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**John V. May Funeral Home • The Lovely Homes on Leland
Henry Wulff - Political Pioneer**

Although it was not our intention, this edition of the Jefferson Park Historical Society Newsletter deals with many of the buildings in the area that are no longer standing. The story about John V. May Funeral Home was prompted by the demolition of the building last year. *The lovely Homes on Leland* is about a typical street in our neighborhood experiencing a rebuilding cycle. Even the story on Henry Wulff includes a picture on page 17 of his lost home on Milwaukee Avenue.

Most Historical Society members are “old building huggers,” nostalgically yearning for what is lost. However, we are also mindful that change is constant and the neighborhood has been in evolution since its inception. Urban changes have been taking place in Jefferson Park for over 100 years, and it is part of our history.

The Jefferson Park Historical Society is pleased to announce a tour of the Historic Pullman District and the Hotel Florence on Sunday, October 7th. A low cost, half-day adventure complete with bus rides from the Jefferson Park Fieldhouse to Pullman and back. Please sign up early. For more information, see page 19 of this newsletter.

Please support the businesses in Jefferson Park. By purchasing locally, you will save on gas and help our business community. We ask that you especially support the businesses whose ads grace the pages of this publication; we could not have a newsletter like this without their financial help. – *Frank Suerth*



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We welcome you to join with us in our celebration of God's Word.

Reverend Christopher Doering, *Pastor*

MASS SCHEDULE

Saturday Evening Mass

4:30 pm

Sunday Masses

8:00 am

9:30 am

11:15 am

Weekday Masses

6:30 am

7:30 am (Chapel)

Holy Day Masses

As Announced

Rosary

Daily in the Lower Church

after the 7:30 am Mass

Novena to

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Tuesday 7:00 pm

Eucharistic Adoration

Every 1st Friday

8:00 am until 7:00 pm

Holy Hour

Last Sunday of month

after the 11:15 am Mass

Mission Statement:

As the Jefferson Park Historical Society, our mission is to educate others about the history of Jefferson Park and the surrounding areas of Chicago. We will accomplish this through discussion at meetings, public tours and events, and dissemination of historical documents and photos through publications. Additionally, we desire to collaborate with others in the community to continue to maintain and preserve the history of our neighborhood. By linking the past with the present and the future, we will provide an awareness and create an appreciation for our place in Chicago's and Illinois' history.

The Jefferson Park Historical Society

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John V. May Funeral Home

A Past Tradition of Service in Jefferson Park

In December of 2005, an important piece of history was destroyed when the building at 4553 N. Milwaukee Avenue was demolished. This structure had been the place of business for the John V. May Funeral Home for over 80 years. Between 1914 and 2004, more people passed through the John V. May Funeral Home on the way to their final resting place than any other funeral home in the area.

John V. May, born in 1888, was a life-long resident of Chicago. The 1910 Census records indicate that he lived in Jefferson Park with his 56 year-old father, John Sr. and his mother, Kate. At this time, May Jr. was most likely working with his father at a delicatessen at 4357 N. Milwaukee Avenue, which the family operated until 1914.

In 1914, May Jr. became an undertaker and opened a business at 4783 N. Milwaukee Avenue. His father ran an auto livery at the same location. The undertaking business was much different back then; a chapel for viewing was not needed because the clients were waked in their homes.

By 1920, May Jr. had married. He and his wife Elizabeth May (nee Balke) lived at the same address as their undertaker business, 5324 W. Lawrence Avenue.



John & Elizabeth May.

Photo Courtesy of Tom Sparks

Elizabeth May was active in Our Lady of Victory sodality and was a member of the Jefferson Park Camp of the Royal Neighbors of America, a women’s organization that held their meetings at the Wilson Park Fieldhouse.

Business for the Mays must have been good because they had a servant, 39 year-old George Keiling, living with them. George most likely also helped out with the business. There were many undertakers competing with May for customers, and one was right around the corner. W. P. Henry was an undertaker who set up shop at 4877 N. Milwaukee Avenue. In 1923, 21 year-old M. J. Suerth set up shop at 4407 N. Elston Avenue.

