programs will continue the Ridge Historical Society series on the great conflict in March and April, 2001. They will be sited at different venues than RHS in anticipation of larger audiences. One will also be a fundraiser supporting increased archiving projects.

Author-lecturer Fred Olivi, co-pilot of the plane that dropped the second atom bomb, ending World War II, will be Ridge Historic's featured speaker

Wednesday, March 14 at 1 p.m. in the Washington & Jane Smith Home auditorium. Olivi's presentation will include a 20-minute film on the loading of the Hiroshima bomb into the Enola Gay and the Nagasaki bomb into Olivi's plane, "Bock's Car".

Olivi was a 20-year old resident of the Pullman neighborhood when he enlisted in 1942 to be an Air Corps pilot. In 1947 he was recruited for counter-intelligence, 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 as a liaison officer for the Air Force Academy in Colorado.

As a civilian, Olivi worked for 36 years as head of bridge operation and maintenance for the City of Chicago. Today he lives in Morgan Park and lectures nationwide on his military experiences and the atomic bomb.

Refreshments and conversation with the speaker will follow his presentation. There will be a \$10 admission charge for this special program.

### HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL PROGRAM

Holocaust Memorial Day will be observed April 25 with Beverly Art Center joining Ridge Historical Society. Time and place will be announced later. High School and 7th and 8th grade classes will be invited to attend. Mr. Joe Hausner will tell his own

story as a prisoner at Auschwitz. He is a personal friend of Gene and Sue Delves.

Advance reservations are advised for both programs and should be mailed to Ridge Historical Society at the address on the cover.

## Eye-Witness Accounts at January Meeting

A fascinating aspect of RHS's recent focus on World War II is not only generous participation by local veterans in taping sessions and the loan of exhibit materials, but also their many suggestions for program topics, drawn from their own experiences.

For the January meeting Sue Delves wove two eye-witness accounts of the same dramatic event into a single script, told in alternating voices by local actors Wayne Wendell and Glenn Hering. Marion and Jim Wilson entrusted RHS with what historians call "primary source material" (previously unused information, told first hand). The Wilson material consisted of two well-written eye-witness accounts of the same dramatic event, along with photographs and a hand-drawn map. This was the source material for the Sue Delves script. The material was an account by Ted Speropulos, Marion Wilson's first husband and Jim Wilson's best friend, who was a Navy dive bomber in the Pacific flying off the aircraft carrier USS Franklin. Ted's handwritten report details his experiences March 19, 1945 when he was jolted awake by a Japanese bombing attack on his ship. Heroic



Fred Olivi  
March 14th Speaker

You are invited to the  
RHS ANNUAL DINNER AND MEETING

Sunday, February 11, 5 p.m.

\$20 per person

at DR. GERMAN HOUSE  
10924 Prospect Avenue

Reserve by check to RHS by February 4th

efforts by Ted and his fellow pilots provided life sustaining care for seriously burned men, who poured into the junior officers' bunk room before the ship's medical staff could take over. He tells of rescue by the Light Cruiser, USS Santa Fe, which pulled alongside the badly damaged ship, so close that men were able to jump from one deck to the other, also putting the Santa Fe in peril.

Alvin McCoy, a war correspondent for the Kansas City Star who was aboard the Santa Fe wrote, "The enemy plane sneaked in, swept across the deck and launched its bombs, destroying planes preparing for flight and crashing through the deck to the hangar below, setting fire to 22 more planes, gased and armed with rockets and bombs....and the deck became a raging inferno."

The Franklin, which was only 58 miles from the Japanese island of Kyushu, was counter flooded and stabilized, and able to travel under her own power the next day. "By daring seamanship and heroism" wrote McCoy, "the ship and two-thirds of the crew of 3280 were saved."

Speropolus was able to shoot two rolls of film of the burning carrier, of damaged planes, of survivors who were water soaked from firefighting and draped in blankets to keep warm, and of the dangerous transfer to another ship in rough waters. He turned them over to the Santa Fe's photo lab, but after the war the pictures were returned to him.

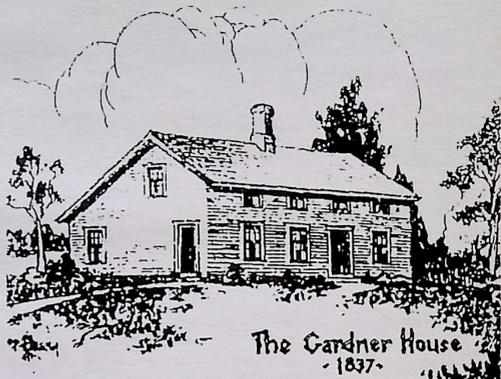
Ensign Speropolus and Marion Rheinberger, also of Beverly, were married in 1944 before he shipped out for the Pacific. Returning from the service Ted joined his father in the family business, the Maple Leaf Restaurant at 53 W. Van Buren.

