Ridge Historical Society

RECORD

BEVERLY HILLS, MORGAN PARK, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS & MT. GREENWOOD

100+ years of Thayer family influence in Morgan Park

BY SUE DELVES

When the Blue Island Land and Building Company first acquired the Morgan estate in 1869, attention centered on creating a pleasant suburb that would appeal to educated families. Far removed from the city, the streetscape could ignore Chicago's grid system and opted for curving streets to enhance the unique setting of the high ridge and its abundant trees.

By 1873, as sufficient fine houses and a few businesses were beginning to appear, education could become a priority and plans were begun for Morgan Park Military Academy for boys, located where the present MPA gymnasium is today. It was established as Mount Vernon Military Academy in June, 1873.

The Chicago Female College (sometimes Seminary or "Fem. Sem.") opened in September, 1875. Students were a broad age range. The setting was described in 1884 by A.T. Andreas as "situated in a natural grove on the eastern brow of the Washington Heights ridge (near 114th St.), commanding a most extensive view of the surrounding country." (Earlier plans to build a hotel had halted, leaving only a foundation. Water in that open basement became the first bathing pool for young Morgan Park boys.)

At the same time, the Baptist Theological Seminary accepted an offer of five acres. For all three schools, the Building Company offered space rent-free to whoever would be responsible for

SEE THAYER, PAGE 6

The Chicago Female College, located at 114th & Longwood Drive, as it appeared in the 1890s from a glass negative by Henry Ralph Koopman II. Mr. Koopman had a photographic studio in Roseland from 1884 until 1914, when he retired to raise Rhode Island reds. The glass negative, one of four surviving from Koopman's work, is from the collection of Paul Petraitis.

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RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Chicago, IL 60643

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Open to the public
Tuesday 2 - 5 p.m.
Thursday 2 - 5 p.m.
Sunday 2 - 5 p.m.
or by appointment

Four houses weather a century on the ridge

Imagine a time machine has warped us back to 1909.

BY CAROL FLYNN

Cities are passing 10 mph speed laws for autos. The ice man cometh door-to-door. A clothes dryer is an outside line. You can order a house from the Sears Catalog of Modern Homes.

The American economy is recovering from a depression. A stamp costs two cents. Milk is seven cents a quart. Annual teacher pay is $325. The average worker makes $12.98 per week for 59 hours of labor. Congress just passed a corporate income tax.

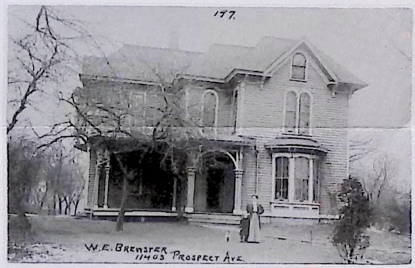
The Gibson girl look is the fashion. The first 'discussion' is airing on the wireless – the topic is suffrage for women. Policemen can arrest women for smoking in public.

The most popular baby names are John and Mary. Sequels to *The Wizard of Oz* and *Anne of Green Gables* are on the best-seller lists. Ping-pong is all the rage. The new Indianapolis 500 race track is opening. Mary Pickford is making her silent film screen debut.

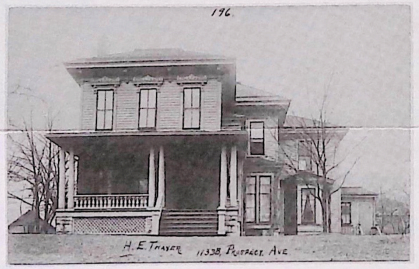
Joan of Arc has just been canonized a saint. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has just been founded. Peary has just reached the North Pole. The construction of a Navy base at Pearl Harbor has just begun.

Leisure time is filled with family get-togethers, long Sunday rides (buggy, bicycle or car), and baseball. In the evenings there are sing-alongs at the piano and reading out loud.

