



Mary Opheim helped with the displays at The Gillespie Center for the Spirit of the Lakes, Festival of the Arts held in July in Mound.

As an educational society we will provide a continuous history of the Westonka area for those who follow after us...

The Andrews Sisters and Their Connection to Mound

By Tom Rockvam

Patty Andrews, the lead singer of the Andrews Sisters group was born in Mound, Minnesota, on February 16, 1918, in a house that occupied the property where The Gillespie Center stands today.

During the 1920's Laverne, Maxene and Patty Andrews spent their summers in Mound, living with their parents in a house across the street from the grocery store that was owned by Pete and Ed Sollie, bachelor uncles of the three girls. (Today, Green T Accounting occupies the Sollie grocery store building, and The Gillespie Center is on the land where the Andrews Sisters' house once stood.)

They were the daughters of Peter Andrews and Olga Sollie Andrews. Peter was a Greek immigrant who came to Minneapolis in about 1910. He was gruff and ill tempered and he resisted his daughters' getting into show business.

Olga, their mother, encouraged their musical gift and they sang around the piano imitating the Boswell Sisters and other acts of that day like Ella Fitzgerald and Mel Torme.

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Still interested in finding out more about The Andrews Sisters?

At the **Great American History Theatre** (Old Science Museum Building in St. Paul) from **November 26, 2005 to January 1, 2006** - enjoy "**Christmas of Swing**" an Andrews Sisters Holiday Musical. **It is back by popular demand!** A terrific look at the holidays through letters from real WW II GIs. Join the Andrews Sisters & friends for a musical extravaganza not to be missed. GREAT AMERICAN HISTORY THEATRE 30 E. 10th Street St. Paul, Minnesota. Box Office:651-292-4323 http://www.historytheatre.com/season/christmas_of_swing.asp

Right Here in Mound! The Andrews Sisters Revival at the Gillespie Center on **Sunday, September 25th** from **3:00 pm to 5:00 pm** with a dinner following, all for the price of **\$6.00**.



Come See the *Visitor Center* Now Open in Mound

Your historical society has officially seized the opportunity to occupy the space in the building north of Threshold. A few loyal volunteers and some paid labor is in the process of transforming our part of the building into a colorful, comfortable space for the WHS and for the Lake Minnetonka Chamber administrative office.

It will be known as the **Visitor Center** since that seems to be a suitable explanatory name for our respective missions. The WHS space may be considered a mini-museum until we have the funds and a location for a permanent history center.

Monetary donations have come in to cover part of our annual rent and we are hoping after you've had a chance to come visit, you'll add your support to this project if you have not already done so. **Remember, we are a 501(c)(3) organization and as such, all donations are tax deductible.** If you require a special receipt for tax purposes, let us know.

We are excited to be able to display some of our smaller items in two donated display cabinets. These may be viewed anytime. If you have an urgent need to buy a Lake Minnetonka puzzle or one of our books, those sales can be handled on weekdays by Patsy or Suzanne, who work with the Chamber, unless a member of the historical society is available to help you. For now, most of the businesses handling the sale of our items will continue to do so. These include Mound Jubilee Foods, Larson Printing & Graphics, True Value Hardware, Gallery Navarre and Lakeshore Interiors in Navarre.

On Saturdays, from 10-2, Mound school yearbooks, our scrapbooks, postcard collection (recently donated) and other books or pamphlets are available for review or research. These items may not be removed from the

building but a copy machine will be available if you find something you may be needing.

There is a comfortable table and chairs for you to use while reading or visiting with the historical society members staffing the building on Saturdays. Parking is on the south side of the building.

Since we are interested in knowing who comes to visit, please sign our Welcome Visitors Guest Book and leave your comments or suggestions in our Message Book. This location is for everyone to enjoy and we value your input on how we can make this space appealing to all.

Our intention is to change the displays in the Visitor Center periodically as is done at the Gillespie Center, so we encourage you to drop in from time to time to see what's new.

We view this as a wonderful opportunity to touch base with our members as well as the community. Hopefully we can attract new WHS members and get more people interested in local history, and that more people will be willing to share their stories and memorabilia with the public.

See related articles in this newsletter concerning our open house celebration and upcoming events.

The Chamber hours are 9-3, Monday through Fridays and their phone number is 952 472-5622. The WHS expects to be holding visiting hours on Saturdays from 10-2. **Our phone is 952 472-9800** and if we are not there, you may leave a message on our voice mail which will be monitored on a regular basis.

