

# RECORD

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

## Dixie Highway celebrates 100th anniversary

By Carol Flynn

Prior to the arrival of the automobile, means of transportation were limited. Local transportation relied on horse and buggy, bicycles or walking. Long-distance trips were made by train, confining travelers to established routes and schedules. The advent of the

automobile allowed more options and freedom for traveling, but to make automobiles really usable, it became obvious that there needed to be a great improvement in roads. In the early 1900s most roads were dirt, and while passable in dry weather, became muddy quagmires when it rained.

The Good Roads Movement was founded in 1880, initially by bicycle enthusiasts, but other groups took the lead once automobiles became more popular. This movement led to improved roadways throughout the country.

In 1915, Carl G. Fisher, an Indiana entrepreneur

who had business interests in both cars and real estate in Florida, envisioned a highway that would run from Chicago to Miami. Thus, the north-south Dixie Highway was born.

The Dixie is actually a system of interconnecting roads that winds its way down through the middle of the country. In Illinois, the Dixie starts in downtown Chicago at Michigan and Adams, runs south to 55th Street, turns west to Western Ave. and runs south on Western through Beverly and Morgan Park. The Dixie continues south through a number of towns in Illinois, crossing over into Indiana around

### SUMMER 2015

Vol. 44, No. 2

### RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

10621 S. Seeley Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60643

773/881-1675

ridgehistoricalsociety.org  
ridgehistory@hotmail.com

Call for current hours.

Look for the Ridge  
Historical Society  
on Facebook.



Carl Fisher was considered a promotional genius, opening the first automobile dealership in the U.S. in Indianapolis. He conceived both the Lincoln and Dixie Highways and became a successful real estate developer in Miami, the final destination of the Dixie Highway. Photo from the State Archives of Florida.

See Dixie, page 2

Dixie, from page 1

Dixie Highway.

growing highway system. As the federal interstate highway system began to be developed in earnest in the 1950s many of the old local routes throughout the

country fell into disuse or were reconfigured. With the completion of Interstate 57 in Illinois, the Dixie Highway lost its stature. Today, in Illinois, much of the old Dixie Highway is now Illinois Route 1.

Danville.

Eventually, throughout the country, over 5,000 miles of roadway became part of the

The Dixie Highway was marked with distinctive red and white "DH" signs. In the late 1920s, numbers began to replace names in the

**Western Ave. was already here**

Western Ave. had long been established as a major road through the area when the section south of

**2015 RHS Board of Directors**  
Edris Hoover,  
President

Mary Quinn Olsson  
Vice President

Cathy Majeska  
Program Chair

Carol Macola  
Asst. Program Chair

Bill Sandstrom  
Counsel

Larry Brown  
Treasurer

Mary Ellen Cassidy  
Secretary

[Vacant]  
Membership Secretary

Linda Lambert  
Historian

[Vacant], Curator

**Directors**

- Anno-Marie Brodsky
- Jeanne Carr
- Paula Everett
- Sue Hendricks
- Mati Maldre
- Joel Morbito
- Joseph O'Connor
- Fran Oehmen
- Elaine Spencer
- James Wognum

**Emeritus**

- Julie DeHaan
- Sue Delves
- Lois Grayston
- Linda Lane
- Pat McGrail
- Doris Moulton
- Herman Schell

**Editor**

Carol Flynn

**Newsletter committee**

- Sue Delves
- Carol Flynn
- Sue Hendricks
- Linda Lambert
- Mary Quinn Olsson

**Designer**

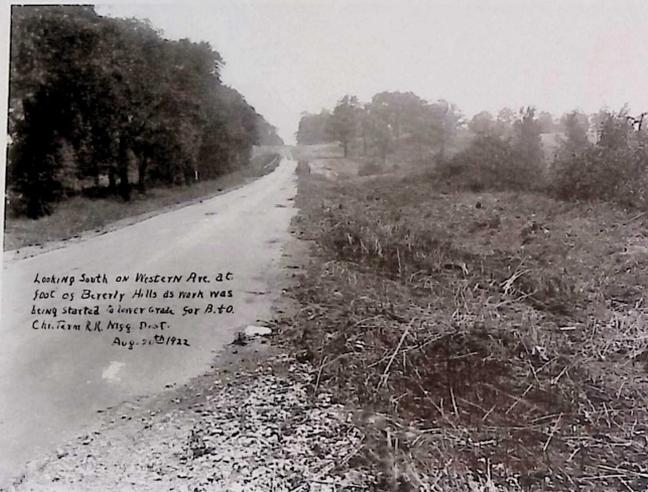
Greg Lochow

**Membership**

A newsletter subscription is a benefit of membership.

