

# NEWSLETTER

## LaGrange Area Historical Society

444 S. LaGrange Road – 708-482-4248

www.lagrangehistory.org

March, 2008



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### President's Comments

There is a box sitting on my kitchen counter waiting to be mailed. The box contains "gifts" sent to me within the past nine months, all from one nonprofit organization in return for a \$25.00 donation I sent them two years ago. Along with the blanket, calendar, tote bag, greeting cards, personalized labels and a stuff toy, there are six letters appealing for more money.

As I prepared the mailing label my thoughts turned to our organization and the manner in which we spend your money. We, who operate a small society, a tiny dot on the nonprofit world map, are keepers of the trust you place in us and we owe you an accounting of where your money goes.

Our liability and board and officers insurance premiums amounted to \$4,225.00 this past year. Utilities, security system, office expenses, newsletter, grass cutting, snow removal, major furnace repairs, totaled \$15,952.98 for 2007.

Your financial support is our major source of income. We have 406 members. Renewals amounted to \$3,905 this past year, and many of you generously included additional donations ranging from \$5.00 to \$75.00. That is just part of the story. Those of you who attended our anniversary celebration and Christmas Open House also donated generously. Our garage sale, gift shop and programs generated additional income. Your year-end charitable donations, ranged from \$10.00 to \$2500 and totaled more than \$4,000. When we include donations from visitors, friends and organizations, our income for 2007 totaled \$19,661.06.

Before I close this chapter, I want to add a few comments. Our disbursements would have been greater had it not been for our volunteers and board members. This past year our young volunteers refinished and restored our signs and outdoor furniture. Members do the house cleaning and take care of minor repairs, and yes, sometimes we do call upon spouses and some of you for help. While we no longer take care of snow removal and grass cutting, volunteers maintain the plantings and the La Grange Garden Club lovingly cares for the rose garden.

Our board members and staff, who seldom present a bill, absorb the cost for many minor expenses; new software, office supplies, long distance phone calls, materials for new exhibits and so much more. We do not employ a grant writer, yet we received two grants this past year. Board member Pat Kozlowski applied for a grant from IBM which awarded us \$1,000 that we used to purchase a new duplex scanner. The grant from the American Association of Museums is for an assessment and evaluation of the Society to take place this spring.

Full disclosure of our finances, part of our annual report, will be discussed at our annual meeting, Sunday March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1:00 at the museum. We welcome your presence, comments and suggestions.

Chapter 2 - Before we rush to the printers, I want to bring you up to date on our dear friend Jeanne Hayden. Many of you know that Jeanne served as an officer and board member of the Society for many years, just one of the many organizations she served.

It was a year ago that Jeanne suffered a massive stroke. Her arduous road to recovery has taken her from hospitals to rehab centers and presently to her daughter's home in Edina, Minnesota.

As reported by her daughter, Jeanne is now walking with the use of a cane. Her speech has improved, although finding just the right word sometimes proves difficult. But her spirits are great, she is doing very well, and would love to hear from her friends and fellow volunteers.

Jeanne's daughter Candy has given me permission to print the address and phone number where Jeanne can be reached. It is 310 Harrison Avenue South, Edina, MN, 55343. Home phone 952-912-0184.

Candy also reported that, "while Jeanne loves to get out, she may not be out walking today as the present temperature is minus 10 degrees." I find this last comment difficult to believe because those of us who know Jeanne also know that a slight chill in the air is not going to deter Jeanne from doing anything she puts her mind to.

Chapter 3 - Kevin Allodi stopped at the museum to tell us that while remodeling his newly purchased building at 14 S. Waiola, he found something in the basement that might be of interest to us.

Shortly thereafter I met Kevin at the building, formerly the home of Allinson Realty, and he led me to four file cabinets in the basement. Crammed in the drawers were listing sheets dating from the 1950s and 1960s. Almost every listing sheet had a photograph of the home as it was back then.

