

Ridge Historical Society

Newsletter

FEBRUARY - MARCH, 2002

10621 SEELEY AVENUE • CHICAGO, ILL. 60643 • (773) 881-1675 • Eileen Klees, President (733) 233-4000

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- WED., FEB. 6 - RHS Board Meeting, 7 p.m.
Underground Railroad
"Double Header"
- SAT., FEB. 9 - "Slave Quilts as signals for
the Underground Railroad"
MP United Methodist Church
110th Pl. and Longwood Drive
Dr. Clarice Boswell, speaker
Time: 1 p.m. Donation: \$5
- SUN. FEB. 10 - "Crossroads to Freedom"
Underground Railroad
Lecture II by Paul Petraitis
1 p.m.
- WED., MAR. 6 - RHS Board Meeting, 7 p.m.
- SUN., MAR. 10 - Opening of Pioneer Gallery
"Early Chicago and the Ridge"
Lecture III by Paul Petraitis

Pioneer Lecture Series Enjoys Good Reception

The December lecture on Early Chicago by John Swenson was a prelude to the RHS Pioneer Lecture Series which opened with a January program on "Early Maps on the South Side" by RHS Curator Paul Petraitis. It attracted a capacity crowd that included many new faces. The program offered newly discovered facts about the Ridge and early Chicago.

Just as during the World War II exhibit that approached the subject from various vantage points (Pacific and European theaters as well as the home front), the current effort is inspecting in depth the formative pioneer era of our community and city (1830 - 1870). The next program (February 10th at 2:30) described elsewhere in this issue, deals with the Underground Railroad in southern Cook County. The speaker will be Paul Petraitis.

The March program date, Sunday March 10, coincides with the opening of the RHS Pioneer Gallery exhibit on the Ridge's relationship to Chicago and how transportation and real estate marketing formed the modern south side.

Future lectures will explore the geology and evolution of our natural landscape and Gurdon Hubbard's role in the blazing of what became the Vincennes Road.



Morgan Park had finally been fully annexed to Chicago for less than a year when the city built this "fire hall" between January and October, 1915. It continues to stand at 11033 S. Homewood Ave. and 1869 W. Pryor. It was designed by city architect Charles W. Kallal (1872-1926). He designed all city buildings except schools from 1908 until his death at age 52. This photograph is reproduced from a postcard donated to RHS by Paul Petraitis.

"Crossroads to Freedom"

The Underground Railroad in Southern Cook County

Program: February 10

The underground railroad, secret routes that moved escaped slaves north to freedom, had main routes through the Chicago area. The "railroad" had no maps, schedules or tickets. Two well-known routes intersected south of the city: "The Illinois Line" from the west and "The Quaker Line" from the south.

A loose confederation of black and white households from Joliet to Morgan Park, from Riverdale to Hammond, hid and fed escapees as they "followed the northern star."

Paul Petraitis, curator of the RHS Pioneer Exhibit, (also co-founder and president of C.U.R.E, the Chicago/Calumet Underground Railroad Effort) will speak Sunday, February 10 at Ridge Historical Society.

"The modern Civil Rights movement, the first generations of Black and White Americans working together through civil disobedience in pursuit of freedom had its roots here in Chicago. And remember,

our immigrant pioneer families, having come to America to escape injustice, had no love for slavery," says Petraitis.

In honor of Black History Month the program will also take a look at recently developed scholarship on the life of Jean Baptiste Pointe deSable.

BE AWARE
Beverly Art Center Auction
Saturday, February 23, 2002

2153 West 111th Street

Pioneer's Passing

Names with considerable historic significance to this community include that of John Gately. He was a longtime merchant in the community, owner and proprietor of Gately's Peoples Store. His father, James Gately, bought a small dry goods store at 112th and Michigan in 1917 named "People's Store" and added his own name to its title. James, Sr. was a prominent Chicagoan and served for many years on the Chicago Park District Board. The Gatelys lived in the large, handsome brick home on the northeast corner of 107th Street and Hoyne. It is still known and referred to as the Gately House. When one of the daughters married, a house was built for her, just around the corner on Seeley Ave. James Jr. and his first wife, Mary, lived at 91st and Hoyne until her death. John Gately built the second store in Tinley Park. John died in December, 2001.

Gately's stores particularly served a blue collar clientele — workers from the steel mills, the chemical companies and the Pullman factory. The breadth of its merchandise almost made it a one-stop shopping center. It even had a place to buy a cheeseburger. Lawnmowers, clothing, groceries and a portrait gallery were all under one roof. It also became a neighborhood meeting place, especially on Saturday nights. Boys went to check out the girls who might gather there.

