



South Milwaukee Historical Society

717 Milwaukee Avenue
South Milwaukee, WI 53172

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER, 2007

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From the President's desk!

Our July Mini Classes held outside under a canopy on a warm Sunday Heritage Weekend were attended by 20 people and 8 warm people took the walking tour of Hawthorne Ave. I hope you all learned at least one new thing and had a good time also. The Bratfest was held on the first Monday in August. We sold 20 plates of brats, chips and soda and made about \$50.00 Perhaps our location and time should be changed to the park on 10th and Chicago and the time extended to 7 PM.

Our presentation to the CDA on the Lawson/ Continental Building went well. At least they didn't laugh at us openly. We asked for a 50 year lease at \$1.00 a year. I think we could make the building into a great museum. Mark Draeger wrote his remembrance of The Factory.

Our Bake and Craft Sale will be Dec. 1, 2007 from 9 until 2 PM. Come and enjoy a cup of hot cider. Shop for Collector Ornaments, Christmas Cards, Note Cards, Image Books, and Then to Now History Books.

Dec. 15, 2007, Christmas Tea at the Grant Park Clubhouse will be a joint effort with Friends of the Mill Pond and your SMHS. It will feature finger sandwiches, waldorf salad, and desserts. It is reservation only event. The cost is \$12.50 Deadline is Dec. 8th. Call 762-5214 or 571-1191.

FOUNDED MARCH 1972 BY MR. AND MRS. DENNIS RANKIN

INITIAL DIRECTORS — DENNIS RANKIN • PENNY RANKIN • GEORGE HOOK • MARY McCARRIER • BRUCE RAYESKE
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Next Fall we will host the State Historical Society's Metropolitan Local History Convention on September 13, 2008. It includes all the suburban historical societies in our area. It will be held at the South Milwaukee Yacht Club. We need to provide a tour of our museum, Grant Park or preservation projects we are working on for an afternoon program event. Lunch will be catered. More details in future newsletters.

We have lost two vibrant members Joe Longo, died Aug. 5, 2007 and Ron Mueller, Oct. 13, 2007. Joe Longo was a generous donor and Ron Mueller helped set up our ice cream social booth and told stories about the bridle trails in Grant Park.

Maritime Historical Society sponsored a Crossing's Tour on the Lake Express. Steve and I participated in their event. We had a bumpy crossing Friday going to Muskegan along with many Irish Dance competitors. After an overnight in Muskegan, we toured two lighthouses, a submarine, a museum, had a lovely lunch, a quick tour of the Milwaukee Clipper restoration and then a very smooth ride home Saturday evening. Their collection is housed in the Zeidler Room at the Central Library in Milwaukee where they hold their meetings.

**Preserving the Proud Past,
Lois Schreiter, president**

Curator's Greetings!

The society acquired an original City of South Milwaukee Welcome sign donated by Richard Gaidish. Mr. Gaidish was a city employee for years; many thanks for this beautiful addition to our collection.

Thanks also go to Joe and Judy Soulak who generously donated original copies of the Voice Journal Newspaper from 1939 and bound copies of the Voice Journal Newspapers from 1942 to 1965.

Lynda Citro, who worked on the Society's website has taken a job as a Library Director in Florida. Before leaving, she and her husband, Phil donated an original survey book from 1932 for the Norris Farm in South Milwaukee, which was located on College Avenue. Thank you so much Lynda and Phil.

Acquisitions: 1. Stefanowski, Guziewski, Benkowski, Lindstrom family for the grocery store scale from the 13th Ave store, 2. Richard and Marc Gaidish family donated a City of SM sign from the corner of Nicholson and College, 3. Copies of the 1922 Centennial Book from Bob Pfeiffer at the Library, and 3. bound copies of the Voice Journal 1942 to 1965 from Joe Soulak and hand delivered by Richard Thinner to the museum. 1932 Survey of Norris Farm from Lynda Citro and husband, Phil.

