

Some months ago, Ted Anderson, a founding member of HPHS, passed away. He is remembered here by a fellow founder and friend, Devereux Bowly.

Recollections of Ted Anderson

I first met Ted Anderson when I was a small boy and my family were customers of his store at 1444 East 55th Street. It was a large, old fashioned hardware store, just the sort of place a boy who liked to work with his hands loved to hang around. The store was delightfully messy, with hundreds of boxes and bins full of miscellaneous parts and gadgets, nothing like the bland, sanitized home center stores of today, where everything is in plastic bags. In those days Hyde Park had a half dozen or so good hardware stores, on 57th Street, especially 55th, and 53rd Street.

The only one who knew where everything was in his store, of course, was Ted, and the entire operation revolved around him. He knew most of the customers by name, and almost everyone who came in to the store sought him out for advice on what merchandise to buy, or how to do a particular repair. The store was also a gathering point for janitors in the area, who stood around the nickel Coke machine to swap stories about their tenants, many of whom were students or professors, who didn't have enough "common sense" not to put grease down the sink, or to lock themselves out of their apartments.

Years later, when I got to know Ted much better, he bragged to me that he had only one job his entire life. He was born in Hyde Park in 1908, and attended Ray School and Hyde Park High School, where he loved to work in the shops that were later moved out when Chicago Vocational High School was built. When he was 10 years old, in the fourth grade, he had a friend whose father owned the local hardware store. The boy told Ted that his father needed a delivery boy, and he got the job. Eighteen years later he bought the store, by then owned by the Wagner Brothers, and renamed it A.T. Anderson Hardware.

During the Depression Ted kept the store going by purchasing the stock of other South Side hardware stores that were going out of business, and by buying distressed merchandise from wholesalers at bargain prices. For example, he once bought 75 broken wooden ironing boards for twenty-five cents each, from which he was able to repair 50 or 60 of them, to sell for \$5.00 a piece. The wood stove in the headquarters was purchased by Ted at a bankruptcy sale and sat in his garage for almost 50 years before being used for the first time. In order to make ends meet, Ted also did a lot of repairing of small appliances at the store, and he was a master locksmith.

Ted and his wife Lillian raised their three children in the large frame house at 5627 Kenwood. He could often be seen smoking his cigars on the front porch, because his wife didn't like him to do it in the house. He was extremely active in the Hyde Park Methodist Church, which was later torn down, and the congregation merged with the United Church of Hyde Park on 53rd Street. He loved music and often led singing at the church. He and his family could usually be seen eating Sunday dinner, after church, at the Tropical Hut restaurant on 57th Street.

Other than his family, his business, and his church, Ted spent an enormous amount of time involved in various volunteer activities in the community. He was a member of the local Draft Board for 20 years, a matter of no small interest to me and my male contemporaries, since we were of draft age during the Vietnam war. He was also active in, and usually chairman of, a virtual "who's who" of Hyde Park organizations, including the YMCA, Kiwanis Club, 5th Ward Citizens Committee, Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, Southeast Chicago Commission, 55th Street Businessmen's Association, Hyde Park Neighborhood Club, Mason's, and Schriener's.

When the Historical Society was formed he was in charge of selling 100 Charter Memberships at \$100 each, which provided the nucleus of funds to rehabilitate the headquarters. We worked very closely together on that project.

In the late 1950's, Ted's original store was slated for demolition as part of the urban renewal plan. He moved to a much smaller interim location, at 1215 East 55th Street, between Kimbark and Woodlawn, where he was located for 8 years. The actual move was made by a parade of volunteers carrying the merchandise from one store to another in borrowed Co-op Food Store shopping carts. Eventually he and other merchants, such as "Mr. G," built the 53rd Street and Kimbark Shopping Plaza where his store was relocated. A few years later he retired, after 55 years in the hardware business, the dean of Hyde Park merchants. The store thrives today, of course, now known as Anderson's Ace Hardware, enlarged and owned by his protegee, George Alguire. George has recently himself celebrated 50 years in the hardware business, but that is another story.

In 1980, after his wife died, Ted moved to Hawaii, where his son Ronald is an engineer. He shipped his furniture, belongings and tools in an enormous container, that also included his beloved Mercedes Benz automobile. He died in Hawaii on January 18, 1994, and a memorial service was held for him at the United Church on February 5, 1994. Even though he had moved from Hyde Park almost 15 years ago, more than a hundred of his old friends gathered to reminisce about him. He will not soon be forgotten. ✕