

MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

KEEPING HOMETOWN MEMORIES ALIVE

MUSEUM



JOURNAL

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THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF LIONS MEMORIAL PARK

BY EMILY DATTILO

Lions Memorial Park has played a central role in Mount Prospect recreation for over 75 years.

In 1947 the Mount Prospect Lions Club purchased farmland located south of downtown and east of South Elmhurst Road. They transformed the land into a park and named it Lions Memorial Park, dedicating the site to all those who died while serving in World War II. Within ten years the park was already undergoing construction for new facilities.

The idea to create Lions Pool was inspired by a heatwave during the summer of 1954. Mount Prospect residents usually cooled off at the neighboring Arlington Heights pool, but that summer brought so many people to the Arlington Heights pool that it no longer had room for Mount Prospect visitors. As a result, the Mt. Prospect Park District was formed the following summer, and one of their first projects was building Lions Pool. The new pool brought a welcome summer relief to the community, especially since not all homes had air conditioning. The original community pool was converted to the Big Surf Wave Pool in 1984, which is still in operation.



Postcard showing Lions Pool, c. 1950s-1960s

Lions Park School opened at the south end of the park in 1956. This school was one of several schools in Mount Prospect added to accommodate the growth in school-aged children arriving in town after World War II. Children living south of downtown Mount Prospect attended classes in this original building until it was replaced with a new structure in the 1990s.

The large, open park also provided the perfect setting for all sorts of youth sports leagues and activities, like football and baseball. In the winter local children enjoyed sledding down a 60-foot hill called “Folger’s Hill” or “Folger’s Mountain.” The hill was formed from soil that reportedly came from excavations for Lions Pool. After over 20 years of sledding, Folger’s Hill was dismantled and the soil moved to the Mount Prospect Golf Club where it was used as berms.

Lions Memorial Park also proved useful for town festivals. By the 1960s the Lions Club began hosting their annual summer festival at Lions Memorial Park. Eventually that summer event became the 4th of July Festival. A Ferris wheel, a haunted house, and other carnival rides and amusements filled the grounds each summer as residents flocked to the



A scene from the 1978 4th of July Festival at Lions Memorial Park

entertainment. In 1980 the 4th of July Festival moved to Melas Park, a more spacious venue, thanks to an agreement with that park’s landowners, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

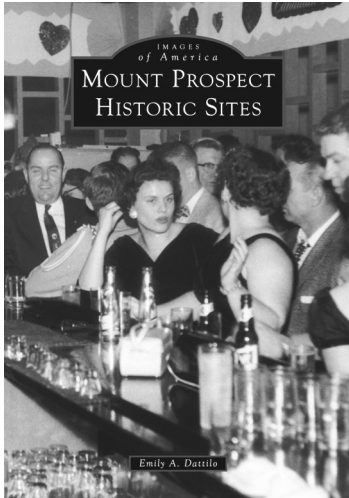
While Lions Memorial Park has been associated with local veterans since its creation, the most visible marker of that relationship, the Veterans Memorial Band Shell, was not constructed until the 1990s.

The adjacent fountain and memorial were added in 2012 to honor local service members. Mount Prospect’s annual Memorial Day ceremony continues to be held at this important site.

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FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR



Readers, I am excited to announce that my new book, *Mount Prospect Historic Sites*, will be published on June 26th. The goal of this book is to highlight the history that can still be found all around Mount Prospect. Even though sometimes that history seems difficult to find, it remains in the landscape, in the bits and pieces left behind, and in the collective memories of its residents.

Mount Prospect Historic Sites has been a work in progress for about a year. Over that time I've enjoyed digging deeper into local

history and uncovering new stories. One of those stories is partly revealed on the cover.

The cover image shows guests at the bar inside the Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall (VFW) on Main Street, which is now the Prospect Moose Lodge 660. VFW Drill Team member Dick Halabrin added this photo to his album, which was later donated to the Historical Society. This photo was taken at the Deutsches Fest on February 22, 1958, but the album shows many of the parties held at the hall throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The VFW Hall was quite the busy venue for both veterans and civilians! Who knew such an unassuming building had such a lively history?

While filming an episode of the Historical Society's video series, *Hometown History*, at the building, my volunteer and I encountered Jeff Taniaz, the custodian, who kindly gave us a tour of the Hall. My awesome volunteer snapped the photo (right) of me sitting at the bar where my cover photo was taken.

There are so many more Mount Prospect stories to tell, and I look forward to sharing them with you in the book, in upcoming book talks, and, hopefully, while chatting with you all at events.

