

# Rushlight Club 2010 Spring Meeting Report

## Treasures Viewed in West Chicago Suburbs & Rockford

by Martha O. DeBlieu

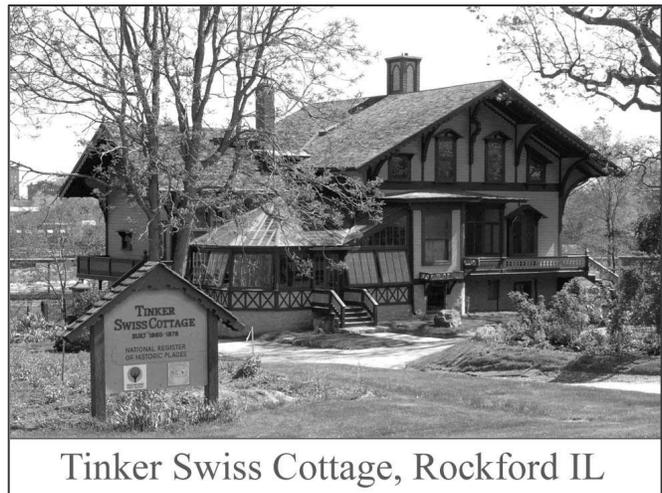
An array of eclectic collections, unique architectural gems, informative presentations, and auctions/sales of early lighting engaged Rushlight Club members at the 2010 Spring Meeting in west suburban Chicago, Ill., April 30 to May 2. Unseasonably mild temperatures and good daytime weather provided an extra bonus.

### Lamps, light fare, & laughter kick off the weekend

Friday evening, members viewed the extensive collection of Don and Donna Schoenly, Club president and Recording Secretary, respectively, while enjoying a reception and light buffet at their home. Primarily pre-1870 candle and wick lamp objects, including a rare marked Miles patent lamp, their collection is augmented by displays of kitchen implements, and advertising, sports, and pharmacy memorabilia.

### Shifts in lighting technology

Saturday morning, members and guests toured the 1865 Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum and Gardens in Rockford. Built by Robert Tinker an early Rockford industrialist, civic leader and amateur artist as a summer home, the Tinker Swiss Cottage is a rare example of Victorian Swiss architecture. Lived in by the family until 1942, it contains much of the original furnishings, artwork, household items, and architectural details, including 20 original gas and electric lighting fixtures. Member Keith Letsche augmented



the guided tour with information about the lighting, noting that the house showed the development of technologies from 1867 to 1942. Examples of multiple technologies and styles appear in the parlor, dining room, two-level ornate paneled library, front hallway, and master bedroom. Evidence of gas outlets still can be seen in several areas undergoing restoration and repair.

Also on Saturday, John and Ann Shallcross welcomed members to study their diverse lighting collection of glass, iron, and tin lamps. Also shown were an array of mining lamps, matchstick holders, candlesticks, and other lighting items, antique kitchenware, clocks and other devices, as well as a pristine, highly organized clock-making and repair workshop.

Following lunch at the Tinker Cottage, members shopped area antique shops, visited area attractions such as the Illinois Railway Museum or the Anderson Japanese Gardens, or checked out items for sale from the collection of the late Barbara Watts, a long-time club member.

### Sales and celebrations

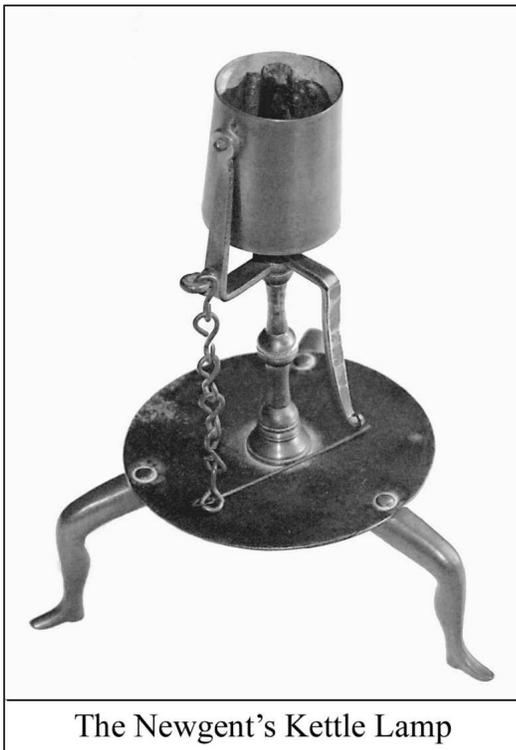
A social hour, silent auction, member sales, and “show and tell” displays preceded the Saturday night banquet at the Crown Plaza Hotel. Members had the opportunity to preview segments of a PBS show scheduled to air in May on the Nantucket whaling industry, featuring Club member Joe Arvay’s Nantucket cottage and lamp collection. Following dinner, President Don Schoenly

conducted a brief membership meeting, introduced new members and gave information on upcoming meetings. Member Chuck Leib shared plans for reprinting the James M. Nichols catalog he recently acquired. Copies of lamp advertisements for Cornelius lamps, Davis patent instructions, a Davis ad, and other ephemera donated by Chuck were auctioned off to benefit the club. Treasurer Pat Howell and Website Editor M.J. Howell also updated members on club activities.

