

The NOW 'n' THEN

**The official newsletter of the
Romeoville Area Historical Society**



DECEMBER, 2022

historicalromeoville@yahoo.com
815-552-9080

P.O. Box 7814
Romeoville, IL 60446

www.romeohistory.org
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October has been a busy month for the Society. The first Saturday, we had a table at Blain's Farm and Fleet where we displayed historic farm items. The second Saturday I gave a talk on the history of Romeoville for the local chapter of DAR, using some of the same display items. The group was very receptive, and several books were sold. On the third Saturday we displayed at the Fire Prevention Week event at Firehouse III. This display included retired Chief Al Stadelmaier's 'Turn-out' suit, which was donated recently. One evening a Brownie troop visited the museum to learn about village history for a badge.



On the fourth Saturday, I represented the Society at Bolingbrook Historical Commission's ribbon cutting for their new annex, which features Roger Claar and his tenure as mayor. During his speech, he credited the Romeoville Area Historical Society with giving Bolingbrook the incentive to start their Historical Commission.

We are closed from December 01, 2022 until March 04, 2023 as we have for the past several years. During this time visits can still be made by contacting the office. Many months there are more visitors by appointment than during our scheduled times.

We wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas.

Nancy Hackett - President



GEORGIA WILSON

You may recognize the name Georgia Wilson from RomeoFest, when Georgia Wilson Day grants individuals with special needs free carnival rides. You may also recognize it as the name of the building the Northern Will County Special Recreation Association (NWCSRA) is housed in. Who was Georgia Wilson and why do we continue to celebrate her name?

Wilson was a Romeoville resident who started out as a volunteer for the Romeoville Recreation Board in 1966. She became a part-time employee a year later and in 1973 was promoted to Recreational Director. She sat on the Title 1 Drop Out Prevention Advisory Board for School District 365U, trying to get dropouts back into school and finding out why they dropped out in the first place. She helped to found the Romeo-Brook Community Core Committee and established a hot-line phone service that people could call in times of trouble. She formed the Adult Athletic Booster Club and High School Band Booster Club at Romeoville High School. She also sat on the 365U School Board. As you can see, Wilson was a very active member of the community.

The work she is most remembered for, however, is with children with special needs. Wilson felt that recreation was important for all children, especially those with special needs. She would fill up the trunk of her car with different sports equipment and supplies and use them to lead programs for these children at Romeoville parks. As the program continued, the number of special needs children that participated continued to increase. Kids from Bolingbrook, Lockport, and Plainfield were coming to the programs because their park districts did not offer anything like it. Eventually, a co-operative between Romeoville and these communities was formed with Georgia Wilson as the director. This was the start of what today is known as the Special Recreation Association. As the director, Wilson worked to secure grant money and other funding for special recreation programs and advocated for the rights of those with special needs. Georgia Wilson died in 2005 at the age of 71. In September of 2010, the Special Recreation Association she helped to create moved into the building at 10 Montrose, the former home of the Romeoville Police Department. Six months later, the building was renamed the Georgia Wilson Community Service Center (now simply the Georgia Wilson Center) in honor of the woman who, no matter the problem or reason, always had time for others. *(Patch; August 01, 2022)*

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Mayor John Noak called it "a special occasion" this week as village officials announced a new name for what most people refer to as 10 Montrose Drive. On Wednesday, board members gave the facility a new name in memory of a longtime recreation department staffer. The building is now known as the Georgia Wilson Community Service Center. Wilson joined the Romeoville recreation department in 1966 and was the driving force behind the creation of the Special Recreation Association.