Mount Prospect Historic Sites is currently available for pre-order in the museum store. I will be signing all copies purchased from the Mount Prospect Historical Society museum store before the book is published on June 26th.

I will be talking about my book at the Mount Prospect Public Library on June 29th at 7pm, and I'll be signing books at the Historical Society during the Second Sunday program on August 13. I hope to see you there!

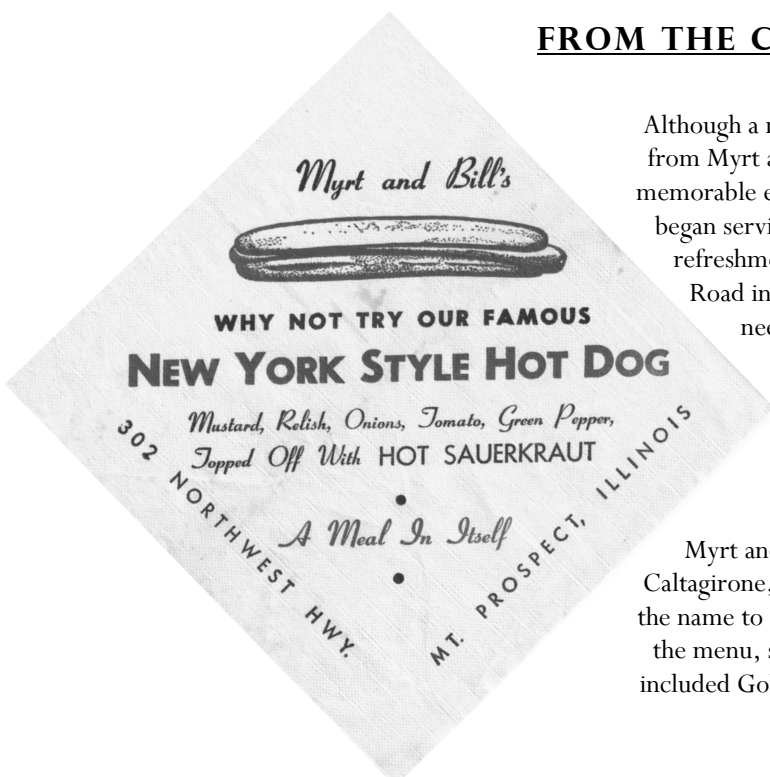


Emily Dattilo
Director

FROM THE COLLECTION

Although a napkin may not seem like an especially historic item, this one from Myrt and Bill's restaurant represents the beginning of a long list of memorable eateries at 302 W. Northwest Highway. Myrt and Bill Hampe began serving hot dogs, hamburgers, and other snacks at their seasonal refreshment stand near the corner of Northwest Highway and Central Road in 1948. By the end of 1949 their stand was so popular that they needed a permanent structure. The brick-and-mortar Myrt and Bill's held its grand opening in early 1950. One of the most popular menu items was their New York style hot dog, pictured on this napkin. Toppings included mustard, relish, onions, tomatoes, green peppers, and hot sauerkraut. They advertised it was "a meal in itself."

Myrt and Bill sold the business to another couple, Carmella and Paul Caltagirone, in 1952 and moved to California. The Caltagirones changed the name to Mell and Paul's Drive In and added Italian-American items to the menu, such as spaghetti and pizza. Later restaurants in this building included Golden Isle and Jake's Pizza. Currently Trezeros Kitchen + Tap occupies this space.



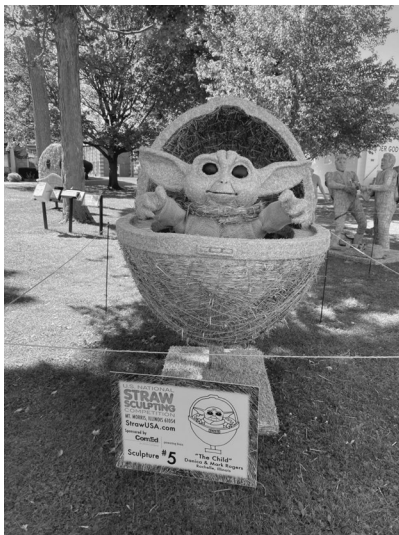
AUGUST BUS TRIP

The Society has planned its next bus trip for Saturday, August 19. We will be enjoying the Eighth Annual U.S. National Straw Sculpting Competition, also known as “Strawfest,” in Mt. Morris, south of Rockford. It is promoted as “Fine Art in Straw” and was inspired by former Arlington Heights resident/artist Fran Volz who now lives nearby in Rockford.