Ted was an energetic volunteer in Beverly Hills American Legion Post 407 which he served as Commander. As a Kiwanian he coordinated the Longwood Drive Memorial Day Parade for many years. After his death in 1977 the Legion Post paid him tribute with a stone plaque placed beside the flag pole on the front lawn of Ridge Historical Society.

In the audience January 6 were many family members and friends from Morgan Park High School days. After the program, James J. Finn introduced himself to the audience as another local man who served on the Franklin — as a bombardier/navigator — and related that the Franklin had been damaged in other action the previous October. According to his son Dan, Finn flew 150 missions in Europe and the Pacific — a rare service record. He also served on the Hornet, another carrier which "took a hit."

### **RHS MAP CLUB BEING FORMED**

Cartophiles alert! Members and friends of RHS who have an interest in seeing, discussing and creating maps are invited to call the RHS Director at RHS headquarters. A first meeting is being planned for February to start projects such as mapping the old Vincennes Road and creating a 3-D model of the Blue Island Ridge from 130th to 87th Street. A meeting time is still open. Call RHS and be prepared to suggest what is a good meeting time for you.



Located at 9950 Beverly Avenue until it was demolished in 1934, the Gardner House became the property of William Wilcox in 1844 and was said to be a link in the pre-Civil War Underground Railroad. Sketch by Murray D. Hetherington

### **RHS DEVELOPING NEW INVENTORY and PURCHASES DATABASE**

*by Harold Wolff*

Anyone who has come to Driscoll House during the past year and experienced the Society's total immersion in the World War II experience may find it hard to believe that anything else of importance has gone on here for the past twelve months. However, the Board of Ridge Historical Society has been pursuing one of its major goals: registration of every book, paper, photograph, document and object in the building. For more than a year committees of Board members and others have been sorting through old donation records, inventorying contents of the attic and listing their way through the clipping files.

And just as the project seemed it would never end, Eileen Klees, Board Secretary, suggested investing in a database. An abortive attempt six years earlier cast some doubt on the suggestion, but results of exhaustive current research by Ms. Klees convinced the current Board and resulted in purchase of RHS's new PastPerfect database, which comes with the endorsement of the American Association for State and Local History, and capability to catalog every book, paper, photograph and document in the RHS collection.

Resurrecting RHS treasures for the purpose of cataloging them has brought forth, for example, little piles of safety pins melted together in the Chicago Fire of October 8-10, 1871, and a multitude of odds and ends that a history museum accumulates, (although why the RHS collection includes a sign that stood in front of a chemistry building at the University of Illinois in Urbana is beyond the ken of Historian Harold Wolff).

First attention is given to accession records identifying sources — gifts, bequests, purchases of things that compose a museum collection. All acquired items are associated by number with the lot with which it entered the collection. Reference to the lot

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

Membership is the principal supporting factor for Ridge Historical Society, and renewal of yours is urgently solicited. A coupon is included to make your renewal response convenient to accomplish, with suggested categories of membership from which

to choose. Your attention is especially drawn to the Guarantor and Patron levels, but expressing your interest and loyalty at any level is most appreciated. Please give this earnest attention within the next few days. The membership donation you make to Ridge Historical Society is tax deductible.

### RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Please enroll me as a member for one year ending \_\_\_\_\_

Name (to be used on Membership Card) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Check preferred membership

Guarantor  \$500

Patron  \$100

Contributor  \$ 50

Family  \$ 30

Individual  \$ 20

Student (under 18)  \$ 5

All donations of cash, securities, museum items, etc. are tax deductible. Thank you for your interest in Ridge Historical Society.

make check payable to:

**RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

10621 Seeley Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60643

accession record avoids necessity to repeat information on the source of each object.

Some accessions are rather large. Driscoll House itself could be considered an accession, having come to RHS in 1972 in an arrangement that involved the Society paying off what remained as mortgage indebtedness. It is not the Society's original building. That honor belongs to the Greenman House, 11124 S. Hoyne Ave. which the Society opened just as Driscoll House was offered to the Society. But, truthfully, the main reason I have not yet accessioned Driscoll House is that I can't think of a way to jack it up and paint an accession number on its underside.

