

Hyde Park History

VOL. 27 NO. 2

Published by the Hyde Park Historical Society

SUMMER 2005

Memories of Greenwood Row

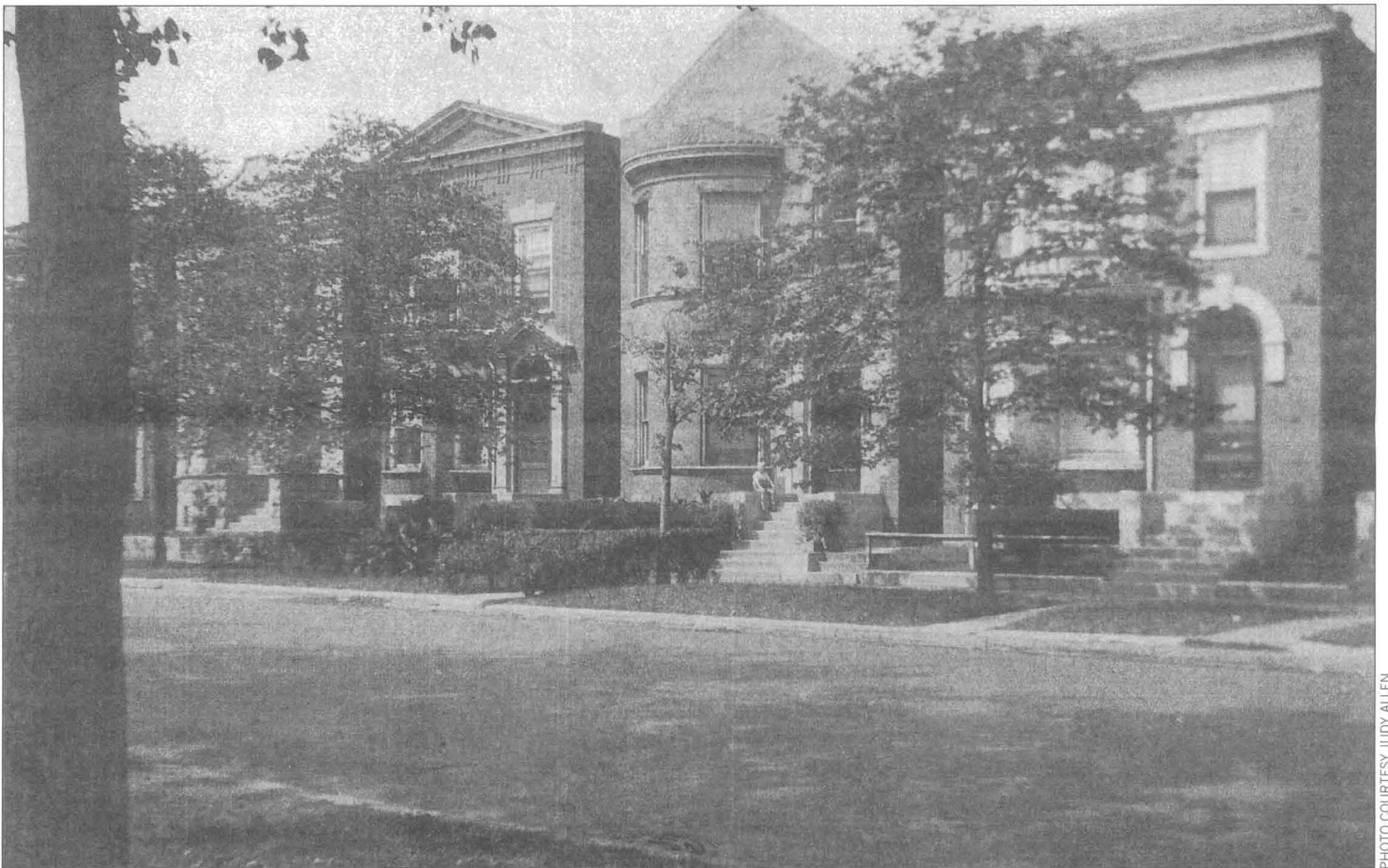


PHOTO COURTESY JUDY ALLEN

By Judy Allen

In the last newsletter, Joe Marlin gave you the background on our Greenwood row houses. I really wish I had known the developer. Mr. Samuel E. Gross sounds like a fascinating person who organized picnics, transportation, etc. to get people to visit and hopefully buy in his new developments. I want to follow up Joe's article with some stories from when my husband and I were raising our children here. Having been in the same house for almost half a

century, I have many, many memories. I have started to write or retell some of the for my nine grandchildren, and will share a few stories with you.

