

# MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

KEEPING HOMETOWN MEMORIES ALIVE

# MUSEUM



# JOURNAL

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## IF WALLS COULD TALK: THE RUSSEL FARMHOUSE AND ITS RESIDENTS

BY EMILY DATTILO

Does this house look familiar? You may have seen it while driving down West Kensington Road before May 2001, or you may have taken a virtual tour through its miniature counterpart on the 2020 Dollhouse Video Tours. Though this house at 211 W. Kensington Road no longer stands, its distinctive red and white siding make it memorable. However, few remember the Russel family who lived there and farmed the surrounding land. The only indication that the Russels were ever there is the street named after them, which intersects Kensington Road near the farmhouse. Despite their relative obscurity in 2021, the Russel family left their mark on the community. Their lives and the life of their house and farm offer a snapshot of the development of Mount Prospect from a small farming community to a busy suburb.

It's unclear when the farmhouse at 211 W. Kensington Road was constructed, but it was connected to the Russel family. Hans Heinrich Russel, also known as John Henry Russel, arrived in the United States from Germany in 1849. He was one of many German immigrants who fled economic and political hardships in the Germanic states during the 1840s. Hans made his way to the present-day northwest suburbs, and there he married Engel Maria Schilling of Schaumburg. They had a son, Henry. Engel Maria died in childbirth, and a few years later Hans married Louisa Katz of Elk Grove. Louisa gave birth to another son, John. She was



Russel Farmhouse, c. 1964

probably related to the Mount Prospect Katz family who owned much of the land north of Central Road, including the surroundings of the red and white farmhouse. Even with this close connection it's not known how Hans acquired the farmland neighboring the Katz family. His 1904 *Cook County Herald* obituary suggests that he began farming that land around the time of his marriages in the 1850s. In 1878 Hans also constructed a house on the 200 block of Russel Street. Almost 50 years later Ludwig or Henry Katz split that house in two and moved the other half across the street.

Despite the geographical distance between neighboring farms, farm families maintained close ties with their community. They helped with each other's farm work, especially at harvest time, and they came together to socialize and celebrate. Hans must have been a

good neighbor to be remembered in his obituary as "one of our substantial German citizens, an early settler who by industry and honesty rose to affluence and influence, highly esteemed by all who knew him." By the 1900s the family and their farm were so well-known in Mount Prospect that the Russel farm was noted as a landmark when the *Cook County Herald* announced the beginning of Mount Prospect's rural mail delivery service.

While Hans and his oldest son, Henry, were actively involved in the farm community, John's career path headed in another direction. As the long-time secretary of the Des Plaines Mutual Insurance Company he insured the goods and farms of families all across the area. He also served as the school treasurer of Wheeling Township and became an elder and trustee in St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights.

Russel family members began moving off the farm and into Arlington Heights in the early 1900s.

Henry rented the farm and sold the equipment at

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### FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

Hello and happy Spring, readers! One of the many lessons 2020 taught us was the importance of flexibility. Like so many cultural institutions around the world, we have been adapting to a new normal. I'm grateful that we have a talented and committed team of staff, board members, and volunteers who have made the transition to virtual programming smoother than imagined.

We met some of the past year's challenges by adapting the format of some of our programs. Some programs were easily modified to follow new safety guidelines, like the blacksmith demonstrations, but others were moved online. Instead of hosting summer History Camp programs at the historical society campus, last summer's campers met online to participate in activities themed around the history of the Olympics and the Chicago World's Fair. The complications of

the pandemic also inspired us to create new programs, like the 2020 Dollhouse Video Tour.

Because so many guidelines have, so far, remained the same in 2021, we are continuing to be creative in finding ways to share history with the Mount Prospect community. Our Annual Meeting, for example, will be a virtual presentation this year. Watch your email inboxes, as well as our website and social media, for more details on this event. The financial presentation of the Annual Meeting is enclosed in this newsletter. This spring our Second Sunday programs will not feature "Make and Takes," but rather "Take and Makes." Participants will take their activity supply bags home and make the craft together over Zoom, instead of in Central School.

Although our buildings are not yet open to the public, you can still reach us by calling the office or sending an email to [info@mtphistory.org](mailto:info@mtphistory.org). We regularly share moments from Mount Prospect history on our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. Make sure to follow us if you're not already! Our social media accounts and our website are two of the best places to stay up-to-date on all our upcoming events.

Stay safe and healthy!



**Emily Dattilo**  
Director

### FROM THE COLLECTION



**Mt. Fuji at sunrise**

Betty Stolze was a new military wife on an adventure in August 1952. Her husband, Bob, was a corporal in the U.S. Army 441st Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment stationed in Tokyo, Japan from summer 1952 to summer 1953. (This assignment was unrelated to U.S. occupation of Japan at the end of World War II. Japan regained independence a few months before the Stolzes arrived.) This album was originally a Christmas gift from

Bob to Betty that year and was donated to the historical society in 2020. Within its pages is a record of all their travels

within Japan, events attended, their apartment, and many of their friends and neighbors. Enjoy a few photos from their travels!



**Bob with a lion in Hibiya Park**

HIBIYA PARK



**Betty & Bob in Korakuen Park**

KORAKUEN PARK



**View from the Stolze's rooftop of their Tokyo neighborhood**

— AND WINTER



(Continued from page 1)

auktion in October 1911 and the Russel farm went up for sale after his passing in 1918. A public notice in the *Cook County Herald* announced the public auktion of the farm on September 21, 1918. The records do not clearly note who purchased the estate, but the H. Roy Berry Company discussed developing Northwest Heights, which includes the Russel Estate, in a January 1926 issue of the *Cook County Herald*. They boasted of turning the farm into “small country estates” that are “especially suited to the man who has a desire to raise his own vegetables and live the life of a small farmer while being employed in the city.”

