

MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MUSEUM JOURNAL

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1 SPRING 2010

WELCOME TO OUR EXPANDED NEWSLETTER!

You talked and we listened. The Historical Society has received much positive feedback about the inclusion of historic articles and photographs in our newsletters. Our new, larger format Museum Journal will allow more space to tell you about the rich and interesting history of our community. The Journal will also discuss the ongoing activities of the Society's efforts to catalog and preserve these treasures. Our first article concerns a little-known episode of local history which was also highlighted at our recent Annual Meeting in late January. In case you missed it . . .



Clockwise from right; Chief George Wittenberg in 1965, The Mount Prospect State Bank circa 1930, and Patrolman Wittenberg on his motorcycle, circa 1935.



THE GREAT MOUNT PROSPECT "BANK ROBBERY" OF 1935

While the country trudged its way through The Great Depression, life in Mount Prospect was certainly challenging, but thanks to the foresight of its founding families, not disastrous. Under the careful guidance of the Busses, Willes and Moehlings and under the leadership of the Village's

second mayor, Herman Meyn, Mount Prospect remained one of Illinois' most solvent communities throughout the 1930s.

Frugality was among the chief virtues of the early German settlers, who did not believe in spending money wastefully or extravagantly. This was

even true throughout the "Roaring Twenties". William Busse's Mount Prospect State Bank was an anchor of stability for the local economy. While banks around the country were folding, the Mount Prospect State Bank only closed its doors for the Bank Holiday ordered by the Roosevelt administration.

INSIDE OUR NEW MUSEUM JOURNAL:

- *Expansive articles on Mount Prospect History*
- *Larger and more photos*
- *Updates on our activities and news from the museum world*
- *Information on our upcoming events and fundraisers*
- *How to get involved with the Historical Society*
- *Much more!*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

DIRECTOR'S NOTE	2
FEATURED IMAGE	2
FEATURED ARTICLE	1, 3
UPCOMING EVENTS	3
MUSEUM CAMPUS	4
ORGANIZATION INFO	4



Greg Peerbolte,
Executive Director

I HAD ASKED MYSELF THE QUESTION "WHY DOES HISTORY MATTER?" THOUSANDS OF TIMES... BUT NEVER IN THIS CONTEXT."

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

Recently, as all of you are surely aware, many of our local and regional historic institutions have had to make some hard financial choices. Some have even had to face the complete elimination of their funding. Recently, I decided to pen a letter of support for one of these institutions.

It was not an easy task. I had asked myself the question "Why does history matter?" thousands of times. I had always used lofty, philosophical justifications to support the dissemination of history. However, I'd never asked myself the question in this context. People are

hurting. Various community and governmental agencies that fund museums are now looking simply to survive. Certainly, when given a choice between police, fire, public works, and the local museum, it usually does not look promising for historic organizations. Thus, I had to be practical. I could not merely quote Churchill or paraphrase an old professor.

My justification for why our organizations matter is that we, too, provide a service to our communities. I have always said that local historical agencies serve as the "front lines" of history. Odds are, if you had a question about your

business, family, or home, it is unlikely you would start your search at the Field Museum. Local museums exist to give people a glimpse, or even a long look into the past closest to them. We hope this will in turn will deepen understanding of your family and community. Obviously, this has a positive ripple effect on any community, and promotes the kind of bonds that gets us through the inevitable difficult days. Don't let these difficult days prevent us from telling the story of how we got through them... So how did I answer the question of why history matters? Because, regardless of

FEATURED PHOTO:



Do you recognize this hidden gem on the Museum Campus?
Turn to page 4.

This iconic postcard image dates from around 1915. It shows scenes of the young, but ambitious, village. A postcard such as this would have been used a promotional tool to entice would-be residents to the community. The picture on the card depicts what would have been important qualities for early Mount Prospect residents. Schools, housing, churches, commerce and transportation were all concerns in those days, much as they are today. Some of these places also hint at village life. For example, the presence of a single and specifically identified Lutheran Church denotes the fact that our community was a very close knit-group of German Lutherans, and encouraged a similar background in potential settlers, at least initially. If there was any doubt as to who was in charge in town, the three "Busse" references would certainly clarify.

BANK ROBBERY, CON'T FROM PAGE ONE**(Con't, pg. 3)**

During the 1930s the country was also captivated by the criminal activity of the various gangsters around Chicago. Outlaws like John Dillinger, "Baby Face" Nelson and "Terrible" Touhy became household names for their brazen robberies of banks. Some of these men even became folk heroes in parts of the United States, seen as such by a financially disheartened public in the darkest days of the Depression.

Few people know that the Mount Prospect State Bank was nearly the site of one of these robberies. Time Magazine recounted the story in August of 1935, perhaps a bit facetiously, in the "Miscellany" section:

"In Mount Prospect, Ill., four brash bank bandits roared up to the Mount Prospect State Bank waving a machine gun, ran toward the door, read the sign on the doorhandle, "Out to lunch," raced back to their car and roared away."

Perhaps this episode wasn't so

humorous (or if so, in much more of a deadpan fashion) to Mount Prospect Policeman George Whittenberg, who was the village's lone patrolman under William Muslo, the village's first chief of police at the time. Whittenberg recounted the episode in a 1968 newspaper article:

"I rode (my motorcycle) toward the Mount Prospect State Bank at the northwest corner of Busse and Main," Whittenberg said, "but traffic was heavy in those days with people going to the races down the Northwest Highway. We had five lanes of traffic on a four lane road."

"I got stuck behind a traffic light at the Northwest Highway. When the light changed to green, I rode up Main towards the bank and noticed someone on the corner waving to me. It was the tailor who used to have a shop between the bank and Busse-Biermann hardware store. He told me about the car that drove away just before I got there."