**Annual dues**

- Student (<18) \$10
- Individual \$25
- Family \$50
- Contributor \$100
- Patron \$150
- Guarantor \$500



Looking South on Western Ave. at foot of Beverly Hills as work was being started to lower grade. For B.F.O. Ch. Farm R.R. Miss. D.O.T. Aug. 2, 1922

Western Ave. was an idyllic but major country road before grading and paving began in the 1920s. Early travelers on the Dixie Highway would have passed through this pastoral setting when entering Beverly. Photo from RHS.



Grading Beverly Hills by Beverly Hills & Western Ave. For B.F.O. Ch. Farm R.R. Miss. D.O.T. Aug. 2, 1922

The grading of Western Ave. in the 1920s flattened out the hills of Beverly Hills, widened the road, and paved it for automobile traffic. Photo from RHS.



The route of the Dixie Highway through the middle of the U.S. shows the interconnection of over 5,000 miles of roadway. The construction of the national highway was complete by 1926. Image from an early map of the Dixie Highway Association, in the public domain.

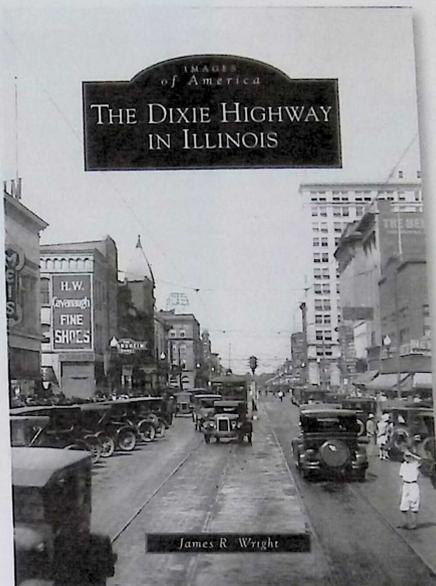
55th became part of the Dixie Highway in 1915.

But the Western Ave. seen today is a far cry from the one 100 years ago. In Beverly and Morgan Park, early Western Ave. was lined by farms and houses and orchards. Major improvements to grade and pave the stretch of road through Beverly and Morgan Park were completed in the 1920s. RHS has a collection of historic photos that show this was quite an undertaking. Other pictures in the collection show the evolution of scenes along Western Ave. through the years. Even though Western Ave. was no longer needed as part of the route to Miami, it remained the major north-south thoroughfare in the

area and today is still the major location for businesses and shopping in the area.

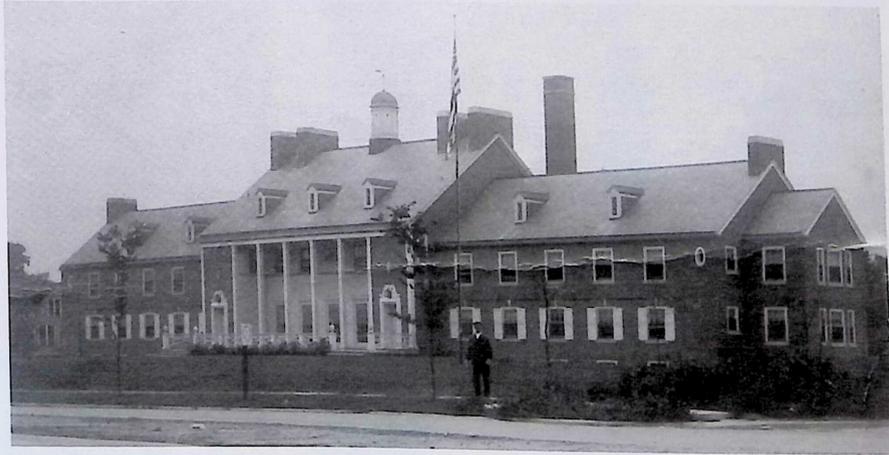
Every year on the third Saturday in June, hundreds of vintage and modern automobiles take part in "Driving the Dixie," a road trip that begins in Blue Island and ends in Momence. Along the way, drivers stop to tour historic points of interest, grab a snack, and have their "passports" stamped, to be eligible for prizes at the grand finish. For more information on this event, which is open to the public, visit the website, [www.drivingthedixie.com](http://www.drivingthedixie.com).

