

# Hyde Park History

VOL. 40 NO. 3

Published by the Hyde Park Historical Society

AUTUMN 2018



PHOTO / CAROL VIETH



PHOTO / SPENCER BIBBS

## A Bright New Day on Lake Park Avenue

After months of anxious watching and waiting the restoration of the Hyde Park Historical Society headquarters is almost complete. The photo on the left, taken on September 12, shows the painters preparing the wooden door and window frames for a new coat of paint. (as close to the original color as possible). To the right is the finished product.

The next step—and the last major expense—is

replacing the glass in the doors and windows. The building is the lone reminder of the Chicago City Railroad, which operated horse, cable, and electric streetcars on the south side between 1859 and 1914.

An open house is scheduled for November 11, at the historical society, to celebrate the restoration. The annual holiday party is set for Sunday, December 16.

## Making Connections: Utilities in Hyde Park

*William Vandervoort*

Hyde Parkers—and Chicagoans generally—don't often consider how their telephone and electrical services reach their homes and business. What follows is a brief history of the connections that were made through the years.

The story starts in 1903 with the opening of Commonwealth Edison's Fisk Generating Station at 1111 W. Cermak Road. Fisk was the first of several "modern" (at the time) coal-fired power plants in Chicago. The plants allowed electricity to be transmitted at a high voltage to substations throughout the city. At the substations, the electricity was reduced to a lower voltage for citywide

distribution. Transformers, typically attached to utility poles in alleys, further reduced the electricity to 120 volts for consumer use.

The Commonwealth Edison substation most familiar to Hyde Park residents is probably the Harper Substation, located at 5611 S. Harper Ave. The neighborhood is also served by the Hyde Park Substation at 820 E. 50th Place, south of Reavis school, and by the substation at 810 E. 62nd St.

The 62nd St. Substation is particularly interesting because, between 1914 and 1972, it supplied electricity to the elevated trains and streetcars operated by the Chicago Transit Authority and its predecessor companies. To power the traction motors the substations had to use rotary converters, which resembled large industrial motors and required a shift from alternating to direct current—a complicated operation.

In the 1920s, mercury arc rectifiers were developed ▶ 2





PHOTO/WILLIAM VANDERVOORT

Former Hyde Park Central Office at 6045 S. Kenwood Ave.

◀❶ as a way of converting AC to DC. The Illinois Central Railroad electrification in 1926 was an early user of the mercury arc technology, which has since been replaced with far more modern technologies. The IC line is now part of Metra, which recently added a new substation along Lake Park Ave. north of the old 51st St. signal tower.

Beginning in 1928, newly constructed substations for the predecessors of the CTA also used mercury arc rectifiers, although older substations continued to rely on rotary converters. By 1964, the CTA rotary converters were the only users of Commonwealth Edison's 25-cycle electricity.

Over the next several years, the remaining rotary converter substations were modernized or replaced. In 1972, the CTA opened its new Cottage Grove substation at 862 E. 63rd St. When the CTA terminated the Jackson Park Branch line at Cottage Grove in 1982, the substation was no longer needed and was demolished.

Now to the telephone.

It is important to note that all of our telephone lines (land lines, that is) are connected to a central office. In this area, there are two. The Hyde Park Central Office was built in 1918 at 6045 S. Kenwood Ave. It was later replaced by a new office at 6050 S. Dorchester Ave. (the old office became the Toyota Technological Institute, which is affiliated with the University of Chicago). In 1939, the Oakland Central Office was built at 825 E. 44th St. East Hyde Park Boulevard is the dividing line between the areas served by the two central offices.

In the early years, the central offices, or exchanges, had their own names. Some names were familiar local areas or streets. Others came from a list created by the old Bell system. But around 1977, the Illinois Bell Telephone Company officially stopped recognizing exchange names. All the exchanges became numerical. So, for example, Butterfield transformed into the

prosaic 288. Fairfax became 324, Dorchester 363, Hyde Park 493, Midway 643, Normal 667, Museum 684, and Plaza 752.

