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We are Back!

The problems of starting the JPHS were a little over whelming at first. We all have jobs and other commitments therefore it was hard to allocate the time that was needed to keep this organization up and running. Maybe JPHS is still not quite running but we are walking fairly well now and I think we all have a renewed commitment to forge ahead with the task at hand. This newsletter is part of our renewed effort.

Our meeting at the Gateway Theater is more of our renewed effort. The theater took its name from the neighborhood. Jefferson Park was once called "the Gateway to Chicago" or "the Garden Gateway" because of the truck farms throughout the area. Farmers would truck their produce to Jefferson Park to sell to the residents and to sell to the people in Chicago by way of Milwaukee Ave. The trucks would come in on Higgins and Northwest Highway, both dead-ending in Jefferson Park. This ideal location made for a successful business district with a large community to support this commerce. The idea that all roads come to Jefferson Park still applies today with the Kennedy Expressway cutting thru our community and the Eden's not far away. The Metro and the CTA Blue Line (subway and buses) all come to Jefferson Park. We are still very much a Gateway community with great potential.

Please support the businesses in Jefferson Park. It's like voting for your favorite business with your money; the more money they receive the more likely they will remain open to serve the community. By all means support the businesses whose ads grace the pages of this publication; we could not have a newsletter like this without their financial help.

I would also like to thank those of you who have supported us in the beginning and I look for your continued support in the future. Why not sign up and become a member of the JPHS. We do need your help. *Frank Suerth*

HENRY ESDOHR

Henry Esdohr was born February 13, 1852, near Hanover in Prussia. His parents were Heinrich Esdohr and Sophie M. Ehsmann. In 1866, two young boys, 14-year-old Henry Esdohr and his 12-year-old brother Herman, made the long journey by themselves to America. Although they never saw their family again, Henry and Herman remained close and never lived more than 2 blocks from each other.

Family history has the young boys growing up near Bensenville. Other reports tell of Henry Esdohr coming to Jefferson Park in his teens. He had established the first retail liquor store in Jefferson Park in 1874 when he was 22. Four years later, on February 28, 1878, Henry married Kate Lauer from Wheeling, Illinois.

Both men were hardworking businessmen. Henry Esdohr was both Postmaster for Jefferson Park and treasurer of the school board for the first township high school in the state, all before 1880. The high school was located in the Jefferson town hall. Around 1881, Henry Esdohr started a business with Henry Wulff, selling agricultural equipment and sewing machines. In 1881 Henry Esdohr was elected City Clerk of the Town of Jefferson.

In the 1880 US Census, 27 year old Henry Esdohr was listed as working in a retail dry goods & grocery store. William Harmon (17) was listed as a boarder living with the family and working as a clerk in the store. Also listed were Henry's wife, 20-year-old Kattie and their 1-year-old son, William. In October, after the census was taken, Henry's daughter Helen was born. Years later his other son Hazelle was born.

As most people know, the area residents obtained their water at the pump on the Esdohr Farm. Henry's well was deeper than other nearby wells, deep enough to catch the flow of water that runs underground all the way from Lake Superior. People came from far away to get the pure and clear water from this well. This well was in operation until 1895.

Helen Esdohr was in the graduating class of Jefferson High School in 1898. She went on to marry Harry Clark. The couple had no children.

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The 1900 US Census shows 48-year-old Henry Esdohr, his 40-year-old wife, Kate working in real-estate, their 21-year-old son William working as an electrician and their 19-year-old daughter Helen working as an office clerk.

Henry & Katherine Esdohr had only one grandchild. She was Katherine Esdohr who was born on June 28, 1924 and was the daughter of Hazelle Esdohr. In 1941 when Hazelle died, her aunt Helen Esdohr Clark adopted her. Katherine Esdohr married Timothy Dillon and moved to Falls Church, VA

Henry Esdohr died on November 8, 1914, while still living at 5425 Higgins. He was buried at Union Ridge Cemetery but his body was later moved to the Acacia Park mausoleum. His wife Katherine lived on to 1937. William Esdohr never married and worked as a real estate broker.