The official address at this building is **2325 Commerce Blvd. Mound MN 55364**. Our secretary's address is **3740 Enchanted Ln, Mound 55364** for correspondence or membership mail.



The Andrews moved to Mound in 1917 to be near Olga's relatives. They returned to Minneapolis a few years later when Peter opened a restaurant. The girls then would come out to Mound and spend their summers living with their uncles and swimming the days away for the next

few years.

In 1931 the girls won a talent contest at the Orpheum Theatre in Minneapolis and within two years they were on the vaudeville circuit.

After six years of hoping in vain to get a break, they were in New York and were ready to quit and go home when a band with a radio spot hired them at five dollars a piece and fired them at the end of the 15-minute show. Nevertheless, that was the "break" that they needed.

As luck would have it the vice-president of Decca Records, Dave Kapp, was in a cab and the cab driver had the radio on when the girls were singing. Kapp tracked them down and asked them to audition for the president of (Decca) company. They got a one-year record contract with Decca Records and were on their way.

In 1937 the girls recorded "Bei Mir Bist Duschon" (meaning that you are grand). It became their first million-record-seller. For the next 10 years they were huge with such hits as "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," "Rum and Coca Cola," "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B," "The Beer Barrel Polka," "Don't Fence Me In" and others. They had America's Top 100 songs of the 20th century.

The sisters toured with Glenn Miller, recorded with Bing Crosby and Guy Lombardo and did videos with Abbott and Costello. They were the first popular singing group to introduce sassy choreography into their act. They were in 17 movies including "Private Buckaroo" and "Road to Rio." They did countless USO tours during World War II. Overall, they sold nearly 100 million records, recorded 700 songs, and had nine gold records. They were the first female group to have a gold record go platinum and had more Top 10 hits than Elvis Presley or the Beatles. The trio brought music, laughter, and happiness in a dark period for Americans (during World War II).

For all of their success in a career that spanned more than 40 years altogether, they were frustrated by small crowds in their hometown area of Minneapolis when they toured. Their last appearance in Minneapolis was in 1951, and again they were disappointed with small crowds. They admitted that this hurt their feelings but it couldn't dim their fondness for their hometown area.

The newspaper library is full of clips throughout the 40's and 50's noting a visit by the famous Andrews Sisters. And each time they always drove out to Mound to visit with their uncles at their little store (Sollie's Grocery) in Mound by Lake Minnetonka.

Maxene in particular seemed drawn by the Mound area, buying 13 acres of property on the west edge of Mound in 1951.

In 1976 Maxene had written her autobiography and planned a publicity tour. "I wouldn't miss Minneapolis or Mound," she told Minneapolis Star columnist Barbara Flanagan. "I spent some of the happiest summers of my life in Mound where our two uncles ran the grocery store," she said.

Laverne, who died in 1977 at the age of 56, was the great dancer of the group. Maxene, who died in 1995 at the age of 79, sang high harmony. Patty, the lead singer of the group, turned 87-years-old on Feb. 16 and lives in California. Although Patty doesn't do much entertaining today, she has performed on ships for several different cruise lines.

St. Paul venerates F. Scott Fitzgerald and Charles Schulz. Sinclair Lewis owns Sauk Center, the hometown he ridiculed. Grand Rapids has (latched) onto Judy Garland, even though Frances Gumm had left town while she was three years old. Laura Ingalls is queen of Walnut Grove. Mary Tyler Moore didn't even live here and she's got a statue in downtown Minneapolis. But search in vain for vestiges of Laverne, Maxene and Patty Andrews, who are all but forgotten in their home towns of Mound and Minneapolis.

I think it would bring positive headlines for the City of Mound and the Gillespie Center to note this fact with a sign on the premises of The Gillespie Center, probably just painted on the base of their new electric sign that is bare and brown. We should recognize these stars who lived here during their childhood and have never forgotten Mound the way we have forgotten them.

Tom Rockvam is a retired long time resident of Mound.



Mound Calls on its Past to Shape its Future

by Bruce Chamberlian
of Hoisington Koegler Group

The train pulls into the depot of this village known as Mound, named for its collection of Native American burial knolls and known for its family resorts and the best fishing on renowned Lake Minnetonka. Eager passengers step onto the platform into a different world from the one they left in downtown Minneapolis. Visitors pick up a few essentials at the grocer, walk to the pier and board a small steamer waiting to carry them to cabins and resorts.