In order to set himself apart from the other undertakers, May decided to purchase his own building—a building large enough to hold a viewing and to accommodate many mourners: a funeral home. May was one of the first to offer an alternative place for the wake outside private homes. In 1922, he and his wife moved into the building that was located at 4553 N. Milwaukee Avenue and it was used as their business as well as their home.



John V. May Funeral Home at 4553 N. Milwaukee Avenue on the right with Chester’s Drug Store on the left. The funeral home eventually occupied the whole building. Longtime May worker, Andrew Mickelson, is shown on the right. Above the door in the center of the photo were the words MAY – BLOCK in the stonework. CA 1930’s.

Photo Courtesy of Ken Vonderohe



John V. May sitting at his desk inside the funeral home.

Photo Courtesy of Jim May

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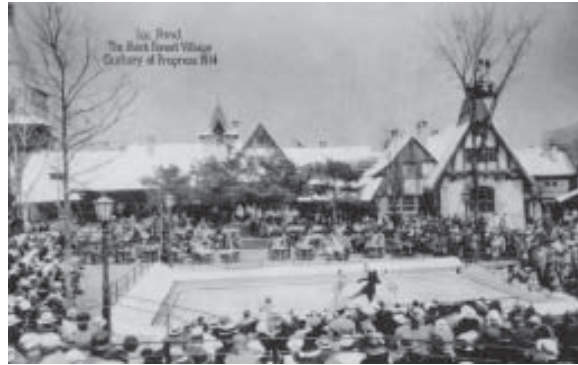
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According to Robert Schubbe and Andrew Mickelson, May Funeral Home employees for over 40 years, the funeral home's interior was decorated with wood beams originally shipped from the Black Forest in Germany and later taken from the German Pavilion at Chicago's Century of Progress in 1934. Jim May said these solid wood beams supported the roof and were added in the mid 1930's in a building addition. Another long-time employee, Ken Vonderohe, explained that these solid wood beams needed to be oiled to maintain them.

A 12" x 12" Tapestry depicting German scenes hung on the south wall of the funeral home. While the origins of this tapestry are unknown, Vonderohe said it had been stored in the basement when employees found it and put it on the wall. It is very possible that it was made in Germany, but it is not known if it also came from the 1934 World's Fair.



The photo is of the Ice Pond at the Black Forest Village at the Century of Progress 1934. These building were dismantled after the World Fair and the decorated wood beams from these buildings were believed to have been in the ceiling of the John V. May Funeral Home.

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Elizabeth died on May 7, 1953 and John died on July 8, 1965. Both are buried in St. Joseph Cemetery in River Grove.

May, who had no children, left behind an estate that was estimated at 1.5 million dollars. His will had 53 specific bequests, including \$100,000 to relatives and friends and \$50,000 to charities. The will also called for 1,850 shares in his business to go to five of his employees. The rest of his estate was divided amongst his brother Anthony and four sisters, Clara Werhane, Mamie Winter, Irene Olsen, and Margaret Werhane.

In the years after 1965, many people helped run the funeral home; Archie Price, John Toenings, Robert Schubbe, Jim May, Andrew Mickelson and Ken Vonderohe were some of the long term employees of the corporation. In 1998, the company was sold to Service Corporation International, the largest national funeral home company in America. Service Corporation International closed the John V. May Funeral Home in April 2005 and sold the building. The building was torn down in December 2005.

Not far from Jefferson Park, the name John V. May joins the name Kolbus at a Kolbus - John V. May Funeral Home & Cremation Service at 6857 W. Higgins Road. Undoubtedly the May name still has great value, as the neighborhood funeral home was a fixture on Milwaukee Avenue and faithfully served the area for 90 years.

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The Lovely Homes on Leland

The following photos from the early 1900's depict homes on Leland Avenue between Milwaukee Avenue on the east and Central Avenue on the west. Some of the homes are long gone and some are still standing; others have been altered beyond recognition.

Leland Avenue, as well as other residential streets on the northwest side of Chicago, has experienced a building boom. Recently single homes on large lots have been demolished to make way for multiple dwellings. This type of development has been happening since the 1950's when vacant land became scarce in the neighborhood.