Kevin and his son emptied the cabinets and loaded the contents into my SUV. I then drove to the museum and delivered them to Mary Ann and Marilyn who will sort the sheets, screen the documents, and copy the photographs.

While the photographs and old listing sheets were fascinating, I found myself thinking more about Kevin. He could have easily thrown everything into the dumpster, it was sitting just outside at the curb, but he didn't. Instead he contacted us and I wondered why. Was it due to his interest in antiques and history or was he thinking that they might be of value to others. Whatever the reason, Kevin Allodi, amidst falling plaster, brick walls tumbling about him, sheet metal and pipes strewn about the floor, decided to pay us a visit.

We, in turn, are preserving the photographs and listing sheets that were filed away more than 40 years ago in the basement of an office on Waiola Avenue. We are able to do this because Kevin could not bring himself to shuck everything in a dumpster. We are able to do this because Kevin cared.

Jeannine McLaughlin

# Recent Donations

Dick & June Keeley – 8x10 black and white photo of home at 338 N. Park c. 1940

Peggy Ann Frey – 3 recordings of LTHS “Sound Track ’57, ’58 and ’59” – 1963 CD of West Suburban Community Band – LT Centennial tee-shirt

Fred Page – 3 bronze street nameplates – had been embedded in concrete sidewalks in LaGrange

Ed Thoele – carved wooden match box, tan doeskin gloves

Estate of Glenn & Joyce Miller – medals and ribbons won by the Millers for their clowning activities as Chubby & Butterball

Vivienne & Bud Holt – 1947 wedding gown and photograph

Eamon Rago – train memorabilia

Anonymous - advertisements from Architectural Forum magazine of building supplies for local buildings – 1933 photo of Boy Scout Troop at the Masonic Children’s Home

Louise Carlson – appliquéd quilt c. 1930’s

Carole Hedrick – Ebert family memorabilia – LG Diamond Jubilee coin – LG vehicle tag from 1984

Jerome F. Doruska – handmade 40” x 20” scale model of Stone Avenue Station and 3 replica train cars (steam engine & tender, coal car, and passenger car)

Carl Nemecek – 26 vintage postcards of LaGrange buildings

Jane Bicek – LTHS memorabilia – 2 oak classroom chairs – “El-Tee Hi Tabulae” – rubber stamp – 6 Homecoming buttons – 8 tabs and other LG advertising items. Also 1920’s child’s wagon and 1930’s push lawn mower

Jeanne Kocmoud – vintage sign

Kevin Allodi – records of Allinson Realty Co. (see article)

Marilyn Vitek – Edward JF Young family memorabilia including baby photos, plaques presented to Mr. Young and commemorative plates

## EARLY TELEPHONE PIONEER HAILED FROM LA GRANGE



Early in the history of the telephone, in the late 1880s, an individual had to pick up the phone receiver and have an operator connect the call to the person called. At about this time, an industrious undertaker in Kansas City, Almon Brown Strowger, became suspicious when a friend died and the telephone operator connected the family to a competitor and chief rival instead of his own telephone exchange. Strowger, obviously angered, developed an automatic switching system that allowed an individual to press a numbered button and be connected to another phone subscriber without the aid of an operator.

In 1891, Strowger was granted a patent on his new switching machine and a year later his first commercial model began operation in La Porte, Indiana.

The World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, provided Mr. Strowger the opportunity to showcase his invention. At about the same time, Almon moved to 444 S. Madison Ave. in La Grange. In early 1894 the Village of La Grange granted him a franchise for a local-based telephone system not tied to a long distance trunk system. It eventually grew to 52 subscribers. A document in our historical society archives lists the names and numbers, with such historically prominent names such as Vial and Slocum, given exchange numbers 24 and 34 respectfully. The telephone exchange was located at the corner of Fifth Avenue (later called La Grange Road) and Burlington Avenue.

Almon Strowger quickly attracted interest and competition from The Chicago Telephone Company (later incorporated into The Bell System).