On Wednesday, Wilson's husband, Harold, and several family members were at the village board meeting to accept a plaque recognizing Wilson for her service. "This is in recognition of the fact that she was so heavily involved in the creation of these services," Noak said. "It's because of her that we have what we have," in terms of special recreation, he said. It was under Wilson's leadership and due to the many recreation programs, she developed for people with disabilities that Bolingbrook, Lockport and Plainfield joined with Romeoville to form the SRA, Noak said. "The need was so great," he said. As the SRA's first director, Wilson worked to secure grant money and other funding for special recreation programs and advocated for the rights of those with special needs. Noak said the building was renamed "in honor of (Wilson's) commitment and service to individuals with disabilities." Current SRA Executive Director Pete Pope was present as village officials rechristened the organization's new home. "We're happy to be a part of the village," he said. "(The new building has) just worked out extremely well for the SRA." *(Patch; March 04, 2011)*

A photograph of a street sign for 'MEMORY LN'. The sign is rectangular with a dark background and white lettering. It is mounted on a metal pole. The background is a cloudy sky with a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

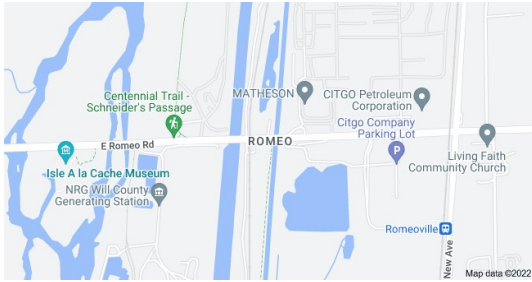
--Memory shared by Judy Bredeweg

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Romeo Beach was a retreat that's gone to the weeds

By Joseph Rizuch (*Chicago Tribune*, September 04, 2009)

Alice Jaje, 69, has many fond memories of her childhood. In the 1950s, Jaje recalls "great times" with her friends and family at her favorite childhood swimming hole -- a flooded quarry with a sandy beach -- down the street from her Lemont home in rural Romeo, which is now Romeoville. Jaje wonders what happened to the legendary Romeo Beach, near 135th Street and New Avenue, with its rural setting and sparkling clean water. Some say it rivaled the beaches along Chicago's shoreline.



"We had great times there," said Jaje. "I was just a kid but remember that it was so much fun. The beach was beautiful. People from all around would come to swim there."

According to the book, "Romeoville, Illinois," by Mabel Hrpcha, a recently deceased member of the Romeoville/Fountaindale Historical Society, the Bruce Quarry was filled with water around 1915 after the owner, Ebenezer Williams, brought in sand to make a beach. He

also ran an ice business at the site. He opened the beach, first called Clearwater Lake, a year later and charged admission fees of 10 cents for adults and 5 cents for children. Ebenezer's son, Herald, operated the beach until 1947. Herald Bruce, believed to be a die-hard White Sox fan, would set aside a day at the beach for the team's players and their families. The Bruce family's home was on the north side of the 16-acre lake. The beach closed to the public in 1973, according to Hrpcha's book. (*Available for purchase at the Romeoville Area Historical Society Museum*) The family later sold the lake and adjacent property to Commonwealth Edison, which used it as a cooling pond.

Today the lake's shoreline is covered with weeds, and it is enclosed by a chain-link fence with "no trespassing" signs. The once quaint rural area is now dotted with oil refineries and the property is owned by Citgo.

Dorothy Hassert, 84, of the Romeoville/Fountaindale Historical Society, said many people would arrive by train from Chicago in the early days to spend time at the beach. She said the area had several hotels to accommodate beachgoers. "The lake was a retreat for city people," she said. "The Hrpcha farm was located right across from the lake. Mabel's mother would make bread and sandwiches for the swimmers. People would also purchase butter and sausage [from the farm] before they would go back to Chicago."

Hassert said the 1950s and 1960s were busy times there. "In the summer, cars would start lining up at 7 a.m. to get in," said Hassert. "The gates would sometimes close because there were just too many people."

There were other quarries in the area used for swimming, including the nearby Santa Fe Quarry. Boaters would fish in the Garden Quarry. The limestone quarries were a thriving business in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and limestone was used to construct buildings in downtown Chicago, such as the Water Tower.