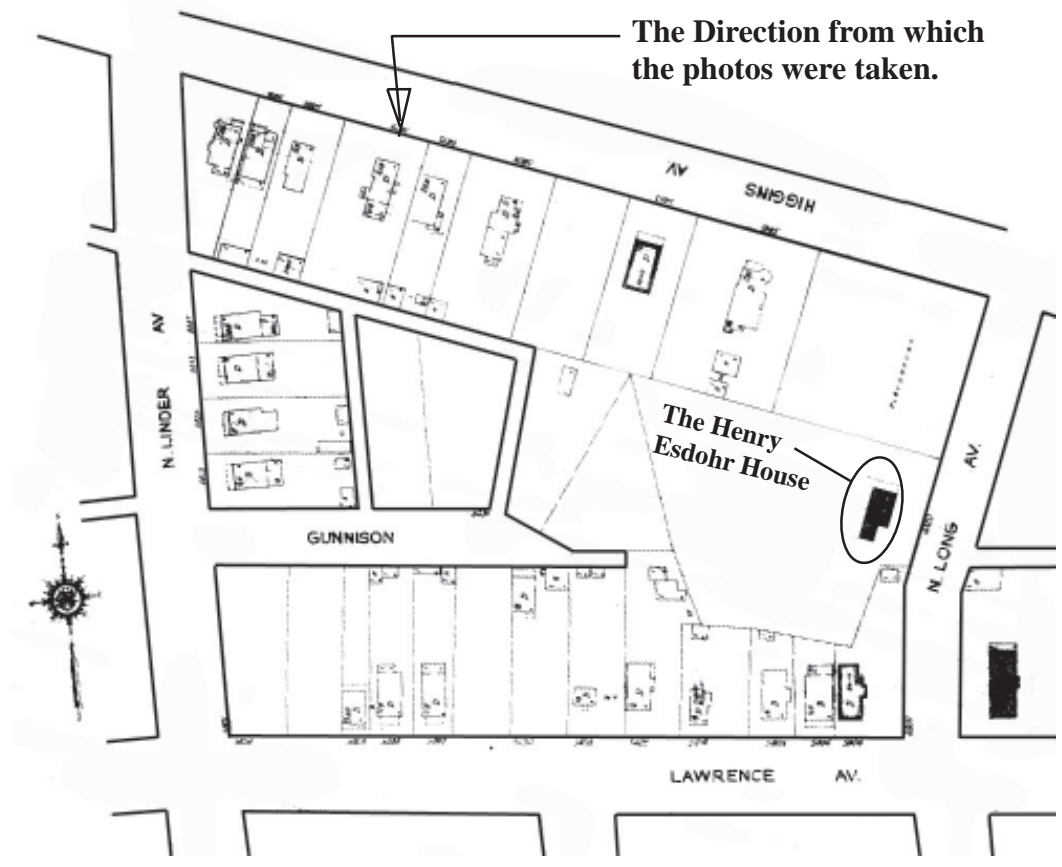
He was widely known as a world traveler and when not traveling, he lived with his sister Helen Clark at 1200 Lake Shore Drive. William died on November 25, 1942 after a 4-year illness. Helen Clark was living at 65 E. Oak in Chicago when she died in 1952. She still had 20 shares of Jefferson Park National Bank stock listed in her estate in 1952. They are all on the 2nd floor of the Acacia Park mausoleum.



The Henry Esdohr House. Henry lived in this house for over 40 years. At the time he owned this farm house it was located at 5425 Higgins Ave. where the Jefferson Park field house now stands. It was moved sometime after his death where it still stands as a landmark on the west side of Long Ave., just north of Lawrence ave. on park property. The Esdohr House was also the site of the first Jefferson Park branch library.

Photo by Frank Suerth

Compiled by Frank Suerth



A 1924 map of what is now Jefferson Park, park property. All the houses on the property are now gone except the Henry Esdohr House. Life long Jefferson Park resident, the late Helen Kraft, lived in one of the houses at the northwest corner of the park. She would sometimes sit at one of the park benches near some large trees that were all that was left of her girlhood home.



