



The Historian

The Journal of the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society

Volume 22, Number 3

Chicago, Illinois

December, 2007

Mary Jo Doyle, 1939 - 2007



On December 17, Mary Jo Doyle passed away after a long fight with cancer. We have re-edited this issue of *The Historian* to recognize Mary Jo, and have included a reprint of a 2005 article on the history of the society and pictures from the Society's 2007 Founders' Day Event where she was honored. Some articles, written before her passing, have not been changed.

Calendar of Events

For information on any listing call:
773/764-4078.

RP/WR Historical Society

Regular Hours

Wednesday & Friday 1-5pm
First Thursday of the month 7-9pm
Other times by appointment
(773/764-4078)

RP/WR Historical Society

Office/Research Center Closed
Thu. Dec. 20, 2007 -
Reopen Fri. Jan. 4, 2008

RP/WR Historical Society

Open House

Learn about the Society's dynamic plans for the coming year from the Board of Directors, Staff, and Volunteers
Sun. January 13, 1 to 4pm
7344 N. Western

RP/WR Historical Society

Annual Meeting, Elections & Volunteer Recognition

Wed., Feb. 20, 2008 7 - 8:30pm
Devon Bank - Lower Level
6445 N. Western

Northeastern Illinois (N.E.I.L.)

Historical Council Meeting

Funding/Grant Writing Workshop
Location to be announced
Sat. March 8, 2008, 9:00-11am

Taste of Rotary - Chicago Far North

Sat. March 29, 2008, 6-10pm
The Breakers
5333 N. Sheridan Rd



RP/WR Historical Society

Watch for news about an Exhibit presenting the work of Society photographer Marty Schmidt



Society Announcement

Farewell to Society President Jacque Day

The Society experienced a significant loss when President Jacque Day resigned. Jacque has moved to Kentucky where she will be attending graduate school to pursue a Master's Degree.

As many of you know, the past year has been extremely challenging as the Board has had to address the possibility of the Society without Mary Jo and at the same time develop plans to update and modernize our systems and procedures.

Under Jacque's leadership the board functioned smoothly and efficiently. As President, she maintained a constructive and positive environment enabling the board to concentrate on issues that will shape the Society's future.

We thank Jacque for her exceptional contributions and wish her well.

Vice President Jonathan Dixon has stepped in as President for the remainder of Jacque's term.

Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society

Open House

January 13, 2008
1 - 4:00

This special event will provide the opportunity for members and non members to learn about the direction of the Society, ask questions, and express concerns

Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society

Annual Meeting

February 20, 2008

- Find out about major plans for the Society
- Provide your input
- Vote for the 2008 Board

The Historian is published three times a year by the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society

Publications Director & Editor-in-Chief Marty Lewin
Managing Editor Mary Jo Doyle
Design and Layout Editor Marty Lewin
Production Staff Sue Sosin, Glenna Eaves, Suzy Travers Byster, Pat Daly, and Mervyn Ruskow

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Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society
Board of Directors 2007 - 2008

- Officers: President Jacque Day, Vice President Jonathan Dixon, Treasurer Diane Mrakitsch, Secretary Linda Bressler
Directors: Events Rene' Camargo, Membership Claire Hirsch, Museum Roy Alexander, Publications Marty Lewin, Resource Development open, Volunteer Services Glenna Eaves
At Large Directors: Peg Olson
Executive Director: Mary Jo Doyle

Residents are a great source of the history of our neighborhoods. We encourage you to share your stories and memories. If you have an idea but don't want to write an article, let us know and we will write it for you.



Please send your article or ideas to Marty Lewin:

e-mail martyl.57@sbcglobal.net
Regular Mail Marty Lewin
c/o RP/WR Historical Society
7344 N. Western Ave.



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Society News

by Marty Lewin, Publications Director

2007 has been an active, exciting, and productive year for the Society, due mainly to the efforts of our Board of Directors and Volunteers. A major challenge was to keep the Society running as smoothly as possible in the face of the reduced role of Executive Director Mary Jo Doyle who was fighting illness.

President Jacque Day has played a leading role, keeping the society on a productive track. The positive impact of her leadership during this challenging year is immeasurable. Good news for Jacque is that she has moved to Kentucky to attend graduate school. Needless to say, Jacque will be sorely missed. Jacque will try to return to chair the 2008 Membership Meeting (scheduled for February 20, 2008).