The Oakland neighborhood lost its exchange names at the same time. Boulevard became 268, Atlantic 285, Drexel 373, Kenwood 536 and 538, Livingston 548, Oakland 624, and Wagner 924.

Today the telephone lines serving our homes are used more for internet access than for voice communication. And the coal fired power plants within the city have all been decommissioned, with nuclear power plants now providing much of the electricity in the Commonwealth Edison service area. But the telephone central offices and the electrical substations continue to keep Hyde Park connected.

## Jackson Park Update

A lot has happened in the last months. In May, a group called Protect Our Parks filed suit in federal court. It charged that the plan by the city and park district to give 19 acres of parkland to the Obama Foundation violated the public trust doctrine. A trial date has not yet been scheduled.

Meanwhile, the park district has drawn criticism for prematurely cutting trees on the site of the proposed new athletic field. Decisions about closing parts of the park's thoroughfares are still up in the air as are specific plans for the promised new track and field facility. The city council passed the OPC ordinance October 31, but federal approvals are still pending.

HPHS is also involved. President Michal Safar and preservation committee chair Jack Spicer wrote a letter responding to the federal Section 106 Historical Review of Jackson Park (referring to a section of the National Historic Preservation Act). The letter encourages planners to restore Cornell Drive to the two-lane drive envisioned by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and to preserve the Women's Perennial Garden at Stony Island and 59th Street.

## Change at *Herald*

The news a few months ago that *Hyde Park Herald* publisher Bruce Sagan was stepping down was not unexpected, but it still marks a big change in a neighborhood institution. His replacement is Randall Weissman, a longtime *Chicago Tribune* editor.

Sagan has been associated with the *Herald* since 1953 and served as publisher for many years. The



weekly itself dates back to the early 1880s. In 1884 the Hyde Park trustees named it the village's official paper. It still fills that role. In 2011, the Hyde Park Historical Society honored the *Herald* with a Cornell award for putting all 125 years of the paper's archives online in searchable form (see <http://hpherald.com/archive>).

Some Hyde Parkers also have fond memories of the 1960s when Sagan and his wife turned the Harper Theater into a mecca for modern dance and theater. The theater had opened as a vaudeville house in 1913. Sagan recalled in a phone interview that the building was about to be torn down when bought it in 1964 to house the first Harper Theater Dance Festival.

For almost a decade Chicagoans got to see the Joffrey Ballet, Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theater, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and other dance masters. Theater troupes introduced Chicagoans to such modern playwrights as Luigi Pirandello.

As an added feature, the Sagans bought some of the fixtures from Finnegan's ice cream parlor on 55th Street (an urban renewal casualty) and installed them in the Harper lobby (they are now at the Museum of Science and Industry).

## Book Club Scores

*Carol Vieth*

Next month, the Hyde Park Book Club, sponsored by the historical society and the Chicago Hyde Park Village, will celebrate its third anniversary. The group meets monthly to discuss books, both fiction and nonfiction, that are either about Hyde Park or were written by local residents.

The initial organizational meeting was held on November 16, 2015. At that meeting, the group decided that, rather than picking just one book to discuss each month, it would propose a theme, and readers could choose among several books. The theme of the first regular meeting in January 2016 was the Leopold and Loeb murder. The bibliography included seven books. The club revisited this topic in September. The guest for the evening was Nina Barrett, the author of the recently published book, *The Leopold and Loeb Files: An Intimate Look at One of America's Most Infamous Crimes*.

Most of the topics are suggested by club members. They have chosen a wide range of topics, including the Hyde Park-based Jane Collective, which provided abortions in the 1960s; the history of the South Park system; the women who worked on the Manhattan Project; the 1919 Chicago race riots; and the 1991



Author Ben Austen led a lively discussion on the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation, and its effects on Cabrini-Green residents.

PHOTO / CAROL VIETH

murder of University of Chicago professor Ioan Culianu in a campus building.

