

Hyde Park History

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HYDE PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING, 2005



A celebratory mood prevailed as nearly 200 guests mixed and mingled at the annual dinner meeting of the Hyde Park Historical Society, held February 5, 2005, at the Quadrangle Club. Attendees were greeted by the sweet strains of music by Gershwin and Schubert played by pianist Elaine Smith. After a meal of chicken breast with mornay sauce, green beans, and praline sundae for dessert, host Bert Benade introduced the Society's president, Carol Bradford, who reported on the current status of the organization.

Presentation of the Cornell Awards followed, the first going to Bruce Sagan, owner and publisher of *The Hyde Park Herald*. In the spirit of the event, Mr. Sagan generously donated a check for \$2500 to the Society. An award was given to the Greenwood Row House Association, represented by Joe Marlin. Chicago Department of Transportation Commissioner Miguel D'Escoto, represented by Chris Wuellner, and sculptor Paul Petreanu, represented by his son, were cited for

their work in the restoration of the Animal Bridge on South Shore Drive. The last Cornell award went to the Montgomery Place Book Committee for their book, *In It Together*.

A high point of the evening was the presentation by Jack Spicer of the first Leon and Marian Despres Preservation Award. This award, appropriately given to Mr. and Mrs. Despres, honored their work on behalf of the city's architectural heritage, including the preservation of Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House, Glessner House in the Prairie Avenue Historic District, and other efforts leading to the establishment of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. After accepting the award and giving due praise to Mrs. Despres, Mr. Despres entertained the audience by reading excerpts from his forthcoming book, an autobiographical account of his life and experiences as Fifth Ward alderman.

A fine time was had by all. **HPH**



The Greenwood Row House District, Part 1

By Joe Marlin

Note: Since this account was written by Mr. Marlin, the Greenwood Row House District was designated a Chicago Landmark by Ordinance of the Chicago City Council on December 8, 2004.

Joe Marlin, who lives at 5234 South Greenwood Avenue, accepted the Cornell Award on behalf of the Greenwood Row House District of Hyde Park at the Hyde Park Historical Society annual meeting in February. His brief acceptance speech was a gracious, often amusing commentary about life on this block. He gave the Society an extended, perceptive, and often humorous report, which has been edited for this newsletter.

Our Block: A Brief History

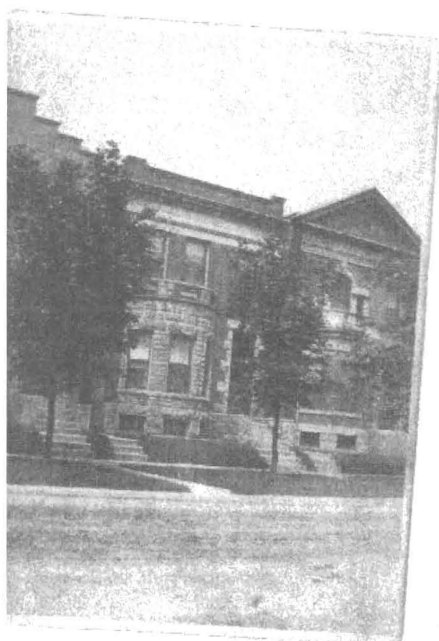
This is a brief history of the 5200 block of Greenwood Avenue (West side, of course) containing for the edification of its readers some brief notes on Hyde Park's past, with appropriate comments on the architectural significance of our homes, together with various and sundry information of the utmost interest to the diligent student of history.

It has been prepared by Joseph R. Marlin, unofficial block historian, who begs your indulgence for

performing a task for which he has no credentials whatsoever, and who wrote a few sentences with tongue-in-cheek!

History of Hyde Park

Hyde Park Township was incorporated in 1861 from a broader swath of land to the south and west, but it was still of significant size, extending from 35th Street to what



5226 S. Greenwood, showing original grassy slope in front



Houses of Greenwood Row, 1954

PHOTOS COURTESY THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

is now 138th Street, and from State Street to the lake. North Hyde Park Township consisted of three areas: Kenwood, Hyde Park Center (51st to 55th Streets), and South Park (55th to 59th Street).

In 1889, the year Hyde Park was annexed into Chicago, the area west of Kimbark was considered vacant swamp land, but with the annexation the ground, never quite hallowed, on which we live, became part of Chicago. I have heard, although this is not confirmed, Aloysius J. Daley, the great-grandfather of the mayor gave several influential persons season's tickets to nearby Washington Park race track (some considered it the finest in the world) to vote the right way. Please do not repeat this.