Since Jacque's resignation, Vice President Jonathan Dixon has assumed the position of President.

A team led by Jonathan Dixon, is charged with finding the Society a permanent home. Whether we end up at the Firehouse or somewhere else, a great deal of time and effort will be needed to make this project successful.

A few board positions were not filled at the 2007 Annual Members Meeting. We recently filled one of these open positions when the Board approved Rene' Camargo as Events Director. Rene' has strong ties to our neighborhoods and is a Community Development Coordinator at DevCorp North.

We were going to announce an exciting new role for Executive Director Mary Jo Doyle, Director of Historical Studies and Research. The purpose was to tap into her unique knowledge of the neighborhoods and document as much historical information as we could for the Society's archives. While that role will obviously not be filled at this time, the Board is addressing the Society's antiquated processes and procedures.

We are working on some major initiatives to improve the Society. We will be revising our office processes, updating our technology, and improving the procedures for assigning and training our volunteers. Board members have been assigned to these projects. An Operations Committee (Jacque Day, Marty Lewin, and Peg Olson) is redefining our daily office processes, and has developed a job description for an Office Manager. A Technology Team (Roy Alexander, Glenna Eaves, and Marty Lewin) will be working with an outside consultant to upgrade our hardware and software at the best possible price. In addition, Glenna has improved the efficiency of volunteer activities and made volunteering a more positive experience.

Finally, there is the financial situation. We simply are not raising enough income. Funding will have to be a high priority for the Board.

Society Celebrates 30th Anniversary!

By Marty Lewin, Publications Director
(Originally published 3/05)

This article, which presents the history of the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society, first appeared in the March, 2005 issue of *The Historian* and is being reprinted in memory of Mary Jo Doyle.

On July 26, 1975, 15 to 20 people met at the Rogers Park Library in response to a notice in *The Rogers Park Paper* (a free weekly published by Graphic House). Their purpose was to start a neighborhood historical society. Among those attending the first meeting were Mary Jo Doyle, who has been a guiding force for the Society from its first day to the present, and the late Albert Weimeskirch, a member of a well-known family that started a funeral business on Clark Street in 1888. Weimeskirch brought photos of Clark Street in the late 1890s and early 1900s. These photos became the start of the Society's extensive photo collection.

The first meeting generated a lot of enthusiasm and the group agreed to meet again in two weeks. Soon the Rogers Park Library was setting aside a meeting room two Saturdays a month for the new organization. One of the monthly meetings addressed Society business and the other was dedicated to historically based programs and discussions. Society members were obviously satisfied with the meeting schedule because they continued it for 18 years.

The new Historical Society elected officers and began soliciting new members. The first president, Marc Lefkowitz, moved out of state after a few months in office. He was replaced by Mary Jo Doyle who had a sixteen-year tenure, serving through 1990. The Society operated out of her house for 16 years. In March of 1976, the *Rogers Park Historical Society* received its charter from the State of Illinois.

Mary Jo and other members began soliciting photos from present and former residents. She would take the pictures to North Shore Camera (on Howard St.), have negatives and prints made for the collection and return the originals, when requested, to the donors. The first house tour, which became a Society tradition, took place in the fall of 1985 and the Society's newsletter first appeared in the spring of 1986.

One day in 1983, Mary Jo discovered that many excellent neighborhood pictures in the Chicago Historical Society's

collection had been taken and donated by photographer Martin Schmidt. She tracked down Marty, who lived in West Ridge, and their first conversation lasted over two hours. Marty joined the Society and made major contributions to the maintenance and growth of the photo collection. He became the Society's photographer, taking countless pictures now in the archives, and has served on the Board of Directors until the present, including several years as President.

In 1991, Mary Jo co-chaired the Rogers Park and West Ridge Centennial Commission to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the annexation of the two adjoining villages to Chicago. Earlier, while doing research, she discovered that Chicago Community Areas have official names and the name of the area west of Rogers Park is West Ridge. Because of the close relationship between the two communities, the Society decided to include West Ridge in its name, and it became the *Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society*.

Also in 1991, the Society moved from Mary Jo's house to 6424 N. Western. With the move, it became necessary for someone to manage the Society's daily activities. Mary Jo Doyle stepped down as president and became Executive Director, a position she still holds. Marty Schmidt succeeded her as president.