Tinley Park was just getting started when Gately opened his store there in 1975. When that store closed in 1994 the mayor was quoted as saying, "Gately's was the first major store to take a chance on us, and we will never forget them for that."

The Roseland store closed in 1980 (although the Gately's sign still marks the site). An era of personalized retailing has ended.

--Data from Mark Konkol article in the Daily Southtown

2002 MEMORIES OF GATELY'S — THE PEOPLES STORE

Don McGary: In about 1926 my mother began taking me over to Roseland on the 103rd Street streetcar to go to People's. There were still gas lights in the store. James Gately Sr. and my mother were very compatible, and I remember seeing him eating at the lunch counter and generally looking the store over. He was not at all intimidating. It was "the place that you went", and that area of Michigan Avenue was quite prosperous for many years.

Helen Boyle: I loved Christmas in July, when there were sales of toys in the basement. During the depression, Gately's was one of the places which extended credit to teachers and other public employees who were being paid in scrip. For years teachers from all over the city would recall their trips to Roseland to redeem coupons with groceries and clothing.

Donations of items for auction may be brought
to the Ridge Historical Society meeting
February 10th, 2002

My mother didn't know what to do with herself after my father died. She went to work at People's, and it was the saving of her. She worked in the men's department and became an expert. When Mr. Gately, Sr. died, Mrs. Gately invited all of the store employees to their home.

It was a complete store. In my twenties, when I was working for a doctor on "the Avenue", I could go to the restaurant for dinner. I remember watching Mr. Gately stroll through the store. He was such a Presence!

Gene Delves: Not Gately's. It was always Peoples. There were three places Fernwood people could shop: Home Store, Baer's or Peoples, which was ten times more fabulous than the others. I chose my electric train there when I was 12, and we bought my first suit (knickers worn with high top boots) for a midyear 8th grade graduation. It cost \$3.00.

Memories of Gately's by Don Jones and Ralph Berg (friends of Gene Delves): There was the stairway split going up to the landing, where shoppers could sit to rest and watch other shoppers. Mr. Garrett, the floorwalker, who always wore a cutaway and striped trousers. He acted as greeter, just inside the main entrance, and the store guide.

Doris Moulton: Gately's donut machine was the best! You could stand there and look through the glass case at the little "train cars" of pink, white and chocolate frosted donuts moving along a track.

Paul Petraitis: My first haircut, Cub Scout uniform, the wedding ring, the best malts, my dad doing window displays -- these are my memories of Gately's.

Virginia Mackle: There was never a store like it. It was the Marshall Field's of the southside. I worked there after school from Thanksgiving to Christmas for several years. It was fun. I worked in the main aisle where the bargains were displayed and Mr. Garrett would walk by, reminding us to "fold the clothes and look busy" when business was slow.

Gretchen McDowell: The wooden floor which was kind of crooked. The open counters of the center aisle were frequently piled with children's underwear "seconds". Mothers crowded around looking for the flaw, to be sure it wasn't significant. There was a special "Peoples Store smell", probably from a combination of popcorn and other foods.

Almost everyone remarked on the pneumatic tube system that whooshed your money and the saleslip to the cashier, who sent back your change with another whoosh!

Words from the President

The Board has launched the new year with a flurry of activity. The exhibit of Lois Lewellyn's needlepoint collection, Paul Petraitis' map presentation and resumption of committee work have kept RHS open most of the month.

I have sent a small number of letters to an assortment of RHS members asking for volunteer help. I will send another round of these letters in February. We have standing committees positioned to make this society a working asset for the community at large. All of them could use some help. Committees include:

Archive Committee: Needs people to clip and paste newspaper articles; prepare Architectural Resource Center materials; accession photos and documents into the collection.

Artifacts Committee: Needs help to research or cross-reference objects that have been accessioned into the collection.

Costume Committee: Needs help sorting, repairing and accessioning the costumes.

Planning Committee: Needs advisors and fund-raising support.

Social Committee: Can you bake cookies?

House & Grounds: The Driscoll House is a bit of a white elephant and always needs something.

Personnel Committee: Docents, docents, docents for any day, any time, although Thursday and Sunday afternoons are best.

Historian/Curator: Needs a range of people interested in the pioneer days of the Ridge — a fascinating topic that is the focus of RHS exhibits the rest of the year.

If you can see yourself doing anything described above please call (773) 881-1675 and leave a message. You will get a call back.