I grew up at 46th and Drexel Avenue, my husband at 44th and Drexel Avenue, but we did not meet until we went to college. I had already started at what was then Chicago Teachers College, at 68th and Stewart Avenue. Pat had graduated four years before from Hyde Park High School, and then joined the navy. I knew his younger sister Barbara from college so met him when he entered college under the GI bill. ➤ 2

◀❶ We married after Pat graduated, and lived for a while with my parents at 48th and Ellis. Months later, when we found that a baby was on the way we needed to find our own place to live.

We already knew we wanted to stay in the neighborhood. We wanted to be near family and friends, and we wanted the same cultural and religious diversity that we found in our families. We felt that the most important gift we could give our children was to raise them to get along with all kinds of people. So, every week we read the Hyde Park Herald to see what apartments we could find.

We almost did not stop here on Greenwood when apartment hunting. Looking at all the houses on this side of the street, we were sure that the ad must be a misprint. We rang the bell, and met Mary O'Brien, the original owner of the house. She was in her 80's, widowed, and some years before we came along, had had the 2nd floor of her home converted into an apartment. So, five months before our son Brian was born, we moved in. Sixteen months later our son Shawn was born.

One night, Mrs. O'Brien rang the doorbell, and asked me to stay with her because she did not feel well. She was worse the next day, so we called her friends who came over and took her to the hospital. Because of a serious stroke, she then went into a nursing home and for a few years, we took care of the building, the snow, and the mail. During one visit to her in the nursing home, she said that she realized that she would never walk again and offered to sell the house to us. We were delighted, especially since another baby, our daughter Lisa, was then on the way.

It was so easy to raise our children here. As we met the families at our end of the block, we all became part of our own special community. Tom and Laura Cosgrove lived at 5200 Greenwood. Tom had been brought to the U of C to develop a Great Books style program for blue collar workers. So, there were lots of great discussions in front of their fireplace or ours, sharing of food, drinking cheap red wine (\$2.50 a gallon), and their three children playing with our three. New neighbors with two children moved into 5202. Soon a new family moved into 5208 with their two girls. We all put gates in our back yard fences so the kids could go from yard to yard without going onto the street. Our yards were wonderful. Our property, including houses and yard, was 20 feet wide and 175 feet deep. When leaves were on trees and bushes in the summer, we felt that we were in the country, not in the city. We had one rule—no playing in the back yard until after 8AM on the weekends. Then all our back doors were unlocked with funny results. How many times was I working in the

kitchen, not paying attention to who came in and who went out, only to find an extra child sleeping on our couch, or waiting at the breakfast table to eat (a second breakfast in some cases).

After work or on the weekend, it was not unusual for someone to suggest that we eat together. So we had some odd combinations of food for dinner, but we had lots of laughter and got to know each other better. In my family, Swedish crayfish dinners were common in August. First we made a trip to Andersonville for cheese, bread, sausage, and jars of cooked dilled crayfish. Then we would sit down to demolish the food, yelling "Skoal" with every sip of Aquavit, beer, or for the kids, a raspberry soft drink. Of course, you know that there is very little to eat in a crayfish, so we each had to crack and eat at least 30 of them, along with the cheese and sausage, to make a meal. That meal would last for hours, and would often end with my father offering to marry all the females at the table.

As the kids grew older, they would ride their bikes down the block, play with the other kids, and we never had to worry. Doug Mazique, Sr., was often sitting in front of his house, watering the grass. Mrs. Scott was often at her apartment window across the street. Mrs. Waters lived near the middle of our block and these people, along with other neighbors, scolded our kids when they were doing something wrong, and then called us to keep us informed. It truly was a special community.

At that time, Berkeley Avenue (the street in back of us) was very different between 52nd and 53rd street. A chain grocery store faced south (53rd street) and the side of the building was parallel to Berkeley. North of it, still on Berkeley, was a large auto repair garage, and right behind us (facing 52nd street) was an apartment building. June, who lived in a 3rd floor apartment, also kept an eye on our kids. In back of these buildings, facing Ellis Avenue, was Chicago Osteopathic Hospital whose Emergency Room was in the right spot. Shawn fell out of the pear tree in our back yard and broke an arm; a bee stung one neighbor's child, another one had an allergic reaction to something he ate. We could run to the ER in 30 seconds flat!