By the turn of the century, the swamp land west of Woodlawn Avenue began to be developed. For example, Frank Lloyd Wright's Heller House at 5132 S. Woodlawn was built, and in 1904, 5235 and 5317 S. University were put up. Our (Greenwood) houses were completed in 1903, but presumably started the previous year.

Before discussing our block's development, who was involved and how our houses relate to our Hyde Park-Kenwood Historic District, we need to understand how Greenwood Avenue became Greenwood Avenue, don't we? Jean Block (in Hyde Park Houses) states that Greenwood was the name of the home of Hamilton Bogue, a real estate broker of the day. However, a card in the street card file of the Chicago Historic Society indicates that Greenwood was named in honor of William M. Greenwood, a lawyer and real estate promoter. There you have it, clear as swamp water. At least real estate seemed to be a common thread. Now let us proceed to consider one Samuel Eberly Gross, our developer and his associates, who wanted to make money and help people move to the more countrified areas in the west part of the old Hyde Park Center.

Our Block: Its Development, Architecture, and History

Just to get you off on the right track, our block is within the Hyde Park-Kenwood Historic District, which is included in the National Register of Historic Places, Department of the Interior. This is not the same as being listed as a Landmark District (as Kenwood is, and as our block is currently being considered for). The plaque attached to (the house at) 5244 does not count (as a landmark building) ... as it was placed there not by the action of the City Council but rather by Dr.

Mittendorf who lived there a few years ago with his family. The plaque refers to our block as the "first professors' row" although some think it was originally referred to as "doctors' row."

Samuel Eberly Gross was the developer of our block. He was not a modest man. In one of his ads he billed himself as "the world's greatest real estate dealer." The southwestern suburb of Brookfield (yes, where the zoo is) was originally called Grossdale... He was a brash big shot who developed thousands of homes, perhaps as many as 10,000, and sold even more lots. Typical of his time, and I guess ours, he over-expanded near the end of his life and went bankrupt. When he was 65 he divorced his wife, married a seventeen-year-old, and apparently rejuvenated, amassed another sizeable fortune before he died in 1913.

Gross is not well-remembered because he was primarily a developer of working-class housing, but he and his architect on some projects, John C. Brompton, did manage to create one landmark district, Alta Vista Terrace (the 3800 block of North Alta Vista Terrace). And when our block is declared a landmark district they will have two to their credit!

In 1987 the Commission (on City Landmarks) rated the homes in our block. This was part of a survey done over several years of every structure in Chicago... Your humble servant must confess that (the house at 5234 Greenwood Avenue) is his! However please be aware that the massacre of the front stoop was perpetrated prior to 1935! It appears that someone wanted to create a coal bin! It has been reported, and this may be apocryphal that in the past several residents developed scoliosis of the neck from trying to avert their gaze when walking by the castellated stoop. (Anyone who

is sufficiently offended by this atrocity can contribute substantial sums to the 5234 Betterment Fund. Sometime back I did get a ballpark estimate for an appropriate restoration. The next thing I knew I was being picked up off the floor!)

So there you have it, the authoritative yet not complete, the skimpy yet somewhat detailed history of our block. I alone am responsible for any errors but I take no responsibility for any attempts at levity. And remember whatever else you do, do not tell the mayor about the annexation move, as he's rather sensitive to certain matters. Oh yes, there is one concluding matter...

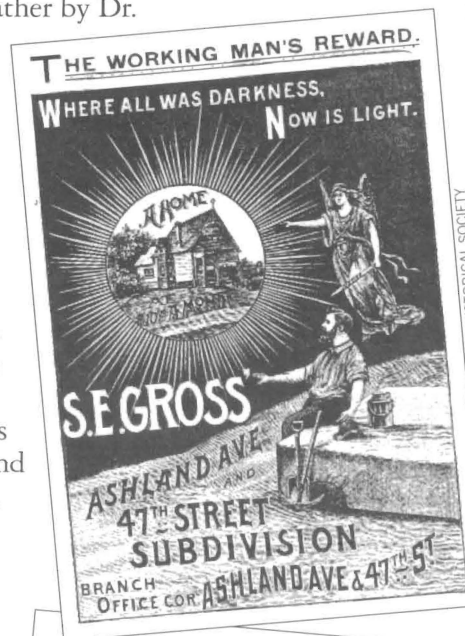
You remember the famous quote, "Ask not what your block can do for you, ask what you can do for your block." Actually on our block we ask both questions. Our block club, which over the years has met periodically, has done a number of things through collective and collaborative efforts. In the summer of 2003 Malba Allen with the help of three other residents, and through her energetic efforts and skills at getting things done, helped the block win a grant to improve our block's lighting, including installing period lighting lower on the posts. The block received \$7500.00 from The Southeast

Chicago Commission's administration of the University of Chicago's Neighborhood Enhancement Grant Program. This year I suspect we will try for another grant.