That was the scene in downtown Mound during Lake Minnetonka's thriving resort era in the teens and twenties. While the resorts are gone, replaced by homes, the scene is being rebuilt. In a monumental effort of public/private partnerships totaling more than \$200 million of reinvestment and years of work, downtown Mound is once again becoming a destination.

The effort is called Mound Visions and the vision grew out of need. Despite its rich history, Mound's downtown had fallen on hard times by the mid 1980s. The resort era abruptly ended long ago with black Tuesday. More recently, shopping patterns had changed to the decline of places like Mound. Famed Tonka Toys was sold and moved from its Mound genesis to Mexico. And that canal from Lake Minnetonka to the Mound depot? It was all but forgotten; overgrown behind dumpsters, a gravel alley and piles of road salt.



Lost Lake - Greenway Area

The community, however, desired a different fate. The City completed a strategic downtown plan in 1990 that, among other things, suggested an organized downtown revitalization effort. That effort, soon known as Mound Visions, took root with the adoption of the downtown master plan in 1992. The master plan was aggressive with the suggestion to essentially tear down the entire downtown and rebuild it with mixed-use buildings, reroute a county road, build a new main street, transit center and farmer's market, rehabilitate the canal to Lake Minnetonka and build a public marina. The strategy was (and still is) to create extremely compelling public amenities and pedestrian spaces as a framework for private redevelopment. The City learned quickly that flipping Mound's tarnished image and attracting private investment would require bold moves and public "seed" investments in key amenities like the canal and main street.

At the time it was unveiled in 1992, the idea of building a traditional downtown was semi-radical. Urban designer Bruce Chamberlain, Vice President with Hoisington Koegler Group, remembers a prominent area developer warning him that such an aggressive plan would never be realized. But the community had unwavering dedication; especially to a plan that focused on its Lake Minnetonka heritage.

The hurdles were at times daunting says Kandis Hanson, Mound City Manager. "Soil contamination, county road and post office relocation, utility undergrounding, rail abandonment,

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**Mound School near the turn of the 20th Century.
Later birthplace of Tonka Toys**

Mound Calls on its Past to Shape its Future



The intersection of Commerce Blvd and the new realignment of County Rd 15

new street rights-of-way, not to mention that the permits required to dredge a canal and build sixty boat slips has kept us focused and savvy.” With the expertise of a top notch City staff, legal and financial council from Kennedy & Graven and Ehlers & Associates, environmental consulting from Earth Tech as well as engineering from MFRA and urban design, landscape architecture and Mound Visions coordination from Hoisington Koezler Group, the public-realm team of this effort has accomplished feats.

Enter the development community. Early skepticism turned to passive curiosity and ultimately to financial commitment with Mound’s establishment of a downtown tax increment financing district and completion of early infrastructure projects. The catalyst redevelopment project by a local hardware retailer in 2000 was quickly followed by a mixed-use retail/housing project by MetroPlains Development and a new downtown post office. These early projects were critical in demonstrating market success and establishing the flavor for the important “main street” projects to come.

Mound Harbor Renaissance, LLC (MHR), consisting of a consortium of development interests, was selected by the City in 2001 as the redeveloper of three high-visibility main street districts in downtown. MHR and their consultants, including Maxfield Research, Landform Engineering, Barr Engineering, Fagre & Benson, Krass Monroe and Edina Realty has embraced Mound’s vision for a traditional downtown and proven to be a wise and highly professional development partner in the effort. MHR’s proposal for mixed-use development embraces

public space and pushes the envelope in quality design and innovative stormwater systems. Tom Stokes, president of Brenshell Townhomes, one of the development partners, says that “the intense market interest of their downtown units prove the sophistication of today’s home buyers who are interested in a full package of high quality amenities that flow from interior details to building architecture to site design to inviting public spaces.”

The public/private teamwork of MHR and the City is gaining wide recognition and support. In the 2005 calendar year alone the team has secured nearly \$5 million in grant funds and received large awards from Hennepin County’s Transit-Oriented Development grant and Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development environmental grant. The project has also been recognized with significant financial support from the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District as an innovative model for stormwater treatment.

The Mound Visions effort will be complete in 2008. All told, over 350 housing units within a five-minute walk from a downtown transit center and 150,000 square feet of commercial space will have been built. The effort will result in roughly \$40 million in public investment and another \$160 million in private investment. Property taxes generated from this small downtown will increase by over 25 times their pre-development levels. When asked if the effort has been worth it, Mayor Pat Meisel says, “We have reconnected with our heritage, set the stage for a generation of success and transformed attitudes from defeatist to confidence. I’d say it’s been worth it.”



