

# Norwood Park Historical Society Journal



NORWOOD PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Chartered Sept. 6, 1973

Headquarters at Carl B. Hoden Branch  
Chicago Public Library, 6083 North-  
west Hwy, Chicago, Ill. 60631

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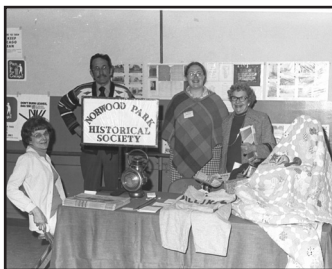
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Three Year

Nell Arnold
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Membership Dues

Individual - \$2.00 per annum
Sustaining - \$25. per annum (Individual, churches, business)
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These are photos of the Norwood Park Historical Society's 1973 Charter and photos from the Home Improvement Exposition from the Norwood Park Historical Society Archives.

*Summer 2020*

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## Volunteers Wanted

Volunteers and students who need service hours are needed for a variety of tasks, from basic office work to gardening to working on special events.

Docents are also needed to greet guests and give museum tours on Saturdays (noon to 4 p.m.). If you



have a few hours to donate, please contact us and we will help you find the best place for your talents: 773-631-4633 or [info@norwoodparkhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@norwoodparkhistoricalsociety.org).

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# *Journal Update*

*by Tom Spenny*

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We would like to thank Amara Rozgus for editing the NPHS Journal for the past 14 years, from the winter issue of 2006 to this summer issue of 2020. She now is our recently elected president and has a lot to deal with in this new position. Back in 1980, I was the founding editor of what was called *The Bulletin of the Norwood Park Historical Society*, and I kept that position for 25 years. Now, 40 years from beginning as founding editor, I am joined by my wife, Diane, and my youngest daughter, Janette, editing the Journal once again. In our fall edition we intend to print an index of all the Journals edited by Amara. Currently, Diane is working on scanning and electronically saving all previous Journals dating back to 1980, with the goal of making all of the rich histories of Norwood Park available to anyone who has interest in such or needs historical data for school projects or the like. We would like to invite

the Senior Citizens of Norwood Park to submit stories or short vignettes about their growing up in our community and what things were like at those times. Articles may be sent electronically to [dispen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dispen@sbcglobal.net) or in written form to the NPHS, 5624 N. Newark Ave., Chicago, IL 60631, Attention Tom. Your articles need not be professionally written as long as they are legible. We intend to hold to a quarterly schedule of January, April, July and October. We look forward to continuing the good work of Amara and will appreciate your suggestions and feedback on our future Journals. Wish us luck!

*This Journal is our Summer Issue Volume 40, Number 2. We intend to get back on track next year with the January Winter Issue being number 1 for Volume 41.*

## *On the Cover*

*by Bob Kelly*

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The photos on the cover were taken in the 1970s at the Norwood Park Home Improvement Exposition. The Norwood Park Home Improvement Exposition was a home show that was sponsored by the Norwood Park Citizens Association and was hosted by Jim Kelly, a local Norwood Park resident. Mr. Kelly thought that the neighborhood was showing signs of deterioration, so he solicited local businesses and organizations to come together at the Norwood Park fieldhouse to promote their services. The Home Improvement Exposition first took place on an April weekend in 1970. The show was repeated each year until 1977. One of the booths at the show was the newly formed Norwood Park Historical Society. The Historical Society was chartered on September 6, 1973 with its first

president, Carroll K. Simons, who was a longtime Norwood Park resident. The photo on the top right has the Historical Society's very first list of their officers and directors and other general information. The Historical Society had a booth at the Home Improvement Exposition which contained historical photos and stories of Norwood Park history. The left top booth photo is being hosted by Elizabeth Kelly-Lawton (Jim Kelly's daughter) and Marge Pfeiffer. The booth photo on the lower left is hosted by, left to right, Marge Pfeiffer, her husband Ralph Pfeiffer (who was also a Society President), Anne Lunde (Norwood Park's most knowledgeable historian) and Florence Hans. The booth photo on the lower right is hosted by Ramona Dobrick Pulley on the left and Marge Kelly (Jim Kelly's wife) on the right.