Many of our block residents attended the May, 2003 meeting hosted by our Alderman, Toni Preckwinkle to explore the City's interest in our block being declared a Landmark District. Alderman Preckwinkle has always been interested in our concerns (and) has been quite supportive in helping us maintain our unique block... More recently we have

dealt with many concerns regarding the conversion of the Osteopathic Hospital buildings to condos just to our west, as well as the construction of 28 row houses. And thanks to Judy Allen, those of us who are chronic accumulators have annual garage sales. And how about our ice cream socials?

So our block's future is what we make of it ourselves. I hope it's a lot! **HPH**



ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Mayor and Hyde Park

By Sue Purrington

The last time I spoke to Harold Washington was about two weeks before he died. I was the director of Chicago NOW at the time and we had auctioned "Tea and Crumpets" with the Mayor at one of our fundraisers (the idea of tea and crumpets, if you recall, came about when Walter Jacobsen publicly hinted that he wanted to be invited to the Mayor's apartment for tea and crumpets). Well, the Mayor's staff was unable to locate crumpets, so the winners and myself had tea and scones with the Mayor.

After the others had left, Harold and I talked for a little while, and I asked him how he was doing and how he liked being Mayor. He said, "I love this job more than anything I have ever done! This was all I ever wanted to be, although I didn't know it at the time." He loved the people, the pomp and circumstance, the working of government and public policy. He loved being Mayor, he loved Chicago.



Mayor Washington at the Monk Parakeet Nest in Hyde Park

And he loved Hyde Park. It is difficult to write about Harold in a non-political way because that was the essence of the man. But wrapped up in that were the strong ties to the neighborhood he adopted. While the south side molded him, Hyde Park was the place in many ways that he had been waiting for all his life.

He loved the neighborhood because while we treated him with the respect he deserved, we were also brash, strong, articulate and relentless in our pursuit of whatever we thought (no, knew) was right. He relished the encounters he had on 53rd Street or 55th Street or at the University of Chicago and he thrived on the intellectual challenges brought to him everyday. He loved the diversity and the deeply respected the people who spent their lives working to

preserve that diversity. People from other parts of the city complained that there were too many.....too many Jews, too many Blacks, too many Hyde Parkers in his administration. Few people remarked that there had not been many Jews, Blacks or Hyde Parkers in city government previously. He was proud of the neighborhood that produced all that talent that not only put him in office but sustained him, and of course, kept after him when we felt he did wrong.

Before he became Mayor, Harold walked around more by himself. Unfortunately that was one of the few things he missed when he went from Congress to the city, he began to lose his privacy. He lunched at the Unique (I always thought it was his favorite place) where he held court regularly, always taking time to launch into an intense discussion with his constituents. And we in turn never really felt we were his constituents, we were his friends; we were his partners going down that path with him to make the city become a better place for everyone. He ate at Valois, he had takeout from the Far East Kitchen, and sometimes had breakfast at Nicky's. And his regular grocery store was the Co-op Express on 53rd, where he did all of his late night emergency shopping for toilet paper, toothpaste, and snacks. That was the place to be just before they closed for the evening: I shopped many nights with Ab Mikva, Bob Mann, Al Raby, Lu Palmer and others. The Express was a hidden hot bed of political discussion. One night at the Express, when Harold was just making up his mind to announce his run for Mayor, he asked me if I wanted to quit my job and run away to the circus with him (join the mayoral campaign). I didn't, he did and the rest is history.

Again, before he became Mayor, I would see him at the easternmost part of the Point, just at the place where there is an endless line of water and sky. He was seemingly staring out at the water, but even then the political wheels were turning about the next adventure, the next challenge. After he became Mayor, I never saw him there again except for special events, something I regretted and I am sure he did. One morning I was stopped in my walk to the then shuttered 63rd Street Beach house by a car in which Harold was sitting.....and we walked around that old building as he told me its history. He would love what it is now. Occasionally he was able to make it on March 13 to honor Clarence Darrow and wait for his spirit to arise from the lagoon. He certainly was never an outdoorsman, but he appreciated the environment and understood the need to protect it.

