

MEMORIES OF GARY

Author compiles 100 years of his hometown's history

BY JEAN STARR
Times Correspondent

With a little wistfulness evident in each page, Kendall F. Svengalis has compiled an illustrated ode to his hometown in "Gary, Indiana: A Centennial Celebration."

The grandson of Lithuanian and Swedish immigrants approached Gary's history from a personal perspective, giving attention to the city's churches, schools, clubs, parks and neighborhoods. Born at 11th and Jackson streets in the city's Central District in 1947, Svengalis spent his youth there and later in Aetna, where his family moved in 1953.

"The most common reaction to the book is that it must have been a labor of love," Svengalis said, "and it certainly was. I loved doing it."

The book begins with Gary's founding in 1906, and the city's first occupants' settlement into tents, tarpaper shacks and sod shanties. Laborers were mostly foreign-born-unskilled men who came from Europe.

The town's first census, conducted in 1906, tallied just 334 inhabitants. By 1910, the population reached 16,807, 70 percent of whom were foreign-born or of foreign-born or mixed parentage.

The Central District, south of the Wabash tracks on either side of Broadway, became known as the "Patch," owing to its poor, largely foreign-born population. Among the largest ethnic groups calling the district home were Poles, Slovaks, Hungarians, Italians, Croats, Germans, Serbians, Greeks and Lithuanians. From a map of Gary's



PHOTO COURTESY OF SVENGALIS COLLECTION

A young Kendall Svengalis plays on the playground at Froebel School in Gary during the summer of 1950.

Central District drawn in 1945, the author highlights the district's landmarks, from Dixie Dairy and Froebel School to the Spanish Union and the Indiana National Guard Armory buildings. It was where Holy Trinity was constructed and where my grandfather and father ran a grocery store until 1960.

Anyone with an interest or a background in Gary will enjoy this book.

It's heavily laden with photos and accounts of the inception of each of the city's first districts. More than a dozen pages each are dedicated to the Central District, Aetna, Miller, Glen Park, the West Side, East Side, Tolleston and the downtown business district.

Rounding out the regional details are photos and background information on Gary's steel mills, schools, public buildings, churches and hospitals, theaters, hotels and restaurants, transportation, parks and organizations. An impressive num-

MEET THE AUTHOR

Kendall P. Svengalis will be signing "Gary, Indiana: a Centennial Celebration" in the Industrial Building at the Lake County Fair through Aug. 13.

ber of early photos and well-researched details fill pages devoted to the city's and the steel mills' beginnings.

Svengalis recalls in the book's preface his memories of Gary's Golden Jubilee and devotes a chapter to the residents celebration of the city's first 50 years in 1956. The author was 9 years old at the time and wondered what the city would be like at 100.

Svengalis' book sparked more memories when his second-grade teacher Louise Elisha, who now lives in Schererville, contacted him.

"She saw a story about the book and wrote me a letter," he said.

Svengalis' next goal is to do a history of Gary's Emerson School.