In April of 1994, the Society opened a museum at the 6424 Western site. The museum was expanded in 1996. Also in that year the idea of producing a historical book was brought up by founding member, the late Jackie McNicol. The idea became a reality in October of 2000 with the publication of *Chicago's Far North Side: An Illustrated History of Rogers Park and West Ridge*. The book, written by members Neal Samors, Mary Jo Doyle, Martin Lewin and Mike Williams, is now in its third printing. On April 28, 2001, *Chicago's Far North Side* received the *Award of Superior Achievement* from the Illinois State Historical Society.

People in the audience at book signings mentioned many memories about the neighborhoods which inspired authors Neal Samors and Mike Williams to produce a second book, *Neighborhoods Within Neighborhoods: Twentieth Century Life on Chicago's Far North Side*. This oral history, with contributions from many residents, is now in its second printing.

July of 2004 marked the official opening of the Society at its new location at 7344 N. Western.



The Weimeskirch Undertaker business on Clark Street. This is one of the original photos in the Society's collection.

Working With Mary Jo...

by Marty Lewin

Author's note: I have been involved with the Society for ten years, first as a member of the team that produced Chicago's Far North Side - An Illustrated History of Rogers Park and West Ridge, and then as a member of the Board of Directors. I worked with, and got to know, Mary Jo Doyle during this period.

Mary Jo's work background up to her retirement was in systems, but she was skilled with words and was also an exceptional proof reader. She reviewed most Society material and occasionally proofed material from outside authors. Her passions were not hidden: family, the Society, the Chicago Cubs.

Virtually any conversation with Mary Jo involving Society business had a preliminary step: a piece of printer paper would appear on which she would write the date and who was present. Then she would periodically add short notes. Normally the close of the conversation would be the last time the paper was ever seen, but it served its purpose – helping MJ process what had occurred. Mary Jo



was a visual person.

A Dynamo of Energy

Mary Jo seemed to have unlimited energy. She normally devoted about 50 hours each week to the Society plus additional time for local organizations and committees. Those who knew her had a difficult time figuring out when she slept. MJ was always talking about what she heard on the WGN (radio) all night shows, and new board members soon stopped being surprised when they received long e-mails from her sent at 2:00 or 3:00 or 4A.M. The sudden reduction of her energy was an early indication of her illness.

An Historian...

Mary Jo's knowledge of the neighborhoods' history was encyclopedic and sometimes seemed to take the form of a stunt. Without checking resources she could identify and provide the history of many old neighborhood houses, convert a current address to the old Chicago address numbering system, provide unique information on historical figures, and identify the date and location as well as other information about an old photo from a brief look.

While MJ's knowledge about all aspects of neighborhood history often surprised, her enthusiasm for learning new information was obvious.

While doing research for the first historical book, we discovered that Temple Menorah, a West Ridge Congregation, used a meeting hall at 6424 N. Western to conduct services before its building was completed. The meeting hall was in the building that housed the Society at the time of the discovery.

Mary Jo stared at the research notes and in a moment had a blank sheet of printing paper in front of her. Her pen flew as she listed additional information she wanted to know about the history of the building. This piece of paper did not disappear.

...and Story Teller

It wasn't just Mary Jo's knowledge of the neighborhoods' history that made her unique but the way she discussed and explained it. Past President Jacque Day described MJ's narrative skills when she noted...

Mary Jo is a special kind of storyteller. To her, yesterday was as ripe, as real, as alive as today, and even tomorrow. She could look at a place in our neighborhood... the Howard and Western Shopping Center, for instance... and see herself as a child, playing ball with

her brother and sister in the empty lot that it once was, and simultaneously appreciate and love what it's become, and its possibilities for the future. She wanted us to see the story of our wondrous area the way she did, with all its possibilities.



The Future

As a founder, Past President, and Executive Director, Mary Jo Doyle has been a part of the

Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society since its first day. Her presence, energy, love and knowledge of the neighborhoods' history has created a legacy within the Society and throughout the communities.

Changes in the Society have been in the works for some time (see the column on page 3) and the Board will continue working to make the society a viable organization.