For a discussion of the Dixie Highway and Western Ave., visit the new series of feature articles on the RHS website, [www.ridgehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.ridgehistoricalsociety.org).



Available from RHS is the Arcadia Publishing book, *The Dixie Highway in Illinois*, authored by James R. Wright. Part of Arcadia's "Images of America" series (like our own *Chicago's Beverly/Morgan Park Neighborhood*), the book tells the story of the Dixie Highway in Illinois mainly through historic photos and captions. Photos from all along the route in Illinois are included. RHS supplied photos of Western Ave. in Beverly/Morgan Park for the book.

To purchase a copy of the book, contact the RHS office at 773-881-1675 or email [ridgehistory@hotmail.com](mailto:ridgehistory@hotmail.com).



A sight along the Dixie Highway was the Washington and Jane Smith Home, opened in 1924, originally called the Oakhaven Old

People's Home. At 113th Place and Western, it was replaced by Smith Village in 2004. Photo from RHS.

# World War II veterans share stories

By Carol Flynn

World War II veterans were honored at the 2015 Beverly/Morgan Park/Mt. Greenwood Memorial Day Parade which was held on May 25. Four veterans from our area were interviewed by the RHS Newsletter Editor for profiles in the Villager, the monthly newspaper of the Beverly Area Planning Association. These interviews will be an RHS website feature for Veterans Day in November.

World War II (WWII) lasted from 1939 to 1945, although the events which led to armed conflict began many years before that.

This war was the most widespread war in history, directly involving over 30 countries and at least 100 million people. The U.S. was officially neutral until Japan attacked the U.S. naval station at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. The U.S. then declared war on Japan, and Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S. Conflicts took place throughout Europe, South East Asia, China, the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa.

WWII proved to be the deadliest conflict in human history. Total military

deaths in WWII are estimated as high as 25 million, including 5 million prisoners of war. For the U.S., the toll was the loss of 407,000 servicemen and women. The U.S. Veterans Administration reports that during WWII, 16 million Americans served. Less than a million of those veterans are still with us today. They are now mostly in their 90s.

## Veteran profiles: Norm Lasman

Norm Lasman of Mt. Greenwood served in the U.S. Navy from 1942 to 1946. He was in eleven major battles. On May 11, 1945, near Okinawa,

his ship, the USS Bunker Hill, was struck by two Japanese kamikaze planes, putting the ship out of commission and resulting in 600 casualties and over 300 deaths out of a crew of 3400. Lasman was below deck in the engine room at the time of the attack and was overcome by carbon monoxide. When he came to, he was on the top of the deck – he had been rescued. He was the only one left alive in the engine room. The story of this attack on the USS Bunker Hill is now told in the book *Danger's Hour*, by Maxwell Taylor Kennedy, the son of Robert F. Kennedy. Lasman participated in a book signing by Kennedy in the Chicago area and Kennedy calls him every year on Veteran's Day.

