



# FLASHBACK



THE HAMMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY - AUG 2006

www.hammondindiana.com

flashback@hammondindiana.com

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

## SOCIETY NEWS AND EVENTS

**ANNUAL DINNER MEETING:** We would like to thank our gracious hosts, Pastor, Dr. Allen Shepherd and members of Seventh-Day Adventist Church, who prepared and served a delightful and delicious dinner. Also all of the members of the society who attended the event. A short business meeting and election of Directors and Officers took place before dinner. A Treasurer's Annual Report for 2005 to 2006 was made. It will be printed in the September FLASHBACK Newsletter. After our meal, members and guests were treated to a brief history of the church and the Hammond congregation, presented by our host, Pastor Allen Shepherd.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS:** There is only a slight change to report on the roster of officers for 2006-2007. Secretary Esther Kristoff who asked to step down, will be replaced by William Uzdanovich. All other officers will remain in place as the previous year.

**UPDATE ON THE HOHMAN HOMESTEAD MARKER:** On Wednesday, May 10th, 2006 the Hohman Inn monument was completed, delivered and installed. A tentative dedication ceremony is being planned to coincide with our September meeting this fall. All of the final details will be worked out over the summer. Watch for an official announcement to be forthcoming. We hope to have a number of officials and dignitaries on hand for the dedication.

**UPCOMING CEMETERY WALK:** Plans for our Eighth Annual Suzanne G. Long Memorial Cemetery Walk to be held at Oak Hill Cemetery in October, will be made during the summer months. If you would like to help with the tour, please contact Richard Lytle at the Hammond Public Library by phoning him at (219) 931-5100 x306. Don't miss this year's tour, as plans are being made to have next year's tour at Elmwood Cemetery.

## HOHMAN HOMESTEAD MONUMENT DONATION

We would like to take this time to thank Mr. & Mrs. John Ward for their donation towards the New Hohman Inn Homestead marker.

While renewing their dues for the upcoming year, they graciously included a donation towards our special project that will install a much needed replacement marker that notes Hammond's first permanent settlement.

The state of the Hohman Homestead Inn marker was brought to light about four years ago by a concerned citizen, who asked if we could do something to repair or replace it. Well, it took some time, but that is finally going to happen very soon.

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Editor in Chief — William J. Uzdanovich  
Co-Editor — Roy J. Speelman  
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The Hammond Historical Society — President, Ken Stromberger — First Vice President, Margaret Evans — Second Vice President, Richard Lytle — Secretary, Will Uzdanovich — Treasurer, Larry Knoerzer 2006-2007

## SPECIAL BOARD MEETING TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2006

NO GENERAL MEETING took place in April of this year, since the third Sunday of the month was Easter Sunday. A special meeting of the board of directors of the Hammond Historical Society was held on April 18, 2006 in the Suzanne G. Long Local History Room of the Hammond Public Library. President Ken Stromberger called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.; Thirteen member were present.

The secretary's report was read and approved. The Treasurer's report was read and accepted. It was suggested that a letter of thanks be sent to donors of a contribution toward the Hohman Inn marker.

Membership Committee reported that letters have been sent to the eighteen members who have not paid dues for some time.

**HOHMAN MARKER:** It was **MOVED, SECONDED** and **CARRIED** that we approve the installation of a base for the marker at an additional cost of \$400. This will bring the total cost to \$1786. It was suggested that on the marker, the logo of the society be moved to the loft of the name. Drawing is attached to these minutes.

**CEMETERY WALK:** After discussion, it was agreed that we will continue the cemetery walks, at Oak Hill in 2006, and possibly Elmwood in 2007.

**NEW BUSINESS:** It was agreed that we will have a joint meeting with the Friends of the Library in November, with Rick Kogan as speaker. The slate of nominees was presented; President Ken stated that he must decline to run for President. Richard Lytle reported on the display at the Lake County Welcome Center, which will be done jointly with the Hammond Public Library. It was **MOVED, SECONDED** and **CARRIED** that we approve up to \$150 to be spent, with recognition as the contributor. Display will be from May 18 to the end of June. Lois reported that reservations are coming in for our annual dinner meeting. Richard reported that grant requests have been submitted.

Meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.

Esther Kristoff, Secretary

## BOARD MEETING MINUTES SUNDAY, MARCH 19TH, 2006

Meeting of the board of directors of the Hammond Historical Society was held on March 19th, 2006 in the Suzanne G. Long Local History Room of the Hammond Public Library. President Ken Stromberger called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.; a quorum was present.

The secretary's report was accepted as read. Larry Knoerzer presented the treasurer's report and it was approved as given.

**MEMBERSHIP:** Ruth Swanson reported some members are very behind in the dues. Is it times to purge the membership list? Will Uzdancovch will print a list by date and it will be discussed at the next board meeting.

**OLD BUSINESS:** Richard Lytle reported the digitization grant is still being written. It is due at the end of March. If we receive the grant HHS contribution would be volunteer labor rather than monetary. He also asked for a grant from the Mayor's Gaming Funds to pay for a photographer for the IHB project. Richard will compose a letter of IHB congratulating them on 110 years in the community. Ken will review and sign.

**NEW BUSINESS:** Discussion of future projects. Museum; Little Red Schoolhouse; Bus Tour of the local cemeteries; and a possible postcard book publication were mentioned. Ken will investigate the possibility of moving the cemetery tour to another location for 2006. He will also discreetly look into the viability of the Hessville Historical Society. He will approach Peg Evans about being the chair of the nominating committee.

The meeting adjourned at 2:26 p.m. The general meeting was held in the Community Room of the Library. Roy Kolas, life long resident and long-time businessman, offered his memories of the community. Refreshments and conversation followed.

Respectfully submitted,

Peg Evans, Secretary Pro Tem

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This will bring us up to date and conclude our Board Meeting Minutes reports until the October FLASHBACK issue in the fall.*



## PARAMOUNT THEATER CURTAIN CALL MAY 7<sup>TH</sup> 1981

Where were you on May 7th, 1981? Perhaps you were one of the last patrons to walk through the doors of the Paramount Theater as they closed to the general public for the last time.

This year marks the 25th year since the classic art deco building was silenced to future theater goers forever. Another theater of similar style and size to the north called the Parthenon, was demolished in 1983 and became a parking lot.

The Paramount Theater was the last of the three grand movie palaces left standing. The others were the Parthenon as stated above, and the State Theater on State Street which opened in 1926 and was destroyed a short time later by a bomb blast in 1927. The State Theater was still standing up until 1967, when it was finally leveled to make way for a new Hammond Public Library Main building.

Built at the onset of the Great Depression for \$600,000, the theater was considered state of the art once the doors were opened at 12 noon on Saturday, August 2nd 1930. It was received with great fanfare by the community. Newspaper reports of the era referred to it as an "Acre of Amusement."

It was one of the most modern, attractive and inviting movie houses of the entire Publix Theater chain. The Publix Theater Company had over 2,000 outlets from coast to coast, including Europe and Canada.

The lobby of the new Paramount Theater was adorned with rich Italian Marble and topped with Parisian Glass chandeliers. Beautiful paintings and period furniture helped to complete the lobby décor.

Specially designed seats filled the vaulted ceiling auditorium. The theater was designed and built for the newly invented talking pictures. The sound was meant to be acoustically perfect through out the entire nearly 2,000 seat auditorium.

A mammoth Western Electric Pipe Organ was also installed as it was in most all of the deluxe theaters of the Publix chain.

One of the finest cooling systems was also installed here at the Paramount. This enormous air conditioning plant would bring in outside air, "wash it" and cool it and then circulate it throughout the entire theatre without any drafts. The circulating air would always remain cool and never cold.

But that was then, and this is now. Over the years as Downtown Hammond became less of a destination and the city's population shifted south, the Paramount Theater fell from grace. The high cost of upkeep and the dwindling audiences forced the ultimate closure of this movie house gem.