Norma Johnson, 88, of Lemont remembers swimming at several quarries in the area. "Lemont didn't have a [community] swimming pool at the time," she said. "The quarries were the only place we could swim. Romeo Beach was the most popular."

"I remember a raft in the middle of the lake. People would swim to it, stand on the raft, and dive into the water. Those were some great times."

Local Obituaries



Geraldine M. Frost 08-17-1927 / 08-05-2022

Geraldine "Gerri" M. Frost Nee Swanson, age 94, peacefully passed away surrounded by her loving family on Friday, August 5, 2022 at Lightways Hospice in Joliet. A 64-year resident of Romeoville, formerly of Chicago. Geraldine is survived by her children John "Jack" (Kathryn), Steven (Colleen), Jacalyn, and Mark (David Luecht) Frost; grandchildren Anne, Michael, Wendy, Charles, Lorelei, Amanda, Genevieve, Kelly Lynn, Christopher, Stefanie, Michelle, Matthew, Melissa, Michael; 30 great grandchildren; 1 great-great grandchild, numerous step grandchildren and step great grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews. She is preceded in death by her loving husband Leonard J. Frost with whom she shared 67 years of cherished married life together; her parents Edward and Lillian Swanson, her brother Edward, and sister LaVerne (late Joseph) Coletta. For over 25 years, Gerri worked for the Romeoville Police Department, first as a radio operator and for many years as the records supervisor of all radio operators, clerks, typists and crossing guards. Due to her knowledge and contributions, she was affectionately given the unofficial rank of "General" by the officers and civilian staff at the police department. Before and during retirement, she was an avid traveler, researching and arranging group vacation trips for many circles of friends as well as her siblings. She was a member of the Joliet Women of the Moose Joliet Chapter 84, serving as senior regent and receiving her Red Stole, Joliet Elks #296 Ladies Auxiliary, and a **charter and lifetime member of the Romeoville Historical Society**. A Democratic election judge for 40 years.

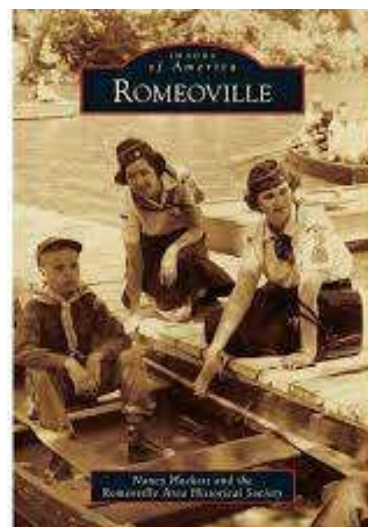
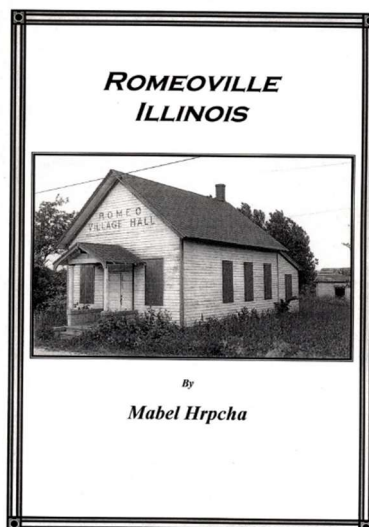
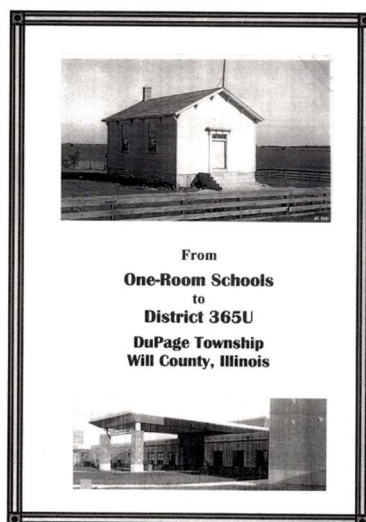


