

Hennepin

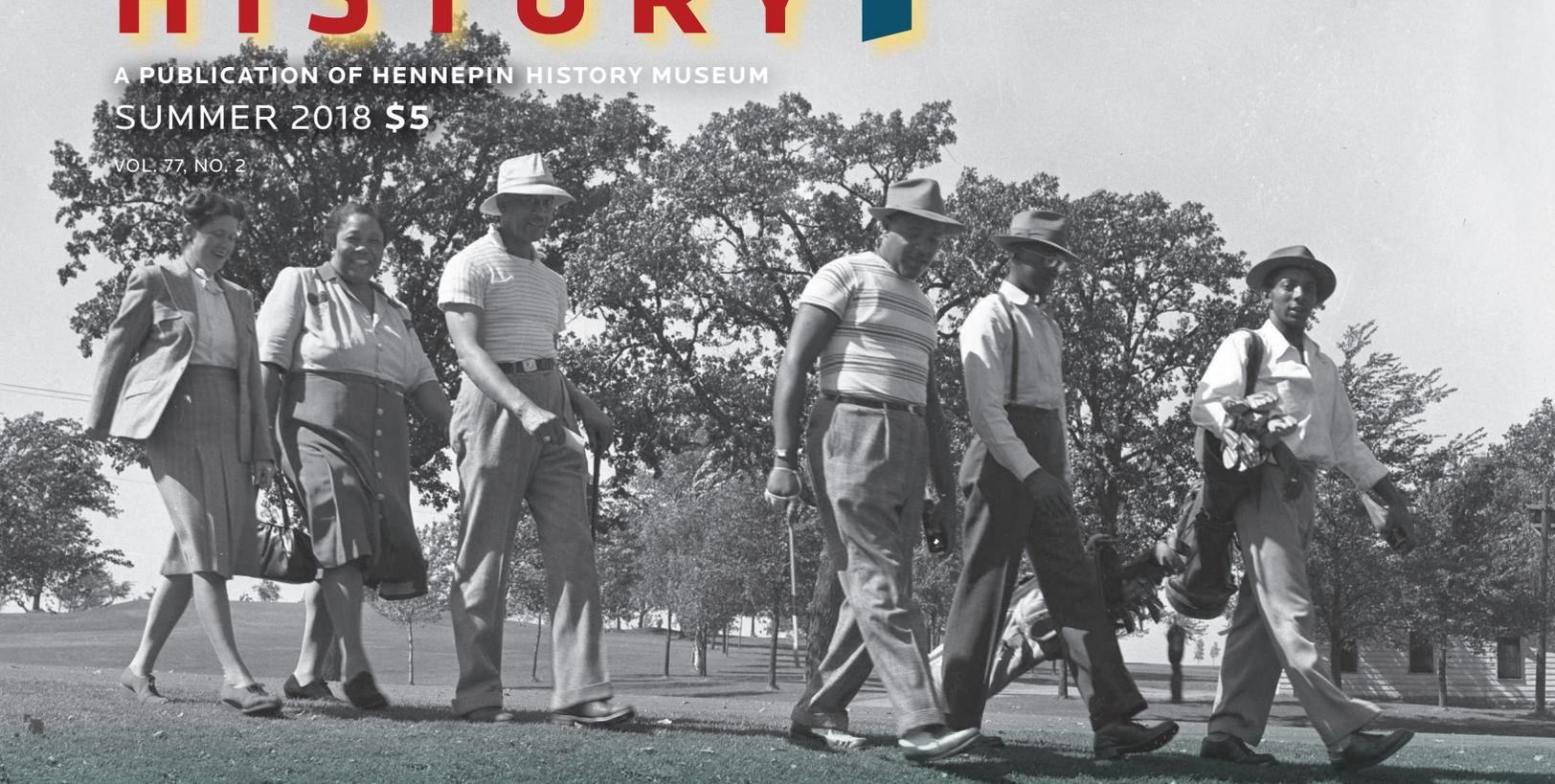
HISTORY



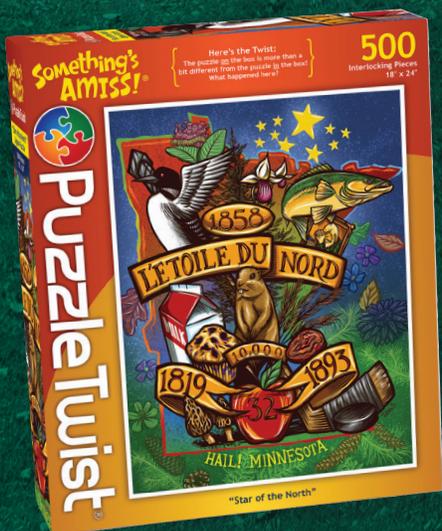
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Celebrating our 80th year!
Crystal game inventor Tony Nelson
Watson Brothers golf pioneers
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Fifty years of community at the Electric Fetus

BY WILLIAM BURLESON

In the last 50 years, much has changed in Hennepin County. Downtown Minneapolis would hardly be recognizable to someone from 1968, with its shiny new buildings and lack of department stores. Communities have grown farther and farther out across what once were fields. In 1968, the Vietnam War was in full swing, Arthur Naftalin was mayor of Minneapolis, and Hubert Humphrey was running for president. Meanwhile, a year after the Summer of Love in San Francisco, the hippie movement was hitting its stride all across the country, including in Minneapolis. Centered on the University of Minnesota and the West Bank, new businesses such as Coffeehouse Extempore were catering to this new attitude.