As the last movie goes filed out its doors, there was still some hope that this once lavish movie house could come back to life again for future generations to enjoy. Several plans by different developers and entrepreneurs had hoped to bring back the Paramount back to the grandeur that it once enjoyed.

Those plans came with many setbacks, ups and downs over the ten years that the Paramount Theater remained dormant and deteriorating. Until she fell victim to the wrecker's ball in January of 1991.

*Paramount Theater Curtain Call Continues Page 4*

# PARAMOUNT THEATER CURTAIN CALL MAY 7<sup>TH</sup> 1981

— *Feature Story continued from Page 3*

In the Paramount's glory days it was host to the best movies Hollywood had to offer. The Paramount was also home to regular vaudeville acts up until 1955.

Paramount also hosted the WLS Barn Dance, a live act that was broadcast over Chicago radio, very much like the Grand Ole Opry is today.

Some of the famous personalities to appear on stage at the Paramount were singer Pat Boone, comedians Minnie Pearl, Homer and Jethro, along with Benny Goodman and the original Doublemint Twins.

Now let's get back to the stark reality, what was to become of the once elegant and grand Paramount? In July of 1984 it was announced that an unnamed fast food restaurant was interested in purchasing the closed theater.

In July of 1986, the city decided to take action. It was ordering the theater owners to either repair the structure or tear it down. Years of neglect were taking its toll on the building. Bricks were falling from the theater's roofline onto adjacent buildings.

A fire in 1985, heavily damaged the interior of the auditorium leaving a gaping hole in the roof, thus accelerating further decay. The theater was also suffering from falling plaster, soaked and rotting carpeting. Needless to say it was a complete mess.

Who would want to repair and update this fast crumbling eyesore? Most people thought the Paramount Theater final destiny was the wrecker's ball.

In October 1987, two young men from Hobart envisioned a performing arts center and asked the city for aid to help make the project a reality. Costs estimates were around \$1.5 million and that included a new roof, new seats and a new heating and air conditioning system. The city was in agreement with the plan. Their fears were that if nothing was done the building would have to be leveled. The main sticking point was, you guessed it, money or the lack of it. Least to say the project never got off the ground.



*Paramount Theater seen here in January 1991.*

August 1988 saw another owner of the shuttered theater, after the previous owners defaulted on the rent payments. Premier Enterprises agreed to assume the \$16,000 a year rent payments to the bank for the building and the land lease.

Ownership of the building was a major roadblock for the renovation of the theater. The land on which the theater sat was in a trust owned by Kaufmann heirs.

The marquee lights on the Paramount Theater were lit for two final times. A former theater employee wanted people to have a chance to see the theater as he remembered in better times. Once on the weekend in early December and lastly on the weekend before Christmas of 1990. The lights were powered by a portable generator.

The Hammond Historic Preservation Commission signed a resolution in October 1989 hoping to keep the demolition crews at bay. The document stated that the Paramount Theater was potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places for its significance to the architectural and historical development of the city of Hammond, Indiana.

It was a nice gesture, however, you can have all of the best laid plans, but if you have no financial backing what good are they? Ultimately the estimated demolition costs of \$100,000 outweighed the millions of dollars in renovation and repair costs.

In January of 1991 wrecking crews completed removing asbestos from the building's 15 foot deep basement level and began tearing down the brick wall on the south side of the structure.