On the south side of 53rd street, next to the alley, was one of the two Jesselson's fish stores that were in the neighborhood. (I forgot to tell you that all I could cook when I got married was popcorn and scrambled eggs.) My husband was a willing guinea pig for my cooking experiments. One day, I walked the kids to the fish store, announced that I did not know anything about cooking fish and could they please sell me something without bones and tell me how to cook

it. With great patience on their part, the Jesselsons gave me many informal lessons and I became a regular customer.

When we bought this house, there was a lot of remodeling to do. The original boiler took up a lot of space in the basement (the old coal bin had been emptied) and there was no hot water heater. The original wallpaper, now more than 50 years old, was on the living room walls (10 cents a roll according to Mrs. O'Brien) and the refrigerator in the kitchen had a circular motor on the top. So, weekends and vacations were busy and we continued to live in our own "construction zone." Now this was long before all the current home improvement shows were on TV, but Pat was brave and neighbors were helpful. My husband would repair and put siding on a porch for one neighbor who in turn would help us with new plumbing. Another neighbor lent us her loom and taught us how to weave and Pat demolished her back porch for her. And so it went, our house being a cross between Grand Central Station and a construction zone.

During one of our projects, we left the house to buy some more building supplies. I thought Pat had the keys to the house, and he thought I had them. When we returned, we were completely locked out. We finally broke a long, narrow basement window and Shawn volunteered to be lowered in so he could unlock the front door. Honestly, we had the window boarded up within an hour, and none of us saw the male cat that must have gotten into our house. About eight weeks later, we could not find our "always indoor" cat. We finally found her but could not reach her. She had crawled into the open panel behind the new bathtub plumbing so she could have her kittens. Since we could not reach her, we thought that when the kittens were old enough, she might carry them out or they would crawl out on their own. One night, lots of friends were over for dinner. Anyone who went into the first floor bathroom could hear a kitten meowing. So, we had a plan. We would chop open the wall and get the kitten out. We all agreed that the noise was about shoulder height, so Pat made a hole in the wall with his hammer. No kitten. We listened again and decided the kitten must be further down. So, we made another hole, a few feet lower. Guess what? No kitten. Finally, a third hole was made in the wall near the baseboard and there we found THREE kittens. They must have fallen between the walls on different days because the one on the bottom was very small and weak, and the one on the top was in good shape. But the wall was not and had to be rebuilt.

And so our kids grew and developed strong friendships with the neighborhood children. The large sandbox in our back yard was always filled with kids.

Dinner tables always had room for one more. Brian raised hamsters, gerbils, mice and rabbits in the back yard, and at one time turned the old coal bin into a darkroom. Shawn and his buddies developed a love for camping and all night rides to Winnetka on their bicycles. He and his friends set up a bicycle repair shop in the garage—called "Cycle Medics". This same group would spend the night in the back yard in their sleeping bags—in winter. I was sure that the neighbors would think I had locked them out of the house, especially the morning that we looked out and saw that their sleeping bags were covered with snow. Lisa loved to follow her father around the basement workshop and still has the two story doll house he made for her. She loved stuffed animals and her cats, especially Oscar who proudly brought her a gift from the backyard one day. He caught a bird and laid it on her pillow, proud to share his treasure.

