

History Hike 4

Rumors, Top Secret Experiments, & Rolling Meadows' Area 51?

As you leave the library, look across the driveway in front of you and to the right. Walk across the drive and proceed south on the bike path through the park next to Salt Creek. In one mile, the path will end at Central Road. Once on Central Road, proceed to the following coordinates, but be careful, many of us think this building isn't what it appears to be. If you decide to go in, you'd better read the rest of this first.

42° 04.021 N
088° 01.170 W

Locals have all heard the rumors that somewhere in this house, declassified time-travel experiments have been conducted. It has been whispered that the people working inside are not what they appear to be (mere local volunteers) and that this is the perfect cover for them to conduct their experiments without raising too many suspicions. If this house was in Nevada's top secret Area 51, it would create a lot of talk – here, it almost blends in. Proceed with caution.

Reports exist that this house is able to generate a time-distortion field that creates a portal to the 1950's. When you enter, you will be told it is a "museum". Is it? Or have you actually crossed into the time-distortion field? Check the date on your watch or cell phone as you walk through the house -- if it says 1955, the field generator is on. One last thing, don't bother asking the museum staff about the time-distortion field, they'll just deny it – until you leave! Keep checking the date on your watch – and good luck in your "travels". Below is the story they want you to believe about this unassuming "museum" of theirs. Check your watch and cell phone – and don't make too much eye contact.

*Rolling
Meadows
Historical
"Museum"*



In the early 1900's it was well-known the land you now stand on contained some of the most fertile soil in the area and was great for growing potatoes.¹ By the 1950's, another vision for the area's future was emerging but it took a good deal of imagination to envision a thriving community of 25,000 rising from these rolling meadows just south of the Arlington Park racetrack. One vision was to build a world class golf course on the property.² When that fell through, the land was eventually purchased and developed by Kimball Hill.³



Kimball Hill 1970

Kimball Hill had a law degree but found that in 1935 it was difficult for a new attorney to get started in the profession without his own money. Instead, he got a job with a mortgage company and fell in love with the building profession.⁴

After purchasing 537 acres among the, as he described it, “rolling meadows” bounded by the racetrack on the north, Wilke on the east, Kirchoff on the south, and Rohlwing on the west, Kimball Hill secured a right of first refusal on an additional 663 acres south of Kirchoff. He intended to build a community of affordable two and three bedroom houses with a purchase price of \$9,900 to \$12,500.⁵

The Village Of Arlington Heights objected to the project.⁶ The Village authorities had discussed, but never approved, a plan to build estate-size homes on 20,000 to 40,000 square foot lots. Arlington Heights also expressed concerns that if Hill’s “Rolling Meadows” project fell through, Arlington Heights would have to support the new homeowners.⁷ Some also expressed a concern that the affordable housing would become a “slum area” and downgrade the standing of its neighbors.⁸

A special sub-committee of the Cook County Board was appointed to hold hearings on the project. The outcome of the hearings were in doubt until one of the home buyers, Robert Lamson, contacted all 250 Rolling Meadows purchasers and issued a call for them to attend the April 26, 1953 planning meeting in Mount Prospect.⁹ Not only did the purchasers show up, they brought along their children – wearing badges saying “Rolling Meadows”. The show of civic pride for the yet to be approved city was enough to convince the Zoning Board to let the project go forward.



Kimball Hill's sales office and future home of the Rolling Meadows Library.



History Hike 4

Civic pride saved the city – before it was built, and Kimball Hill, the attorney that wasn't, became the father of Rolling Meadows. Kimball Hill has since been inducted into the National Housing Center's Housing Hall of Fame for his high standards of design and production.¹⁰

By the end of 1953, 144 families lived in Rolling Meadows. A poll taken during 1954 indicated that the typical homeowner was a World War II veteran, a Roman Catholic in his mid-20's, holding a blue collar job and earning between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a year. The size of the average family in Rolling Meadows at that time was 3.5 people.¹¹

Residents remembered the great camaraderie which developed among neighbors. Since no one had all that they needed when they moved in, borrowing wheelbarrows, ladders, and other household items became a local custom that lasted for years. Their sense of community was also strengthened by a wonderful sense of humor. As new resident Bette Kocian put it, "We were all working on a shoestring, and were all in just about the same straits. It wasn't a case of trying to keep up with the proverbial Joneses, because there weren't any Joneses out here."¹²



You are now at the front door of the Rolling Meadows Historical Museum. Step inside, and back fifty years. Your time-travel experiment begins now!

Rolling Meadows Historical Society

Take a walk through time at the Rolling Meadows 1950's Historical Museum

3100 Central Road
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008
Phone: 847-577-7086
Fax: 847-577-7346



Museum Hours:

Sundays	1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Wednesdays	10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
	April through the 2nd Wednesday in December

The newly built Historical Museum was designed as a replica of the first ranch-style homes constructed in the community by Rolling Meadows founder, Kimball Hill in 1953. Displays of donated historical documents, photos and finishings of the '50's era are combined to create authentic interior spaces within the home. The objective was to create a museum that did not feel like a museum. Visitors who enter the house will feel they have been transported through time to the actual home of a 1950's Rolling Meadows homemaker. The exhibit in the Kimball Hill Family Educational Center contains information on Kimball Hill, early days in the development of the City of Rolling Meadows, and displays of '50's memorabilia. Handicapped Accessible. **For group tours please call 847-577-7086.**

Rolling Meadows

Our Museum

by Don Klemp

Our Museum's full of nifties-
Takes you back into the fifties,
When the world was filled with simpler memories.
We were garbed in polyester-
Jackie Gleason was our jester,
Lucille Ball lit up our black and white TV's.
Having fun, for kids was easy-
fly a kite if it was breezy,
Have a Hula-hoop, a Davy Crockett hat,
A playpen for your crier-
and a washer and a dryer.
Could heaven offer more than that?
Every sofa held an afghan,
Everybody had a milkman
Who brought bottles right up to the door.
Floors were covered up with tile,
carpets had to wait a while,
spent a lot of time mopping the floor.
We weren't on the internet,
it hadn't been invented yet.
We had to read a book to find things out.
Over gas stoves we would slave,
Now we've got the micro-wave.
Tougher in the fifties, there's no doubt.
All of this touched our lives.
Mix-master and forty-fives
And even telephones we had to dial.
You won't feel a bit of gloom
as you wander through each room.
Say, "We had one of those!" and smile!!

Become a member!

Join the Rolling Meadows Historical Society. We are dedicated to preserving the past, present and future of Rolling Meadows for generations to come. Meetings are held on the third Monday of each month at 4:00 p.m. at the Historical Museum (3100 Central Road). For more information, please call 847-577-7086. Membership forms are available at City Hall, the Senior Center, the Historical House Museum and Park Central.