Even the birds. He had a love/hate relationship with those parrots. He understood how valuable his location across the street from them protected them and helped them thrive, but there were those days, at

6:30 a.m. when they flew by his windows on their morning flights with their raucous voices when he felt like opening his window and screaming at them to go away. But his was proud of them in his own way and told me once they fit well in Hyde Park because of their loudness and their tenacity.

And next to the people, he loved the bookstores. Harold Washington, despite his tight schedule, was a voracious reader all his life. He spent his extra hours in Powell's, O'Gara's, 57th Street, and Seminary, and read and read. I saw him often in that wonderful bookstore on Kimbark, Reid Michener's, that seemed to stay open forever, and where he spent late night hours reading everything. I think his favorites were biographies and autobiographies, however, and mostly about people who effected change, both in the system and from the outside. I would come home some nights and there would be a book dropped off to my landlord for me about someone he thought I should know more about. There was never a note with the book but I knew it was from him and that this was my homework.

Harold and I lived in the same precinct, and when he was in Congress, about once a month, as I was waiting for the #6 bus downtown, the limo would turn the corner at 54th onto Hyde Park Blvd., the door would open and Congressman Washington would open the door, get out and invite me to ride with him. I actually believe he timed it so that a large number of people were waiting at the corner when he picked me up. I would get in and we would laugh all the way downtown. I loved all the pomp and circumstance too! Of course that all came to an end when he was elected Mayor. I would see that limo turn the corner onto the Hyde Park Blvd and keep going. I mentioned this to him when I saw him at an event and told him that apparently I was no longer good enough to ride with the mayor of Chicago, and about a week later, as I was again waiting for the bus, the limo rounded the corner, it stopped, the Mayor got out and invited me into the car, talking to whoever remained at the bus stop. He smiled and asked me how I felt riding with the Mayor of the city of Chicago and I told him how excited I was. He said, "well, good, I'm glad you are enjoying it because this is your last free ride!" And it was.

He would talk to me about the vibrancy of the neighborhood and about the integrity it produced. He also told me that Hyde Park was one of the few places where he could truly be himself in the midst of all the political machinations because in Hyde Park everything was political, and familiar, from the hundreds of meetings on everything, to the passion of

the causes and the arrogance of "divine right." It was a place where he could be anyone he wanted to be and not worry about who he was supposed to be.

I still have his home phone number and periodically get ready to throw it out because someone else has it now, but I can't, and I still think of him sometimes when I am waiting for that bus in the morning and a long black car turns at the corner of 54th and Hyde Park Blvd. and heads downtown. **HPH**

Teach Us to Tango

By Al Klinger

My inner ring laced with ice
 until you made my
 melancholy syrup run fast
 like swallow sweep of lake
 shore meadow rising in May
 time dandelion. You confirm
 the killdeer spring the trill of
 redwing blackbird in the
 February nest top of the
 bridge, at Forty seventh street
 O man. O woman press us to
 you teach us to tango upside
 Woodlawn's curbstones
 wanton warblers of 48th,
 51st, 53rd. Lake Park snare
 drummers, hush the
 limestone, ride the whitecaps,
 roll in on the furls of
 northeasters, fantail the spray
 sparkle off no. 6 Jeffrey. You
 tree top, you apple blossom,
 bloom of pear, you Fruehling,
 you primavera. Burst us
 forth with harvest gold,
 burnish our behinds until sap
 becomes cotton wood and
 crab sweet as Norway.
 Vanish gates and staircases.
 Sing gargoyles, make altars
 swing, chalices congo, belly
 roll crypts and make room for
 titicaca bruisers **like you and
 me.**

The Purloined Bug Comes to Hyde Park

Saturday, February 19, 2005, dawned cool and bright, a perfect day to sleuth for exotic wildlife in Hyde Park. Wait a minute! Wildlife in Hyde Park? In February?? A lot of people seemed to think so.

Professor Michael C. LaBarbera of the Department of Organismal Biology of the University of Chicago had come to speak to members of the Hyde Park Historical Society and other interested individuals about bugs. Bugs??

It seemed that many people are interested in crawlers, buzzers, chirpers, flitters, and creatures that bite and sting. In fact, so many people came that a second program had to be scheduled for the following



Eastern Tiger Swallow

week. Rumor had it that the Society was dickering with the United Center for a venue for a third presentation. A front page article in the Chicago Tribune no doubt contributed to the general interest—venturesome sorts from as far away as Deerfield and Naperville drove in to see what our small, urban community had to offer in the way of assassin bugs, cicada killers, and other creatures of the ground, leaves, flowers, and air.