## Frederick Pennix

Frederick Pennix, formerly of Morgan Park, was a young husband and father when he was drafted into the U.S. Army infantry. His units were segregated because of race. Pennix was with an anti-aircraft artillery



WWII veteran Norm Lasman, in front of his "wall of fame" showing his medals and other accolades, survived the bombing of the USS Bunker Hill. Today Lasman is a welcomed presenter at schools and other venues. Photo by C. Flynn.

quartermaster trucking company and was shipped to Iwo Jima on March 1, 1945. The U. S. had invaded the Japanese island 10 days before and was in the midst of a battle

that would last five weeks and comprise some of the fiercest and bloodiest fighting in the Pacific. In the midst of this fighting, the company unloaded the ships and hauled

supplies, including guns and ammunition, through the area. The unconditional surrender of Japan to the U.S. in September 1945 officially ended WWII. Pennix returned to his native Chicago and began a distinguished career in law enforcement that lasted 60 years.

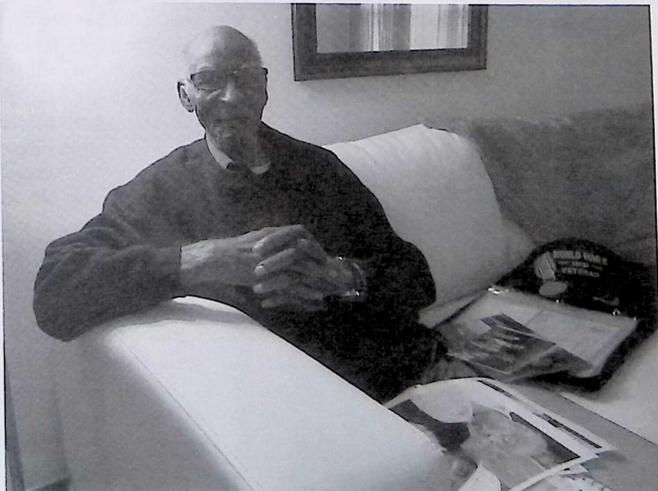
### **Bill Sandstrom**

In 1944, RHS's own Bill Sandstrom was offered the chance to take the Eddy Test, an exam used to identify recruits with the aptitude for training in the Electronics Training Program, which was the best technical training program then available in the Armed Services. He passed the test and

was accepted into the Naval Radar Program and off he went to Great Lakes Training Station for boot camp. But at Great Lakes, Sandstrom encountered a different kind of very deadly enemy – scarlet fever. Infectious diseases had long been a major problem during war times, and this was neither the first time nor the last that Great Lakes was affected. Scarlet fever was a major cause of death before antibiotics, and penicillin was just starting to be produced in any notable quantities. The hospitals were full; some of the young men died, but Sandstrom was saved by penicillin.



WWII veteran Bill Sandstrom, well known for his community service in Beverly, joined the Navy in WWII almost to die from scarlet fever in boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Station. He was an early user of the G. I. Bill of 1944 which offered education and other services to veterans. Photo by C. Flynn.



WWII veteran Frederick Pennix shares photos from his Army service and his distinguished career as a law enforcement officer. He is proud that all six of his sons served in the U.S. military and his daughter worked in security. Photo by C. Flynn

### **Jack Lyle**

Jack Lyle served as a fighter pilot with the 332nd Fighter Group of the U.S. Army Air Forces. The popular name for this group is the "Tuskegee Airmen," the first group of African-American aviators in the U.S. armed forces. Lyle flew 26 combat missions, over 100 combat hours, in his P38 twin-engine plane equipped with machine guns. The missions were mainly for escorting bomber

See Veterans, page 6



WWII veteran Jack Lyle in 2016 in front of a poster commemorating his receipt of a Congressional Medal for his service with the 332nd Fighter Group of the U.S. Army Air Forces, popularly known as the " Tuskegee Airmen." Photo by C. Flynn.

Veterans, from page 5

planes and photo reconnaissance, and attacking "targets of

opportunity." He shot down a German Fw190 fighter plane in a dogfight. He returned to Chicago as

a first lieutenant with a commission, only to be denied the opportunity for further training at O'Hare airfield until there was a program for "colored" pilots.

In 2006, the Tuskegee Airmen received Congressional Medals recognizing that their "Outstanding Combat Record Inspired Revolutionary Reform in the Armed Forces."