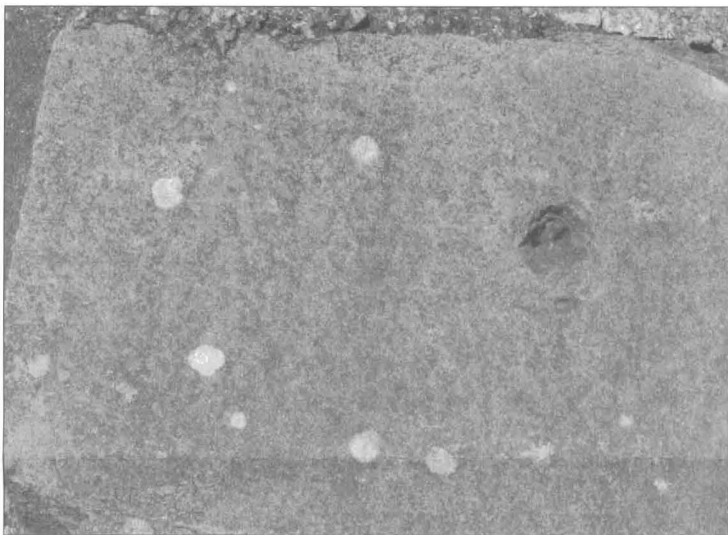
Winter nights often meant a trip to Powell's bookstore where each child was given a few dollars to spend on books. Warmer nights might mean a trip to Court Theater (it was outside then), or a walk along Navy Pier, eating fried shrimps from the fish shack there while watching the ships from other countries unload their cargo. Or, a family favorite, a trip to Siebens brewery on the near north side where we could sit in their courtyard between the brewery buildings, eating wonderful sandwiches, washed down with root beer or their own special brew. That trip would happen any time my father called to say it was hot out—and he felt hot quite often.

We read aloud to our children, even when they were pre-teens. The atmosphere had to fit the story. (This was something I learned from my mother who was an expert at telling ghost stories.) One night, during a mystery story that I was reading in the dark—using only a flashlight, a neighbor rang our doorbell. With a startled look on his face, he told us that his garage was on fire. We ran out the back door, grabbed the garden hose, and ran to put out the fire, only to discover that someone had forgotten to reconnect the hose to the outdoor faucet. It was a scene right out of the "Keystone Cops". Thank heavens the fire department arrived then so no one noticed our mistake.

As I look back, I remember so many other experiences (ask about our toothless dog that loved ice cream), the many all night card games with my husband's buddies who were also public school teachers, the chance to try new foods (yes, I did learn to cook!) and the many friends who are still in our lives. Those years were very special, and certainly the semi-attached row houses, the deep back yards, the variety of caring, wonderful people who lived in this diverse community made it all possible. **HPH**

Lichens on the Rocks—and Trees

I met Rich Hyerczyk near the benches at the west side of the underpass to Promontory Point. He had not had time to eat before driving in from the western suburbs after work so appreciated the granola bars I had brought. In recent years I've met a lot of enthusiastic collectors of esoteric items—corkscrews, sand, shells, train schedules, but Rich was in a class alone. While we eyed the bark of trees and scrambled



PHOTOS | FRANCES S. VANDERVOORT

Crustose lichen on a limestone block at the Point

about on the rocks near the water, Rich told me about his work, and his passion.

A machine designer by training, Rich is a young man with a mission. Since 1991 he has specialized in lichens, the small, crusty, flaky, or sometimes lacey organisms that grow by attaching themselves to tree trunks, sidewalks, cement posts, even such odd surfaces as old shoes and glass. Rich, with a degree in Botany from St. Xavier University in Joliet, is now Manager of Natural History Education at the Morton Arboretum. At present he is conducting a survey of the lichens of Cook County, including the major parks of Chicago. He has found 112 species in Cook County, of which 45 are in Chicago's parks, and is looking for more.

He is the founder of the Chicagoland Lichenological Society, a group of about 40 members that go on collecting trips and attend lectures about lichens and plants, and has published a number of papers about lichens in state and local science journals. He was trained as a docent by Wanda Iza for the Chicago Park District in the late 1980's, and has worked in Jackson Park and Bobolink Meadow.

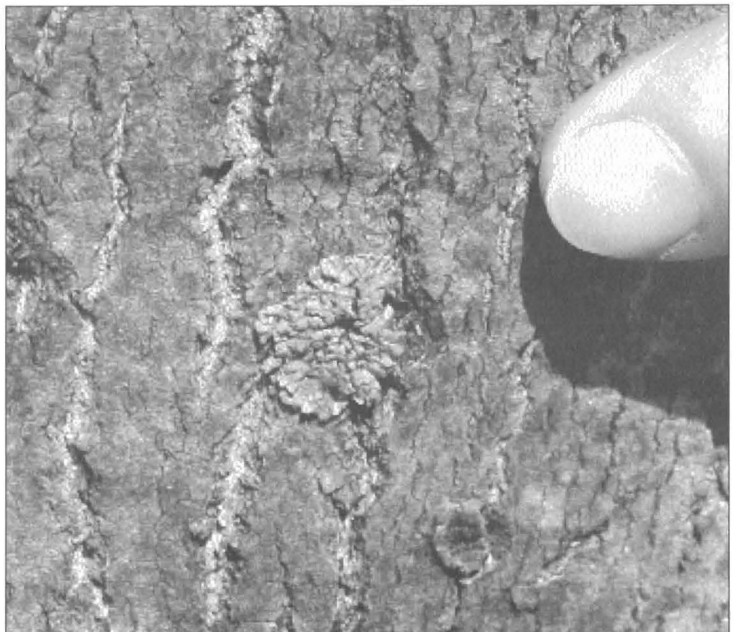
Rich's eyes gleamed as we found one type of lichen after the other. Using hand lenses, we identified five