“This seems like a particularly appropriate bus trip for us to sponsor since years ago rural Mount Prospect was referred to as ‘Mount Strawstack’ by passing train engineers,” said Society Director Emily Dattilo.

Participants will ride a luxury coach, leaving Mount Prospect at 9 a.m. After arriving in Mt. Morris, tour-goers will have plenty of time to enjoy the large, unique straw sculptures, arranged around the picturesque town square; vote for their favorites; and tour the Encore! Mt. Morris Old Sandstone Art Gallery which is filled with local artwork.

After perusing the artwork and straw sculptures, bus tour participants will enjoy boxed lunches of pre-chosen sandwiches in the air-conditioned Pincrest Grove Auditorium, the home of local theatre productions.



Fran Volz, the one who inspired this contest, will speak during lunch about his first exposure to straw sculptures during a trip to Germany; his fondly-remembered “Chicago Snow Competition” event which premiered at Randhurst Shopping Center in 2004 and then moved to Navy Pier where teams of artists from Spain, China, Germany, Canada and Russia competed; and his other well-known artistic endeavors while living in the Northwest Suburbs. Many recall his gorgeous snow sculptures entertaining drivers along Arlington Heights Road each winter.

Following lunch, Jeff Bold, steering committee chairman of “Encore! Mt. Morris” which is working to revitalize the community, will board the bus for a guided tour of local points of interest including White Pines Forest State Park with its rare, picturesque grove of native white pine trees, and “The Eternal Indian” or “Black Hawk” statue along the river in nearby Oregon, IL which has recently been restored. It is a local landmark by famed sculptor Laredo Taft. Stops for locally-produced maple syrup and locally-grown corn-on-the-cob might also be possible if tour-goers are interested.

Tickets for the August 19 trip, which includes lunch, are \$80 for Society members and \$90 for non-members. 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. Comfortable clothing and shoes are strongly urged.

Space is limited, so if you are interested, contact the office at 847-392-9006 or register online at www.mtphist.org.

About Mt. Morris: Mt. Morris’ downtown received National Historic District status last summer. *It was once the home of the Rock River Seminary, founded in 1839. The beautiful “Old Sandstone” building they built in 1850 survives today. After closing in 1878 due to financial problems, the seminary campus was sold to the Church of the Brethren which opened its own school.*

In 1884 the school, under a new charter, was re-named Mount Morris College, and several buildings were constructed. In 1912 a fire destroyed much of Old Sandstone but the outer walls were left standing and were used in its rebuilding.

Fire struck again in 1931 and three large campus buildings were destroyed but Old Sandstone was not damaged below the third floor and was again restored. In 1932, after nearly 100 years, the college was closed permanently.





MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Second Sundays at the Society

11:30am — 1:30pm

Location: Mount Prospect Historical
Society Central School (103 S. Maple St.)
The Dietrich Friedrichs House (101 S.
Maple St.) will also be open for tours.
Fee: Free!

July 9: Patriotic Crafts

August 13: Read in the Garden and Book
Chat with *Mount Prospect Historic Sites*
Author Emily Dattilo

September 10: Apples

Needlecraft Nights

7pm — 9pm

Location: Mount Prospect Historical
Society Central School (103 S. Maple St.)
Fee: \$5—\$10 donation
Get out your needles and thread. All
experience levels are welcome. Advance
registration is recommended and a \$5
donation is suggested.

June 14: Iris Paper Folding

July 12: Swedish Huck Weaving

August 9: T-Shirt Yarn Projects

September 13: Quilted Hearts

October 11: Felting

Afternoon Teas

1pm

Location: Mount Prospect Historical
Society Central School (103 S. Maple St.)
Fee: \$15, registration required

November 4: Chicago True Stories with
Martina Mathisen

Five Dollar Fives

10am

Location: Mount Prospect Historical
Society Central School (103 S. Maple St.)
Fee: \$5

July 29: Exploring the Mount Prospect
Historical Society historic gardens with
the Garden Club of Mount Prospect

September 30: WJAZ and Ham radio with
Frank Corry

Bus Tour

August 19: Strawfest in Mt. Morris

For more information, visit our website at
www.mtphist.org or call us at (847) 392-
9006.

Summer Programs for Young Historians

History Camp Week Two: July 10-14
Prairie Kids I & II - July 20
The Science of History - July 27
If You Lived - July 27

