

Quick, Timely Reads  
*Reading in the Time of Coronavirus*  
On the Waterfront

Mister Peanut:  
Annual Neighborhood Visitor

By David Frew  
February 2021

*Dr. David Frew, a prolific writer, author, and speaker, grew up on Erie's lower west side as a proud "Bay Rat," joining neighborhood kids playing and marauding along the west bayfront. He has written for years about his beloved Presque Isle and his adventures on the Great Lakes. In this series, the JES Scholar-in-Residence takes note of life in and around the water.*

One of the joys of summer during the 1950s in Erie, Pennsylvania was the annual visit by Mister Peanut. Word of his arrival would spread like wildfire and neighborhood kids would rush to meet him, surrounding the costumed character and begging for bags of free peanuts. Mister Peanut, the neighborhood visitor, had a staff of handlers (like the action characters at Disney) who kept him supplied with bags of circus peanuts to give to the kids. The handlers carried a large sign advertising the Planter's Peanut Store downtown at 10th and State streets. And if for some reason the kids became rowdy, the handlers would "take care of things." Under their watchful care, Mister Peanut walked slowly along the block, shaking hands, passing out peanuts, and handing out discount coupons for Erie's downtown Planters Peanuts Store.



*Most now realize that Mister Peanut was an ordinary man in a 30-pound, plastic costume. But he wore a realistic top hat, monocle, white gloves, and spats. He also carried a black cane, so we almost believed in him. Most of us were just in it for the peanuts.*

During the 1950s and beyond, every Planters Peanuts franchisee was provided a Mister Peanut costume. As part of a national marketing campaign, franchisees were required to hire people to go out into the community wearing the costume and handing out free samples of Planters Peanuts. Local franchisee John Heinz opened Erie's peanut store at the corner of 10th and State streets in 1950 and continued to send Mister Peanut out on neighborhood walkabouts until he sold the store in 1975. A German immigrant, Heinz sold his store to a woman whose family came from the same small German village where his family lived. Annie Linebach took over the store but decided to change the business model. Adding penny candy, fudge, and other sweet treats to the business, she re-named her place "The Peanut Shoppe," as opposed to "The Planters Peanuts Store." She also decided that she would not continue the expensive Planters franchise, so she ended the Mister Peanut walkabouts, which would have been a franchise violation since she was no longer an official franchisee.

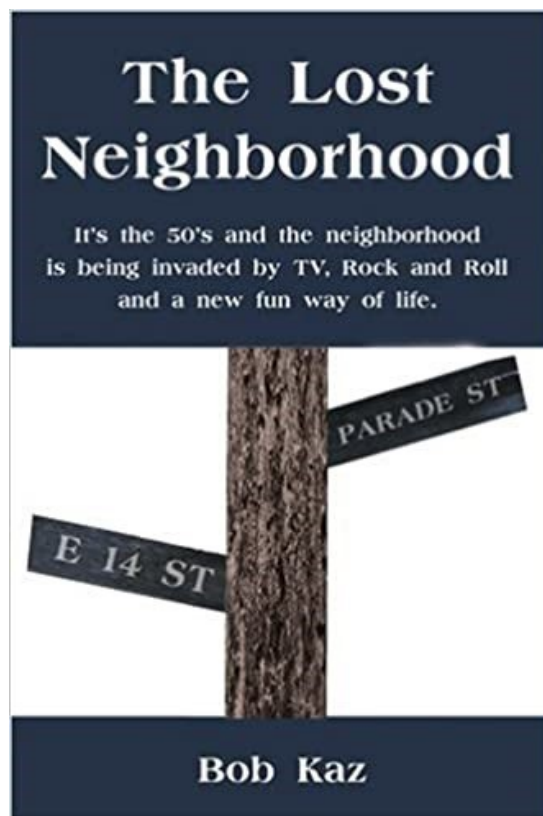


*The Peanut Shoppe at 10th and State in the old Baldwin Building, now Renaissance Centre*

Annie Linebach, or "the Peanut Lady," as everyone has called her, made the downtown peanut business a huge success. In addition to nuts, she sold every imaginable treat to both retail and corporate customers, offering gift boxes and baskets that featured mixtures of products. When she took over the store, she inherited an enormous, old fashioned peanut grinding machine, which she used to make a signature product: 100 percent pure, ground peanut butter. Decades before modern specialty shops began offering ground nuts, including peanuts,

almonds, or sunflower seeds as healthy alternatives to sugar-filled commercial peanut butter, she was providing it to customers. She even featured ground nut blends in which she mixed peanuts, cashews, walnuts, and other nuts.

In 2002, when I became the executive director of the Erie County Historical Society (now Hagen History Center), I began my tenure with a community survey in which I asked locals to list the kinds of exhibits they wanted to visit at our museums. There was an overwhelming interest in the 1950s with respondents telling us they were interested in period memorabilia. To launch a new 1950s exhibit, I solicited the help of my good friend Bob “Moose” Kaczenski. Bob was a 1950s aficionado and a retired Erie history teacher with a major interest in local history. He had even written a book about the 1950s in Erie called “The Lost Neighborhood,” using the pseudonym Bob Kaz. After brainstorming, Bob and I made a list of Erie’s most interesting 1950s phenomena, which included the Y-CO Dances, neighborhood movie theaters, diners, and Mister Peanut. Bob had exactly the same experience that I did as a boy, with Mister Peanut walking through his neighborhood.