#### Veterans share traits

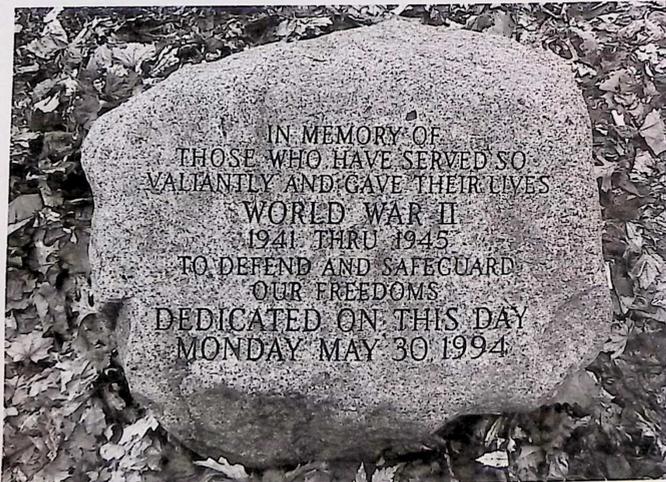
Although they come from diverse backgrounds and have pursued different paths in life, there are a number of traits these WWII veterans share. They are humble; they don't look at themselves as heroes. They were very young men put in situations not under their control – they did what they had to do. None of them romanticize war;

it was not glamorous, it was not fun. They consider themselves among the lucky ones who survived.

#### Humble words

Lasman shares some words by another WWII vet that he says reflects the way he feels but could not put into words, "I did not view my service in World War II as being heroic in any sense of the term. GIs such as myself were simply doing the job we were trained to do. To be honored is one of the most humbling experiences I have ever had. It is my prayer and hope that the current generation born in the ashes of 9/11 and shaped by the trials we are now experiencing will develop into one which children and grandchildren can honor and respect in the like manor. May God continue to bless America as He has in the past."

Look for their stories in upcoming RHS website features.



A marker honoring the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II was placed on the grounds of Ridge Park in 1994 by the Dewalt Mechlin Chapter of the Daughters of American Revolution. Photo by C. Flynn.

# Root beer is an all-American drink

By Carol Flynn

The indigenous peoples of the Americas willingly shared their knowledge



An early Hires Root Beer ad promoted the health and temperance qualities of the drink. Hires kept the name “beer” even though the beverage was non-alcoholic to appeal to the coal miners in his native Pennsylvania.

of native plants and animals with the European settlers who came to the New World. One Native American beverage has evolved into today’s root beer.

Root beer grew out of two influences: herbal remedies that native healers or shamans made from medicinal plants, and “small beer” that the colonists brought with them from Europe. Instead of the sweet, fizzy drink of today, the first root beer was a fermented tea brewed from a variety of roots, herbs, leaves,

berries, hops and yeast, sweetened by molasses – a beguiling mix of flavors that was also good for you.

Root teas were brewed from local plants so recipes would vary. In the Chicago area, roots and bark from sassafras shrubs and trees would have been the likely major ingredient. Modern researchers conclude that sassafras has analgesic and antiseptic properties. Today, the sassafras tree is on Chicago’s top-ten list of native non-invasive urban tolerant trees to plant to increase tree diversity in the area.

Other likely ingredients in a local tea were wild ginger and wintergreen berries, which have salicylic acid, an ingredient of aspirin. Sarsaparilla was the most common ingredient in root teas in other areas of the New World.

Homebrewed low-alcohol “small beers” had been made from roots and barks in Europe for hundreds of years as a safer alternative to water. The colonists brought with them hops plants, molasses and yeast; then adapted

the Native American root teas for their purposes. Root beer was likely the beverage of choice at the first Thanksgiving feast in 1621.

By the 1800s, alcoholic and non-alcoholic root beers were marketed for their medicinal properties. Then Charles Hires of Philadelphia removed the alcohol and mixed the syrup with soda water and premiered modern root beer in 1876. Root beer sales really took off during Prohibition (1920-1933). In 1937, Chicago-based Dad’s Root Beer Company opened, the first to sell its product in a six-pack.