This series of events for the Russel farm was mirrored elsewhere in Mount Prospect, especially during the 1920s development boom. For example, William and George Busse purchased the rest of the Owen Rooney farm in 1916 and over the following years subdivided the land into Busse’s Eastern Addition. These sales laid the groundwork



Russel Farmhouse, c. 1940s

for Mount Prospect’s transformation from a small farming community into a growing suburb.

In 1942 Margie Atwood and her family moved into the Russel farmhouse. The Great Depression halted much of the redevelopment of the 1920s, so the rest of the neighborhood, like much of Mount Prospect, was still surrounded by farm fields. Prospect High School and Randhurst Shopping Center, two present-day landmarks in the area, hadn’t been built yet. The Atwoods were at the edge of town.

The Russel farmhouse appears run-down in a photo from the 1940s (and for this reason was included in the book *Lost Mount Prospect*), so it may have been impacted by the Great Depression’s slowdown. Fortunately, the Atwoods brought the Russel farmhouse back to life around the same time that development resumed in the rest of the neighborhood. By the 1964 photo (page 1) the house appears well-cared for. In this way the Russel farmhouse successfully transitioned to its role as one of many homes in a suburban neighborhood, a feat not guaranteed for most historic farmhouses.

The Russel farmhouse stood facing Kensington Road until it was



Margie Atwood’s Dollhouse

destroyed by fire in May 2001. A new house with a new design was constructed in its place. However, the story of this house doesn’t end here. Margie Atwood was so charmed with the farmhouse after living there for almost 40 years that she decided to build a dollhouse replica. This project fulfilled her lifelong dream of having her own dollhouse, according to a 1982 *Daily Herald* article. She renamed the house Atwood Manor.

This dollhouse not only represents a long-time resident’s labor of love, but it also serves as the only remaining physical link to the neighborhood’s agricultural past. Through this dollhouse the Russel family continues to have a place in the Mount Prospect community.

*Thank you to Jean Murphy for research assistance!*

*Note: The spelling of “Russel” appears most frequently with one L.*

## PANDEMIC MOMENTS PROJECT

2020-21

MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MOUNT PROSPECT PUBLIC LIBRARY  
MOUNT PROSPECT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

# Pandemic Moments

Once Upon a Difficult Time... We Coped:  
Living in MP during the Pandemic of 2020-21

Who will tell Mount Prospect’s story of the COVID-19 Pandemic?

You – the MP resident is the best resource to tell the story. The Pandemic has been with us a year. Vaccines are now on the horizon, and a better future is approaching. The Pandemic Moments Project was started last year to collect and preserve what life has been like *here* in our Village. We have many opportunities for you to provide your unique insights, thoughts, experiences and reflections through writing, photographs, drawing and video. Please consider contributing to this important archive for future residents and historians. This spring we have created additional ways for you and your family to provide unique perspectives. We are publishing stories of how you personally coped during this time – for example, did you do something to cheer your neighbors, did you create new routines? Did you create artwork? We are also providing a time capsule project for younger children, and we created a Padlet space for sharing photos as well as short responses on how you celebrated milestones during the Pandemic. We encourage you to visit our Website, Facebook page, and Instagram to find out about these opportunities and more.

The Pandemic Moments Project is run by the Mount Prospect Historical Society, in cooperation with the Mount Prospect Community Engagement Committee, Mount Prospect Public Library, the Mt. Prospect Park District and River Trails Park District. Please join us in preserving what local life looked like during this period. At the conclusion of the project, the Society will also welcome donations of journals, letters, or other physical items to the Society’s collection.



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### NEWSLETTER

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## STAY CONNECTED WITH US!

### Spring Flower Bulb Fundraiser

An assortment of bulbs, provided by Dutch Mill Bulbs, is available to order completely online with payment through PayPal or a credit card. By following the link provided on the Mount Prospect Historical Society website (<https://www.mtphist.org/support-us-with-dutch-mill-bulbs-2/>), your purchase will be automatically credited to the Society. Proceeds from the sale benefit the Society. Each order will be shipped directly to the purchaser. The bulb sale ends June 1.



### Second Sundays at the Society

**April 11 & May 9  
11:30 am via Zoom**

Second Sundays have gone virtual! Join us for some fun "Take and Make" activities. April's activity is a tree craft to honor Mount Prospect's status of Tree City USA. In May, celebrate Mom with a cute flower project you can do with her or for her. Pick up your bag of supplies at the Society the week before the event (April 5-9 and May 3-7.) Bags can be found in the breezeway between the Dolores Haugh Education Center and the Meyn Blacksmith Exhibit. Then join us on Zoom (Connection details will be found in your supply kit.) to complete the crafts together. All ages are welcome at this free event. No

sign up necessary, but on-line attendees are limited to 15. Supply kits available on a first come, first served basis.



about King Tut's child bride, James Joyce, Brookfield Zoo and wealth unimaginable. Cost: \$10. Space is limited and reservations are required. Refreshment goodie bags and the Zoom invitation will be available for non-contact pick up at the Society the week before the event.

**Come 'Meet' Edith Rockefeller McCormick**  
**Saturday, May 15  
1:00 pm via Zoom**

The reviews are in for *Edith: The Rogue Rockefeller McCormick*, by Andrea Friederici Ross. All agree it is fascinating! Be treated to a unique experience as Edith, portrayed by Ellie Carlson of Ellie Presents, herself walks off the page and onto your Zoom screen, and the author enlightens you about the odyssey of Edith's life. Get ready for questions

For more information visit <https://www.mtphist.org> or call us at (847) 392-9006.

