

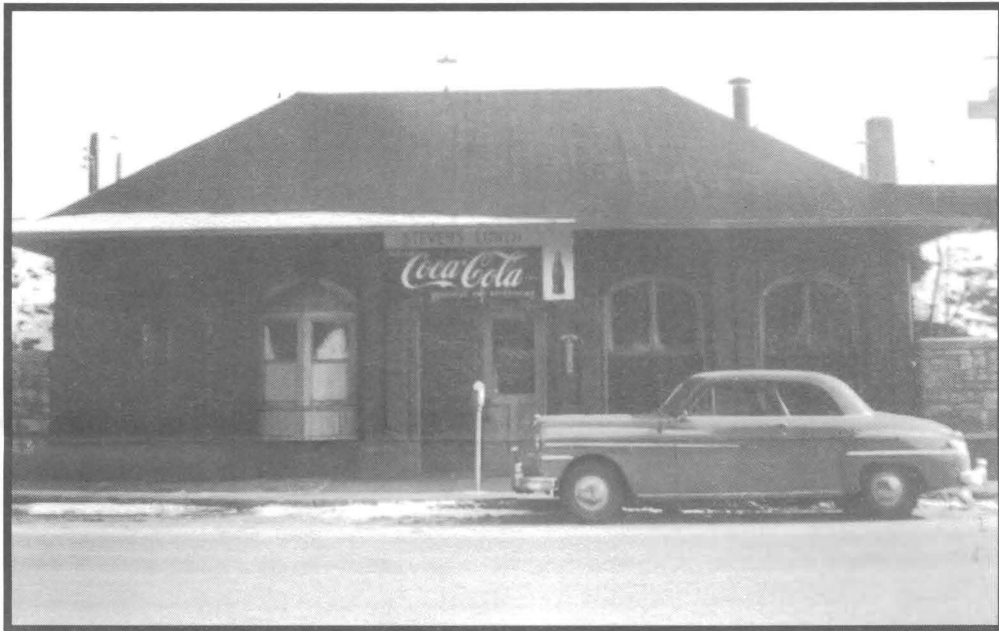
Hyde Park History

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Steve's Lunch



From the late 1940s to 1965 HPHS headquarters was the Steven's Lunch diner.

As told to Alta Blakely by Steve's grandson, Greg Thorson

In about 1948 or '49 Steve Megales, my grandpa, acquired the business at 5529 South Lake Park; that is, he owned the furnishings but never the building, which we think remained the property of the Illinois Central Railroad.

Although he was Greek, he served more traditional American bacon and eggs and pancakes for breakfast, franks and hamburgers at lunchtime.

From his third-floor walk-up apartment at 1535 East 55th Street, near Cornell Avenue, under the I.C. tracks and around the corner from the cafe, he and his wife Rose would come to open the restaurant at 4:30 in the morning, serving breakfast, then lunch, and closing at about three in the afternoon. Sometimes he would stay to prepare food for the following day,

especially a beef stew or a pot roast or a ham. Standing all day was hard on his feet.

Tables for customers were small. There were perhaps four, each used for two or three people, to the right of the double doors as they entered, perhaps one or two tables to the left.

The counter was in the middle of the room, running about half or two-thirds the length of the building, starting from the south end. Then, just north of it, was the cash register, where Steve's second wife, Rose, presided. (She also had an interest in fortune-telling.) Steve did the cooking behind the counter, along the east wall, next to the railroad tracks, where there was a stovepipe and a chimney for the oven and grill.

In the small north room Steve kept supplies, money, and perhaps a small bed. A washroom *continued on page 2* ▶



◀ continued from page 1 was also at that end.

I remember visiting my “Papuli” (as Steve signed his cards to Greg) with my mother when I was about five, watching him in his tall chef’s hat, flipping eggs. Breakfast with two eggs was thirty-five cents. I used to sit on the tall counter stool, next to the first stool in the row. I liked to play “bus driver” with that first counter stool, turning it this way and that—often even spinning it nearly off its post!

Steve had a good business. Many University of Chicago students were his customers. If they had almost no money to pay, he would say, “That’s okay. You just go and be the best doctor or lawyer you can be.”

Sergeant Earl Jackson, of the Chicago Police Department, was a customer who also became a good friend. He called Steve “Pops.” He would often stop in his squad car. I remember his telling me that he said to my grandpa, “Hey, you dirty Greek, when are you going to wash that apron?” or “What do you have under that hat, Pops?” One early morning Sgt. Jackson saw two men preparing to attack Steve. They were in a black car waiting. Sgt. Jackson and a fellow cop took them in.