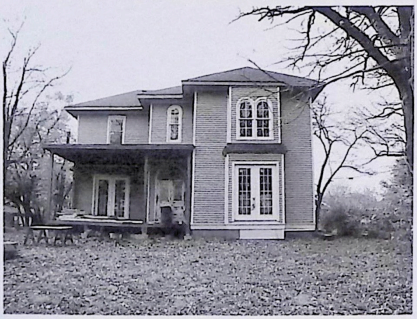
The Village of Morgan Park is an idyllic, suburban community, still largely rural. Wildlife is abundant – hawks and foxes hunt rabbits, gophers and prairie chickens. The Rock



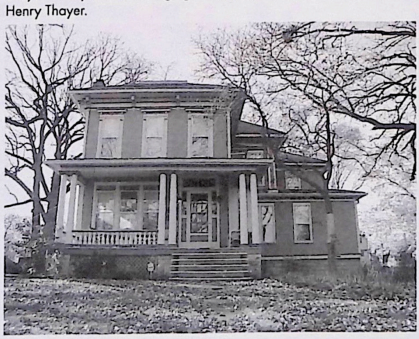
THEN This Italianate-style house at 11400 Prospect is believed to be the Israel Wilkinson House, built ca.1876. In 1909 it was owned by the Thayer Family (see accompanying article) but was leased by William E. Brewster and family, who was in the laundry business.



Although this house at 11338 Prospect is popularly known as the Thayer House, it is actually the Horatio and Elizabeth Mary Ann Underwood House, built in 1874. (Houses are traditionally named for the person who first built the house.) In 1909, it was another Thayer Family home, belonging to Anna Weeks Thayer, widow of Henry Thayer.



NOW Today the house belongs to Ed Walsh, whose wife is Dr. Margaret Walsh of the Beverly Hills Animal Hospital. The current address is 11359 S. Lothair



The house was expanded and stucco added over the original frame. Today the home is on the market (Molloy & Associates, Inc., Realtors, Bernadette Molloy, 773-779-9898, www.mollayrealestate.com). The address now is 11347 S. Lothair.

Island train line can take you into the city of Chicago. Closer to home, social activities include hayrides in the fall and ice skating on the cemetery pond in the winter, church sociables in the spring and picnics in the summer. There are private clubs with billiards for the men and separate reception parlors where the ladies meet for conversation and card playing. There is dancing (but no liquor – remember, Morgan Park is a temperance community). *"The Post,"* Morgan Park's newspaper, keeps one up-to-date on community events like church activities, local sports, house warmings, comings and goings.

1909 postcard collection

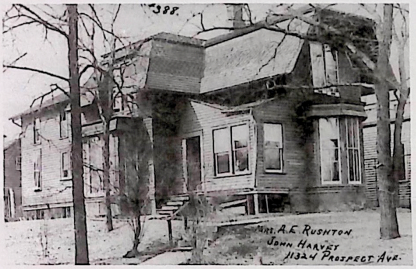
In the last RHS newsletter, we introduced the 1909 postcard collection of Morgan Park houses and contrasted a few houses from 'then' with a look at 'now.' Let's take a look at some more houses from 1909 and their status today.

In 1909, what is now Longwood Drive south of 111th Street was an extension of Prospect Avenue. If you walked down the east side of Prospect in the 11300 block, and looked to the west, you would have seen four houses, and only those four houses, situated above you on the ridge nestled among the trees.

Today these houses look much like they did 100 years ago, although the world around them has changed. Subdivision of most of the original long, narrow lots has changed the orientation and addresses of many ridge properties.

Three of the four houses now have addresses on Lothair Avenue and are entered from the 'back.' Two of the houses are barely visible from the front due to the construction of modern houses on the street level of Longwood

SEE RIDGE, PAGE 5



This house at 11324 Prospect is Second Empire in style and built in 1873 as the Jordan B. Cottle House. In 1909, the house belonged to Dr. John Harvey, a deacon at the First Congregational Church (now the Plaid Academy). His daughter, Miriam (Mrs. Alfred E. Rushton) is also listed on the postcard. Miriam was an early kindergarten teacher at Esmond School and her husband was Vice President of Calumet Trust and Savings Bank of Morgan Park.

This brick Colonial Revival house at 11322 Prospect was built later than the other houses, in 1906, as the Joseph A. Alexander House. Alexander was the owner of the Alexander Supply Company, a mail-order concern.