Most of these photos were taken from old printed-paper real estate listings and were in very poor condition. Efforts have been made to enhance the quality of these photos.

Edward Fox

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Photo Courtesy of Ricardo & Maria Villarreal CA 1914

The house on the left is the Charles Zickermann house at 5253 W. Leland and the house on the right is at 5259 W. Leland. When the above photo was taken Leland was a dirt road. Both house are still standing.

For more information on Charles Zickermann, see "Charles Zickermann – the 99 year-old painter of Leland Street" in the Jefferson Park Historical Society Newsletter July 2005 Number II.

Photo on the left is how these houses now look.





These two photos are of the same home at 5334 W. Leland. According to the Cook County Assessor's Office the building is 105 years old.

Sometime in the early 1900's, Martin D. Stevers listed his home for sale but was not successful. He wanted \$5,500 (\$1,000 cash with balance easy payments) for his 10-room modern house, with city water, sewers, furnace, heat cement cellars, and electric lights. The photo shows two women and three men sitting in the side yard with a man walking his Saint Bernard dog along the wooden sidewalk. Martin D. Stevers was a life Insurance agent and was born in New York. His wife, Jennie Stevers, was born in Canada. She died in 1921 at age 62 and is buried in Lake Geneva, WI. It is not known if they are in the picture.

By 1929, Martin Stevers was still living in the house but with his second wife Pearl. Lawrence Flannigan occupied the other apartment with his wife Grace. Martin D. Stevers died on July 6, 1932.





Front View



12. Side View

This house is at 5432 W. Leland Avenue. According to the Cook County Assessor's Office the building is 98 years old. Both the house and the garage are still standing.

Notice the lack of houses looking north of the buildings.



This home was at 5529 W. Leland and it had wooden sidewalks at the time this photo was taken. In 1929 Mrs. L. C. Schaefer lived in the house. It was torn down in 1976 and replaced by the two houses shown at the left.

13.

Henry Wulff

Of all the early pioneers in the area, no one had more political control and influence over the development of the town of Jefferson than Henry Wulff. In the 1800's, Jefferson went as far south as North Ave., as far west as Harlem, as far north as Devon, and as far east as Western. Henry Wulff lived close to the heart of Jefferson, on Milwaukee Ave. where the Jefferson Park bus terminal now stands.

Henry Wulff was born in 1854 in Schleswig Holstein, Germany, and he came to the area with his parents, Claus F. Wulff and Katherine Schmook, in 1863. Claus was born in Germany in 1824 and Katherine was born in 1828. Claus F. Wulff died in 1892 and Katherine died in 1880. Both are buried in Union Ridge Cemetery.

Henry was educated in the public schools in Jefferson and graduated from Dyrenfurth's College of Chicago. Later, Henry Wulff and Henry Esdohr started a business selling agricultural equipment. Wulff went on to marry Miss Katherine Englehardt of Chicago in Jefferson on December 28, 1874. Katherine was born in 1854 in New York. They were German Lutheran and attended church locally.

Henry and Katherine had five children, two of whom died before the age of ten. Frederick Wulff, who was born in 1884, died when he was eleven years old. They had two children that survived into adulthood, Nellie and Lillie, who were both born sometime in the mid 1870's. Lillian M. Wulff graduated from Jefferson High School in 1895 and married Robert E. Maypole in 1902 in Elkhart, Indiana. Nellie K. Wolff married John Ray McGurren,



Henry Wulff 1854 - 1902 Photo taken when he was Illinois State Treasurer ca 1894

15. Photo courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library

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who was born around 1914. Today, there are no living descendants of Henry Wulff.

Henry Wulff was a Republican and started out his political career as Deputy Sheriff of Cook County in 1878. Still acting as Deputy Sheriff, he was elected to the Board of Trustees for the Town of Jefferson and later became president of the Board, where he served two terms. He was also the Village Trustee. Over the next 10 years, he was on the Jefferson Finance Committee, elected twice as Clerk of Cook County, elected Illinois State Treasurer, served as a delegate at the Republican National Convention at Minneapolis, Served as Treasurer of the Jefferson Street Railway Company and President of the Double Eagle Mining Company. In 1900, became Alderman in the City Council. Henry Wulff was never defeated in any election.