I want to thank Julie DeHaan and the Morgan Park Woman's Club for the outstanding work they have done for the Archives Committee. They have been meeting at RHS the second or third Tuesday of the month to clip, paste, mount and "wrap" dozens of articles about people, places and events of the Ridge community.

Thanks go to Eleanor Hollander and Patricia Carroll who are also working with the Archives Committee on the Architectural Resource Center project. The Center will be officially open to the public by the first of February.

RHS is the grateful recipient of a Gateway computer system, complete with an HP Laser printer, DVD player and CD-burner, all set up in the docents' office. Many, many thanks go to Dirk and Millie Kitzmiller who so generously donated these much needed items.

The Board agreed to change the monthly meeting date to the first Wednesday of the month, beginning in February. The next Board meeting is Wednesday, February 6 at 7 p.m. All members are invited.

Last but not least: Do you know a graduate student or single adult who might be interested in renting the Driscoll House tenant space in exchange for

committee related work? The tenant space is two+ rooms with a full bath. The rooms face Longwood Drive and are very spacious. The tenant shares the kitchen on the main floor. Rent is \$300 per month plus 20 hours of committee work such as research, data entry, docent support or exhibit help. Utilities are included in the rent. Interested persons should call (773) 881-1675 and leave a message for Eileen Klees.

EILEEN KLEES, President pro tem



Mati Maldre photograph of the house at 9900 S. Hamilton built in 1930. (Lyman J. Allison, architect)

Maldre Slide Show on Bungalows

A slide lecture, "Photographing the Bungalow" will be given by RHS Board Member Mati Maldre at Beverly Art Center, 2153 W. 111th St. at 7:30, Tuesday, March 19. Maldre is Professor of Photography at Chicago State University and is the official photographer for the Chicago Architectural Foundation's exhibit and book, *The Chicago Bungalow*. He will also demonstrate a 4 x 5 view camera. There is no charge for the event.

"Hidden in Plain Sight"

Quilt Patterns as Signals

The title is that of a talk about quilt patterns created by slaves that provided signals to their runaway brethren as they journeyed to freedom along what became known as the Underground Railroad.

The speaker is Dr. Clarice Boswell and she will display 40 pieced quilt tops to illustrate her remarks. Her presentation blends storytelling and spirituals with discussion about the family life and artistry of the women who created these quilts.

The program is cosponsored by Ridge Historical Society and the United Methodist Women and is scheduled Saturday, February 9, 1 p.m. at the Methodist Church, 110th Place and Longwood Drive.

For further information or to make a reservation (which is not imperative), leave a message at RHS (773) 881-1675 or with Sue Delves (773) 445-5806. For this program please enter the church at the north end of the parking lot.

Good Things Happening at the House

Steve Lewellyn has donated an extensive collection of about 4000 glass and film negatives. The glass negatives are of old, interesting scenes of the southside that were given to Steve's father when he was still part of the business. Others are negatives from the beginning of Steve's career, many showing industrial and construction sites, some from areas eliminated by the construction of the Dan Ryan Expressway. There are many interesting portraits of early community people. They have been inspected and considered by Mati Maldre and Paul Petraitis as additions to the RHS collection.

Another RHS collection of historic periodicals was recently supplemented by a further donation from **Walt Kelly**.

The **Morgan Park Juniors** has delivered the first batch of mounted clippings they are organizing, related to the community and those activities that have historic significance.

"Early Chicago", an encyclopedia of pre-1840 history, is available for purchase at RHS. Bookstore price is \$60, but the special RHS price is \$50 of which RHS receives \$10.

John Swenson, the December speaker and co-author of the book, was generous in his praise of Paul Petraitis,

who is also listed as a co-author. Swenson commented "The book is different because of Paul's contributions." It was Paul who provided his own extensive research on the Calumet Region, expanding the scope of the book.

Election and Bylaws

Election of Officers for the year 2002 and ratification of RHS Bylaws will be part of the agenda for February 10, prior to the program of that day. The bylaws were approved by the Board of Directors in January but must also be submitted to vote by the membership. Any member wishing to inspect the bylaws prior to the February 10 meeting should phone a request to (773) 881-1675. The few minutes devoted to these issues each February serve as an annual meeting of RHS.

In progress is the reorganization of the **Morgan Park Academy** file at Ridge Historical Society to accommodate a recent gift of additional copies of historic Academy publications.

New owners of 10721 Hoyne approached RHS to check the history of their new home. They had been told it was built for a Lithuanian Consul and modeled on his home in that country. It is also rumored that rear and side yards were designed as formal gardens with a fountain and suggestions of a moat. One source says the house was vacant for a dozen years. Can any readers support these claims, or supply a different background story for this structure?