Founders' Day – 2007

The 2007 Founders Day, held on July 29, was truly special on many levels. Volunteer Services Director Glenna Eaves assumed the additional role of planner for the event and did a superb job. Held on the grounds of St. Scholastica Academy, the large crowd enjoyed activities, conversation, and lunch. The weather provided full cooperation to make the day special. As an added attraction, representatives from the Chicago Fire department Museum manned a table and spoke with attendees.

A program held indoors honored the volunteers who make the Society work. Peg Olson, nurse and Board Member, arranged to bring Mary Jo Doyle, who was in a nursing home, to attend the presentations. This would be her last appearance at a Society event. As she rested from the short trip many people paid their respects before the start of the program. It soon became clear that Mary Joe was the guest of honor. And she was honored – by Alderman Joe Moore, by Alderman Bernie Stone, and by a proclamation from the Chicago City Council.

The pictures on the page and the next are from *Founders Day – 2007*.



Mary Jo Doyle (left) and Society past President Jacquie Day at the presentation program.



Alderman Bernie Stone presenting Mary Jo with a copy of the City Council Resolution recognizing her contributions.



Volunteer Services Services Director Glenna Eaves presents Volunteer Robert Case with an award for his contributions to the Society. Glenna also produced this very successful event. Robert has been leading the Photo Archiving project.



Welcome Table at the 2007 Founders Day event.

Report from the Conference on Illinois History

By Jonathan Dixon, Society President

For anyone who has an interest in local Illinois history – from the earliest French settlers, to American pioneers, to Abraham Lincoln, to 20th century Illinois politics – the annual Conference on Illinois History is a treasure trove.

The 2007 conference, held on October 18 and 19, offered fascinating and provocative presentations including, "An Illinois Soldier's Journey to Atlanta with General Sherman," "Tear Gas, Mace, Batons, Barbed Wire, Barricades, Yippies, and a Pig for President: – The Chicago Demonstrations of 1968," "Was Abraham Lincoln Clinically Depressed During the Lincoln-Douglas Debates?" and "25 Miles a Year: Building the Cook County Expressway System" – along with many other engaging offerings.

What's more, within a five block radius of the conference in downtown Springfield is the Abraham Lincoln Home, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, the Old State Capitol, the Illinois State Museum, and the Lincoln-Herndon Law Office. Downtown Springfield is truly a walking history museum with so many significant historical sites as well as

numerous historical markers on virtually every street corner. The "Looking for Lincoln" historical markers liberally scattered all over downtown Springfield are far from the boring, old bronze historical markers; they are in full color and provide amazing facts and insights into 19th century life in Springfield. They point out a lot of the workday realities of Springfield residents in the days before electricity, running water, and the internet. On a nice day, there is more than enough to see during a day-long walk around all of the sights in Springfield. Moreover, admission is free to most of the sites.

The Conference on Illinois History is co-sponsored by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. For history buffs who can take the time, attending the 2008 conference will be a genuine treat. Also, given that the conference is always on a Thursday and a Friday, it offers a great chance to extend the experience into a long weekend of history and sight-seeing in Abraham Lincoln's home town.

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THE TIME HAS COME FOR THE MARTIN J. SCHMIDT EXHIBIT

by Mary Jo Doyle



For the past few years, our Society has been discussing an exhibit of Marty Schmidt's photos. But each time the conversation got serious something happened to make us table the idea. I believe the time has come to honor this man who is both a society and a neighborhood treasure.

Martin Schmidt was born in Glenview, IL on May 15, 1921, the oldest of three boys. His grandfather was a veteran of WWI who, after the War, worked for Garvey Stationery. Later he and a business acquaintance, Al Schiller, opened a stationery store and worked together for many years. Marty's grandmother was a homemaker who took care of her children.

When Marty was six years old, the family moved from Glenview to a house at 3850 N. Leavett in Chicago, where he acquired many fond memories as he grew up. His love of cameras started when he was twelve, and 75 years later it has not changed. His father gave him a movie camera and a 35MM and, during the summers of 1933 and 1934, Marty went to the Chicago World's Fair where he took movies and stills.

Marty attended St. Benedict's Grammar School at Irving Park Road and Leavett (very close to his home) for eight years, where he took photos of his classmates. When he started first grade, there were twelve boys in his class who ended up becoming lifelong friends. They grew up together, attended each other's weddings and went to many parties. All of the friends served in World War II and all returned safely. Eighty years after they met, six of them are still alive and they all keep in touch. They play cards every two weeks. Marty has been unable to attend the games for quite awhile because, for the past several months, he has been staying at Lake Shore Rehab Centre (in the heart of Rogers Park). He had an operation on his left foot and is now learning to walk again.