"The tailor said one of the men stood out in front of the bank with a machine gun., two men ran up to the door and one stayed behind the wheel for the getaway... If I had gotten there 30 seconds sooner the machine gunner would have seen me and

half of me would have continued on with the motorcycle and half would have stayed on the spot." The (Time Magazine) story was true," Whittenberg said, "except for the sign on the door handle. The bank people weren't out to lunch; the bank always closed by two o'clock in the afternoon in those days."

Officer Whittenberg, who would later become Police Chief Whittenberg, was himself a staple of life in early Mount Prospect. Joining the force in 1932, Chief Whittenberg served the Village for 35 years, serving under seven village presidents and 70 trustees. Under his leadership, the Department grew from two to 25 full time officers. It was also reported that outside of his regularly scheduled vacation, he never missed a day of work. For years there was a monument to his service in the village -- the Whittenberg Fountain -- underneath the Mount Prospect water tower just off of the stretch Northwest Highway which he would have often patrolled on his beloved oversized motorcycle. It was recently removed, however, due to safety concerns. Appropriately, it sat directly across the street from Mount Prospect's Police and Fire Headquarters.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**Quilting Exhibition to be Held at Historical Society**

The "Sew-Bee-It" Quilting Circle and the "Patchwork" Quilting Circle from Sevres, France will be hosting a joint quilt exhibition at the Dietrich Friedrichs Home. Quilts created by the two groups will be presented. The exhibit will run from Wednesday, April 14 through Saturday April 17. Phone the museum for exact hours. A community potluck dinner will also be held at village hall on Thursday, April 15.

New Exhibit Opening

The latest installment of the exhibit series "They Felt It Had Prospects For The Future", will open with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m., Friday, March 19. The exhibit will feature the Moehling family, who established the first general store in the area, as well as many other early commercial ventures, some of which remain Mount Prospect fixtures. The exhibit will run through October.



The John C. Moehling Home, formerly at 8 E. Northwest Highway, is seen here circa 1900.

Eat at Photo's in March

Photo's Hot Dogs, 1706 E. Kensington Rd., will once again hold a month-long fundraiser for the Mount Prospect Historical Society. Simply eat at Photo's anytime during the month of March, and tell the cashier you would like to support the Society. That's it! A percentage of your purchase will then be contributed to the Society's operating fund, which makes it possible for our organization to continue its mission. The more times you do this, the more it helps us so make Photo's your favorite place to eat during March.



MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

101 South Maple Street
Mount Prospect, IL 60056
WWW.MTPHIST.ORG

Located on the Southeast corner of Maple Street
and Busse Avenue, adjacent to the Chase Building

Phone: 847-392-9006
Fax: 847-577-9660
Email: info@mtphistory.org

This newsletter provided by



Mount Prospect, IL 60056
847/670-9125
www.byhmeusa.com

NON-PROFIT ORG

U.S. POSTAGE PAID

PERMIT NO. 90

MT. PROSPECT, IL

A HIDDEN GEM ON OUR MUSEUM CAMPUS, AND ITS CREATOR

Tucked away in the southeast corner of the Society's garden, just south of the Education Center, is a gem that not enough people see. The Society has a sensory garden there comprised of four herbs and four vegetables planted in raised containers and labeled with Braille markers so that those who are blind may enjoy them along with everyone else.

"Planting a Garden for the Blind was part of the way that we satisfied our Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements when we opened the museum," recalled former MPHS President Dolores Haugh. "We couldn't afford to equip the museum with an elevator and it would have ruined the historic character of the museum, anyway," she continued. "So we built the Education Center with its accessible bathrooms; put together a video tour of the museum which could be viewed from the Education Center; and we planted the Garden for the Blind."

Responsibility for the special garden has always belonged to Mount Prospect resident George Luteri, a long-time MPHS volunteer (see photo on page 2). Haugh gave Luteri every bit of the credit for the garden, saying that without him, the garden would not exist because he has done all of the planning, planting and maintaining of the garden over the years. "The Society and the Mount Prospect Garden Club first started talking about such a garden in 1991," Luteri recalled recently. "They got a \$2000 grant from the Mount Prospect Lions Club and used that for the Braille plaques and all of the other materials."

Bessie Friedrichs Barnes, the woman who grew up in the house which is now the Society's museum, had fond memories of a kitchen garden that her mother maintained. So members of the garden committee wanted to replicate such a garden and decided to combine it with the desire for a sensory garden for those who could not see.

Luteri recalled researching different ideas for the garden at the Chicago Botanic Gardens before choosing three-foot high, 12-inch diameter clay sewer pipes. He purchased eight of them, and with the help of fellow volunteer, Mel Both, set them on end and filled them with soil before planting eight different plants in the various pipes. The pipes contain the four most common herbs: sage, parsley, chives and basil and four vegetables: tomatoes, beans, peppers and green onions.

We wanted the planters elevated so that people wouldn't have to bend over to enjoy them," Haugh recalled. "And we chose the herbs and plants we did so that people without sight could touch and smell a nice variety of plants with fuzzy leaves and other differences."

Each year Luteri starts the plants from seeds at home and transplants them when the weather breaks. And each fall he covers the clay pipe planters with garbage bags to keep them from flooding with water and breaking when the water turns to ice.

"It doesn't take too much of my time," Luteri said, "but it is an interesting little thing to do." Luteri can also be thanked for the cement sun dial pedestal in the main garden. Ornamental stone work has long been a hobby of Luteri's, so he made the pedestal using a balustrade mold that his Italian stone mason grandfather brought from Italy.