Many trains went by “Steve’s Lunch” (officially, Steven’s) in those days—the City of New Orleans, the City of Miami, the Seminole, the Carolina Special, the Panama Limited, Michigan Central and the “Big Four” (Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati and St. Louis). All roared by on the embankment overhead, as well as South Shore and South Bend commuter trains and Illinois Central local electric trains.

Toward the end of my grampa’s Hyde Park “Steve’s Lunch” days, he was diagnosed as a diabetic, and he began to look for a buyer for his business.

By 1963, he had purchased a house in the town of Knox, Indiana, in Stark County, about two hours drive from Chicago. However, he still had the apartment on East 55th Street and was still working in the restaurant while looking for a buyer. By 1963 “Steven’s Lunch” was mostly open only on weekdays, and he and Rose went to their Indiana home on weekends. (Wherever they were, I remember they never wanted to miss the Ed Sullivan Show on TV on Sunday evenings.) My grampa had probably sold the business by some time in 1966—perhaps to a Hyde Parker called “Papa Joe” or “Papa John”. ■



Rose, “Papuli” and a young friend

Steve Megales’ Pre-Hyde Park Days and His Aid to His Family

Steve’s daughter, Constance Megales Thorson (Greg’s mother), gives this interesting background of her father:

Efstathios Megales (Steve) had come from Klessura in southwestern Greece in 1915. He stayed in Kansas City for a while, sponsored by a cousin. He was a “gandy dancer” (track worker) on the “Frisco” Railroad. He worked in Warren, Ohio in 1916 and then came to Chicago where he had relatives.

My mother, Olga Lambropoulos, was his first wife, whom he married in 1923. That year he bought a home in the Hegwisch community near 130th Street on the far south side. He worked for Republic Steel, in South Chicago, at the open-hearth.

During all the years, from about 1927 to 1953, he was sending money to family members back in Greece—during the Depression probably \$25 a month, later more. But the nine-month strike in 1937, with the disagreements between the A.F. of L. and the CIO were very hard on our family.

We had the first telephone in the area (our phone number was South Chicago 9590). We were responsible for twelve families at the steel mill. The phone might ring at midnight, the mill telling us they wanted so-and-so to come in and work. We had

to get up and go to tell them.

Our Hegewisch home became like a little Hull House. Relatives kept coming from Greece. As they did, we children would have to give up our beds and sleep on the floor until the relatives were able to find work and move out. From the 1930s there were never fewer than seven people in our home. We had a goat, a cow, lambs and chickens. My mother did lots of canning.

In the late 1950s Steve sponsored his brother Harry (Aristedes), who had been a Marine soldier in Greece during World War II, to come to the U.S. In Hyde Park Steve taught him the restaurant business. Harry, in turn, sponsored his eight children and the family of his sister Constantina Apostolou.

Harry's children and Constantina's all worked in Harry's large restaurant in Humbolt Park (The Parkside) that he bought after Steve retired. Harry taught his sons and nephews the restaurant business well. Now they own prosperous restaurants in Chicago, Niles, Burbank, and Lombard. John Apostolou owns or franchises the Giordano's

Restaurants and Pizzerias—in Indiana; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Kissimmee, Florida (near Disney World); and thirty-five in Illinois; he is corporate president of Giordano's. All of these young men have become wealthy.

When Steve Megales retired to Knox, Indiana, he had little money. But he was happy; he had helped his family to a fine legacy. He died January 30, 1969. ❀

Editor's note:

Mrs. Donald Robert Erickson (Cathy) was liaison for these interviews, thus making this story possible.

We welcome our readers' additions to the history of 5529. For example, was there a restaurant on the premises before 1948 or '49? Dev Bowly remembers a rather widely held story that Steve was given the business by a railroad as compensation for a railroad-related injury, but Greg Thorson and his mother say this is not so. Who remembers the history of the property after 1966? Please address replies to Alta Blakely or Theresa McDermott, Hyde Park Historical Society, 5529 S. Lake Park Ave., Chicago 60637.



Steve, Rose and a helper in their diner



Robie House Becomes Historic House Museum

As you know, the Frederick C. Robie House—Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie masterpiece has been leased to the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio Foundation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation by the University of Chicago so that it can be restored and operated as a historic house museum.

Considered an architectural masterpiece, this quintessential Prairie house features sweeping horizontal planes, dramatic cantilevers and long ribbons of art glass windows. Neighbors were shocked by its revolutionary design in 1910, but more than 80 years later the building remains a cornerstone of modern functional form.

Robie House was commissioned by Frederick Carleton Robie, a young bicycle manufacturer, whose interest in cars led Wright to build him one of the first three-car attached garages in the world. The house remained a private residence until 1962 when it was acquired by the Chicago Theological

Seminary, which used the building as a dormitory and dining hall for students, but was mainly interested in re-developing the site.