Marty went on to attend DePaul Academy where he was a photographer on the yearbook staff during his junior and senior years. He attended DePaul U. where he continued taking photographs of various classes and school activities.

In 1939, Marty's father opened Atlas Stationers in downtown Chicago. After World War II, Marty's brother Joe went into business with his dad and eventually purchased it. Marty worked there for awhile as a shipping clerk.

At the same time, Marty's maternal grandparents owned a house with a small store and deli where grandfather Munz made hand-made sausages. There was also a hot dog stand on the property. Joe and his wife Lydia would drive out there on the weekends and Joe would work at the hot dog stand.

In February of 1942, Marty enlisted in the U.S. Army Signal Corps because they had a photography unit. He completed his basic training at Camp Cowler in Joplin, MO. Later that year, he went to a US Army photography school in New York. Thirteen photographers in his unit shipped to Wales and traveled by train to London. For the next two years, they worked in a photo lab developing film, not only from the front, but also from cities in Germany, France and England. Later, he befriended a family in England and lived with them during the 1942 London Blitz. During this time he took a series of photos of the men in his unit.

Marty was discharged in March of 1946, but during 1945 and 1946 he took some excellent photos, including capturing Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the return of the King of England with his wife and two daughters to their home in Buckingham Palace. They had been at another location due to the bombings. He shipped home in March of 1946, rested for awhile and then got back to his photography. He began by traveling across the country taking many photos.



Marty is a member of several photography organizations and clubs, has taught photography in Winona, IN, and has been a judge at many competitions.

I met Marty in 1983. I was at the Chicago Historical Society looking through photos for our Society. I kept seeing his name on the back of many photos he had donated to the organization. When I got home, I looked up his name in the phone book, called him and we wound up talking for a couple of hours. It was at this time that he offered to be our photographer. He joined the Society and eventually joined our Board of Directors, serving for a few years as Vice president and then Society president.

Marty has generously donated countless photos to our Society. When the time comes, the large quantity of high quality shots will enable us to create an excellent exhibit to honor this great photographer and thank him for his contributions to our Society.

The Society Store

CHICAGO'S FAR NORTH SIDE
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF ROGERS PARK AND WEST RIDGE



NEAL SANDER MARY JO DOYLE MARTIN LEVIN MICHAEL WILLIAMS

Our 30th anniversary Poster!

This 18 x 24 poster replicates the cover of our first historical book, *Chicago's Far North Side – An Illustrated History of Rogers Park and West Ridge*. The cover features one of the most important photos from the Society's collection, "Birch Forest at Lunt and Ashland", c. 1900.

The Chicago's Far North Side poster comes in two editions

	<u>Members Cost</u>	<u>Non-Members Cost</u>
• High grade glossy paper	\$ 12	\$ 15
• Framed Canvas Poster, <u>limited to 100 copies</u>	\$100	\$125

There will be no reprints of the canvas poster. Each person ordering a canvas print will receive a Certificate confirming that it is a limited edition and each print will be numbered.

Historical Books published by the Society

- *Chicago's Far North Side - An Illustrated History of Rogers Park and West Ridge*
 - *Neighborhoods Within Neighborhoods - Twentieth Century Life on Chicago's Far North Side*
- | | <u>Members Cost</u> | <u>Non-Members Cost</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Price of each book | \$ 30 | \$ 35 |

Photos from the Society's collection*

Copies of selected photos from the Society's collection are available for purchase. Five popular and significant photos have been selected for 2005. These photos are displayed in this issue of *The Historian*, on pages 6 & 7. The price per photo is:

	<u>Members Cost</u>	<u>Non-Members Cost</u>
	\$10	\$ 12

shipping charges are listed in the enclosed Order Form

* Photos are for personal use only

People joining or renewing during 2007 can obtain specified items from our store for free.

Please check the Membership Application/Order Form enclosed in this issue for details. The form can be used for membership in the Society and/or for purchasing items from our store.

Welcome New Members

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Membership information as of
October 31



Happy Holidays!