For the last four decades the house has belonged to the Gilligan family. Current owners are Patrick, owner of Gilligan Construction and Contracting; Maureen, who holds a PhD in American Studies and teaches at the Chicago Military Academy (and is a member of the RHS Board of Directors); and Josie, 11, and Charlie, 8, students at Clissold School. The house has a back addition and a front porch added. Today the address is 11333 S. Lothair.

This is the only one of the houses that still has its entrance on Longwood Drive and except for the addition of a cement wall in front, appears identical to its postcard picture. At the time of this article, the owners on record are Carl and Linda Murrain. The current address is 11322 S. Longwood Drive.

Comings & goings

For those of you who haven't been to RHS of late, progress in the RHS Archives is moving forward! This room will no longer be the catchall for extraneous boxes of miscellaneous stuff.

For those of you who haven't been to RHS of late, progress in the RHS Archives is moving forward! This room will no longer be the catchall for extraneous boxes of miscellaneous stuff.

Thanks to Sue Cummings and Linda Lamberty, materials that didn't belong were removed and what remains to be re-filed or evaluated for accessioning has been consolidated and is queued up for processing. Now we're looking for volunteers to help with specific archiving or data entry projects so our research facility can become more user-friendly.

A big debt of thanks is due Kristina Maldre for her invaluable input in this area. Kris is creating our first searchable electronic databases covering the existing Archives systems we have been using (the hard way, where your fingers do the walking… and walking and walking and walking!) since Bob White, Fran Warren and Gary Sauermann set them up so many years ago. Mike Stachnik did a lot to make the systems more understandable and accessible, but this improvement takes us to a whole new level of research options. In addition, it paves the way for volunteer projects that will improve accessibility even further.

• Anyone interested in Volunteer opportunities, please write to: ridgehistory@hotmail.com (and put "Volunteer" in the Subject line) or call: 773-881-1675 to register your interest in helping out. We will do our best to cater your volunteer activities to some area that most interests YOU!

• A surprise packet arrived during the summer from Ken Masson, former reporter for Southtown Economist. He wrote: "I thought The Ridge Historical Society would like to have a DVD of a documentary I did on the history of Thirteenth Church of Christ, Scientist, Chicago in about 1993. Some new material was added on the end, which brings everything up to date to the time the church disbanded. The DVD contains an interview with Joy Tupper about how our pastor came to Beverly-Morgan Park and video of the inside of Thirteenth Church before condo conversion to become Tower Condominiums."

This is a real piece of history, and we appreciate Ken's sending it to RHS.

• For a number of years now RHS has used PastPerfect (PP) museum software to organize portions of our holdings. Former Registrar Harold Wolff was the first to do so and spent countless hours entering accessions into the Collections database. Since his departure circa 2005, however, no one else has been in a position to pick up the ball... but then, not until recently have we had an active Collections Committee to process accessions.

Others have taken stabs at using the PP Membership feature, but of late it has been used more and to better effect by Lois Schell. Other areas covered by the software, for example in the area of financial record keeping, remain largely untapped.

In late September/early October a small group of RHS Board members and volunteers took part in a webinar hosted by PastPerfect. This webinar provided detailed pointers and support on using the software to accession collections. What an eye-opener this proved to be!

Those able to attend over the three weekdays the class was offered were Edris Hoover, Sue Delves, Mary Ellen Cassidy, Mati Maldre, Cathy Majeske, Linda Lamberty, Lois Schell and Ryan Hall. The group has agreed to follow up by continuing to learn PastPerfect using an educational CD sent to RHS upon registration for the webinar. Other parties interested in this work should let the Collections Committee know so they can be included in the next go-round of PastPerfect training activities.

And last but not least, a HUGE thanks to Smith Village and Executive Director, Kevin McGee, for allowing RHS the use of their wonderful facilities for our webinar at a time when we had technical difficulties at the Graver-Driscoll House. Their hospitality was generous, warm and timely!

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MEMBERSHIP
A newsletter subscription is a benefit of membership.

ANNUAL DUES
Student (<18) $10
Individual $25
Family $40
Contributor $100
Patron $150
Guarantor $500

In Memoriam

Virginia Lane Mackle

Ginny Mackle, daughter of Dewey Lane, longtime RHS supporter and member.

Virginia Lane Mackle passed away on Nov.19th. She came from a long line of pioneers, covering more than 175 years on the Ridge and surrounding territory.