*Source info: microfilms of The Times, Aug '30, July '84, July '86, Oct '87, Aug '88, Aug '89, & Dec '90.*

Mayor Thomas McDermott Sr. has declared May 25th as Hands Across America Day in Hammond. He has urged all Hammond Citizens to participate in this event. The "Hands Across America" fund raiser to take place on May 25th, will cross through the city. The route will begin at the edge of the city limits at Cline Avenue and proceed west down US Route 20 (Michigan Avenue) and continue as it intersects Indianapolis Boulevard, where it will continue to travel west down Michigan Street until it meets Hohman Avenue. The chain of hands will then turn left and go south down Hohman to Sibley Street where it will take a right down Sibley and continue to the Illinois state-line. || New \$41 million soap bar facility was dedicated by Lever Brothers. Joining in the ceremonies with Lever Brother officials were many dignitaries from the city and state. The plant located along Indianapolis Boulevard near Lake Michigan, puts Hammond on the map, now the "Soap Bar Capital of the World." The new four story building is highly automated and is scheduled to work three shifts a day with only 38 employees. Hammond is the only US facility that manufactures Lux and Lifebouy brand bar soaps. Hammond and three other US plants also produce Dove and Caress bar soaps, but the bulk of the production comes out of Hammond. Lever Brothers invented the bar soap process in the early 1950's. || City officials proclaim the week of May 5 through 11 "National Historic Preservation Week." An exhibit at Woodmar Mall will feature "Images of Hammond" and will be on display over the weekend. Several awards were presented to individuals for their special efforts in historic preservation. || The SCM Metal Products plant located on Summer Street will cease operations due to a downturn in business. The closing of the facilities will mean the loss of jobs for 78 salaried and hourly employees at the Hammond location. || NIPSCO officially dedicates its new South Annex to its corporate headquarters located in Downtown Hammond. The eight story landmark building had undergone a 13 month renovation. A second floor skywalk and an underground tunnel will provide convenient access to the original main building just north of the South Tower Annex. NIPSCO will occupy the lower floors of the newly remodeled building. A law firm for NIPSCO will take the top three floors of the new annex. || Reported rumors that Queen Anne Candy Company is up for sale are true. A high ranking official for the Dietrichs Corporation stated that the Luden's division is up for sale. The ownership will eventually change, but Queen Anne is not moving.

# THIS MONTH IN HISTORY -



## 25 YEARS AGO    MAY 1981

Construction continues at Peoples Park located at the northwest corner of Michigan and Sohl. The 4.3 acre park is expected to be finished by the end of the summer. Numerous grants and government agencies have played a part in the parks development. Private and non-profit organizations have also played a roll in the parks construction. "The name People's Park was chosen because the original idea and much of the work for it came from the people." || The Northern Indiana Arts Association has agreed in principal to sell its building located at 5448 Hohman Avenue to St. Margaret Hospital for the sum of \$140,000. The new location has yet to be determined and may not necessarily be in Hammond.

## 30 YEARS AGO    MAY 1976

The Hammond Bicentennial Committee will establish a \$1,000 scholarship fund to be deposited at the Hoosier State Bank. The fund made up of 6 cents from the city's 16,666 students, will collect interest to be used to help top scholars in the year 2076. How much the fund will generate will depend on prevailing interest rates in future years. || Plans were announced to demolished the 60 year old First United Presbyterian Church at 6021 Hohman Avenue and replace it with a new building. || On sale at Goldblatt's in Downtown Hammond an In-Dash 8 Track Stereo Tape Player with AM-FM Radio ONLY \$66.88.

## 40 YEARS AGO    MAY 1966

Committee to consider a new Lake County Courthouse at the site of the current Hammond High School. "The courthouse idea is only one of several solutions to what is called the Hammond High problem" stated one official.

## 45 YEARS AGO    MAY 1961

The Hammond Park Department is currently constructing a new \$15,000 garage for all of the districts equipment to be stored at Turner Park.

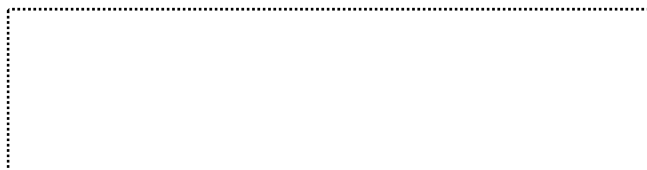
*Source information microfilms of The Times newspapers May 1986, 1981, 1976, 1966 & 1961.*



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