*Bob Kaczenski's 1950s book is now a collector's item.*

While I was busy with museum technical director Dave Pugh and his friend Bud Kovacs, building a diner interior in an exhibit hall at the State Street History Center, Bob Kaczenski offered to visit with the lady who owned the Peanut Store and ask about Mister Peanut. He returned with the proverbial “good news and bad news.” Mister Peanut (the costume) was there at the store. In a storage closet. But store owner Annie Linebach would not let us borrow it for the exhibit. Assuming that Bob had not known how to approach her properly, I put on a tie and jacket and made a follow-up visit. I thought that if I explained that we would advertise her store, take exquisite care of the costume, and provide insurance against damage, that she would let us borrow Mister Peanut. I had a vision of the cartoon character walking around the museum, greeting people, and passing out free bags of peanuts (which I was more than willing to

buy). Just like the old days.

I took our “official archivist” along for the meeting, confident that I would be returning to the museum with Mister Peanut. After making my best offer, however, which included certificates of insurance, our official titles as an accredited museum with protected archives and much more, Annie Linebach flatly refused. She did let me see Mister Peanut who was in a closet but she would not even let us photograph him. As I was leaving, terribly disappointed, the “Peanut Lady” added that she would have been more inclined to loan the costume to Bob Kaczynski than me because she trusted him and added that he even bought a large bag of peanuts. These days I prefer to think that she was afraid to allow Mister Peanut to leave the store because of potential Planter’s Peanuts legalities. In either case, I failed. The “Nifty Fifties Exhibit” at the History Center opened without Mister Peanut.



*Anne Linebach, the Peanut Lady (Photo courtesy of the Erie Times-News)*

The Peanut Lady continued at her State Street store until December 2020. At 89 and facing an expensive lease renewal, she decided to retire. After suffering through the downtown business collapse of the pandemic, she closed her iconic store after 45 years (of her ownership). Sadly, she passed away just a few weeks later. The organizational psychologist in me was not surprised.

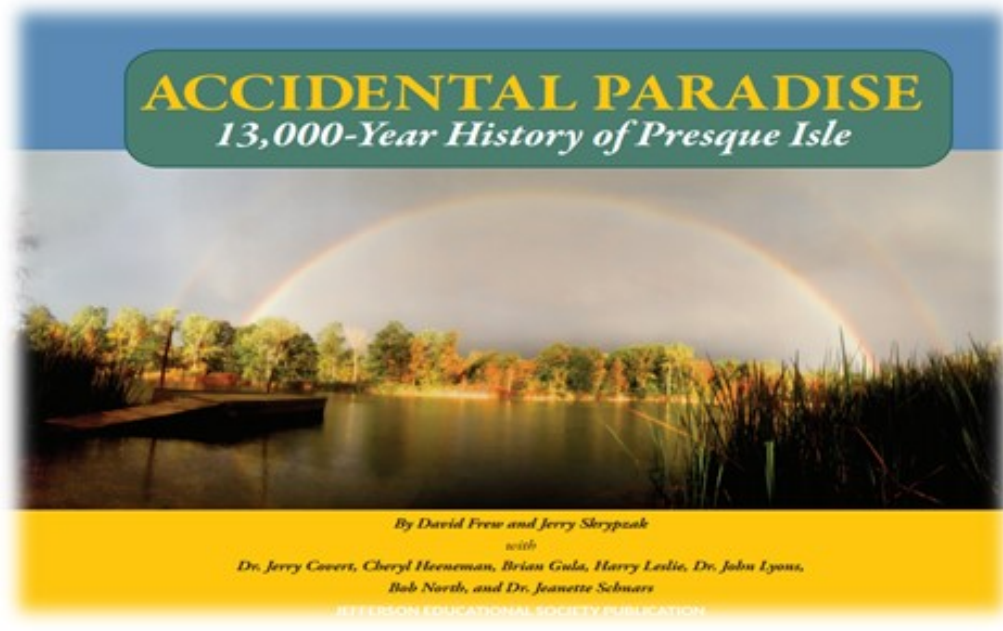
.....

In a strange advertising stunt in early 2020, it was announced that Mister Peanut had died in a tragic accident. He had been driving along a mountainous area when he swerved, unselfishly, to save the life of an armadillo. The peanut car went off the road after which he sacrificed himself to save his two companions. The death scene as well as a funeral were to be run during the Super Bowl, when “Planters” planned to eulogize Mister Peanut. The title of the planned, two-part advertisement was “Farewell Mister Peanut: 1916 to 2020.” The death of Kobe Bryant, however, caused Planters to cancel the advertisement as a courtesy to the Bryant family. The funeral scene, which is available online, concludes with “Baby Mr. Peanut” rising from the cemetery lawn, Baby Yoda style.

Upon learning that the Peanut Shoppe had been sold and that Annie Linebach had passed away, I can’t stop wondering if Erie’s Mister Peanut is still there ... in a dark closet at the Renaissance Centre.

## Accidental Paradise Available at TRECF

*Accidental Paradise*  
by Dr. David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak



## *Accidental Paradise Available at TRECF*

The much-anticipated new book on Presque Isle by authors David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak – “Accidental Paradise: 13,000-Year History of Presque Isle” is on sale at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center’s gift shop and through a special website, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

The book, priced at \$35 plus tax and shipping, can be ordered now through the website sponsored by the TREC Foundation, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

Presque Isle Gallery and Gifts on the main floor of TREC, located at 301 Peninsula Drive, Suite #2, Erie, PA 16505 will also handle sales *Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

For more information, send an email to [aperino@TRECF.org](mailto:aperino@TRECF.org).

To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and*



*more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.*

## In Case You Missed It

[Who was George Washington?](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence Dr. Andrew Roth

[The Mercer Boys: Psychological Roots of a Dream](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence Dr. David Frew.

---

Jefferson Educational Society | [jeserie.org](http://jeserie.org)