Her father, Dewey Lane, along with his uncles operated for 100 years (1890-1990) the Lackore Nichols & Lane Funeral Home in Morgan Park. Her father and uncle, Bud Lane, were founding members of RHS and to the end of their days worked on its behalf.

Virginia married John Mackle, also a Morgan Park High School graduate, in 1949 at St. Margaret of Scotland Church.

They raised their family in Palos Park and one daughter, Peg Kapustiak, is a former RHS Board member who continues the family tradition of dedication to RHS purposes. Our heartfelt condolences go out to this wonderful family.

'Tis the season ...

Ridge Historical Society's home has been winterized ... storm windows in, radiators drained, and contracting with a new gas supplier who, we hope, will lower the bills.

Fallen leaves(162 bags) have been cleared from the grounds. Also, Gene Delves has penned his annual fund drive letter, which is now in your hands.

During the coming cold winter months RHS Board members' attention will be centered on indoor projects that will maximize the use of available storage space housing our collections. (Feel free to call and join us in this endeavor if you have some spare time; we'll welcome your assistance).

Lastly, the officers and board members wish you the happiest of holiday seasons and a healthy, prosperous 2010.

Doris Moulton
President

P.S. A message from Gene Delves: As we go to press, RHS has received $5275 for the Annual Fund from 58 donors. The total gets closer to the challenge amount daily!

Nostalgic drawing created by local artist

Nostalgic print

RHS worked with artist Susan Engle Budash, Morgan Park high School Class of 1967, to develop a nostalgic drawing, "Nostalgia - Symbols of the Sixties."

This print shows sketches of a number of Beverly/Morgan Park businesses and other symbols that were around in the sixties such as Mickleberry's, an old Rock Island passenger car, etc.

The black-and-white print is 11 by 14 inches, and costs $25.00, plus $3.50 shipping if we mail it out.

RHS wishes to thank:

- Ryan Hall, for database creation and collection processing.
- SWAP (Sheriff's Work Alternative Program) – For the second year, the Cook County Sheriff's Office brought a busload of young men over to rake up all the leaves and clean up debris on the RHS property
- Everyone who helped with the RHS garage sale.

RIDGE, FROM PAGE 3

Drive. Despite these changes there is still a sense of the rural up on the ridge itself. Behind, between, among the houses, a visitor today can envision the wildness that was there 100 years ago. And the area still serves as home for hawks and foxes.

The author thanks Jennifer Kenny, Linda Lamberty and Maureen Gilligan for research information. Pictures from the Morgan Park Postcard Collection (1967.0534) are used with the permission of the Chicago History Museum.

Gift ideas for the folks on your list…

Christmas gifts from RHS

Holiday time is approaching, and that means it's time to come up with those special gifts for friends, family, neighbors, co-workers and, RHS offers a variety of gift ideas for the folks on your list.

Membership

First, there is membership in RHS, for those interested in the history of the area and wishing to support a community institution. Benefits include the RHS newsletter and free admission or reduced fees for programs.

Dues are: Student (under 18), $10; Individual, $25; Family, $40; Contributor, $100; Patron, $150; and Guarantor, $500.

Historic building research

One of the most popular services that RHS offers is "house histories" for those who live in the Beverly/ Morgan Park area.

Using available resources, information such as when the house was built, who designed it, who built it and for whom it was built, who has lived in it over the years, and any recorded changes to the house over the years can usually be determined.

The cost for this service varies with the amount of time needed for the research.

Contact RHS to discuss this service.

Historic home plaque program

Homes in the Ridge Historic District that meet certain requirements are eligible to receive a cast bronze plaque for mounting on the home.

The plaque is 8 by 11 inches, and contains the original name of the house, the construction date, architect, and the logo of the Ridge Historic District.

To qualify, the home must be at least 50 years old and must not have undergone substantial exterior alterations and

A gift that will last a lifetime

Paver brick program

This program offers you the opportunity to have a message engraved on a brick paver stone, installed in the landscaped gardens at RHS.

This is a great way for a lasting record of any type of notable event or recognition. The size of each brick is 8 by 5 ½ inches, and may include up to three lines of print.