A customer enjoying the Westonka Historical Society members - Anne Dorweiler, Pam Myers, Sue Cathers

Ice Cream Social at the Burwell House, sponsored by the Minnetonka Historical Society



Anne Dorweiler, Sue Cathers



The Minnetonka Historical Society graciously invited members of the Westonka Historical Society to join them at the Annual Burwell House Ice Cream Social, held this year on **Saturday, June 25, 2005**. We shared the shade of their tent, displayed our Lake Minnetonka puzzle and the Tonka book, and enjoyed talking to the many people attending the festival.

A Saga Hill Landmark Will Become History

Keep your calendar open for **Saturday, October 15, from 10:30 - noon** for an intriguing and informative historical program about Solbakken, the historic home of Dick & Martha Williams, located on the north shore of West Arm in the Saga Hill area. This property was built in 1856 by a North Dakota banker named Haugen, then purchased in 1899 by the Lutheran Deaconess and Deaconesses as a summer retreat for doctors and nurses. Dick (who passed on in May of 2004) and his wife Martha became only the third property owners in 1973 and were avid collectors of Lake Minnetonka and Native American memorabilia. This historic site will be sold in the near future and the home is expected to be torn down.

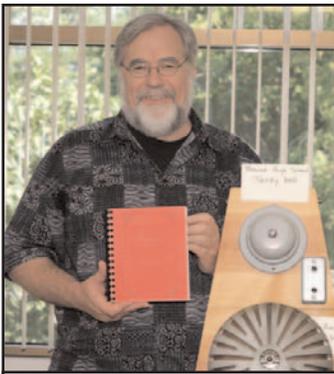
Martha has generously chosen to donate their collection of Lake Minnetonka history to the Westonka Historical Society. We are so grateful for this wonderful gift to our community. Solbakken holds a large part of Martha's heart and it is obvious when she refers to the home as "Her."

Please join us at the Gillespie Center on October 15th for coffee and rolls and hear about this hidden treasure.

On July 27th, Jeanne Englund sent the WHS a check in the amount of \$100, with the following note:

"This donation is being made in recognition of, and with much respect, for the exceptionally fine work Mary Opheim does. She is inspiring in the ways she personalizes history for our community."

The WHS wanted to share this note with our members and add our appreciation to Mary Opheim for all the work she does. Please visit the Gillespie Center to see her State Fair display.



Paul Gasch with the Mound High School tardy bell.

The second annual Festival of the Arts (July 14 - 17) brought many visitors to Mound for an exciting weekend of family activities. On Saturday visitors to Mound were given the first glimpse of the Visitor Center (VC) in the beginning stages of construction. The WHS was also involved with several of the Sunday family events,

including sponsoring Bob Gasch, a storyteller who related tales of local historical interest; coordinated with Al & Almas for historic boat tours from Mound Bay Park; organized music including groups of Czech concertinas, bluegrass music with banjos and fiddlers; worked with the Veterans History Project and partnered with The Gillespie Senior Center, and hosted displays in the Cottonwood Room.



Lavonne Adams, Paul Gasch and Carol Senn

**Pictures of the Festival courtesy of *Julie's Photography*. Over 400 pictures of the Festival available for sale from Julie Benz at JulieAnn

THANKS FOR THESE RECENT DONATIONS

From Martha Williams 8/16/05 (Deaconess Hospital summer cottage)

- 800 postcard collection
- 1 Hennepin county Historical Society Magazine index
- 31 Henn. Cty H.S. magazines 1974-1989 . incomplete, some water damage
- 1948 Lake Minnetonka phone residential directory
- Two-sided laminated Big Island Park assorted pictures with lake bays, etc.
- One-sided laminated Big Island Park scene
- 1899 Minnetonka edition of National Health Journal (reprint)
- Twin City Rapid Transit Pictorial 1984... water damage
- The 1940s Twin City Lines... water damage
- Como Harriet Story... water damage
- Sheet music *By the Waters of Lake Minnetonka* by Thurlow Lieurance
- A few misc. papers... Dick Gray cols, West Henn. County Pioneer Assn newsletters and others