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Top photo taken by Curt Hinsch sometime before 1930. It shows two houses on the south side of Higgins in the park. The houses were moved or torn down to make way for the park. Bottom photo taken in 1990 by Ed Hinsch *Photos Courtesy of Ed Hinsch*

Life sketch of
HERMAN HENRY ESDOHR

By Robert D. Hunn (great grand son)

Written in May 2004

Herman Henry Esdohr was born April 14, 1854, on his family's farm in the tiny village of Okel in the Kingdom of Prussia. This is in northwest Germany not too far from the city of Hanover. The village is so small that it is not even shown on most maps. His family owned a farm, which had been in the family since the late 1600's. He had 2 older brothers, Diedrich and Henry, and a younger brother John. There were also 2 sisters in the family.

Because the farm was only large enough to support 1 family it could never be divided among several children when the father died. It was the universal custom and tradition in all of Europe in those days that when the owner died, that farm would pass to the oldest son while the younger sons would have to find some other Livelihood, and this is how it had always been in the Esdohr family.

So it was known from the time the children were born that Diedrich would eventually inherit the farm while Henry, Herman and John would have to find other ways to make a living.

Herman grew up working on the farm with his brothers and presumably attended some little village school. Those days were the golden age of emigration to America for the peoples of northern Europe, especially the British Isles, Scandinavian countries, and Germany. Practically every family had members who had gone to America, or at least had friends or neighbors. And in most cases the letters would come back from them telling tales of the wonderful freedom and opportunities in the new world. So it became the dream and goal of millions of Europeans to immigrate to America. So it is no wonder that as the boys grew older the Esdohr family turned their eyes towards America.

They also had another major concern. They lived in the Kingdom of Prussia, which at that time comprised more than 1/2 of Germany. For more than 2 centuries Prussia had been a powerful and highly militaristic nation. They always maintained a large army and had frequent wars. And they kept up their strength by compulsory military service for all able-bodied young men, who were drafted into the army at age 18. And the Prussian army had a notorious reputation for harsh and severe discipline so that young men came to dread and hate the military service. In fact the fear of going into the army was so great that many young men would leave the country to avoid going into the army. Because of this the government passed a law that any young man who had reached the age of 15 was forbidden to leave the country.

And so it was that in 1866 the Esdohr family considered the situation. Diedrich, the oldest son, would have to stay at home and endure the military service and remain on the farm. They decided that the other boys would have their best life opportunities in America. But the problem was that Henry, the 2nd oldest was now 14 years old and if he reached his 15th birthday he would be barred from leaving the country for the next 5 or 6 years. So the decision was made that Henry would have to go to America that year. And because he was so young to be undertaking such a momentous and potentially dangerous journey they decided that it would be best to send Herman with him. They reasoned, with good logic, that having the 2 boys together they would have companionship and could help each other cope with problems.

And so the 2 boys, 14 and 12 years old, not speaking a word of English, with little money and what few personal possessions they could pack in their suitcases, took leave of their family and set off for America and a new life. It must have occurred to all of them that they may never see each other again (and in fact they didn't) and one can imagine the kinds of emotions that must have attended their departure.

Advanced planning had of course been carried out for the boys' care in America. The Esdohrs knew a family in America - I'm not sure if they were relatives, or perhaps ex-neighbors from the village. The family owned a farm in Bensenville, which was then a farming community NW of Chicago. My understanding is that that farm now lies somewhere under the runways of O'Hare Airport. This farm family had agreed to take the boys in and take care of them. I presume the agreement was that the boys would work on the farm to earn their keep until they were old enough to go out and make their own way in the world. Whether or not they attended school in Bensenville I don't know.

Unfortunately I don't know many details of Herman's life for the next 14 years. But this much can be said: he learned English quickly, was ambitious and hard working, adapted quickly to life in America, and had a life-long financial plan that made him a very prosperous man. His plan was: "you make a quarter, you put 15 cents in the bank." In other words he banked 60% of what ever he made! Can you imagine trying to do that today?