The cost of each brick is $100 and includes a picture of the completed brick. You can also visit RHS and see the 100+ pavers already engraved and installed by the front entrance (10621 S. Seeley). A brick bought now would be ordered and installed for spring 2010.

THAYER, FROM PAGE 1

operating the schools … a "build it and they will come" theory.

Enter: Gilbert Thayer LLD, a Middlebury-educated easterner who had operated Female Colleges at Bloomington and Jacksonville, IL for 17 years. He accepted, and in 1876 became president and professor. Daughter Julia joined the faculty teaching English, among a group of prominent educators offering an extensive list of subjects.

In Jacksonville, Thayer was described as "an engaging person with pleasing manners, financial and social prowess, and magnetism of enthusiastic purpose, which drew strangers to him with remarkable facility." Students were charmed "by the beauty of his silver locks and fascination of his laughing eyes and sparkling speech."

It appears the family -- his wife Adeline and 3 of their 5 adult children -- moved into the house at 11359 Prospect. Thus began a period of well over 100 years of a Morgan Park strongly influenced by the Thayer Family.

The August 23, 1884 Chicago newspaper "Daily Inter Ocean" praised the school saying: "The educational standard is of the highest, and more and more the institution takes rank with the best Eastern boarding schools forgirls."

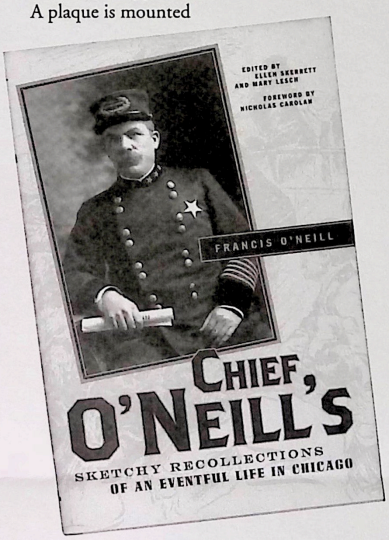
At about the time of Gilbert Thayer's death in 1892, the Baptist Seminary was becoming the nucleus of the new University of Chicago, Morgan Park Academy became the U. of C. prep school and the Swedish Baptist Seminary moved into the Female College building, renaming it Walker Hall. As president of "Fem. Sem" Miss Julia moved the school to the Givins Castle until 1898, then opened the Studio of General Culture and Literary Training in the Auditorium Building, teaching there another 20 years. Her poetry was widely published, and at her death in 1943 she was the oldest member of the Illinois Woman's Press Association.

Julia's younger sister

from Ridge Historical Society

additions.

The application fee is $50 and the cost of the plaque is $275. Contact RHS for an application. A plaque is mounted at RHS (the Graver-Driscoll House, 10621 S. Seeley) if you wish to stop by and see it.



Books

RHS offers two books for sale:

• *Images of America – Chicago's Beverly/Morgan Park Neighborhood*

By Joseph Oswald, published by Arcadia Press, this book contains over 200 images gathered from the RHS archives, plus historical information on our community. The price is $20 and it is available at RHS.

Add $3.50 for shipping and handling if we mail this out.

• *Chief O'Neill's Sketchy Recollections of an Eventful Life in Chicago*

By Ellen Skerrett and Mary Lesch.

Francis O'Neill settled in Chicago in 1871 and was Chief of Police in Chicago from 1901 to 1905.

His recollections were edited by his great granddaughter, Ms. Lesch, and Ms. Skerret who has written and edited a number of books on the Chicago Irish.

O'Neill is also remembered and beloved for his devotion to the preservation of traditional Irish music.

The cost is $30 and the book is available at RHS, or we can mail it for $4.50.

Please call RHS at 773-881-1675 or e-mail ridgehistory@hotmail.com about any of these items. The business office is open Monday through Friday, from 2 to 5 p.m. and credit cards are accepted.

Happy holidays!