# Bicycle Races in Norwood Park

by Ron Stolle

*Ed. Note: Ron Stolle is a son of Helmut Stolle who had a well-known bakery in Norwood Park in the 1940s and 1950s and was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in the late 1960s. Ron wrote a story called "Remembering Norwood Park: 1948-1970", and his story appeared in two 2014 Journals. Here is a reprinting of a portion of his story pertaining to the bike races.*



*Ron Stolle (center), age 5, wins 1st place in the 1954 Tricycle Race at the Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby*

In addition to his business involvements, my father (Helmut Stolle) was a frustrated hopeful Olympic cyclist (1932) and six-day bicyclist enthusiast. He helped form a group of amateur and professional cyclists into the Norwood Park Wheelman. In 1949, he organized and staged the first Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby, which became a major annual event for Norwood Park. The Derby was typically held in June on a Sunday afternoon. It was staged on the 1-mile circular street, Circle Avenue. Races were held for both area kids riding their "stock" bikes, and for serious amateur and professional cyclists, including a 10-mile finale. A parade, led by the Norwood Park Drum and Bugle Corp, would kick off each year's Derby festivities. The Derby was attended by thousands of spectators and hundreds of participants. Prominent politicians were also sure to appear, including such notables as U.S. Senator Everett Dirksen, Congressmen Tim Sheehan and Roman Pucinski, and Aldermen Joe Immel and Bill Cowhey.

The bike races would start and finish on Circle Avenue, in front of the Norwegian Old People's

Home, near the Nina Avenue intersection. A speaker's platform, food concession stands and bikers' tents were located across the street on the grounds of the Norwood Park grammar school. Each year's Derby also included a contest to select a Derby Queen and her court. For a few years, in the mid 1950s, a Derby King was also selected. Also in the 50s, a talent show was held in the auditorium at Taft High School to help select the contest winner. In addition to winning various prizes, the Derby Queen would ride in the parade and present trophies to the winners of the Derby bike races.

In 1954, after a couple of years of not even finishing, I won the tricycle race. It was the last year of my tricycle eligibility, which meant I hadn't yet reached the age of 6. For my efforts, I was pictured in the local Edison Norwood Review Newspaper and was awarded a trophy. To this day, that trophy occupies a place of honor in my study.

In the weeks leading up to Derby Day, the windows of the bakery would be filled with all of the trophies to be awarded. That display would draw many neighborhood kids who'd gaze upon the trophies dreaming of victory on Derby Day.

*Ed. Note: The Derby ended after the 1970 event but was brought back for one more year in 1974 in order to celebrate the Centennial of Norwood Park.*



*Ron Stolle (right), age 17, gives the starting signal to competitors in the 1966 Tricycle Race at the Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby*

# *“The Big Push”*

## *Memories of the Norwood Park Bike Races*

*by Jane Spenny Heide*

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*At the starting line of the 1954 Girls race at the Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby in Norwood Park, Jane Spenny and father, Ralph, (far right) prepare for the big push-off.*

I lived in Norwood Park on West Circle Avenue for fifteen years, from 1948 until I left to attend college in 1963. I was three years old when my parents, Ralph and Dorothy Spenny, and older brother, Tom, moved here from an apartment on North Mason Avenue in Chicago. One of my strongest childhood memories of living in Norwood Park is that of the annual bike race around Circle Avenue, a unique street shaped like an oval by the original designer. That circular route constituted a one-mile, side-walked, tree-lined urban neighborhood street in the very northwest corner of Chicago, right next to Park Ridge, the nearest suburban community outside the city limits. In many ways, Norwood Park was like a small town. I walked to Norwood Park Elementary School, just two blocks away, and attended the Norwood Park Presbyterian Church, which was across the intersection in front of the school. Northwest Highway was a bit further, but had everything our family needed, ranging from Jewel Grocery Store to the Public Library (one of my all-time favorite places), to the train station. I also walked to Taft High School with kids from the neighborhood. Like a small town, there was an annual celebration specifically for our location,

which was an annual bike race called the Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby.

Once a year, all the families along Circle Avenue pulled out lawn chairs and sat in wait for professional bikers to go racing by their homes. The professional races went on for several miles, so observers quickly became familiar with their favorite riders as they zoomed by, lap after lap. While consuming a picnic lunch on the front lawn, we waited patiently for a gaggle of bikers coming around the bend. Sometimes, there were stragglers, and, of course, we gave them great encouragement, while also cheering-on the riders who were way ahead of the pack. As I recall, these riders were young men from all over the country and they all wore bright colored biking outfits. I think that the Norwood Park event was a well-known race for people knowledgeable about the sport of bike racing in the 1950s and early 1960s. For us, it was just a really neat (one of our favorite superlative words) thing to do.

As a side attraction to the “real” races, there were racing activities for the neighborhood kids.