When possible, the club's cofounders, Michal Safar, president of the historical society and Allison Hartman of the Chicago Hyde Park Village, have invited authors to the meetings. Last May, for example, Hyde Park resident Ben Austen spoke on his new book, *High Risers: Cabrini Green and the Fate of American Public Housing*. In this case, discussion branched out to include another significant book on public housing, Devereux Bowly's *The Poor House: Subsidized Housing in Chicago*. Bowly was a founder of HPHS.

Other guests have included Rebecca Janowitz, author of *Culture of Opportunity: Obama's Chicago*; Ronne Hartfield, *Another Way Home*; Claire Hartfield, *A Few Red Drops*; Lisa Page, *We Wear the Mask*; and Larry Baran, who wrote *The Housewife Loved a Bandit*. All are current or past residents of Hyde Park.

Book Club meetings are open to anyone interested. Since Treasure Island's abrupt closing, they have a new home: the Hyde Park Historical Society at 5529 S. Lake Park. The day and time are the same: 7:30 on the third Monday of each month. For more information, including reading lists, contact Michal Safar at [president@hydeparkhistory.org](mailto:president@hydeparkhistory.org) or Allison Harman: [Alison.c.hartman@usa.net](mailto:Alison.c.hartman@usa.net)

The October meeting focused on three remarkable women (and prolific authors) at the University of Chicago: Hanna Holborn Gray, Muriel Beadle, and Maude Hutchins.

Coming up on November 19: The first Book Club meeting to be held at its new location. The historical novel chosen for discussion, *The Lake on Fire* by Rosellen Brown, is a timely one for this year, the 125th anniversary of the Columbian Exposition.

# Jay Mulberry: A New World

## *Ruth Knack*

A while ago, I sat down with Jay Mulberry to find out why he decided to stop creating the calendar for Good Neighbors and switched to photos.

Q. What made you switch?

A. I had been doing the calendar with the Chicago Hyde Park Village for a long time. It got to be more and more complicated. One day I decided to put up a picture. I got messages from people who loved the idea. So I continued. Now the calendar is maintained by the Chicago Hyde Park Village.

Q. How do you find the photos?

A. It's easy. You start by going to Google and looking for something like Chicago, 47th St. in 1920. You can refine the search by going to Good News, Images. View, and so on.

I use Facebook quite a bit, but I like Hyde Park



1962—George Wells Beadle, President of the University of Chicago, with Bernie Sanders on his right. The picture was part of a story in Time Magazine.

Classics best. Postcard sites are another good source. Once you start looking, you find a million different places to go to.

Q. How often do you post pictures?

A. Every day.

Q. Are local photographers good sources?

A. Absolutely. Recently, I have posted fantastic

photos from people like David Travis, Mark Monaghan, and Linda Swift. David puts most of his stuff on Facebook so it's easy for me to get to.

Q. What's the best thing about doing this?

A. It has alerted me to the fact that some things are easily forgotten. For example, what the Hyde Park Co-op looked like 20 years ago. Or who Len Despres was.

The pictures make things clear. They show you trends, like the fact that there used to be so many hotels and so many private schools in Hyde Park and Kenwood. Seeing them raises all sorts of questions.

## What People Want to Know

### *Michal Safar, HPHS archivist*

*The Hyde Park Historical Society receives a wide range of inquiries from all over the country on subjects related to Hyde Park. Below are some of the more interesting questions recently received and answered.*

**Madison Park** We get lots of inquiries about the history of Madison Park. Development started in 1868 when John Dunham bought the property bounded by 50th St., Dorchester Ave., Hyde Park Blvd., and Woodlawn Ave. Check out the historical society website at [www.hydeparkhistory.org](http://www.hydeparkhistory.org).

**World's Columbian Exposition** A big question is where the Ferris Wheel was located. The answer is on the Midway between Ellis and University (where the skating rink is today). In September 2000 crews digging at the site of the new rink and warming house discovered the foundations of the Ferris Wheel. The find was reported in the September 13, 2000, issue of the *Hyde Park Herald*.