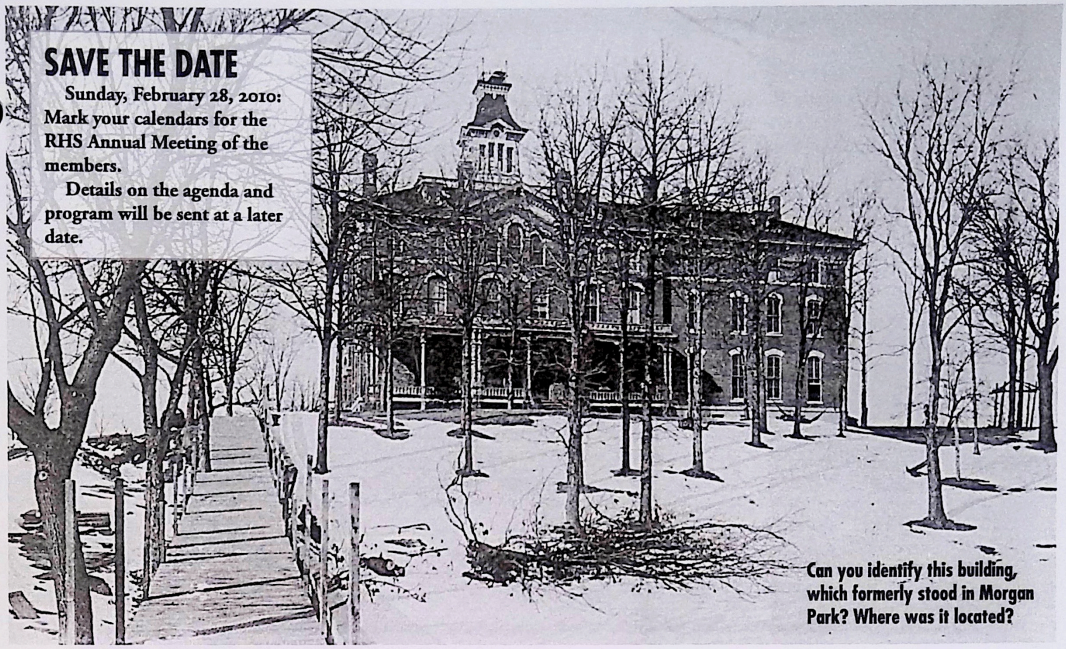
Addie married Robert Thomson, a prominent wool merchant at the Union Stock Yards. They and their two daughters lived in the house just west of Morgan Park Academy. In 1927 she died in an auto accident a block from home.

The Thayers' son Henry E. married Anna M Weeks in 1869 in Cook County, and their son Harry Weeks was born before the senior Thayers had arrived in Morgan Park. By 1880 Henry and Anna were living here with his parents, and by 1882 John and Elizabeth Weeks, Anna's parents, had purchased today's 11347 S. Lothair. Henry, who was in the stationery business, died in 1894. The house passed to Anna from her parents; she lived until 1918.

Harry Weeks Thayer married Ethel Clissold ca 1903 and lived at 2208 W. 110th St. He worked 40 years at W.A. Alexander & Co. an insurance firm. A strong community leader, he was particularly involved in forming the first Boy Scout troop at the Baptist Church. He died in 1946 at age 77, leaving his wife and son Robert.

As World War II approached, Robert was just beginning work with his father at Alexander & Co. when he and his bride Henrietta (known as "Susie"), moved to Washington D.C. for the duration. There, his extensive experimentation in his hobby "ham" radio, equipped him to be chosen as an administrator of a highly secret project -- development of the Radio Proximity Fuze. It had three significant effects: defense from Japanese Kamikaze attacks; radar-controlled anti-aircraft measures that neutralized the German Buzz Bomb attacks; and dramatic change in land warfare during the Battle of the Bulge.

After returning to Morgan Park, the Thayers delved broadly into many local organizations. Although Robert died at 55, Susie continued to be incredibly active in numerous civic and philanthropic groups until she died in her late '70s. There were two daughters, Susan and Patsy. Their son Tom, who played football for Morgan Park High School, lives in Wisconsin. His wife Donna was very helpful in providing family facts for this story.



SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, February 28, 2010: Mark your calendars for the RHS Annual Meeting of the members.

Details on the agenda and program will be sent at a later date.

Can you identify this building, which formerly stood in Morgan Park? Where was it located?

Beverly Historical Society

RECORD

BEVERLY HILLS, MORGAN PARK, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS & MT GREENWOOD

10621 S. Seeley Ave., Chicago, IL 60643