Professor LaBarbera, who specializes in form and function in marine invertebrates, wanted to see how many kinds of arthropods—generally small creatures such as insects and spiders with multiple legs and shiny outer coverings—he could find in Hyde Park. Armed with camera and notebook, he began his search in the area running east to west from Stony Island Avenue to Drexel Boulevard, and north to south from 56th to 59th Streets.

To his astonishment, he found 120 different kinds of arthropods—gaudy black-and-yellow striped beetles,

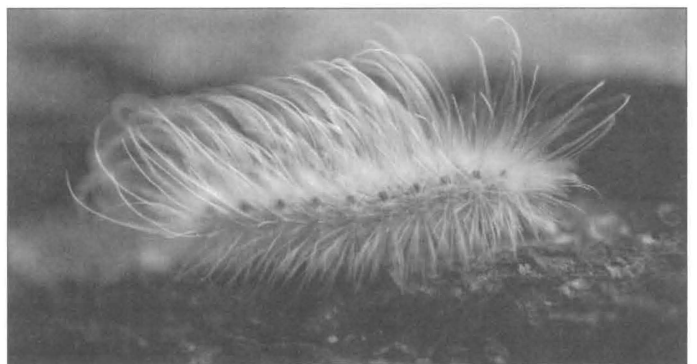


Cucumber Beetle

PHOTOS | MICHAEL C. LABARBERA

tiny candy-striped leafhoppers adorned in bands of blue and red, and two kinds of lady bugs, one a recent arrival from Asia. The audience oohed and aahed at the magnificent black-and-yellow garden spider that had built an impressive orb web in the garden just east of Ray School. A tiny jumping spider, scarcely one-quarter of an inch long, stalked prey, its four forward-directed eyes agleam with anticipation. Approving smiles greeted butterflies that flashed on the screen: clouded sulfur, tiger swallowtail, and a tiny purple hairstreak. Less spectacular but still lovely were small wasps, bees, and beetles.

Professor LaBarbera gave people a new appreciation of the richness of life just beyond the doorstep. He also raised a warning flag about one of the most numerous arthropods in Hyde Park, a small millipede that in recent years apparently migrated from southeast Asia. These creatures, between one and one-and-one-half inches long, often are found crawling on sidewalks, especially near gardens mulched with shredded bark. They look innocuous enough, but seem to have taken over the ecological niche of native species of millipedes.



Unidentified species of caterpillar

There is little doubt that Professor LaBarbera inspired his audience to take a closer look at the smaller denizens of Hyde Park. Will a new legion of wildlife photographers emerge? Time will tell! **HPH**



Celebrating the Bird of Peace

On Easter Island, legend has it that a bird-god laid the egg from which the world hatched. Hyde Park sculptor Cosmo Campoli said, "The egg is the most exquisite shape there is. You hold one in your hand and you are holding the whole universe."

Cosmo Campoli (1923-1997) created a sculpture, Bird of Peace, affectionately known as "The Egg," a five-foot bronze bird with the body of an egg. Its two legs are clutching two eggs. Except for short periods when it was away for repair, the sculpture has resided in Nichols Park since its dedication on June 3, 1970.

On March 19, 2005, between 75 and 100 adults and children came to Nichols Park to celebrate the rededication of the Bird of Peace, now buttressed by proximity to the golden-toned brick walls of the new Nichols Park Fieldhouse. The Bird is held securely in place on a granite "nest."



Alderman Toni Preckwinkle pays tribute to Cosmo Campoli



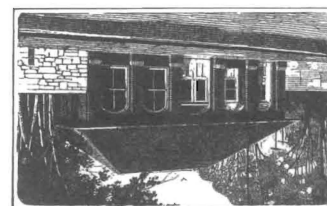
Bird of Peace, sculpture by Cosmo Campoli in Nichols Park

PHOTOS | FRANCES S. VANDERVOORT

Speakers paying tribute to Cosmo Campoli and the Bird included Fourth Ward Alderman Toni Preckwinkle, Stephanie Franklin of the Nichols Park Advisory Council, daughter Anna Campoli Kolata, conservator Andrezej Dajnowski, and friend Robert Borja. Borja commented that, "The egg is a yin shape ... that contains something." Quoting Victor Hugo, Borja said, "There is nothing more interesting than a wall behind which something is happening." He concluded by saying, "Within eggs something is evolving and growing in identity and strength. For Cosmo it is peace."

Activities following the ceremony included music, games, face-painting, and crafts for children. Photographs of Cosmo Campoli's work on display in the fieldhouse revived memories of this notable Hyde Park artist. **HPH**

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Hyde Park Historical Society

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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.

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