



South Milwaukee Historical Society

717 Milwaukee Avenue
South Milwaukee, WI 53172

NEWSLETTER Month Year

Newsletter published quarterly in Jan., Apr., July, and Nov.

2020

OFFICERS

| | | |
|--------------|------------------|----------|
| President | Richard Thinnes | 762-6214 |
| V. President | Lois Schreiter | 762-5214 |
| Secretary | Sue Ziarek | 520-1959 |
| Treasurer | Judy Balestreiri | 630-8604 |

Curators: Judy Balestreiri
Richard Thinnes
Stephen Schreiter

BOARD OF DIRECTORS (Term Expires)

| | |
|--------------------|--------|
| Don Bulley | (2021) |
| Stephen Schreiter | (2021) |
| Vicki Bartoshevich | (2021) |
| Carol Munia | (2021) |
| Kris Schell | (2021) |

Welcome New Lifetime Members

Jim Anderson *Cheri Remlar*

The President's desk!

Wow! Greetings South Milwaukee! There has been, since my last letter, many wonderful things happening here at your museum.

My first "wow!" is our digitization project to copy all of South Milwaukee's newspapers from the 1900's to now is almost 95% complete. We should begin the restoration in late April with the help of the Wisconsin Historical Society. This could not have happened without the outstanding support from local businesses and many, many, individual contributions, from your fellow society friends and members! We have, in South Milwaukee, so many friends who are really committed to preserving So. Milwaukee's History-Thank you all so much!

My second "wow" is-we are making progress on the 54 framed pictures of So. Milwaukee's streets, buildings, etc. from the first half of the 20th century. Steve Shreiter is working very hard on this project. Hopefully, he will find the best way to scan them and create a dvd presentation of them. Anyone have an idea how to speed up this project?

My third "wow!" is our printer is now "talking" to our computer. Thanks to Don Bulley's work-Thanks Don.

My fourth "wow!" is your Board of Directors. They are doing so much to make this place a great place for you.

I will close now with our wish that all of you have/are weathering this world, national and local crisis! Stay safe and be healthy!

Richard G. Thinnes, president

Meetings are held on second Monday of Month at the Museum , 6 pm

Open House - First Thursday of Month, 1:00pm to 3:00P

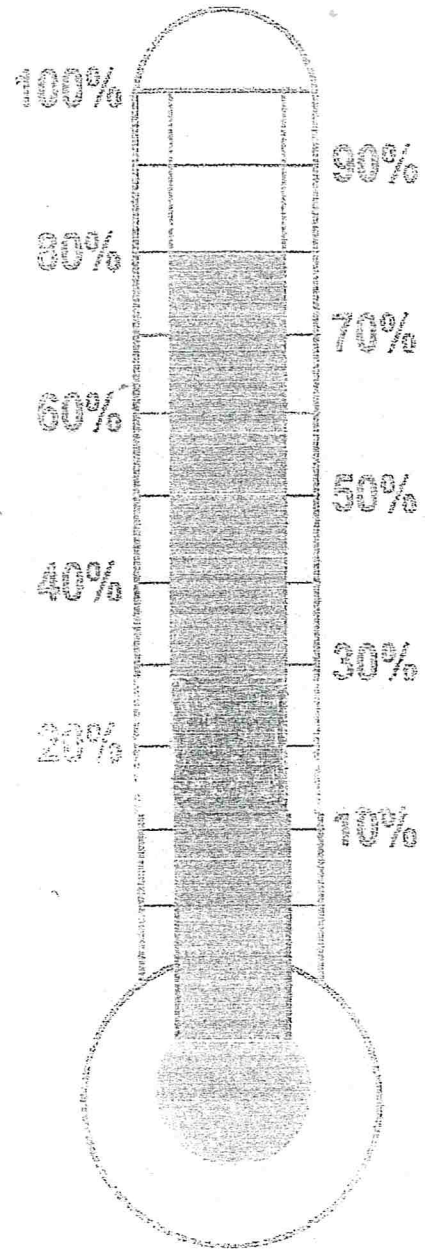
FOUNDED MARCH 1972 BY MR. AND MRS. DENNIS RANKIN

INITIAL DIRECTORS — DENNIS RANKIN • PENNY RANKIN • GEORGE HOOK • MARY McCARRIER • BRUCE RAYESKE
DORA LEE SZEWCZUGA • WILLIAM DOMOE • LILLIAN DISHONG • CHESTER GROBSCHMIDT

**NEWSPAPER MICROFILM DIGITIZATION
PROJECT REPORT**

The South Milwaukee Public Library and the South Milwaukee Historical Society have jointly begun a project to digitize and make searchable the local newspapers from 1893 to 2006. We have received approximately 33 donations, totaling \$11,600.00 from our fund raising. Thank you to all of the individuals and organizations that donated. With this amount and additional donations, we are confident that this project will be completed. Submitted by Steve.

