



# FLASHBACK



THE HAMMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY—AUG 2005

Late Spring / Summer Edition / May / June / July / August

## 2005-2006 OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

During the business portion of the annual dinner that was held on Tuesday, May 17th 2005 at the Assembly of God Hessville Church. The Hammond Historical Society Board of Directors and society members in attendance elected the following slate of Officers and Directors to serve through the fiscal year of 2005 to 2006.

### OFFICERS:

Ken Stromberger - President  
Peg Evans - First Vice President  
Richard Lytle - Second Vice President  
Esther Kristoff - Secretary  
Larry Knoerzer - Treasurer

### DIRECTORS THRU MAY 2008:

Thora Berry — Mary Ann Carter  
Tom Rutowski — Roy Speelman  
Lois Sherby Stromberger

Changes of note are that Marjorie Sohl will step down as the Historical Society's secretary and serve as a Board Member on the Board of Directors. Marjorie Sohl has been the secretary for the society for many, many years.

Esther Kristoff will now serve as the historical society's new secretary. Marjorie Sohl will fill the Board of Director seat that was vacated by Esther Kristoff, the term will expire in May 2006.

A special thanks goes out to the Nominating Committee of Mary Ann Carter, Peg Evans and Richard Lytle.

## Business News and Agenda

During the April Board of Directors meeting several items of importance were up for discussion, action on some was taken while others were tabled for further input.

An invitation was received by the society to attend a La Porte County Genealogy Society event to be held on Saturday, October 15, 2005. The board voted that it would be good exposure at a nominal cost to the society. "It will be a great opportunity for us to sell some of our publications and possibly recruit some new members." Three members will attend the function.

Should the society establish a web site? A committee was formed to look into this matter. A motion was made to get in touch with the Rotary Club and see the status of the upcoming Hammond Achievement Award Dinner for this year if any. A invitation for a dinner fund raiser event at Balmoral Park was voted down, it was determined to be unfeasible.

A Community Grant application that was submitted was turned down by the Gaming Advisory Committee in early April. The grant was to be used to fund and staff the Hammond Museum.

Looking for something to do this Summer?

Here's your ticket—PARADE



Towle Community Theater

A 1999 Tony Award Winning Best Musical Directed by John D. Glover — SHOW DATES July 15-17, 22-24, 29 & 30, 2005 — Curtain Times: Friday and Saturday — 8pm, Sunday — 2pm  
Towle Community Theater - 5205 Hohman Avenue, Hammond  
Tickets: \$12.00 — For more information on the theater itself, this show and upcoming shows visit: [www.towletheater.org](http://www.towletheater.org)

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The Hammond Historical Society — President, Ken Stromberger — First Vice President, Margaret Evans — Second Vice President, Richard Lytle — Secretary, Esther Kristoff — Treasurer, Larry Knoerzer 2005-2006

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# ON THE FAST TRACK



*Early view of the Roby Speedway in North Hammond.*

The history of Hammond race tracks dates back to the tail end of the nineteenth century, up through the first half of the twentieth century. At one time the city boasted three race tracks at once. Several others, although planned and made public were altered or just never built.

All of the tracks were located in the northern most part of the city, in the areas more commonly known as Roby and Robertsdale. Early on, however a race track was proposed along Columbia Avenue in 1905. If a group of Hammond businessmen had their way, they were ready to invest a hundred thousand dollars to build a horse track and athletic grounds on the property they owned.

Plans called for a first class facility that would be second to none in the state. Proponents for the track complex stated that the city was ready and long over due for such a venue. It would provide amusement and entertainment for the factory workers of Hammond.

This group of determined entrepreneur businessmen was determined to get their project off the ground as soon as possible, to beat the encroaching Chicago developers who were also just as enthusiastic. But for whatever reasons the project never became reality.

Another plan in August of 1911 called for the building of a five mile track that would surround "Mud Lake" in Robertsdale. It was noted that the course when completed would be one of the finest in the country, and would not cross a single railroad track. Imagine that! The race track would eventually be built at only half of the original size.

Located just a few miles from the famous Roby Speedway was the New Hammond Raceway which operated from September 12, 1937 to May 24, 1942. It was an open competition track for big cars. It was constructed as a 5/8 mile semi banked track with no guard rails. The site would later become the 41 Outdoor Drive-In Theatre.

The Hammond Speedway Exposition Company was working on a greyhound race track, in 1934 between Calumet and Sheffield as plans ground to a halt, when the operators could not get the necessary permits. The triple track facility was near completion with exception of the track course. Kennels at the track had been in use since the spring, as trainers had been at work exercising the greyhounds on a daily basis.

Company officials were hoping for an August 24, 1935 opening date, and stated that gambling would not be attempted, but a new form of wagering in compliance with the law would be introduced.

The track was to operate under the Jeffersonville plan in which greyhounds may race and spectators may purchase an interest in the dog's winning. However you say it, it was still gambling, which was not permitted. The site would open a few years later to race autos.