In 1941, learning that the house was to be demolished, Wright led a campaign to save the building. In 1957, the 90-year-old Wright led another successful battle for its preservation. In 1963, Robie House was donated to the University of Chicago and designated a National Historic Landmark; it was subsequently used to house the University’s Office of Alumnae Relations.

The Foundation will undertake a comprehensive restoration of the Robie House, provide regular tours of the building, and offer a number of educational programs related to Wright and the Robie House. Presently tours are offered daily at noon; visitors can purchase tickets at the main entrance on Woodlawn. Adults \$8. Seniors (65+) and Youth (7-14) \$6. For tour information, call 708-848-1978.

MEMBERS *please note:*

The Frank Lloyd Home and Studio Announces Volunteer Training for Robie House

Applicants are being accepted for the third Robie House interpreter training program which begins on May 31. This intensive course will meet for three consecutive Saturdays—May 31, June 7, and June 14—from 9am until 12 noon, and on Thursday, June 5, from 7 to 9pm.

If you are interested in sharing with visitors from around the world one of the country's most historic structures—Wright himself called it “the cornerstone of modern architecture”—you are encouraged to register.

You will learn about Wright's life and work through slide presentations, in-depth tours of the home and outside reading, while examining the principals of successful architectural interpretation. For more information or to register, call Robie House Operations Manager Janet Van Delft, at 773-834-1362.