Wulff was also President of the Continental Financing Company. Both Wulff and the Secretary of this company, Justus W. Lobb, were convicted before United States Commissioner, Mark A. Foote, for using the mails with intent to defraud. It was this “get rich quick” scheme that landed both of them in the house of corrections for two years.

The book *Progress Trend - Jefferson Park* states, “Politically the town was controlled by Henry Wulff, a Republican, and Fred Eldred, a Democrat. As the population was mostly German, Wulff made Republicans out of all of them.”

After a long illness, Henry Wulff died on December 27, 1902, at the Robert Burns Hospital at Washington Boulevard and Garfield Park in Chicago. His wife Katherine died in Chicago on March 7, 1941. They are both buried in Union Ridge Cemetery.

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The Henry Wulff Residence - 4923 N. Milwaukee Ave. The Jefferson Park Bus Terminal now occupies the space where his house once stood. Photo taken 1907

Photo courtesy of The Chicago History Museum from The Chicago Daily News collection glass negative ; DN-0005191

Conspiracy Annexation

In December of 1888, the town of Jefferson and Henry Wulff, County Clerk, found themselves on opposite end of a lawsuit filed in Superior Court of Cook County. The plaintiff, the town of Jefferson, alleged that Jefferson had been illegally annexed to the city of Chicago.

E. J. Bronson, town Clerk, stated that the County Board ordered a vote by the people in the spring election for the annexation of Jefferson Township to Chicago. The plaintiff stated that none of the ballots cast in the spring election were printed with the question of annexation. However, in three out of seven precincts, some voters wrote out ballots for annexation. A total of 24 write-in votes were cast, which was only 2% of all the votes! The petitioner said that most of the voters in Jefferson were opposed to annexation to Chicago, but they did not understand that they were voting on this issue, as it was not printed on the ballots. Mr. Bronson believed that these few individuals were part of a conspiracy to vote in favor of annexation without the knowledge of the other voters.

The township was officially annexed in 1889.

Dead Horse Tells of the Gateway History of Jefferson Park

Wally Slowik of Orion Industries, located at 5170 Northwest Hwy, found a horseshoe with the nails still in it when concrete workers dredged up the sidewalk last month. The next day bones from a horse were unearthed.

In the mid-to-late 1800's, Jefferson Park become known as the "Gateway to Chicago" because of the truck farms throughout the area. Farmers would truck their produce to Jefferson Park to sell to the residents. They would also truck products to Chicago by way of Milwaukee Ave. The trucks would come in on Higgins or Northwest Highway, which both end in Jefferson Park.



This crudely shaped horseshoe was made from iron bar stock and forged to shape by a locate blacksmith.

It is not known if this horse belonged to a truck farmer coming or going from Jefferson Park or someone coming into town to purchase supplies. What we do know is that it was very common to leave a dead horse on the side of the road right where it died and let scavenger animals and insects dispose of it. The most likely scenario was that a horse pulling a wagon came into town and died suddenly, and the owner unhitched the horse and dragged the horse to the side of the road. He left the horse at the side of the road without even removing the shoes!

Walking Tour of the Historic Pullman District And the Hotel Florence

Please join the Jefferson Park Historical Society for an interesting and exciting tour of the Pullman Historic District and the Hotel Florence.

The tour will include bus transportation, a stop at the Visitor Center to view a short film, a walking tour of the neighborhood guided by the Historic Pullman Foundation and a tour of the Hotel Florence by the Pullman State Historic Site.

Sunday, October 7th

We will meet at the Jefferson Park Fieldhouse for 12:30 p.m. departure and expect to return by 5:30 p.m.

Costs are as follows:

Before September 1st

JPHS Members \$15

Non-members \$20

After September 1st

JPHS Members \$20

Non-members \$25

A limited number of seats MAY be available the day of the tour for \$30

Reservations and checks may be mailed to:

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Hope To See You There!

For more information, please call 773.725.5774