kinds of lichens, including bright yellow *Candelaria concolor*, a flaky gray-green lichen, and tiny brown disc-like lichens with white rims all on a single concrete bench support. Gray-green and yellow clusters and streaks of these and other lichens added color to the bark of trees. Nearer to the water's edge, I was astonished to learn that the blackish material dusting almost all limestone blocks and concrete surfaces is, in fact, a lichen.

Rich showed me several white spots about two inches in diameter on a limestone block close to the eastern end of the flat walkway around base of the Point. "Those are not paint spots," he said. "Watch." With a practiced finger he scratched the surface of one of the spots. A soft green color emerged. "That's the photosynthetic part of this lichen, *Verrucaria calkinsiana*."

Contrary to common belief, lichens are not plants at all. Instead, each lichen is the product of a special relationship between a fungus and an alga or blue-green bacterium. The fungus provides structure for the lichen and the green organisms produce sugars and oxygen photosynthetically. The two components can be separated from one another in a lab, but mixing them together again makes an amorphous blob nothing at all like the original lichen. In other words, said Rich, putting them together cannot "lichenize" them. Compounds such as lichenic acids and pigments can be produced only when both components are together. This summer the National Park Service launched a major project to clean and restore the presidential heads at Mt. Rushmore. Rampant growth of lichens growing in cracks and crevices are producing acids that could damage the monument.

Lichens grow very slowly, and efforts to cultivate



Foliose lichen on a tree trunk at the Point



them rarely succeed. The fungus and algae in a lichen do not live together in genuine symbiosis, an association that works to the benefit of each organism. Instead, the fungus inserts tiny, nutrient-absorbing structures into the cells of the algae in a special, mild form of parasitism called helotism. The fungus's cell structure does not contain cellulose, as plants do, but chitin, the substance that makes up the hard outer covering of insects and other arthropods.

For years I had been advising my students, friends, and other co-travelers in the Great Outdoors of Hyde Park to keep their eyes and ears open. "Pay attention," I would say. "Look at trees, plants, bugs, clouds, Lake

Michigan. Check sidewalk cracks and gutters for moss and migrating ants. Listen for the warning chirp of a robin who has spotted a roaming cat. Listen again for the wheezy whine of a young crow begging tidbits from its parents. There's a whole ecosystem just out the window. Look for it!"

After meeting with Rich, I found myself ashamed that for all the years I'd been tooling about Hyde Park with binoculars and hand lens, I had been totally oblivious to these common, easily found bits of life—lichens. This has now changed. These fascinating organisms are there for us all to see, adding a bit more diversity to our biologically rich community. **FSV**

A New Book About Earl Dickerson

HPHS members should all watch out for a new book, *Earl B. Dickerson, A Voice for Freedom and Equality*, by Robert J. Blakely with Marcus Shepard.



Earl Burrus Dickerson, November, 1983

This book, which will be published by Northwestern University Press in late summer, is one of a series of books about Chicago leaders in civil rights and community governance.

To get away from racial oppression, at age 15 Earl Dickerson (1891-1986) stowed away on a train from Mississippi to

Chicago, thus beginning a lifetime journey to fight racial injustice. In the book, Blakely tells how Dickerson worked his way through preparatory schools, college, a segregated officers' training school, and the University of Chicago Law School. Upon graduation, his courage and character led him to undertakings never before attempted by an African-American: general counsel to the first insurance company owned and operated by African-Americans, the first African-American Democratic alderman elected to the Chicago City Council, and the power behind *Hansberry v. Lee*, the U. S. Supreme Court case leading to the end of racist real estate covenants.