Eliminating Driscoll House as an accession item leaves the flag pole from the Washington Heights factory of Chicago Bridge & Iron Company as RHS's largest single accession in terms of size. It was installed in April, 1976 and dedicated to the memory of Horace E. Horton, founder of Chicago Bridge & Iron. Another large accession from this company is the factory whistle, received in early 1975. It is 38 inches high and weighs 75 pounds. (In view of the current size of our collections, I wish now we had asked for their factory).

Some of the old accession records have their own story to tell. In 1975, the Chicago Historical Society, overwhelmed with the many quality donations of clothing which it had received, allowed several local historical societies, including ours, to select from items which duplicated styles already sufficiently represented in their collection. One of the lots we received included 27 dresses, accessories and other items of clothing that once belonged to the George Pullman family, the donors being Mrs. C. Phillip Miller and Mrs. Alfred F. Madlener, granddaughters of the sleeping car baron and founder of Pullman. In expressing the Society's gratitude for the gift, our

curator at that time, Margaret Lawrence, not only referred to Mrs. Miller as "Mrs. S. Phillip Miller", but on the assumption that the Pullmans had actually lived in Pullman, referred to Mrs. Miller's ancestors as "the Pullman family of Roseland."

To this faulty communication Mrs. Miller (who was George Pullman's granddaughter and daughter of Florence Pullman for whom the Florence Hotel in Pullman is named, and of Illinois Governor Frank Lowden), wrote a letter of thanks with only mild reproof for the errors. She then visited the Ridge Historical museum on June 15, 1976, when the Pullman heirlooms were on display, and later sent a check for \$100 to the fund drive we had to mount while we were paying off mortgages on both the Greenman House and Driscoll House. It was a very gracious gesture for someone whose only connection with our area was the 27 items of clothing which, of course, also originally came to RHS as her gift.

Innumerable interesting stories relate to RHS collections and acquisitions, and will be forthcoming in future Newsletters. --Harold T. Wolff, Registrar

### FROM the DIRECTOR'S DESK

by Paul Petraitus

It was a year ago when we began assembling the World War II exhibit — a different kind of exhibit that stayed and grew with each passing month.

"From the Home Front to the Battlefield" drew steady, record attendance, increased Ridge Historical Society membership and contributed to a greater awareness of RHS locally and citywide through word of mouth, a series of successful programs and increased media attention.

Now as we begin to consolidate the exhibit, first

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Elmer H. Johnson, Editor  
Newsletter

# Ridge Historical Society

DATED MATERIAL — FIRST CLASS MAIL

into our own World War II "History Packet" (some say we have enough veterans' material to do a book) we will be expanding RHS horizons from recent history to pre-history — from history within living memory to glaciers, Indians and frontier families.

Pre-history, then, are stories of periods before there were books. Of course our vets had many unpublished stories, from steamy New Guinea jungles to frozen Italian mountains — the tales of men and women fighting for freedom. Some were relayed to us face to face, others from across time, beyond the grave if you will: personal letters, diaries, the Trib and the Review and Ernie Pyle.

The stories of our pre-history (which includes the pioneer period) also come from various sources: old fences, paths across the prairie, striated bedrock, archeological remains, township and county records, weathered tombstones, and probate records.

With the upcoming pioneer exhibits and programs RHS hopes to begin writing the first chapter of history of the Ridge: not just for us, but for the children, because the history of the south side isn't in their textbooks. Yet our children need to know why the landscape looks the way it does and why we are here.

Join us as we write the first chapters of our neighborhood's history. Let RHS be your local history channel!

## CALL for DOCENTS

Docent is a fancy museum title for a volunteer.

Think you don't know enough history to do a good job? Don't worry — we'll teach you!

Learn by doing. RHS would like to expand the hours it is open to the public (perhaps Saturdays). To achieve that goal more docents are needed.

Basically a docent hangs out the "OPEN" flag at the Seeley Ave. entrance, answers the telephone and cordially greets visitors. RHS has assembled a good assortment of "factoids" about Beverly/Morgan Park to help its docents answer most visitor questions.

Consider volunteering. Bring a friend! Docents in pairs make a good impression on visitors.

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## VISIT the RHS WEBSITE

[www.ridgehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.ridgehistoricalsociety.org)

to learn about Ridge Historical activities, exhibits, Harold Wolff's house articles and Dave Daruska's ongoing documentation of the 111th Street Rock Island Metra station restoration.

JUST ADDED: our new e-mail address:

[ridge.history@hotmail.com](mailto:ridge.history@hotmail.com)

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