Now we fast-forward to 1880. Herman is 26 years old and working for the Budlong Pickle Co.(1) He drove a horse-drawn wagon and delivered pickles to stores, restaurants, etc. One of the places he delivered to was the Waukegan House, a small hotel or inn on Milwaukee Ave. (I think) somewhere between Jefferson Park and downtown. The manager or the hotel was John F. Hertel, himself a German immigrant who had originally settled in Half Day. Mr. Hertel had an auburn-haired 20-year-old daughter named Dora who caught Herman's eye. In May 1881 Herman and Dora were married.

(1) *The Budlong Pickle Company was started in the 1860's. The factory was located in what is now Lincoln Square and the farm was north of there. The Budlong Pickle Co. closed in 1960.*

I don't know for sure where they lived initially but Jefferson Park would be a good guess. A few years later I know they had a large frame house with a large yard, on Milwaukee Ave. a little south of Lawrence.⁽²⁾ Within a few years Herman had gone into business. He formed a partnership with his good friend Alvin Peters.³ They opened and operated a large general store, also somewhere on Milwaukee Ave. They were both good businessmen and the store prospered from the start. In addition to groceries and general merchandise they also sold feed (oats for horses). At that time there was a streetcar line, which went from downtown Chicago on Milwaukee Avenue and terminated in Jefferson Park. The cars were drawn by horses, and since Jefferson was the end of the line, that's where all the large, hard-working horses were stabled. And when Peters and Esdohr secured the contract to supply the feed for the streetcar company their prosperity escalated in a major way.

Herman and Dora had 9 children between 1882 and 1895, one of whom died in infancy: sons Fred, John, and Hertel and daughters Frances, Charlotte, Adelaide, Lois, and Esther. They enjoyed a comfortable and pleasant home life. Their prosperity allowed them to have hired help. Twice a year, spring and fall, a seamstress would move into the house for a week or two and make new clothes for the children (and possibly for Dora also). And I once heard that Grandma (Dora) didn't cook the meals - some hired maid or cook saw to that. Each of his daughters on her 18th birthday received a gift of a diamond ring (about 3/4 carat).

Herman had quickly become one of the best-liked and most respected members of the community. He and Dora attended the Jefferson Park Congregational Church, where all 9 of their children were christened. He was very active in the Masons (Providence Lodge) and became a Knight Templar. His brother Henry was Master of the Lodge for a number of years. He had a widely recognized reputation, as an excellent businessman and shrewd investor, and many people in the community would come to him for advice in business and financial matters.

- (2) *The Herman Esdohr family lived at was is now 4738 N. Milwaukee Ave. They lived at this address until after 1910.*
- (3) *Actually, Herman's first grocery store was a partnership with Peter F. Thomsen. It was called Esdohr & Thomsen and was located at 4817 N. Milwaukee Ave. Later Alvin C. Peters replaced Thomsen and the business was renamed Esdohr & Peters. The store did not move and was atthe same location, on the SE corner of Ainslie and Milwaukee.*

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Like most immigrants of that era Herman was a proud and devoted citizen of his adopted country. He learned to speak English very quickly and became a citizen as soon as he was eligible. He knew right from the start that America was to be his home and his future and the land of his posterity. He was so determined that his children would be thoroughly American that he and Dora would never speak German in the presence of their children, even though it would have been a little easier for them. But sometimes late at night their children, who were supposed to be in bed sleeping, would hear their parents quietly conversing in German.

Herman was keenly interested in politics and never missed a chance to vote. Like all good businessmen in those days he was a staunch Republican. There is a family story that during the 1896 or 1900 election Dora kept goading him to vote for William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic candidate (women couldn't vote then, of course.⁽⁴⁾) This was a source of great aggravation to Herman who couldn't abide the fact that she actually wanted him to vote for a Democrat!

Thanks to his business success and sound financial abilities, Herman was able to sell his interest in the store and retire before he was 50. I am guessing it would have been around 1900-1904. At that time he also sold his house on Milwaukee Ave. and built a large new red brick house at the corner of Giddings and Long.