This book about the "dean of Chicago's black lawyers" belongs on Hyde Park bookshelves. No, this book belongs in the hands of Hyde Parkers and all other people interested in the battle for racial justice in Chicago.

The Chicago Community Trust supported the publication of these books by Northwestern University Press. The series, entitled *Chicago Lives*, includes *Challenging the Daley Machine: A Chicago Alderman's Memoir*, by Leon Despres with Kenan Heise, and *Knocking Down Barriers: My Fight for Black America*, by Truman K. Gibson, Jr. with Steve Huntley. **FSV**

V Memorial on Blackstone Takes on a New Meaning

The story behind this concrete V on the northeast corner of Blackstone Avenue and 56th Street, long believed to be the site of one of several victory gardens planted in Hyde Park during World War II, has been found to be more detailed and more poignant than first thought.

In early June, in a letter to the Hyde Park Historical Society, Ms. Damaris Day of South Kenwood Avenue wrote that, "The V was not a victory garden V, but part of a memorial erected by the building's janitor for



FRANCES S. VANDERVOORT

his son killed in World War II. It (once) contained a flag pole and an American flag."

Perhaps the V should be a tribute to this young man's valor. **FSV**



Undergrads Look at 55th Street



MELISSA SCHMIDT

Non-interactive commuters on 57th St. Metra Platform.

On June 1, 2005, HPHS members and guests came to Society headquarters to see University of Chicago undergraduates' impressions of 55th Street, arguably the most important thoroughfare in the community. The students were all enrolled in an undergraduate seminar, 55th Street, taught by Ann Stephenson, a Ph.D. candidate in the University's Department of Art History. For her, 55th Street as a place where "... most major trends in American urban history and Chicago history are visible."

Students, most of whom are from out of town, rose to the challenge with creativity and enthusiasm. Melissa Schmidt's sociological study of the Metra Station at 55th, 56th, and 57 Streets showed that riders seldom interact with one another, and were cool to her efforts to talk with them. She felt that the design of the station, with all benches facing the same way, discouraged people from talking to each other.

Lakshmi Shenoy detailed the history of Hyde Park's Compass Players, "the first modern improvisation comedy group in the world." As most Hyde Parkers know, the Compass Theater was founded 50 years ago near Jimmy's Woodlawn on 55th Street near Woodlawn Avenue.

Brianna English reported on the Lucky Strike Restaurant on the first floor of the University of Chicago parking garage at 55th Street and Ellis Avenue from a first-hand perspective—she works there. As a combination restaurant, bowling alley, and pool, the Lucky Strike serves a wide cross-section of south-siders.

Tasha Matsumoto prepared a beautifully detailed Calendar of Hyde Park History. She illustrated each month with a color image of a familiar Hyde Park feature, including the Statue of the Republic (Golden Lady in Jackson Park), the Museum of Science and Industry, and the statue of Karl von Linné on the Midway near Ellis Avenue. The January 16 entry notes that in 1896, Amos Alonzo Stagg coached the University of Chicago to victory over the University of Iowa. On May 24, 1865, Mary Todd Lincoln arrived in Hyde Park after vacating the White House upon the assassination of her husband. The calendar is a fine history lesson for local residents.

Visitors were intrigued by Nicholas Poulas's report, a collection of "cognitive maps" of Hyde Park drawn by members of the class. Maps were minimalist, detailed, charming, and provocative.

These projects are now part of the Hyde Park Historical Society's archives. **FSV**

Hyde Park Views

By Stephen Treffman



Jackson Park Beach Promenade and Concession Stand, (Knight, Leonard and Company Publisher, Chicago, c. 1890.) A follow-up to our story about the Paved Beach and the Iowa Building (Winter, 2003) is this view of the beach along Lake Michigan at about 57th Street. The concession or public facilities stand, shown at the upper right corner, was probably built before the Jackson Park Pavilion (the original Iowa Building) was constructed in 1888. It was made of wood and wrought iron and was demolished prior to the World's Columbian Exposition. It appears to have been located on the site where the Fair's German Building (1893-1925) later stood.

