

MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

KEEPING HOMETOWN MEMORIES ALIVE

MUSEUM



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THE MOUNT PROSPECT PARK AND SHOP: A HIDDEN HISTORY

BY EMILY DATTILO

When most people think of a historic site, a shopping center usually isn't the image they conjure up. Imposing Victorian mansions or places like expansive battlefields seem old and unique in the 21st-century world, making them worthy of consideration as a historic site. Shopping centers, on the other hand, are a relatively modern addition to the American landscape and they seem to be everywhere. What could possibly be historic about a place like that?

Despite assumptions to the contrary, shopping centers, like Prospect Place in downtown Mount Prospect, have a historical context. Although this local shopping center is about to undergo redevelopment, the center itself is a product of earlier redevelopment.

The 1923 Drainage District Map indicates that the land on the corner of today's Main Street and West Prospect Avenue belonged to a farmer named George Meier. It's unclear exactly when Meier sold his land, but the Weller Creek Drainage District office ledger, which recorded land payments, shows that by late 1940 a woman named Stella C. Wilson was making payments on the property. Later in the 1940s it was the site of the annual Lions Club Fall Festival. Whenever the sale occurred, Meier was one of many local farmers during these decades who sold their farmland to investors or developers looking to build new neighborhoods.



Mount Prospect Park and Shop, c.1950s

However, the northern part of Meier's property was destined to become the site of "one of the most modern and unusual store developments in the entire Chicago area," according to a February 11, 1950 issue of *Realty and Building* magazine. This store development was originally named the Mount Prospect Park and Shop and was designed by architect Edward P. Steinberg.

The term "park and shop" was commonly used in the mid-1900s to refer to a shopping center that also provided nearby parking spaces. 21st-century Americans might instead consider a similar structure a strip mall. This type of shopping center represents an important change in retail history and in the development of the suburbs. In retail history, park and shop centers mark a change in architecture that accommodates customers and their cars. Park and shop centers were, in theory, a way to solve the congestion issues caused by increasing numbers of cars on the road.

For Mount Prospect, the park and shop served to accommodate a growing population and was a way to keep residents shopping in downtown areas, rather than on the outskirts of town or, more significantly, in neighboring towns.

When Mayor Pendleton shoveled the first scoop of dirt during the May 1950 groundbreaking ceremony, the \$250,000 Mount Prospect Park and Shop Center was planned to hold eight or nine stores. The Park and Shop opened for business in fall 1950, and the entire block of stores was completely full by the end of 1952.

Some of the earliest tenants at the Park and Shop were Reid's Ladies Apparel, Sethness Men's Store,

(Continued on page 3)

IN THIS ISSUE:

PARK AND SHOP	1
FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR	2
FROM THE COLLECTION	2
"PLAINS AND TRAINS" BUS TRIP	3
UPCOMING EVENTS	4

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

It is so refreshing to see this summer's calendar filling up with in-person programs. If you've already peeked at the "Upcoming Events" section of this newsletter, then you probably noticed that many of our summer programs will be held on the Historical Society campus. It will be fantastic to see visitors on our grounds again!

All of us here at the Mount Prospect Historical Society are also eager to welcome everyone back into our buildings for research, rentals, and tours. We are currently planning this stage of reopening and hope to allow visitors inside buildings by the end of this year, providing it is safe to do so. Please watch our website and social media accounts for future reopening updates.

Part of reopening, however, will require your help. **We are currently looking for volunteer tour guides to lead tours of the Dietrich Friedrichs House.** Lena and Dietrich Friedrichs built this home in 1906, and at the time, it was the thirteenth house in

town. Today it is both a museum and the home of the Mount Prospect Historical Society. All of us at the Historical Society love this historic building, and you can help us show off this beautiful home as a volunteer tour guide! Becoming a volunteer tour guide is a wonderful way to share local history with your community, as well as learn more about it yourself. More information on volunteer responsibilities and the volunteer application form can be found on our website: <https://www.mtphist.org/volunteer/>

If you'd like to help the Historical Society in other ways, we have plenty of opportunities to volunteer with us once we fully reopen. In addition to house tours, we offer hands-on experiences working with the artifact collection and researching topics in local history. As we begin resuming in-person programs, we will need volunteers to help at many of our events. There is always household maintenance that needs to be done too, so if your talent is fixing things around

the house, we could certainly use your talent. Whatever time or talent you'd like to share with the Historical Society, we'd be happy to have you. Please fill out the volunteer application form on our website to become a volunteer.

Have a wonderful summer, readers, and I hope to see many of you join us as volunteers!



Emily Dattilo
Director

FROM THE COLLECTION



Bricks, c. 1927
Roof finial, c.1980s

These two bricks and the roof finial were recovered from the small Tudor-style building at 2 W. Northwest Highway on the day it was demolished in March 2021. Almost 100 years ago, in 1927, this building first opened as the Moehling Service Station. John C. Moehling, also owner of Mount Prospect's first store, built this service station in order to serve the growing number of cars in the area. By the early 1930s John C.'s son, John P., began managing the station. The bricks and finial are now part of the Historical Society's collection.

The service station remained in operation for many years under different owners. In 1981 George and Dee Zoumaras diverged from that trend and opened Submarine Express, a sandwich shop, in this same building. By 1990 the timber-frame façade features, including this roof finial, were added to the structure. The exterior transformation helped this

historic building better match the style of its neighboring historic buildings in downtown Mount Prospect. George and Dee's son, Tom, later managed the restaurant. Over its almost 40 years in business, Sub Express became a local favorite and one of the Historical Society's most enthusiastic supporters.