We also get lots of questions about fair souvenirs and memorabilia. The best source for specific information is eBay (under World's Columbian Exposition 1893). On any given day over 1,000 items will be for sale.

**Wall of Faces** The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund contacted HPHS for a photo of Lewis Anderson, a Hyde Park High School graduate who was killed in Vietnam in 1967. The photo was to be posted on the project's Wall of Faces. We located photos of Anderson in the 1962, 63, and 64 Aitchpe



and sent them on. See his senior picture at <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/1054/LEWIS-C-ANDERSON>.

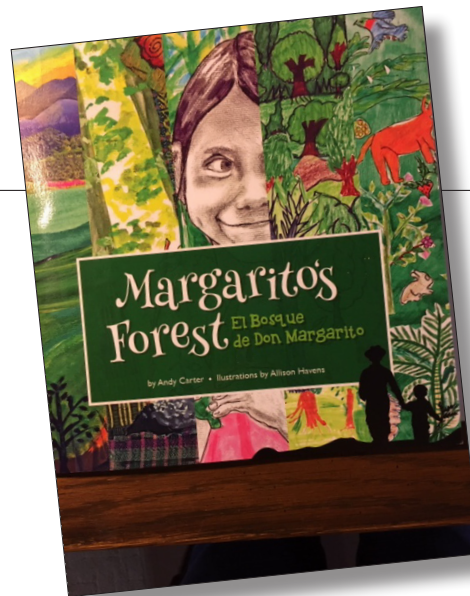
**Nancy Hays** Nancy was a well-known local photographer. Legend has it that she photographed every tree in Hyde Park at one time or another. In 2007, she left her entire collection of thousands of negatives to HPHS. They are stored at the Special Collections Research Center in Regenstein



PHOTOS / NANCY HAYS



Library. As luck would have it, the new owners of Nancy's Kenwood condo are themselves professional photographers. They are now working on a retrospective exhibit of her work.



## Margarito's Forest

*Fran Vandervoort*

Once again, Hyde Parker Andy Carter, artist, educator, and musician, has given us a timely portrayal of someone who overcame extraordinary obstacles. Andy's first book, *George Washington Carver*, written with Carol Saller and published in 2001, was reviewed in the Spring 2017 *Hyde Park History*. It tells of Carver's modest upbringing and his role both as an outstanding scientist and award-winning painter.

In his new book, which is bilingual, Carter portrays Don Margarito Esteban Alvarez Velasquez, a Guatemalan farmer born in 1931, who spent years tending the forest he planned as mayor of a village in the Guatemalan highlands.

His story is told by his daughter, Dona Maria Guadalupe, to her grandson, Esteban, a young boy tasked with planting a tree in his great grandfather's forest. Dona Guadalupe describes the challenges she faced after her village was destroyed by the military in a long civil war that included genocide of the Maya.

Carter's book is based on first-hand experience.

He has made many trips to Guatemala with delegations from the University Church in Hyde Park to assist in community development.

The church is also instrumental in the sanctuary movement established to welcome Central American refugees to the U.S.

Carter ends with Dona Guadalupe showing her grandson the Mayan way of planting, "just as Papa showed me so many years ago." For more details about the book's origin, see <https://www.margaritosforest.com>.

Larino Book Awards named *Margarito's Forest* an "inspirational children's book." It was also named the Best Book of 2017 by the Bank Street College of Education. Carter is a professor emeritus of mathematics at Roosevelt University. Royalties for the book go to the Maya Book Project.

## Notes

**Mark your calendar** “Pictures from an Exposition: Visualizing the 1893 World’s Fair,” at the Newberry Library, offers a wide array of fair memorabilia—from fine art to popular souvenirs—all from the library’s own collection. The aim is to show how the exposition fit into late 19th century U.S. culture. It’s open (and free) until December 31, with curator tours and speakers scheduled periodically. Note particularly: the talk on Jackson Park’s late 19th-century transformation by Julia Bachrach, November 15; Christmas at the Fair, December 4; and digital visual simulation, by Lisa Snyder, December 8. For more, go to [www.newberry.org](http://www.newberry.org).