The rest of the world doesn’t “get” root beer. They especially don’t get



root beer floats – why would anyone want to ruin good ice cream by mixing it with a medicinal-tasting concoction? But root beer floats are a traditional summer treat in the U.S. and August 6 is National Root Beer Float Day.

## Brew your own root beer

Brewing your own root beer has become a popular hobby. A quick Google search on line brings up numerous resources and recipes for making alcoholic and non-alcoholic versions. Here is one recipe for making non-alcoholic root beer syrup. The ingredients can be found at Whole Foods, Mariano’s or similar stores, or from on-line sources such as Amazon.

### Ingredients

- 4 cups water
- 2 T\* chopped fresh ginger
- 1 T chopped dried sarsaparilla root
- 1 T sassafras root
- ½ T chopped dried licorice root
- ½ T chopped dried burdock root
- ½ T dried wintergreen leaves
- 3 star anise
- 4 cups brown sugar
- \*T=tablespoon

Add all the ingredients except the brown sugar to the water in a medium sauce pan, and bring to a low simmer for 15 minutes, uncovered. Add the brown sugar and stir until fully dissolved. Remove from heat. Let stand and cool for two hours. Strain through cheesecloth or other fine strainer into a bottle. Refrigerate for up to six months.

To serve: Add three tablespoons to a large glass (12 oz. or so), and top up with sparkling or other carbonated water and ice.

This recipe is from *Handmade Gatherings: Recipes and Crafts for Seasonal Celebrations and Polluck Parties* by Ashley English.

To improvise, consider adding a cinnamon stick, a teaspoon of dried orange peel, part of a vanilla bean, a clove, an allspice berry. Sugar replacements could include honey or Splenda.

Dad’s Root Beer in Chicago was the first root beer company to use the new six-pack system that Coca-Cola came out with in 1923 for carry-home goods. Prior to that time, bottles were primarily distributed in wooden crates which were heavy and burdensome to carry home.

Ridge Historical Society  
**RECORD**  
 EVERLY HILLS, MORGAN PARK, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS & Mt. GREENWOOD

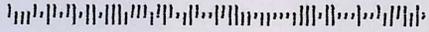
10621 S. Seeley Ave., Chicago, IL 60643

**SUMMER 2015 ISSUE**



Wendell A. and Margaret Kapustiak (2015)  
 1212 S. Naper Blvd. Ste 119  
 Naperville, IL 60540-7349

6054087349 0043



World War II veterans and RHS supporters Angelo Blondo, left, and the late Carl Spencer, right, were honored by RHS at the 2009 Memorial Day Parade. The RHS bike race, party is named for Spencer, RHS Board member emeritus, who was a cycling enthusiast. Photo by L. Lambery.

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25 THRU SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2015**  
**RHS Annual Garage & Better Book Sale**  
 Friday, Saturday and Sunday, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., at RHS, 10621 S. Seeley Ave. RHS will begin taking donations of gently used items and books in August. For more information, contact the RHS office at 773/881-1675 or [ridgelistory@hotmail.com](mailto:ridgelistory@hotmail.com).

World War II veterans and RHS supporters Angelo Blondo, left, and the late Carl Spencer, right, were honored by RHS at the 2009 Memorial Day Parade. The RHS bike race, party is named for Spencer, RHS Board member emeritus, who was a cycling enthusiast. Photo by L. Lambery.

**FRIDAY, JULY 17, 2015**  
**The Annual Carl Spencer Memorial Bike Race Party**  
 From 5:00 to 9:00 p.m., at RHS, 10621 S. Seeley Ave. Features a full hot dinner buffet; wine, beer and soft drinks; and desserts. The cost is \$40 per RHS member, and \$50 per non-member. Children under 12 are free and must be accompanied by an adult. Reservations are required. Contact the RHS office at 773/881-1675 or [ridgelistory@hotmail.com](mailto:ridgelistory@hotmail.com). This has become the "not-to-be-missed" event of the year! The Beverly Cycling Classic bicycle race draws contenders from all over the globe, and can be watched up close and personal from the Seeley Ave. entrance of RHS or the Longwood Drive lawn, or you can get the panoramic aspect from the Graver-Driscoll House terrace.

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**