(4) *William Jennings Bryan was nominated in the 1896 Democratic National Convention in Chicago as their presidential candidate. He lost to William McKinley. He run again in 1900 and lost to President McKinley.*

Herman Esdohr's House on the corner of Giddings and Long. According the Cook County Assessor's website, this house was built in 1908. The 1920 US Census list 65-year-old Herman Esdohr as retired and living with his 59-year-old wife Dora in this house. John Esdohr was the only one of his children still living in the home.



Photo by Frank Suerth

Herman's retirement didn't last too long though. By this time his children were growing up - Fred and Frances both got married in 1904. Herman had the somewhat ahead-of-his-time idea that his daughters should have some kind of practical work experience before they got married. And in order to be sure that they got the right kind of experience in an environment that he was sure about, he decided to start another business to have a good place for his daughters to work. So somewhere around 1905-06 (I think) he opened a dry-goods store. I think it was called "H.H. Esdohr Co." and was located somewhere on Milwaukee Ave. I'm not sure how long they had that store -I would guess until about 1914-16.(5)

Herman and Dora's oldest son Fred graduated from high school in 1900. He then got a job in a bank in Irving Park.(6) Like his father, Fred was a hard worker, ambitious, and a fast learner. As he worked his way up through the bank he absorbed a thorough knowledge of all aspects of banking. As time went by Fred could see that there was a golden opportunity for a bank in Jefferson Park. The community was growing rapidly and there was no bank in town - the closest place residents could go for banking services was Irving Park. And so he started developing ideas and plans for Jefferson Park's first bank.

By about 1912 Fred felt that he had enough knowledge and experience to go ahead with his plans. The bulk of the money to start the bank was put up by Herman who used a portion of his "nest egg" to buy 60% of the shares. The rest of the shares were bought by Herman's old friend and business partner Alvin Peters, and several other prosperous local men.(7)

And thus was born the Jefferson Park National Bank with Fred Esdohr as President and Chairman of the Board. Fred had obtained a "National" charter for the bank, as opposed to a state charter. The standards were higher for the National charter, which gave the bank more prestige and also enabled it to actually issue currency in accordance with treasury regulations. Some family members still have old \$20 bills with Fred Esdohr's signature. I'm not sure where the bank's first building was located, but somewhere on Milwaukee would be a good guess.(8)

- (5) *The 1910 US Census, list 55-year-old Herman Esdohr with his family living at 4738 N. Milwaukee Ave. it also lists him as a retail merchant, at a dry good store. The dry good store was at 4784 N. Milwaukee.*
- (6) *Fred Esdohr in the 1910 census was listed as a bank teller and worked at a few banks before the Jefferson Park National Bank. He was a teller at the Milwaukee Ave. State Bank and a clerk at the Nation Bank of Chicago and at the National City Bank.*
- (7) *Israel Zwick was one prosperous local men who helped get the bank started. He also helped found the Irving Park Bank and the Elston State Bank.*
- (8) *The Jefferson Park National Bank, Charter # 10108, was chartered on October 5, 1911 and the title changed on June 28, 1932. The bank was first located at 4815 N. Milwaukee then move to their new building on the SW corner of Milwaukee & Lawrence.*



Milwaukee Ave.

at Lawrence Ave.

The Jefferson Park National Bank on Lawrence and Milwaukee Aves.

Sketch Courtesy of Joan Moody

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The bank was an instant success. In 5 or 6 years it had outgrown its first quarters and in 1919 Fred Esdohr built a large splendid new building at the southwest corner of Milwaukee and Lawrence. The new building was definitely “state-of-the-art” (for 1919) and the pride of Jefferson Park. Throughout it’s approximately 20-year history the Jefferson Park National Bank played a major role in the growth and development of the community. Many of the homes and businesses in the community came into existence by loans from the bank. The story of its sad and unnecessary death in 1932 is a subject for another story.

Fred H. Esdohr first purchased this property in 1904 and in a few years built this house. His family lived here until 1923. This house is at 4736 N. London.

Photo by Frank Suerth



This building on the northwest corner of Milwaukee & Lawrence is one of the many buildings the Jefferson Park National Bank helped to finance. The bank had made a 10-year \$100,000.00 loan for 6% to finance the construction of this building in 1930. The building with land was appraised at \$260,000.00.