The C.T.C. was granted a franchise from the village later in 1895, opening an office at 20 s. Ashland Avenue in 1896, where its corporate predecessor still maintains a switching center.

Mr. Strowger soon sold his company and patent to his main competitor, and his basic electrical engineering genius led directly to the invention of the dial telephone, which became the norm for telephones until the introduction of the touch-tone telephone in the 1960s. With continued “improvements,” we now have cell-phone service and the need to memorize six (soon to be seven) Chicago metropolitan area codes; necessity or nuisance?

-Ralph H. Fredericks

## VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT TALK

On December 12 about 20 people gathered in the dining room for an educational talk about our reproduction Victorian Christmas ornaments. Carol Norling, the artist who created them told in detail how each type of ornament was constructed from supplies which she had ordered from Germany. The materials had been made on the same machines that produced the materials for the original 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian ornaments. All were fascinated.



## CHRISTMAS AT THE MUSEUM



## H.V. ALLINSON & CO. DONATION

H.V. Allinson & Co. was a real estate company whose office was at 1 S. Waiola in LaGrange from 1934-1995. Before 1934 they had an office in Western Springs at 608 Hillgrove from 1928 -1933. From 1942-1948 they had an office at 821 W. Burlington in Western Springs in addition to the office on Waiola. In 1949 the company name changed to Allinson & Co. The Allinson families (H.V. & Thomas L.) lived in various homes in LaGrange, LaGrange Park and Western Springs.

In 2007 Kevin Allodi, who had purchased the Waiola Avenue building, was preparing to convert the space to a restaurant and wanted the building emptied. In December of 2007 he donated all the records found in the building to the LaGrange Area Historical Society. Many boxes of Allinson's records were moved from 1 S. Waiola to 444 S. LaGrange Road. Since then we have sorted through them and separated the papers of interest to us from those that would be of interest to other historical societies. We have distributed many boxes to our cohorts nearby.

Which brings us to the bonanza we at the LGAHS received from Mr. Allodi. We have 6 boxes of real estate listing sheets and original photographs which must be accessioned, scanned, copied and made available to the public. These records are from the 1950's and 1960's and in processing the first 6 boxes, we had 229 original photos plus the copied images on the listings sheets. So, we feel we have acquired at least 1200 original pictures of homes in LaGrange and LaGrange Park in the 1950's and 1960's plus an equal number of copied images.

If you have an interest in what your house looked like in the 1950's and 60's, stop in. We may be able to help you. This is a work in progress but we would be happy to start having visitors to our newly acquired ephemera.

## RECENT VISITORS

Cub Scout Den 1 and Den 2 from Pack 14 of First United Methodist Church

Cub Scout Den 4 of Pack 66 in LaGrange Park



### WANTED:

Artificial, life like and life size amaryllis in pots. Will be used in our Christmas displays.

### NEW MEMBERS:

The Historical Society would like to welcome the following new members:

Gail & Joe Piccione

Mr. & Mrs. William Holder

## Then & Now Information from H.V. Allinson & Co.

55 Dover: Sold for \$26,000 in 1959

201 Dover: Sold for \$21,900 in 1961

611 S. Ashland: Sold for \$28,000 in 1961

136 S. Spring: Sold for \$26,000 in 1954

112 S. Waiola: Sold for \$18,000 in 1963

308 S. Catherine: Sold for \$23,500 in 1964

136 S. Catherine: Sold for \$22,200 in 1962

143 S. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue: Sold for \$29,000 in 1963

444 S. Stone: Sold for \$27,000 in 1957

Sold for \$573,000 in 2007

Sold for \$225,000 in 2007

Sold for \$730,000 in 2007

Sold for \$870,000 in 2001

Sold for \$811,500 in 2007

Sold for \$475,000 in 2001

Sold for \$477,500 in 2004

Sold for \$757,500 in 2006

Sold for \$590,000 in 2001



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