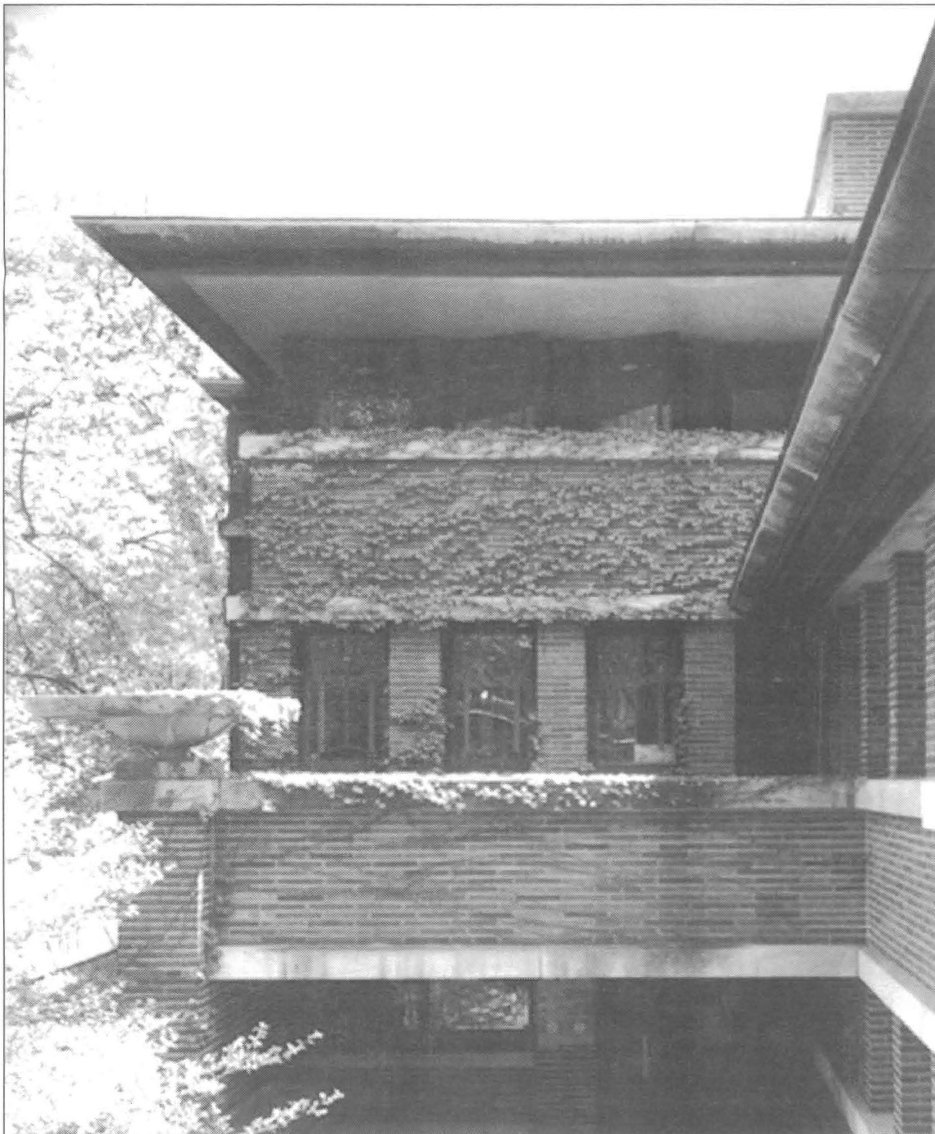


photo by Hedrich Blessing



Notes from the Archives

by Stephen A. Treffman, HPHS Archivist

SKY EYES: A promotional flyer featuring "Sky Eyes" that probably dates from the 1940s or early 50s has recently been donated to our archives by Helene E. Brewer, a long time Hyde Park resident now living in Connecticut. Sky Eyes, pictured here, is described as an accomplished singer and lecturer on Native American spirituality with references from such diverse groups as the Executives Club of Chicago, the Ottawa Illinois Home bureau, the Pure Milk Association, and the Commonwealth Club of Greenwood, Mississippi!! The brochure lists an address at 5321 South Cornell. If any of our readers has more information about Sky Eyes, we would be delighted to include it in a future newsletter.

Mrs. Brewer, once owner of the Hyde Park florist in the Del Prado Hotel, was active in the south side Zonta organization and in the Hyde Park Business and Professional Association. Among her other gifts to us are a Zonta membership list from the early 1950s, a copy of the 1962 HPBPA annual program and director's list, and several items related to the Chicago Osteopathic Hospital, where her late husband, Dr. Darl Brewer, D.O., was affiliated and where Mrs. Brewer also served a term as director of volunteers.

These materials have considerable potential for researchers into our community's history. We are very grateful for Mr. Brewer's gifts as well as for similar donations: from Alta Blakely—the 1959 annual report of the Hyde Park YMCA; from Roberta Siegel and Joan Dix—various editions of the Hyde Park High School's "Aichpes" dating from the 30s and early 40s; and from Frances Guterbock—decades of programs and membership records from the Hyde Park Music Club.

When you come upon similar bits of Hyde Park History, please consider giving them to the Society.

Historical Happenings...

Did you get to our Annual Meeting?

We were royally entertained at our annual meeting on February 22nd when members of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, led by those inimitable G & S practitioners, Bob Ashenhurst and Roland Bailey, presented selections from *The Sorcerer*.

It was a delightful performance and the Society is very grateful to all members of the cast: Roland and Helen Bailey, David Currie,...

This year's meeting was dedicated to the memory of John McDermott who had passed away during the summer. John was a long-time friend of the Society having served on the Board of Directors for several years and as MC at our annual meetings since their inception.

Our Paul Cornell Awards this year went to:

André W. Carus, Owner, and John Thorpe, Architect, for the renovation of the Carus house at 5537 S. University.

Wilbert Hasbrouck, Architect, for the renovation of the bridge at 59th and South Shore Drive.

The University of Chicago, Owner, for the exterior renovation of the commercial building at 57th and Kenwood.

Congratulations Awardees!

On-going exhibit at HPHS Headquarters:

The 57th Street Art Fair: Fifty Years

Be sure to stop at HPHS Headquarters to see the wonderful display of 50 years of our Hyde Park Art Fair. At a special presentation on May 4th, John Parker helped us remember some of those early days. In a video interview we heard of the very beginnings from Mary Louise Womer, founder of the Art Fair. The 1997 Fair is coming up on the weekend of June 7-8; it might be even more interesting to you if you have delved a little into the history of this very special Hyde Park event.

From the Hyde Park Herald of Yesteryear:

WANTED: A good boy to learn the printer's trade. He must have a fair English education, must live at home, with his parents, relatives or guardian. He must leave smoking, chewing, drinking liquor and beer, as well as swearing, entirely with the editor. Such a boy will find a situation at the office of the HYDE PARK HERALD, where he will be taught the entire business so that he may be able to do any and every part of the work, on a newspaper or in a job office.

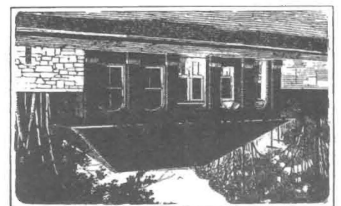
All debts due to the Hyde Park Publishing Company must be paid at once. We pay as we go; now come and settle up every mother's son of you.

Friday, November 25, 1887

An explosion which gutted the house and upset the neighborhood occurred on West 55th St. last night. The affair brought to light a custard pie factory which had evidently been operating for some time under the innocent guise of a gambling house, its true purpose unsuspected by the authorities. Federal agents who were quickly on the scene in search of evidence confiscated four rolling pins and a pie-board.

October 13, 1922

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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.

Member \$15 Sponsor \$50
 Contributor \$25 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 South Lake Park Avenue, houses local exhibits. It is open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays from 2 until 4pm.

Telephone: **HY3-1893**

President.....**Tom Pavelec**
Editor.....**Theresa McDermott**
Designer**Nickie Sage**

Regular membership: \$15 per year,
contributor: \$25, sponsors: \$50,
benefactor: \$100