The Driehaus Museum exhibit on Treasures from the White City runs to January 6: [info@driehausmuseum.org](mailto:info@driehausmuseum.org).

**Hot off the press** HPHS member Andrew Taylor Call has published a new book on his family’s role in Illinois politics and civic life. In *Chicago: A Civic, Industrial and Familial History*, Call traces the story back to his great great great grandfather Jacob Bunn, a Springfield financier who was a close friend of Abraham Lincoln. The book also covers the family’s life in Cook County. It is available on Amazon. Watch for notice of a book signing at the historical society’s headquarters November 18.

**Herald columnist** Long-time Hyde Parkers will recall Sam Lesner, who, after years on the staff of the *Chicago Daily News*, wrote a regular column for the *Hyde Park Herald* in the 1980s. Now his daughters have gathered his wartime correspondence in a new book: *Somewhere in Europe: The World War II Letters of Sam Lesner*. It’s available at 57th Street Books and the Seminary Coop.

**Chicago Metro History Fair** Once again, Chicago-area high school students showed off their talents at the annual Metro History Fair. Three projects were celebrated at the historical society on June 10: Harold Washington and the Council Wars (a website created by Lincoln Park High School students) and Laughter Is the Best Weapon: Dick Gregory’s Hilarious Fight for Civil Rights (a paper by University of Chicago Laboratory High School students). The Leon Despres Award for Legal/Political History went to Lincoln Park High student Juhul Jin for a paper on the Shakman decrees.

## Preservation

**Good news** The Clarence Darrow Memorial Bridge, named for the renowned defense attorney, has finally been scheduled for restoration (and designated a landmark). The Chicago Department of Transportation has budgeted for the project, with work to begin next year. The bridge is the starting point for the Darrow Day symposium—held every year on Darrow’s birthday, March 13, at the Museum of Science and Industry.

**Church to townhouses** The owners of the Shiloh Baptist Church (built as a Christian Science church) at 48th and Dorchester have received city approval to demolish all of the structure except for the east façade. The historic church, part of the Kenwood landmark district, will have a new life as a residential building. Any news about the similar church building on Blackstone near 57th?

**Gone, but not forgotten** Several historic houses have come down in the past couple of years. The 123-year-old house at 5738 Blackstone is the most recent. Before that came 5837 Blackstone, torn down in December 2017 and in November 2016, 5449 Woodlawn.

## Programs

**Last Harbor Master** On July 29, Robert J. Nelson, drew a substantial audience for his talk on the history of the lakefront harbors. Nelson, the former director of harbors and marine services for the Chicago Park District, is the author of *Dirty Waters: Confessions of Chicago’s Last Harbor Boss*. In 1990, the historical society awarded a Cornell Award to the Chicago Park District for the restoration of the Coast Guard Station, a project overseen by Nelson.

**Commemorating Frederick Douglass** Also in midsummer, HPHS and Friends of the Parks joined forces to organize a panel at the society’s headquarters, one of a series of programs focusing on the fair’s 125th anniversary. The topic, “No Blacks in the White City,” referred to the treatment of African Americans and other minorities at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition.

The panelists were Christopher R. Reed, professor emeritus at Roosevelt University, Rebecca Graff, archeology professor at Lake Forest College, Courtney



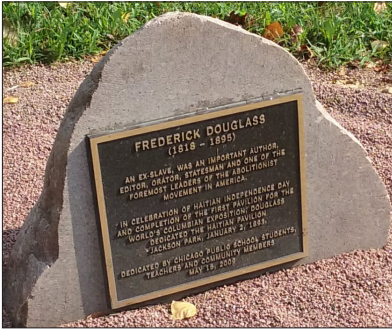


PHOTO / MICHAL SAFAR

Pierre-Cain, also from Lake Forest College, and Dwight Powell of the Jackson Park Advisory Council. The occasion of the panel was the relocation of the Frederick Douglass monument in

Jackson Park. Douglas, who was the American ambassador to Haiti in the late 1860s, made a speech at the fair's Haitian Pavilion. A monument to him was erected in 2009. It was moved this spring to a path north of the 59th Street marina inlet.