William Stolarczyk 01-12-1930 / 09-28-2022

William Stolarczyk, age 92 of Romeoville, IL, passed away Wednesday, September 28, 2022. Beloved husband of the late Ann M. Stolarczyk nee Lattyak; loving father of Mary Ann (Robert) Hill and the late William S. Stolarczyk; cherished grandfather of SamathaJo (Nick) Bostic, Stephanie Hill, and Joshua (Gloria Alvarado) Hill and great-grandfather of three; fond brother of the late Genevieve (the late Jerry) Yurczak and the late Mary (the late Paul) Gadzala; uncle to many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents Mikolaj Stolarczuk and Helen Palyga.

William was an Air Force Veteran and retired from Castle Buick in Berwyn, IL. He loved camping, fishing, gardening, woodworking, crossword puzzles, water exercising, and was an avid reader. He was a 62-year member of International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Lodge #701.

Publications available for purchase either at our museum located at 14 Belmont, Romeoville, or from our website at: www.romeohistory.org



From the June 05, 1963 issue of the Beacon (covering Hampton Park, College View & Mikan)

LOU BALEK'S CHAMPS CELEBRATE

Lou Balek, center, takes a bite of the victory cake (assist by Bill Vandeborn, 2nd baseman) at the party for her championship baseball team. With her are Bruce Connors, C.F., Vandeborn, James Lowery, pitcher, and Earl Hicks, L.F.

Miss Balek's H.E.L.P. American League Team compiled a 10-0 record and went on to defeat the National League champs by a 4-3 score.

The victory celebration for the team and their guests was held at the home of Marcel LeVesque, 301 Belmont. Hamburgers, hot dogs, pop and cake were enjoyed by the boys and their guests. Chief cook for the occasion was Bill Balek. Music and dancing followed the food. Individual trophies were awarded to all the players.

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NVCO SETS SEPTEMBER MEETING

The next meeting of the NVCO will be at 8 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 16 at North View School. The program will include the following:

Award of Little League Trophies to members of the winning team and its sponsor. A talk by Mr. Walter Lanon of the Citizens Utilities Co. Discussion by Dr. Wm. H. Blatnik, Superintendent of the Lockport High School Dist. 205, and members of his staff, covering the position and needs of the High School in our community. Report on the well Baby Clinic. Refreshments will be served.

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE ON 12/31/22

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Please use this form to renew your membership of the Romeoville Area Historical Society. The present cost of an individual membership is \$20.00 for one year or \$35.00 for two years. A business or organization membership is \$50.00 for one year or \$95.00 for two years.

Membership includes free access to the museum and our newsletters. **Please mail your check and membership form to Romeoville Area Historical Society, P.O. Box 7814, Romeoville, IL 60446.** You may also pay for your membership or donation through PayPal or through Zelle or Venmo by sending it to historicalromeoville@yahoo.com

We are now in our new museum located at 14 Belmont Drive, Romeoville, Illinois. It is named after the late James P. Sczepaniak, a long-time faculty member of Valley View School, Lockport West High School, and Romeoville High School. He was also a member and contributor to the Romeoville Area Historical Society.

Please print:

NAME: _____

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DUES ENCLOSED: [☐] 1 year individual \$20.00 or [☐] 2 years \$35.00

[☐] 1 year business or organization \$50.00 or [☐] 2 years \$95.00

DONATION (OPTIONAL) \$_____ Since we are a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, donations may be tax deductible. Please consult your tax advisor for more details.

We have NO paid staff, and our only sources of income are dues, donations, or book sales.

Romeoville Area Historical Society
14 Belmont Drive
Romeoville, IL 60446



We are closed for the winter thru 03-04-2023

but will open for tours by appointment.

Please call Nancy (after 4pm) at 815-886-0273

or email us at historicalromeoville@yahoo.com