The South Milwaukee Historical Society Museum is open the first Thursday of the month 1 to 3 PM and by appointment. Allow 45 minutes. Volunteers are always needed. Visitors, school groups, scouts, families, clubs and individuals are welcome. Call Dean Marlow, Jr.

Genealogy by Steve Schreiter: Steve offered to do one hour of genealogy for anyone with the new \$10.00 membership dues. Basic information forms must be filled out and returned to Addie Becker with dues. Forms may be obtained from Addie Becker (see membership form) and also on the Internet at www.ci.south-milwaukee.wi.us

The Factory

By Mark Draeger, SMHS Member, Nov. 2007

I moved to South Milwaukee in the Winter of 1960. I was in kindergarten at that time and attended school at Lakeview. My father worked at Line Material, and wanted to live closer to the Central Plant where his office was located. We moved into the old Dude Iannone house on the corner of 9th and Marshall. It was an interesting location, as we had the City Garage behind us, an empty lot on the curve north of us (later Krambo, Kroger, and Tate's), and only one other house on our "block". That other house was the Dobratz's, and Edgar, Lucille with their sons Mike and Phillip, and Grandma Guenther lived there. Edgar worked as a welder at Line Material, so Dad knew him and us kids quickly became friends. Mike was quite a bit older than me and soon went into the Service. So Phillip, who was my next older brother Lee's age, was the one I remember most. Phillip was one of those guys who was always the instigator in any group of kids that got together to do something. He always knew of a construction site that we could play "King of the Mountain" in, or an abandoned rail car we could investigate, or where to dig for arrowheads. How he always seemed to know about these things, I'll never know. So Phillip was the obvious person to introduce us to "The Factory". He knew 2 or 3 different ways to get in, where the Police or nosy neighbors wouldn't see us. There was so much overgrown vegetation around the buildings that we always had good cover. There was one neighbor down the street, however, that seemed to always be at home, and would watch for anybody near the factory. She was our biggest threat. Luckily, we never got caught, or I'd have some tough explaining to do to my father. Remember, back then physical punishment was the norm, and kids didn't have any rights. So we would play in the factory every chance we got for years. I must have been historical way back then, as I loved looking through the old invoices piled in the front office, looking for the oldest dates I could find. They were all pottery or tile invoices and railroad bill of lading as I recall. The oldest went back to about WWII, or maybe the late 30's, so I was disappointed and didn't keep any as souvenirs. Remember, WWII was only about 20 years ago at the time, and recent history. I was looking for "real antiques" from the 1800's, when my Grandparents were born. That would have been old to me! And besides, pottery and tile sounded "girly" to me, I was hoping for cool machines, radios, or old cars on the invoices. Besides the office, we explored every inch of that factory. We always went in the daytime, as even Phillip thought it was too dangerous at night. Even so, it was always dark inside. We didn't carry flashlights, as that would give it away to our parents who told us never to go into the factory. One of the scariest things that regularly happened in the factory was Phillip's dare to me to go investigate the far southwest corner of the factory, closest to the railroad tracks. That corner was where hobos that rode the trains would sleep or drink between "rides". Since it was pitch black in that corner and there were no windows, you never knew if a hobo was back there in the mountains of paper and debris. Well, young boys have to take a dare if challenged, so off I went on way too many occasions. As I slowly crept over into the darkness, my heart raced with fear

and anticipation. If nothing happened, I hurried back out into the relatively dim light joining my friends and continued our exploring quite proud to be so brave. However, if I stumbled upon a hobo, they usually let out a yell or a curse, and terrified they would “get” me, I ran out to find my friends already high-tailing it to the front and out the window.