—Gary Osseward

**Oral History: Hyde Park-Kenwood Stories Then and Now** Tom Pavelec was one of the speakers at the Hyde Park-Kenwood Stories program held at Montgomery Place August 19.



PHOTO / KATHY HUFF

The program, commemorating the 150th anniversary of St. Thomas the Apostle Church and School, was organized by Lala Rodgers and Kathy Huff, co-chairs of the HPHS Oral History Project. Pavelec told touching and humorous stories about some of the key individuals

involved in the parish over the years. Sarah Bond talked about the church's unique architecture, and other speakers recounted memories of their school years at St. Thomas.

## In Memoriam

**Willie Pickens** Pickens, who died on December 12, 2017, was a world-renowned jazz pianist and much-loved neighbor. His life was celebrated at a memorial concert at Orchestra Hall.

In October, A diverse group of friends and neighbors gathered at the west entrance of Ray Elementary School for the unveiling of a mural of Willie Pickens at the piano. The location is across Kimbark Avenue

from the Pickens home. All three of his children attended the school.

The muralist, also a Ray School graduate, is Sam Mulberry, who was present at the unveiling. Mulberry (known as Desi Mundo), who lives in Oakland, California, is the director of the national Community Rejuvenation Project. The project is supported by a broad-based fundraising effort.

The event was also the occasion for the presentation by the historical society of a brass plaque honoring Pickens and his wife Irma, to be placed on the Pickens home. In addition, thanks to Fifth Ward Alderman Leslie Hairston, a new street sign was unveiled: Irma and Willie Pickens Way.

**Nicholas Rudall** Nicholas Rudall, who died June 19, was the founding artistic director of the Court Theater and professor emeritus of classics at the University of Chicago. He was born in Wales and received his doctorate in classics from Cornell University.

It was Rudall who turned the university's theater program into a professional theater company and who oversaw the design and construction of the theater itself. He also directed and acted in a number of plays.

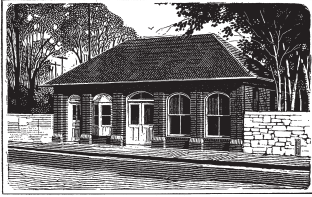
Rudall received a Paul Cornell Award from HPHS in 2017 and charmed the audience with his tales of growing up in a Welsh mining town. A memorial service was held at the Court Theater in September.

**Elizabeth Brackett** Channel 11 reporter Elizabeth Brackett, a Hyde Parker, was the guest speaker at the annual HPHS dinner in February 2008. She amused the audience with her insider tales about the press corps on both the state and national levels. Brackett was also a world champion triathlete. She died in June of this year, following a fall on the lakefront bike path. Her friends have raised funds to honor her with a bench at Promontory Point.

**Richardson and Janice Spofford** Dick Spofford was a respected accountant who served as treasurer of the historical society. His wife Janice was a professor of biology at the University of Chicago. Janice Spofford died in April, Dick in July. They both loved travel, camping, and the outdoors. In 2014, they received the HPHS President's Award for the restoration of their Kenwood house, which was designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw, and their many years of service to the community.

*This is our first electronic newsletter. Let us know how you like it. Contact the editor at [ruthknack@gmail.com](mailto:ruthknack@gmail.com)*

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



**AUTUMN 2018**

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    \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$30    \_\_\_\_\_ Family \$40

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

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. Visiting hours are announced on our web site.

Website: [hydeparkhistory.org](http://hydeparkhistory.org)

Telephone: **773-493-1893**

President: **Michal Safar**

Vice-President: **Janice A. Knox**

Secretary: **Gary Ossewaarde**

Treasurer: **Brigid Maniates**

Editor: **Ruth Knack**

Membership Coordinator:

**Claude Weil**

Designer: **Nickie Sage**