*Continued on next page.*



These would generally be only one mile, or one lap around the circle. They began at the starting line, right next to the Norwegian Old People's Home and ended up on a straightaway on Northcott Avenue, a street tangential to Circle Avenue. I have a vivid memory of participating in one of those races when I was nine years old. I had recently received a brand



*Ralph Spenny exits the course after giving daughter, Jane, a big push-off to take the lead.*

new blue fat-tired "girls" bike for my ninth birthday that June, much to my total delight. It had curved handle bars with an attached bell to warn others of my speedy path. I loved that bell! So, my new bike and I, along with my dad, showed up at the starting line for my age-level race, which was perhaps for 8-10 year-olds. There were about ten bikes lined up across the span of the street, all in a perfect row, behind the starting line. Each of us had an adult who was allowed to give us a push-off. Little did I know how invested my father was in that race. Not only did he give me a push-off, but he ran alongside, pushing my bike for about a block. This gave me a tremendous advantage over my competitors. That running push put me in the lead, where I remained as I pedaled my heart out around the entire circle. In the end, I was the first to cross the finish line and was rewarded with a new set of handle bar grips. I was thrilled!

Many years later, I thought of this experience as an example of what a privileged life I led as a child. My dad's "push" became a metaphor for being born into a safe, comfortable, supportive middle class environment in which I had the support of a devoted piano teacher, Sunday school and youth group teachers, Camp Fire Girl leaders, school teachers, and, of course, parents. Plus, I had two wonderful brothers and a younger sister along with school and neighborhood friends. After thinking about and

new blue fat-tired "girls" bike for my ninth birthday that June, much to my total delight.

discussing this "push" metaphor in my later years, I became aware of the pressure to succeed that was behind that "push". So I guess one could say there were at least two sides to my story!

And no, I did not go on to become a professional bike racer!

*Ed. Note: Ironically, after Jane wrote this story, a silent semi-professional film of the 1954 Golden Wheel Derby surfaced. Ron Stolle sent a copy of it to Bob Kelly and this happened to be the exact year of "The Big Push". As I watched the film and about 10 minutes into it, I realized I was watching the line-up of the very race that Jane described. Then came that big push, but on camera it was really no more of a push than the other dads did for their daughters, it certainly did not last a whole block. Our dad, Ralph, was quite tall and with his long arms quite possibly was able to impart good momentum to Jane's bike. But shortly after her start, the film showed Jane in her final sprint to the finish line, well ahead of the nearest competitor, and it became obvious why she won the race. She was observed to be very focused, determined and poised in a great bike racing form. She was so motivated and determined to win at the start, she probably did not even realize that it was all her doing, no one was doing the pushing!*

*~Tom Spenny*



*The photos in this article are stills from the aforementioned film, and the film is currently on display in "The History of Sports and Recreation in Norwood Park" exhibit at the Noble-Seymour-Crippen House.*

*Jane leans-in for the final sprint down Northcott Avenue, past the Norwegian Old People's Home, to win the 1954 Girls race*



# Memory of a Golden Wheel Queen (almost)

by Diane Spenny

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When I was growing up in Norwood Park in the 1950s/1960s, my sister, brothers and I always went to the bike races. At first our parents took us, but after a while we just went on our own. I remember my younger brother David, being in the tricycle race with a big huge smile on his face. He loved his bike more than anyone I ever knew and always rode his heart out at the races. (As he got older, he used to do Evil Knievel stunts in the alley, jumping over garbage cans. I don't know if he ever got hurt, but it scared me to see him and I would tell him not to do it.) Later on, he spent quite a few years getting up very early in the morning to deliver his paper route on his bike, come rain or snow. I liked my bike too, and also delivered a local paper on my bike. At one point, I even organized a bike riders club in the neighborhood.

We always rode in the Golden Wheel kids races but never won. I raced my little blue bike in probably every bike race until I went to high school. We enjoyed sitting on the grass watching the speeding racers go by and eventually picking a favorite to root for. They were so fast, and worked so hard with their strong legs. It was really impressive, although I

never endeavored to become a bike racer, I couldn't imagine ever riding so fast.

Once I started high school I got busy with new endeavors and new friends as well as many side jobs. One of my little jobs was working at the IGA grocery store on Northwest Highway. One summer night in 1968, when I was 15 going on 16, I came home from the IGA and my mother announced that I should hurry-up and change and get over to Norwood Park, across the street from our house. I

was totally confused as to why and it turned out that she had signed me up to be in The Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby Queen Contest. I loved the bike races, but did I ever know that they had a beauty queen contest? No, I did not. But

I was a good girl and did what my mother told me to do. So, I got dressed, went over to the park, found the interview room and presented myself.

I was late, because of just getting off of work, but they allowed me to interview and I gave the best answers that I could. The neighborhood boys all stood outside of the open park windows gaping at us and making rude sounds, of course.

