

# Skokie heaves sigh of relief

By Dennis Byrne

Political and religious leaders expressed relief Friday that Sunday's scheduled Nazi march in Skokie has been called off.

"What has happened is now history," said village president Albert J. Smith. "But I would be remiss if I did not express the gratitude of every Skokie resident for the magnificent outpouring of support we received from both Christians and Jews from around the world.

"Today we look forward to a return to peace and tranquility — long a hallmark of the Skokie lifestyle. ... We are thankful for this decision and equally proud of our village's unwavering stand on the issue involved.

"Rabbi Hayim G. Perelmuter resident of the Chicago Board of Rabbis, said there may

have been at least one useful outcome of the threatened march.

"It was an affront to constructive forces everywhere — not just against the Jews," he said. "If that lesson was learned, then it may have served a useful purpose."

With the threat of the march gone in the heavily Jewish suburb, residents went about getting their lives back to normal.

**IT WASN'T JUST** the threat of the march that bothered these private people. There was the media attention, with reporters and photographers sticking microphones, cameras and note pads in their faces, asking what they thought about the march, what should be done, what they would do.

And there were the thousands of people, some peaceful and some apparently bent on violence, ready to pour into town from all

over the nation. And there was the prospect of thousands of law enforcement officials and troops rolling in to set up their security perimeter and checkpoints.

There was the thought of all this hate and all these outsiders using their town, stomping across the private perspectives and cherished memories of their own community. Brown shirts on Lincoln Av., where generations of kids have passed heading for an ice cream at the corner store on warm summer days?

Up the street, an old Army tank has reposed in front of an American Legion post for as long as most people can remember. But the threatened march made the thought of military equipment rolling down the street real.

**LIKE HUNDREDS** of other communities and neighborhoods in the Chicago area, what is most remarkable about Skokie history is simply the collective memories and private perspectives of generations of people.

Skokie began building its own recollections in the late 1800s, when German and Luxembourg settlers began draining the swamps that ran from what is now about Touhy Av. to the Skokie lagoons. They filled in the swamps with farms and greenhouses, providing vegetables and flowers for Chicago. The village itself was incorporated in 1888 as Niles Center, but in 1938 the name was changed to Skokie, which means "swamp," to avoid confusion with the nearby village of Niles.

For years, the population totalled only several hundred. But things changed in 1926 when the city transit system extended its L line to Dempster St. and a year later when Samuel Insull built his Skokie Valley Route of the old North Shore electrified rail line through the community. It gave the community excellent transportation, and combined with widespread real estate speculation going on in many suburbs, people started to pour in.

Developers subdivided the farm land installing streets, sidewalks and utilities in anticipation of even a bigger boom. But the

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Depression ended the speculation, and tens of thousands of lots on tree-lined streets stood vacant until the next boom in the 1950s.

Now, the population in "the world's largest village" stands at about 66,500. Mostly, it's a community of single-family homes, selling now for an average of about \$70,000. Median family income in 1976 was estimated at \$25,400. Urbanologist Pierre de Vise, who periodically lists suburbs by their socio-economic characteristics, ranked Skokie 37th last year, compared with 44th in 1970.

**THE NAZIS HAD** picked Skokie as their target because of its large Jewish population. Even so, the Nazis and the media have sometimes overestimated its size, calling the community predominantly Jewish. Although no firm figures are available, the best estimates are that 30 to 40 per cent the population is Jewish.

Also uncertain is the exact number of Holocaust survivors — either those who actually survived the Nazi death camps or those who had close relatives die in the atrocities — who live in Skokie. It is estimated that, based on surveys of the Jewish congregations, a remarkable one out of 10 residents of Skokie may be a Holocaust survivor.

Also without precise explanation is why so many Jews migrated to Skokie. Rabbi Karl Weiner of the congregation Judea Mizpah in Skokie pointed out that Jews did not establish themselves in the community until after World War II.