In a humor-filled talk and demonstration entitled “Does dumb luck favor tenacity in research?,” member Mel Zaloudek traced the history of varied lanterns patented by William Westlake, Thomas Walton, A. (Archibald) W. Paull, John Morgan, Dietz & Co., John Irwin, and others and of the various lamp manufacturing companies over the years in describing his quest to identify several lanterns he had purchased. The conclusion: It helps to have both skills – luck and scholarship -- for identifying a special “find.”



Mel Zaloudek Recounts His Quest



The Newgent’s Kettle Lamp

In “show and tell,” Philip Asprooth offered a Wharton’s Victoria patented taper holder; Lela and Darrell Sago, an American sinumbra lamp for which they sought a shade; Gil McGurl, a pewter and glass oil lamp; John and Myrna Newgent, two unique kettle lamps; and Peter Gregory, a “married” lamp which appears to be partially a Simmons lamp with individual wick adjusters.

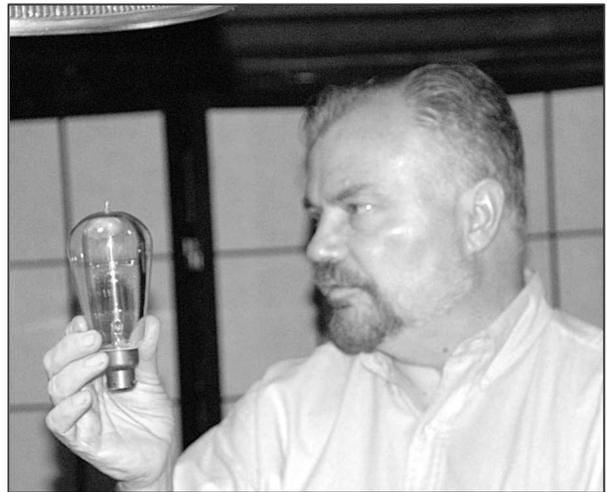
Member Ed Klausmeyer shared his luck in being given a set of three binder-notebooks tracing the early history of the Rushlight Club, including articles by co-founder Dr. Edward Rushford dating from 1930 from the *New York Sun* and other publications. The binders, passed on by the granddaughter of early member Mabel Hillis Peck, include the program of the Club’s first exhibition in 1935 at the Boston Public Library. Later, her son Robert Peck joined the Club and continued to add to the binders. Ed reports the family is thrilled that the materials have found their way back to the Club.

**Collection viewing and an electrifying presentation**

Sunday morning, members traveled to Keith Letsche’s 19<sup>th</sup> century American Victorian-furnished home in West Chicago to view his wide-ranging collection of working early patent gas lights, pre-kerosene and kerosene lamps, early electric lights, as well as early telegraph, telephone, and other electrical artifacts. Keith’s presentation “Thomas Edison and his competitors: Incandescent electric lighting, 1878-1894” was extensively illustrated with bulbs, electrical apparatus, patent drawings, and other items from Edison’s Menlo Park period. Experiments and

technical contributions by Edison's predecessors and contemporaries, including Hiram Maxim, Joseph Swan, Nikola Tesla, William E. Sawyer and Albon Man, Elihu Thompson and George Westinghouse, in the development of filaments, fittings, bulbs, switches, and distribution systems as well as Edison's own inventions and patents were cited as important steps in development, mass production, and mass marketing of electric bulbs and lighting.

Sunday Afternoon, members enjoyed a lunch buffet and viewed the collections and gardens at Bob and Caroline Jacobsen's Wheaton home designed by architect Jarvis Hunt. Besides 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century pewter, tin, and glass lamps, the collection also featured candlesticks, antique furniture (including a table once owned by Aaron Burr), glass and china, Korean earthenware pottery and ceramics, farm implements, ship paintings, decoys, and fishing lures.



Keith Letsche Showing Early Bulb



Sunday Afternoon at Bob and Caroline Jacobsen's

Participants thanked the meeting organizers Keith Letsche and Don and Donna Schoenly, as well as the Shallcrosses, the Jacobsens, Mel Zaloudek and the Watts family for an enlightening, enjoyable meeting