John P. Moehling Jr. outside of the Moehling Service Station, c. 1934



Submarine Express, July 2020

(Continued from page 1)

Brunberg's 5 & 10, Lenhart's Pastry Shop, Bachmann's Hardware Store, the National Food Store, and McMahon's Dry Goods. While none of these early tenants remain in the shopping center, other tenants became fixtures. Keefer's Pharmacy, Strass' Ladies Apparel (later Mary Jayne's Ladies Apparel), and Sam's Place were or have been located in the Park and Shop for over 40 years.

Although the style of a park and shop center was supposed to relieve traffic congestion, the one in Mount Prospect had the opposite effect. The *Mount Prospect Herald* reported in December 1950, only a few months after opening, that the Village had recently imposed a two-hour parking limit on south side of West Prospect Avenue in order to "accommodate the new stores." Another suggestion to improve traffic involved creating a driveway space leading into the

Park and Shop parking lot through the central island of grass and trees down Prospect Ave. These parking issues were part of larger downtown parking problems throughout the 1950s, so the Village eventually asked a commission to study the situation.

Over the following decades, the name "Park and Shop" disappears from the records. It seems that the Park and Shop became part of the Village landscape as the rest of the street filled in with new retail space. The building is currently called "Prospect Place Shopping Center," but there are no records of when or

why the name changed. (If you know the answer to this history mystery, please contact the Historical Society!) Though the name may be mysterious, the Prospect Place sign with the clock is instantly recognizable in the downtown landscape.

At the time of writing, the Village has approved plans to replace the shopping center with a five-story building containing first floor commercial space and apartments above. It appears that this land along West Prospect Avenue will continue the cycle of redevelopment, but this time in a new century.



Sketch of the proposed Mount Prospect Park and Shop in *Realty and Building* magazine, February 1950

"PLAINS AND TRAINS" BUS TRIP PLANNED

The Society has planned its Second Hopefully-Annual Bus Trip on Saturday, August 28. This year we will be exploring historic delights on the South Side of Chicago – first, the Frank Lloyd Wright Robie House on the campus of the University of Chicago and then the Pullman neighborhood where Pullman railroad cars were once built.

The Frederick C. Robie House in the Hyde Park neighborhood was built between 1909 and 1910 and was placed on the very first National Register of Historic Places list in 1966. At the time that he commissioned Wright to design his home, Robie was only 28 years old and the assistant manager of the Excelsior Supply Company which was owned by his father. He and his wife, Lora Hieronymus Robie, a 1900 graduate of the University of Chicago, selected the property in order to remain close to the campus and the social life of the University.

After lunch on your own near the University, the tour will continue south to the Pullman neighborhood.

Historic Pullman was built in the 1880s by George Pullman as workers' housing for employees of his railroad car company, the Pullman Palace Car Company. He established behavioral standards that workers had to meet in order to live in the area and charged them rent. The distinctive rowhouses were comfortable by standards of the day, and contained such amenities as indoor plumbing, gas, and sewers.

This was the site of the two-month-long Pullman Strike in 1894 that eventually required intervention by the US government and military. After Pullman died in 1897, the Illinois Supreme Court required the company to sell the town because operating it was outside the company's charter. In 1889, the town and other major portions of the South Side were annexed by Chicago and within ten years, the city sold the houses to their occupants.

Tickets for the trip are \$65 per person and include tour admissions and bus transportation. The tour bus will depart from the Historical Society, 101 S. Maple St., promptly at 9 a.m. and is expected to return back there by 5 p.m. Lunch will be on your own. Comfortable clothing and shoes are strongly urged.

Also, be aware that the Society will follow all CDC COVID-19 recommendations in effect at the time of the tour, so please be prepared to wear a mask on the bus and during the tours, if that is still required.

This tour is now fully booked. If you would like to be added to the waitlist please contact the office at 847-392-9006.





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UPCOMING EVENTS

Second Sundays at the Society

Location: Mount Prospect Historical Society (Please note, buildings on the Society campus will not be open.)
Fee: Free!



Patriotic Craft

Sunday, July 11
11:30 am — 1:30 pm
We'll be making red, white, and blue paper wind socks. (Take and make activity kits will also be available on this day if you prefer.) This session will be held outdoors. If weather is inclement, the event will be canceled.

Local Storyteller Pam Nelson

Sunday, August 8
11:30 am — 1:30 pm
Join local story teller Pam Nelson for some fun, interactive storytelling sessions. If weather is inclement, this event will be canceled.

Summer Programs for Young Historians

Location: Mount Prospect Historical Society
Boys & Girls Age 7 & Up
Space is limited and registration is required. To register, visit: <https://www.mtphist.org/summer-2021-activities-for-young-historians/>

Prairie Kids II

Thursday, July 1
9:30 am — 11:30 am
Fee: \$25

Science of History

Thursday, July 15
9:30 am — 11:30 am
Fee: \$25

If You Lived: Crossing on the Mayflower and Life in Plymouth

Thursday, July 29
9:30 am — 11:30 am
Fee: \$25



Other Events & News

Pullman Museum & Robie House Bus Tour
Saturday, August 28
9 am — 5 pm
Fee: \$65, includes tour admission and bus transportation.
Space is limited and registration is required. To register, visit <https://www.mtphist.org/bustour2021/>

Pandemic Reflections Project

Have you stuck it to COVID? Let's see your vaccination photos!
Visit: <https://www.mtphist.org/padlet/> to share your photos and participate in this important project.

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