Framed Photos or Ads

- Grand opening of Roller Skating Rink, Lake Park, Minnetonka 1883
- Scene w/people on dock by steamer, sailboats and bldgs in background
- Signed Lloyd Borg print of Wayzata Depot Summer of 1906. faded to blue
- Two photos Excelsior Casino and Blue Line Restaurant
- Trolley ad
- Steamer Puritan ...damage
- Tonka Bay Hotel
- Steamship Victor
- Excelsior snack bldgs and boat ... maybe Lady of the Lake at the dock?
- Spring Park Bay Del Otero's 1914 Casino
- Del Otero
- Steamboat Excelsior
- Excelsior Bldg....damage
- Big Island's Old Amusement Park

Books/booklets

- Walking the Trails of History Excelsior third printing 1986
- Lake Minnetonak Souvenir booklet 1903
- The Early Background of Minnetonka Beach 1957 hardcover
- The Fun & Facts of Lake Minnetonka 1977
- Orono 100 years 1889 - 1989 hardcover
- Guide & Map of Lake Minnetonak reprint by WHS March 2000
- 1884 Lake Minnetonka Directory... reprint 1983
- Happenings Around Wayzata
- The Saga of Saga Hill 1971 reprint hard cover

From Mary Lou Christy Triebenbach, 7/17/05 MCHS Class of 1953

- 1950 Mohian

From Patty Dykoski, 7/05

Books and Puzzles for Sale

Tonka

by Lloyd Laumann and Dennis David - \$30.00

Lake Minnetonka Puzzle

1934 map of Lake Minnetonka - \$20.00

Minnetrista Memories

by Mildred Krenke Banks - \$11.00

Historical Backgrounds of Mound Minnesota

by Melvin W. Gimmestad - \$6.50

Barefoot on Crane Island

by Marjorie Myers Douglas - \$16.00

Guide and Map of Lake Minnetonka

Advertising Booklet Reprint - \$7.00

Historical Tour of the Westonka Area - Year 2000

by Jeff Magnuson - \$8.00

Picturing Lake Minnetonka: A Postcard History

by Jim Ogland - \$35.00

Several Books by Leo Meloche

American Lotus Note Pad

Color photo by M. Magnuson - \$2.00

Books also available in Mound at:

- Larson Printing & Graphics
- True Value Hardware
- Jubilee
- And in Navarre at: • Gallery Navarre

The puzzle is available at Lakeshore Interiors.

For a complete description of books with order form, write to

PO Box 394, Spring Park, MN 55384

or go to our webpage at:

Membership Information

- Senior/Student.....\$ 10
- Family/Individual.....\$ 15
- Annual Contributing.....\$ 25
- Business.....\$ 50
- Patron.....\$ 100

Special Donation - Donor's Choice

Membership dues and special donations are tax deductible.

Donations of photographs and artifacts are graciously accepted.

Contact any board member for more

Westonka Historical Society

- Sue Cathers, President** 952-472-4893
- Jeff Magnuson, Vice President** 952-472-3653
- Lavonne Adams, Secretary** 952-472-1885
- Phyllis O'Malley, Treasurer** 952-471-9703
- Larry Beno, Past President** 952-472-7157

Board Members:

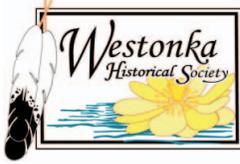
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- Pamela Myers 952-474-1601



**3740 Enchanted Lane
Mound, MN 55364**

<http://www.westonkahistoricalsociety.org>

Calendar of Events:

September 13th - Tour of Martha Williams house with Board of WHS 4:00 - 5:00

September 17th - WHS Board Meeting - 10:00, Visitor Center

September 25th - Andrews Sisters Revival - Gillespie Center 3:00 - 5:00 with dinner following. \$6.00

October 13th - Open House - The WHS & the Lake Moka Chamber of Commerce will be co-hosting an Open House from 5:00 - 7:00. Please stop by and see our wonderful new space and **enjoy refreshments and live music**. Watch the Laker for more details.

October 15th - Program- Martha Williams will talk about her home and the history with it.

October 28th - November/December Newsletter Deadline

November 19th - WHS Board Meeting - 10:00, Visitor Center - **Election of new board members**

There are 2 openings on the WHS board - please consider one of these positions.

November 26th - January 1st - Christmas of Swing - a Holiday Andrews Sisters Musical

Purposes and Goals of the Westonka Historical Society

1. Document, preserve, and classify early historical records.
2. Provide children and adults with history of the area accessible to them.
3. Make tapes and recordings to preserve and interpret material unique to our Westonka history.
4. Gather artifacts and reproductions for exhibiting the story of the area.
5. Involve our children with a living program of historical significance to make history "come alive" to them.