Perhaps the most notable racetrack in the city was the Roby Speedway located north of Wolf Lake. The Roby Speedway was in it's heyday in the 1920's and 1930's, until safety concerns would lead to its untimely demise.



*Midget cars race at the New Hammond Speedway.*

On September 15, 1935 some 16,000 fans packed the Roby Speedway and witnessed a terrifying incident as a 32 year old race car driver was severely burned on his arms and legs as his auto caught on fire as he sped around the track at 90 m.p.h. When he passed the grandstand his car became engulfed in flames. A caution flag was quickly raised as an ambulance was sent to aid the injured race car driver.

Five spectators and three drivers were injured in three separate incidents on September 12, 1937 at the New Hammond Speedway. Five Hammond youths suffered only bruises, and a driver received cracked ribs as the wheel of his race car flew off into the jam packed crowd.

Two other drivers suffered serious injuries as their midget race cars front wheels locked and crashed through a side wall overturning and pinning them. Another driver from Detroit received several cracked ribs when his vehicle crashed while rounding a curve. In a miraculous turn of events this young racer received quick medical attention and went on to win one of the final events of the day. After completing the race the crowd sprang up on their feet and gave this determined driver a well deserved standing ovation.

One of the most horrific accidents occurred when three spectators were killed on June 16, 1930 during an air show at the Roby Racetrack. A plane failed to gain enough altitude and crashed into a row of parked cars.

*Source info from the microfilms of The Times newspapers Jan '05, Aug '11, Jun '30, Jun & Jul '34, Jul & Aug '35, Sept '35, Sept '37, files of Hammond Historical Society.*

# 2005 Annual Dues Renewal Reminder Notice

Our new fiscal year begins on May 1st, 2005 — As our current fiscal year comes to a close, now is the time to make sure your annual dues are up to date.

Please check the date above the name on your address label. If the date does not read — **EXP 4/30/2006** your dues need to be renewed for the upcoming year. *Please note that we Do Not send out any bills for membership dues.*

▶▶ **EXP 04/30/2006** ◀◀  
**Mr Marcus M Towle**  
**5276 Sohl Avenue**  
**Hammond IN 46320- 5678**

The current dues schedule is as follows:

**\$10.00 Individual — \$15.00 Joint — \$25.00 Corporate**

**ATTENTION:** If you have already renewed your dues for the upcoming year and it is not reflected on the current address label it will show up on the next issue in September. Thanks!

**2005 Dues**

Hammond Historical Society  
Please Enroll or Renew My Membership  
Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_  
**ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_  
**CITY** \_\_\_\_\_  
**STATE** \_\_\_\_\_ **ZIP+4** \_\_\_\_\_

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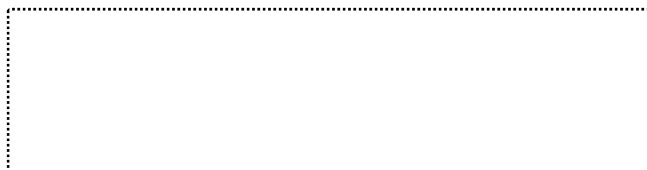
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# THIS MONTH IN HISTORY —



## 5 YEARS AGO                      MAY 2000

Grand opening of the "First Tee" Youth Golf Course at Lost Marsh takes place on May 15. | Gasoline prices continue their upward climb as costs increase 27% from just a month ago to a 48% jump from a year ago. Average prices around town for self-serve are \$1.82 for regular and \$1.91 for special grade.

## 10 YEARS AGO                      MAY 1995

Funding for the new federal courthouse to be constructed in Downtown Hammond is fully restored after being cut just six weeks earlier. Construction is planned for 1996 with completion expected in late 1997 or early 1998.

## 15 YEARS AGO                      MAY 1990

Hammond Marina acquires the historic S. S. Milwaukee Clipper at auction for \$335,000. The 351 foot ship faced certain doom, as it was destined for scrap until the Port Authority purchased the vessel.

## 25 YEARS AGO                      MAY 1980

Most of the city's speed limits to increase by 5 M.P.H. in an effort to keep speeding fines from being diverted to the state coffers. | A giant cloud of ash from the eruption of Mt. St. Helens passes over the region causing the sun to dim and restricting aircraft visibility. | Suspicious fires at two Hammond companies do extensive damage to both businesses. Blazes at the Great Lakes Warehouse at 5009 Calumet Avenue and the Sealtest Foods located at 4808 Hohman Avenue are both under investigation as possible arson fires. | Summer arrives early as temperatures soar to 90 degrees for several days. | Pullman Standard Company signs a contract to build 235 double deck AMTRAK passenger cars. The company will take over the Allied Structural Steel Plant at 1435 – 165th Street, a facility that it had originally owned. Work will include manufacturing 20 coaches, 60 food service cars and 55 sleeping cars to replace AMTRAK'S aging fleet, many of them 25 years old on average. Work is expected to begin sometime in the fall of 1980. Approximately 1,000 new jobs will be created and will help to alleviate the city's nearly 9.3% unemployment rate.

*Source information from the microfilms of The Times newspapers of May 2000, 1995, 1990 and 1980.*