*Continued on next page.*



*Diane (Litchfield) Spenny accepts the 2nd runner-up trophy in the 1968 Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby Queen Contest*



One of the best parts of the interview was meeting Grace Lunde, Anne Lunde's mother, who was a well known writer for the Review Newspaper. She was such a lovely, kind woman, and she put all my nervousness at ease. I always remember her for being so kind to me.

It turned out, that all of the other contestants were a couple of years older than me, but I guess I still qualified. After the interviews they told me that they normally didn't have such a young winner, and I assumed that therefore, I wasn't going to win. Not a problem for me, since I was only doing it for my mother. So, I went home and put it out of my mind.

A few days later when I came home from school, my mother told me that I had won 3rd place (they called it second runner up) and would be required to be on the Queen's platform at the bicycle race. I was not happy. What's more, I was supposed to wear a long formal dress and since money was always tight, I was doomed to wear my older sister's previous year prom dress that was at least 2 sizes too big for me. I guess my mother took it in to fit, but the whole thing was rather embarrassing for me.

On the day of the races, I had to sit up on the back of a flatbed truck dressed up in my hand-me-down gown while the neighborhood boys all guffawed at us. Luckily for me, there was one boy who was there that always supported me, my good friend Doug Ulysses. And then there was that high wheel bicycle rider that sat up on his 54" wheel bike slowly riding around the car with the Queen's Court and tipping his hat in a flirtatious way at the girls. Little did I know that that bicycle rider someday would be the man I would marry. The trophy came with me, (along with my then current bike), and it became one of his favorite possessions. He displays it on his chest of drawers to this day, and now you can see it in the current NPHS museum display. Ah, sweet mystery of life...or fate.



*Above photo from the Chicago Tribune, June 18, 1953 of the Fifth Annual Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby featuring that year's King and Queen, with Helmut Stole, the producer, director, and primary responsible person of The Derby.*



*Photo from the Chicago Sunday Tribune, June 21, 1953 of the Fifth Annual Golden Wheel Bicycle Derby*



# *2020 Elections of NPHS Officers and Directors*

*by Bob Kelly, Susan Bragg & Tom Spenny, Nominations Committee*

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This was a very unusual and unique year for the normally simple process of electing new officers and directors for the NPHS. It began early in the year with the formation of a Nominating Committee (Nomcom) who was charged with the responsibility of developing an election slate for 5 officer positions and 3 director positions. According to our written Constitution and Bylaws (C&BL), said committee was to be appointed prior to the election which for 47 years has taken place at an annual meeting on the 4th Wednesday in May. Our tradition is to appoint the 3 outgoing directors whose terms are expiring in the election year and this year the committee was composed of Susan Bragg, Bob Kelly and Tom Spenny. The Nomcom then began the process of recruiting and interviewing candidates for the various positions but during this process the Covid-19 Pandemic hit our country and normal and usual procedures changed drastically. Since everyone was on "Stay at Home" orders, our April board meeting was held by a Zoom method which is an on-line procedure that allows several people to participate together by sharing their images on a computer screen. This meeting was set up by our tech guru, Art Krumrey. The slate developed by the Nomcom was announced at that meeting and then was sent out by the Newsletter to the NPHS general membership. The chances for our usual May annual meeting seemed slim but we did hold out hope that we could have the elections at an in-person June meeting. As June approached with no immediate opening day for museums in sight, the Nomcom decided to proceed with a remote system of voting. The first step was to send our membership the slate of officers and directors with the opportunity for people to make nominations from the floor such as usually done at an annual meeting. This was accomplished by email and regular mail and all nominations were collected by Bob Kelly with a deadline of June 5th. There were several nominations

sent, and the people who were nominated were contacted as to whether they wished to accept the nomination or decline it. Some nominated people were not eligible for reasons pertaining to being non-members or not fulfilling constitutional requirements. In the end, the positions of President and Recording Secretary were the only contested positions from the proposed slate.

The second step was to send out paper ballots by regular mail, one for an individual membership and two for households with a family membership. The deadline for the return of these ballots was June 26th and there were just over 90 ballots returned, that constituted many more voters than ever before at our in-person elections. The ballots also offered an opportunity for write-in candidates, but although there were some that came in, no write-in person had enough votes to win. The contest for President was very close and the winner of that election was Amara Rozgus over the slated candidate, Harris Miller. All the other slated candidates were duly elected as usual.

Then not part of the election process, some director vacancies needed to be filled and according to the C&BL the remaining directors needed to vote on appointing new persons to those positions. Keith Engelmann was appointed to replace Mike Carroll, Debbie Stein was appointed to replace Denise LeSeur-Waechter and Harris Miller was appointed to replace Art Krumrey who had just been elected to be vice-president.