The annual South Milwaukee Historical Society Garden Tour is currently scheduled for June 20, 2020. Volunteers will be needed. Please contact Patti Bergeson at 414-651-9549 for details beginning in May 2020.



When Gene Autry Rode Into Town

-Nels J. Monson

It was a road that brought the first settlers to South Milwaukee in 1835. Since then, millions of people have travelled that road to or through South Milwaukee - each with their own purpose. Roads are a great equalizer. They really don't care if you're young or old, rich or poor, famous or anonymous. Moreover, roads have that distinct ability to connect people with places and events.

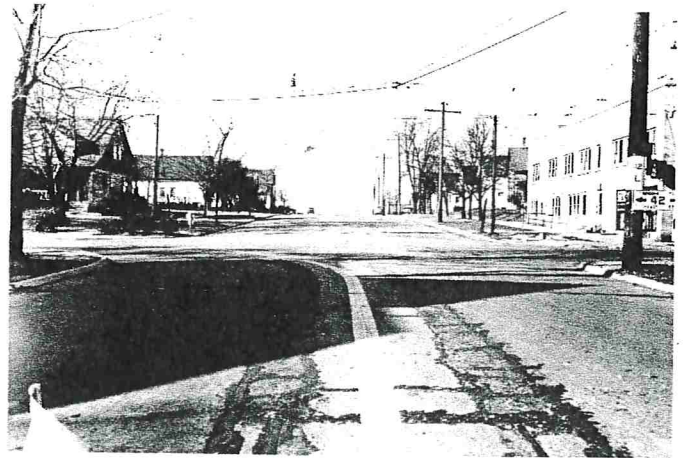
One such connection was made at 12:15 a.m. on Friday, June 16 1933 when South Milwaukee Police Officer Nick Conrad pulled over a snazzy late-model Buick with out-of-state license plates near the intersection of South Chicago and Marquette Avenues. Conrad had spotted the vehicle travelling fifty miles per hour down 10th Avenue. Little did he realize that he was about to come face-to-face with one of the most up and coming singers in the country - Gene Autry. The handsome, twenty-five year old Autry had earned national fame as "Oklahoma's Yodeling Cowboy" on Chicago's 50,000-watt WLS radio station. He was broadcast live on a morning show five days a week, as well as on Saturday evenings on the highly popular *WLS Barn Dance* program.



Gene Autry in 1934

It is not exactly clear what brought Gene Autry to South Milwaukee in the first place. In those early days of live radio, artists were usually allowed by their sponsors to travel on their off time to perform at other venues as a means of supplementing their income - as long as they were back in the studio by broadcast time. As such, it was likely that Autry was hurrying back to Chicago after an appearance elsewhere in Wisconsin. Perhaps... but he was still in too *much* of a hurry - as Officer Conrad dutifully noted, writing out a ticket. Eager to settle the

matter and get home, Autry was soon brought before Police Justice George Anderson by Officer Frank "Pinky" Chybowski. Waiving his procedural regularities he pled guilty to speeding, paying the \$10.00 fine plus \$5.83 in court costs. With that, "The Singing Cowboy" left town, presumably making his eight-o' clock Friday morning broadcast. It is uncertain whether Gene Autry ever ventured through South Milwaukee again - but if he did, he probably kept a closer eye on his speedometer.



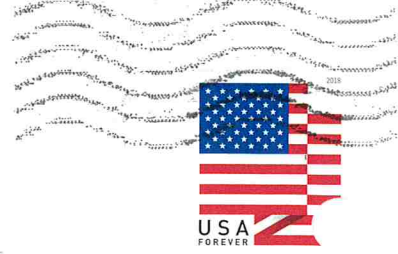
This 1934 photograph shows the approximate location of Officer Conrad's brush with fame.

Gene Autry left WLS in July 1934 and moved to Hollywood, California where he began a successful career in the film industry - making ninety-three motion pictures in all. He would also record 640 songs, selling over 100 million records - including his 1939 signature tune "Back in the Saddle Again." Currently, Mr. Autry is the only performer to have five stars on Hollywood's renowned "Walk of Fame" - one each for Radio, Recording, Television, Live Performance, and Motion Pictures. Not only an entertainment icon, Mr. Autry also possessed tremendous business acumen, amassing a fortune estimated in 1990 at \$300 million. In 1961 he became the owner of Major League Baseball's new expansion team, the Los Angeles Angels and would own the team for the next thirty-six years. Mr. Autry was also a generous philanthropist, donating large sums of money to various charities until his death in 1998.

Anyone wishing to study a genuine American success story would be well served by reading more about the life and times of Mr. Gene Autry. And as brief and mundane as the encounter was, the road that brought him to South Milwaukee and under the watchful eye of a local cop would forever cement a connection between our fair city and one of the most popular and successful entertainers in American history.

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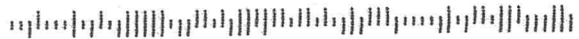
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53172-121504



Just a note:

South Milwaukee Historical Museum is closed until further notice.

Any questions contact us at southmilwaukeehistory@gmail.com