School History Fair Draws Large Crowd

Fourteen enthusiastic middle and high school students described and demonstrated projects about a wide array of topics of local interest at the Hyde Park Historical Society's annual History Fair June 12, 2005. Friends, family, and guests joined Society members, including Fair coordinator Priya Shimpi, to learn about Chicago blues, Pilsen neighborhood's "Little Mexico," the history of Frank Lloyd's Architecture, South Side Murals, Soccer in the Croatian Community, and a number of other topics that caught the fancy of these young people.

Candice Welch, a freshman at Hyde Park High School, was given the Chicago Metro History Fair's award for the best project about Hyde Park. Her project, *Aitchpe*, was about the history of her school's yearbook. Anja Rieser of the Ancona School's compelling project, *What's the Point? The History*

and Conflict at Promontory Point, tied for first prize with schoolmate Olivia Carlize's project, *The Murals of the South Side*.

When it comes to inspiring students to learn history, Cory Stutts, the teacher at the Ancona School, is a natural. That the lion's share of projects came from this school should be no surprise. "It is important to let them follow their own interests," says Ms. Stutts. "I encourage them to start with an area they are interested in, like the arts, or sports, or particular events they are curious about. Then they do research and talk to people, the librarian, parents, teachers, local historians."

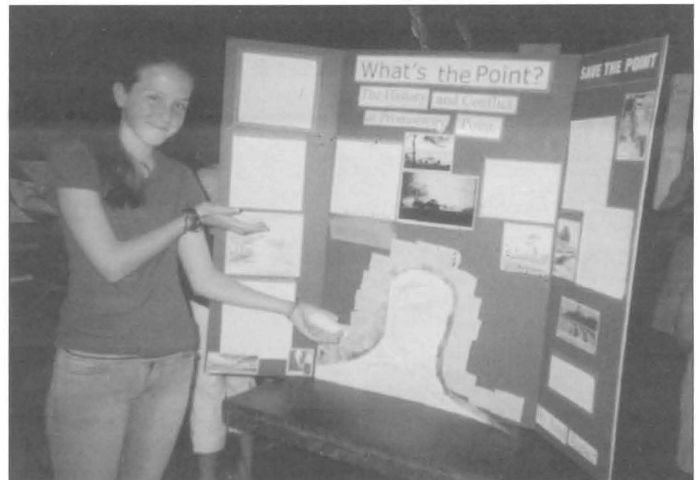
"They can be very resourceful, talking with activists and aldermen... Doing some kind of history fair research is a school requirement, (and) kids get enthusiastic about local topics or places that are familiar to them. They start to see their familiar surroundings a little bit differently."

For her outstanding work with Ancona students, Cory Stutts was given special recognition and a big round of applause. **FSV**

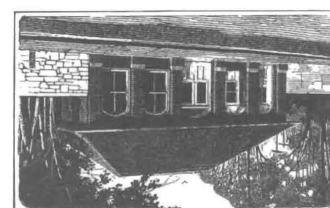


PHOTOS: I.F.S. VANDERVOORT

Hyde Park High School student Candice Welch is awarded top prize for her project, *Aitchpe*, about the history of her school. Awards were distributed by Priya Shimpi, coordinator of the fair for the Society



Anja Rieser of Ancona School prepared this project about Promontory Point



HP Hyde Park Historical Society
5529 S. Lake Park Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Chicago, IL
Permit No. 85

Hyde Park Historical Society

COLLECTING AND PRESERVING HYDE PARK'S HISTORY

*Time for you to join up or renew?
Fill out the form below and return it to:*

The Hyde Park Historical Society
5529 S. Lake Park Avenue • Chicago, IL 60637



*Enclosed is my _____ new _____ renewal membership
in the Hyde Park Historical Society.*

_____ Student \$15
_____ Member \$25

_____ Sponsor \$50
_____ Benefactor \$100

Name _____

Address _____

Zip _____

This Newsletter is published by the Hyde Park Historical Society, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1975 to record, preserve, and promote public interest in the history of Hyde Park. Its headquarters, located in an 1893 restored cable car station at 5529 S. Lake Park Avenue, houses local exhibits. It is open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays from 2 until 4pm.

Web site: hydeparkhistory.org
Telephone: **HY3-1893**

President: **Carol Bradford**
Editor: **Frances S. Vandervoort**
Contributing Editor: **Stephen Treffman**
Designer: **Nickie Sage**