This was the context in which 50 years ago the Electric Fetus opened for business. It was a record store that focused less on doing things the usual way and more on catering to the interests of its owners, the tastes of their community, and the spirit of the Age of Aquarius.

The “Fetus” was started by Ron Korsh and Dan Foley, both students at the University of Minnesota, in a tiny storefront in the West Bank at 521 Cedar Avenue South. A few months later, Keith Covart and Roger Emslie were in and Korsh went back to studying architecture. They moved to a larger storefront at 514 Cedar Avenue South, where they continued to live up to their counterculture roots. The store’s website describes how they were ticketed for refusing to take down a poster of John and



Yoko’s *Two Virgins* record cover with Richard and Pat Nixon’s faces, and the Streakers’ Sale, in which customers were allowed to take a record and pipe for free as long as they shopped in the buff, among other escapades.

In 1972, after losing its lease, the Electric Fetus moved across town to a storefront at the not very prestigious 2000 Fourth Avenue, next to 4th Avenue Hardware and Free Press, a printing company off Franklin. Eventually, Keith became the sole owner, and the ‘Fetus grew to take over the storefronts all the way to the corner.

Flash forward to the store’s 50-year anniversary, and the Electric Fetus is going as strong as ever. “We created this little community,” says Stephanie Covart Meyerring, president of Electric Fetus. Stephanie took over from her dad about ten years ago. Her husband, Aaron, “a corporate refugee,” went to work at the store full time one and a half years later.

It hasn’t always been easy. “It’s hard for a small business,” says Stephanie.

There is the location, one most people would consider an outpost. It was chosen because Keith Covart grew up in the neighborhood and “my dad had memories of this area,” says Stephanie.

There were acts of God, such as the tornado in 2009 that lifted the roof off the building. “It was a low point. But then people showed up bringing food and getwell cards,” remembers Stephanie.



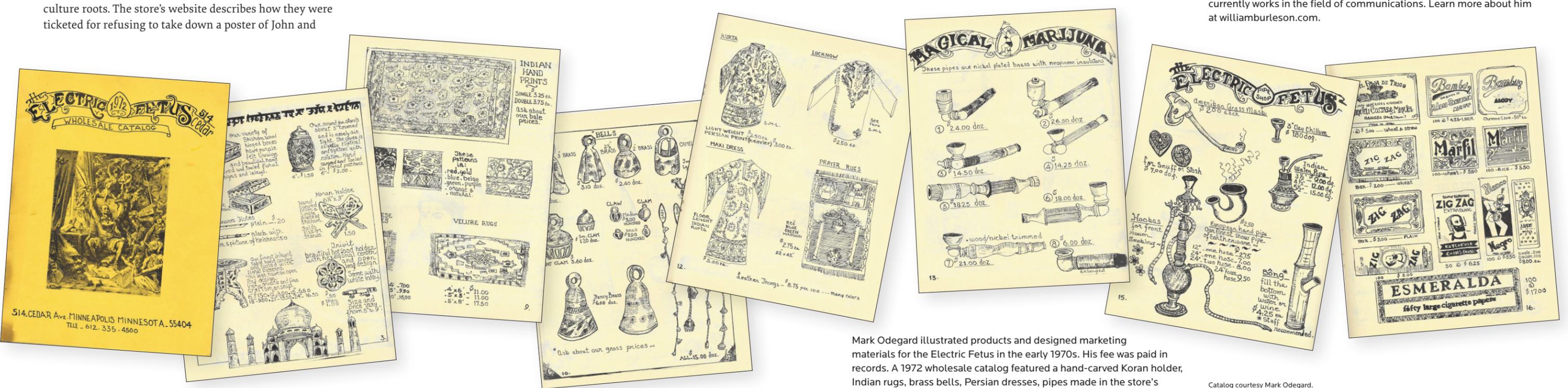
Second-generation owner Stephanie Covart Meyerring and her husband, Aaron Meyerring, continue the traditions started by her father.

Photo courtesy Electric Fetus.

SOURCES:

- The Electric Fetus website, electricfetus.com.
- *A History of the Electric Fetus* prepared for the Greater Twin Cities Blues Music Society, Penny A. Petersen, and Charlene K. Roise, Hess, Roise and Company, July 2006.

William Burleson is an author and lifelong Minneapolis resident who currently works in the field of communications. Learn more about him at williamburleson.com.



Mark Odegard illustrated products and designed marketing materials for the Electric Fetus in the early 1970s. His fee was paid in records. A 1972 wholesale catalog featured a hand-carved Koran holder, Indian rugs, brass bells, Persian dresses, pipes made in the store’s basement with lamp parts, and a variety of rolling papers.

Catalog courtesy Mark Odegard. Used with permission from the Electric Fetus.