Photo by Frank Suerth

Although Herman was the majority stockholder of the bank, he never actually worked there and didn't actively participate in the management. But I am sure he was keenly interested in the bank and no doubt was consulted often about bank business.(9)

Somewhere around 1920 or 21 Herman suffered a stroke, which left him partially paralyzed and wheelchair-bound. His wife took loving care of him (there were no long-term care facilities in those days) and on May 28, 1923, he passed away from either another stroke or a heart attack.

Herman's estate was valued at \$75,000, which doesn't sound like too much today. But adjusted for inflation that would be the equivalent of \$ 1-1.5 million in today's dollars.

But the value of a man's life can't be measured by how much money he accumulates. Herman Esdohr's real value lies in a life well lived, a life of hard work, honesty, and integrity, service to community and individuals and devotion to his adopted country.

(9) *Herman never actually worked in the banking business but many in his family did. In later years, his son Frederick H. Esdohr was President of Norwood Park Trust and Savings Bank at 6101 Northwest Highway. His son, John A. Esdohr was an assistant cashier of the Jefferson Park National Bank for ten years. Herman's son, Hertel Esdohr worked as a transit manager at the National Product Bank. His son-in-law, John D. Hendry was an assistant cashier at the Jefferson Park National Bank. Herman's grandson, Clifford E. Hunn was auditor and cashier at the Citizens State Bank of Park Ridge for 11 years and he was vice president and a director of Western Savings and Loan.*

Note: Most of this biographical sketch I wrote up on Herman Esdohr is based on "hearsay" – that is, stories and reports that I heard from members of the family over the years. I can't guarantee that all the dates and facts are completely accurate, but I believe the great majority of the information is correct.

Robert D. Hunn

The Gateway Theater

5216 W. Lawrence Ave. Chicago, IL 60630

The Gateway Theater opened in 1930 and is the only surviving movie theater in the Jefferson Park business district. Architect firm Rapp & Rapp, who designed the Chicago and Oriental Theaters in downtown Chicago and the Riviera and Uptown Theaters on the north side, designed this theater. The Gateway is the architect's only surviving example of an atmospheric style theater and the only example in the city of Chicago. A movie patron would see the grand style Roman interior and have a sense of an outside courtyard on a starry night, complete with clouds moving slowly over head.

Balaban & Katz originally own the Gateway Theater and for over 50 years it was their main theater on the northwest side. At this time, first run movies would run only in Loop and then the Gateway, along with a few other large theaters, would be next in line. After the Gateway with their 2045 seats, the smaller theaters would have their viewings.

The Plitt Theater group owned the Gateway for a short while until it was sold to the Copernicus Foundation in 1985. Although the Copernicus Foundation changed the outside of the theater, the interior has been restored. At the right side of the massive screen with velour curtains sits the Red Wurlitzer Grand Pipe Organ. The original was removed in the 1960's and the current one installed in 1983. The Grand Pipe Organ has over twelve hundred pipes, some over 15 feet high! The organ has many sound capabilities. Sleigh bells, cow bell, wind chimes, Chinese gong, bird whistle, siren, car horn and thunder are a few of the sounds that give "voice" to the silent pictures that are shown here each summer.



The art deco facade and marquee of the Gateway Theater. Photo from mid 60's.



Interior of the Gateway Theater

Courtesy of the Theatre Historical Society of America



The Solidarity Tower that was added by the Copernicus Foundation is a small-scale replica of a 800 year old clock tower that was part of the Royal Castle in Warsaw. This tower now stands as beacon, visible from the Kennedy Expressway, welcoming and guiding visitors to Jefferson Park. It has become a landmark and is revered by people of all ethnic backgrounds in Jefferson Park. The photo on the left is of the Copernicus Center at 5216 W. Lawrence. The photo on the right is of the clock tower from the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Poland.



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JPHS Meeting

Sunday, Jan. 16, 2005 - 3:00 PM
1st floor - Copernicus Center
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In the Next JPHS Newsletter

- Beaubien - 100 years
- Charles Zickermann -
The 99 year old painter of Leland St.
- Leo Schueneman - Bowling alley pioneer

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