Since I was fascinated with the old factory, Edgar told me about its history. He was the one who first told me it was an airplane factory. I didn't believe him, as only the Wright Brothers made early airplanes as far as I knew. Just like Henry Ford made the only early cars. And besides that, there was nothing airplane related left in the factory to indicate they were ever built there. He also told me how that area was all part of his parents farm from the City Garage to the tracks that was swampland, to the fertile fields all around the farmhouse. The farmhouse and garage were all that were left of the original buildings, and that's what I knew as where the Dobratz's lived. I could hardly believe that the modern and thriving City of South Milwaukee was once farmland. Edgar thought the factory was important, and didn't like to see it in such disrepair. Looking back, I understand how he must have remembered that front office with all its beautiful tilework when it was in operation. To me, it was just a dirty old abandoned playground to have fun in. Out in front of the office window, set flush into the ground, was a beige colored sundial, about 3 ft. in diameter. This sundial was somewhat ornate, had markings for the hours, and had the four directions of the compass on it. It was all one cast piece without any paint or tile embedded in it. I was confused by it because it had no vertical piece standing up that would cast the necessary shadow to read the time. And it didn't appear to have anything broken off of it. Edgar told me that was because it was just meant to be a decoration. He sternly warned us kids not to deface or break it in any way, and we promised we wouldn't. One day, about 1970, he decided that too many other people besides us good kids, were going in and trashing the place. So he and his sons dug up the sundial and moved it to his back yard in front of his screened in cottage to preserve it from being stolen or damaged by vandals. As I recall, it cracked in two pieces when he dug it out, but he carefully reset it in his yard and it looked good as new. The other day, when the Society toured the factory, I looked over the fence to see if I could spot the sundial, but I couldn't. It could be that it was moved or taken away years ago, or perhaps the lawn has grown over it in the last 37 years. Edgar and Lucille died some years ago, and I saw Phillip at his Mother's funeral. He was living in Florida at the time. I don't recall where Mike was living.

Edgar loved telling me about the old airplane factory, maybe because I was the only one interested at the time. He told me how the area south of the factory down 9th Avenue was open farmland with a nice hill for a plane to take off from. He also told me that Lawson was very important in aviation history and that if the plane didn't crash, I would have learned all about him in school. He was an eyewitness as a boy to the take-off and crash and it seemed his father knew Mr. Lawson. I'm sure Edgar would be surprised that I'm telling this story today

Editors Note: The Draeger and Dobratz homes at 2500 and 2514 9th Ave. still stand. Factory is the Lawson/Continental Faience Building at 909 Menominee Ave.

Think Christmas.

Images of America, South Milwaukee, a picture history book is for sale at the SM Historical Society. Authors are Nels Monson and Dean S. Marlow, Jr. \$19.99. This book makes a wonderful gift.

Bake and Craft Sale

Dec. 1, 2007

9 AM to 2 PM

Christmas Shop:

Collector Ornaments \$12.00,
Divine Mercy Chapel
Historical Society Christmas Cards,
Note Cards, Image Picture Books,
Then to Now History Books
Spoons and tie tacks
Bakery and crafts

Have a cup of Cider

Good friends are hard to find and due to ever increasing printing and postage cost, we need your support of \$10.00 a year. Won't you please help to preserve South Milwaukee's history?
South Milwaukee Historical Society Membership form: 2007

Name: _____ Date: _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone Number: _____

Type of membership: _____ amount: _____ Dues: Single, \$10.00; Family, \$15.00; Life, \$100.00; Business, \$25.00; Make checks payable to South Milwaukee Historical Society. Send membership dues and dinner reservations to Membership Chairperson, Addie Becker, 526 Sycamore Ave., South Milwaukee, WI 53172 (414) 764-2118.

The South Milwaukee Historical Society would like to extend our wishes, condolences or congratulations to its members. If you know of someone who should be remembered, please contact Sunshine Chairperson Barbara Mueller, 762-2712. If you leave a message, please indicate if the card should be sent to their home, hospital or nursing home. The name of the hospital or nursing home would also be appreciated.

Jewell Heise has been doing Fund Raising for the Historical Society for many years. She works with Piggly Wiggly Grocery receipts and makes great strawberry rhubarb jam. She needs your Piggly Wiggly receipts and clean Jelly Jars with covers. Call Jewell at 762-4650.

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