The list of your 2020-2021 Officers and Directors is included in this Journal. Their terms will end on May 31, 2021 (Except directors in classes of 2022 and 2023). We hope to have our annual meeting and our usual election process in May next year but think we did the best we could under the circumstances this year and we did get the elections accomplished.

*NPHS Board of  
Directors  
July 2020-May 2021*

**Officers:**

President – Amara Rozgus  
Vice President – Art Krumrey  
Recording Secretary – Judy Sirvio  
Treasurer – Judy Rustemeyer  
Corresponding Secretary – Laura Banash

**Directors (3-Year Terms):**

Class of 2021 -  
Harris Miller, Keith Engelman & Deborah Stein  
Class of 2022 -  
Carmine Fantasia, John Kwasinski & Cindy Wrobel  
Class of 2023 -  
Susan Bragg, Bob Kelly & Ryan Ruehle

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**F**ortune Restoration is a full service painting, tuckpointing, and restoration company that serves residential homeowners from Hyde Park to Lincoln Park to Oak Park and River Forest, and the entire North Shore and Western Suburbs. Commercial, industrial and institutional projects are also taken on throughout the Chicagoland area.



*1938 photo Norwood Park's first pool (article on right)*



# History in the Making

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## Norwood Park's First Swimming Pool

*By Bob Friedlander*

All of you “oldies but goodies” may remember the first swimming pool at Norwood Park. Compared to today’s pool, the old one was like an ocean compared to a small lake.

The light poles in the center were connected with a chain between bases to keep all the little ones from going in the deep water. The water started at about 6 inches deep, and once you made it as far as the chain, the depth was about 2 feet. Yours truly never managed to make it past the chain, as I never learned how to swim, even though the pool was about a football field from my house. I think there was a diving board, but again, I never ventured on the other side of the chain!

The pool was built in 1925 and renovated in 1938 as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. Originally the locker rooms for males and females were located in the old woodcraft shop that replaced the locker rooms in the 1960s. One walked left or right, and got a wire basket with a number attached to a safety pin. Just put the pin on your suit and return it and you got your clothes back from an attendant. I think the worst part of venturing into the pool was the “ice cold shower” one had to take before going swimming!

And every Wednesday the pool was closed even if it [were] was 100 degrees outside! And you ask “why?” This pool did not have a filtering system at all so Tuesday night, a Chicago Park District engineer (probably a gentleman by the name of Sars Bradley) had to turn this big iron wheel to drain the water from the entire pool. And when he came back Wednesday morning, he had to close the drain and open up the water spigot to let water flow back in to the pool. So, if you decided to take a dunk Thursday, I guarantee the water was ice cold.

And after you were finished with a day in the pool, there was a brick concession stand on the southeast corner of the pool to get an ice cream or a pop.

The new pool was built in 1959. You can still walk around the outside of the new pool and look for old sewer covers to see how big the old pool was back in the day!

I think my best memories of the old pool were when Norwood Park had their weekly show at the pool featuring the “human fire ball!” They used to light up someone who went off the diving board on fire to the “thrills and claps” of the audience. The water shows also featured water clowns, lifeguards test of skills and, I believe, a Norwood Park “beauty contest” for the women.

I actually got a job at the park in 1971, and was told by supervisor Bill Schultz that part of my job was to teach swimming to the area children. I told him, “I can teach them how to ‘drown,’ as I don’t know how to swim!”

And to this day, I have never put an ankle in to the new pool! And, have never seen the “indoor pool at Taft High School after going there for four years. The old pool was really something to behold!

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## We want to hear your stories!

COVID-19 is making history in so many ways. We want to learn about how it's having an impact on your life. Read about neighbors' stories here: <http://norwoodparkhistoricalsociety.org/norwood-park-covid-19-stories/>

Share your stories at [info@norwoodparkhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@norwoodparkhistoricalsociety.org)

## Upcoming 2020 Events

*Please note that all dates are subject to change.*

○ Norwood Park's Birthday Party:

Saturday, July 25

○ Spring Tea: Saturday, August 1, and

Sunday, August 2.

○ Giant Yard Sale: Saturday, August 22.

8 a.m. – 3 p.m.

○ Indoor Rummage Sale: Friday, October 16, Saturday, October 17, Sunday, October 18

○ Victoria's Holiday Craft Boutique and Holly Daze Café: Thursday, November 12, to Sunday, November 15. Members' first-pick night is Wednesday, November 11.

○ Holiday House Tour: Saturday, December 12.