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# common ground

Spring 1974

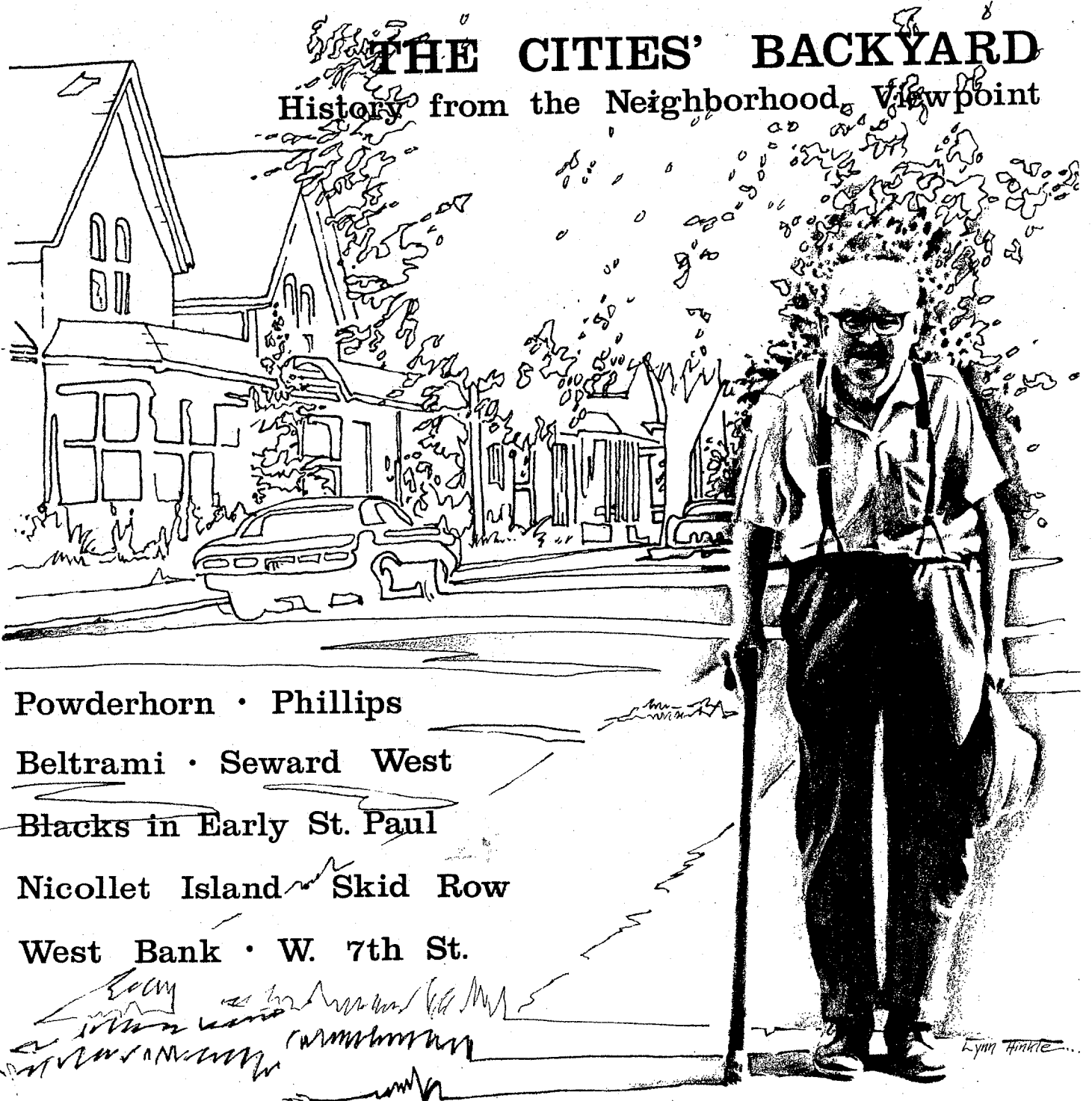
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## THE CITIES' BACKYARD

History from the Neighborhood Viewpoint



Powderhorn • Phillips

Beltrami • Seward West

Blacks in Early St. Paul

Nicollet Island Skid Row

West Bank • W. 7th St.

*Handwritten scribbles and signatures at the bottom of the page.*

# commonground

*This is the first issue of Common Ground, a quarterly magazine about work and community. Each issue will delve both into the common experience of people isolated in their workplaces and their neighborhoods in the Twin Cities, and into the means to translate this into a sense of unity and greater self-determination.*

*Future issues of Common Ground will often focus on one topic, but will rarely cover one topic exclusively, as this neighborhood history issue does. Continuing feature articles, as well as coverage of timely issues, will be developed. Common Ground costs \$1.00 per copy, and is available either through subscription or at Twin City bookstores, coops, and magazine counters. While New Vocations Project staff forms the core of workers on the magazine, we welcome help in writing, artwork, production, and distribution.*

## INTRODUCTION:

*This issue examines history from the viewpoint of people who live and work in nine different neighborhoods in the Twin Cities. Clearly, this treatment of history differs from the chronicles of spectacular events packaged with the description of notable industrialists and government officials. Although traditionally taught to us as "our" history, most of us find little in this package that tells us anything about ourselves and our neighbors. Common Ground has decided to talk about the history of people in Twin Cities neighborhoods in an effort to communicate that:*

- 1. Neighborhoods are coherent, though unique, social units in which residents have the potential to work together on shared concerns.*
- 2. A comparison of neighborhood histories demonstrates the similarity of their separate experiences dealing, often unsuccessfully, with the same problem (such as freeway construction).*
- 3. Plans for development of the neighborhood where we live can grow out of our understanding of the community's history, and not merely out of a reaction to developers plans for urban renewal.*
- 4. Our understanding of current problems in urban renewal areas grows when these concerns are seen as historical developments, but is stunted when the past is separated from the present by an overly idealized glossy version of local history.*

*Common Ground is a publication of the New Vocations Project, an independent, non-profit organization. New Vocations Project also publishes resource publications (The Vocational Skills Training Directory), organizes community business (such as the Southside Community Garage) and acts as a resource group for people seeking better vocations. Cost for this issue is \$1.00; or \$1.25 if mailed in the U.S.A.*

*Entered as third-class mail at Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

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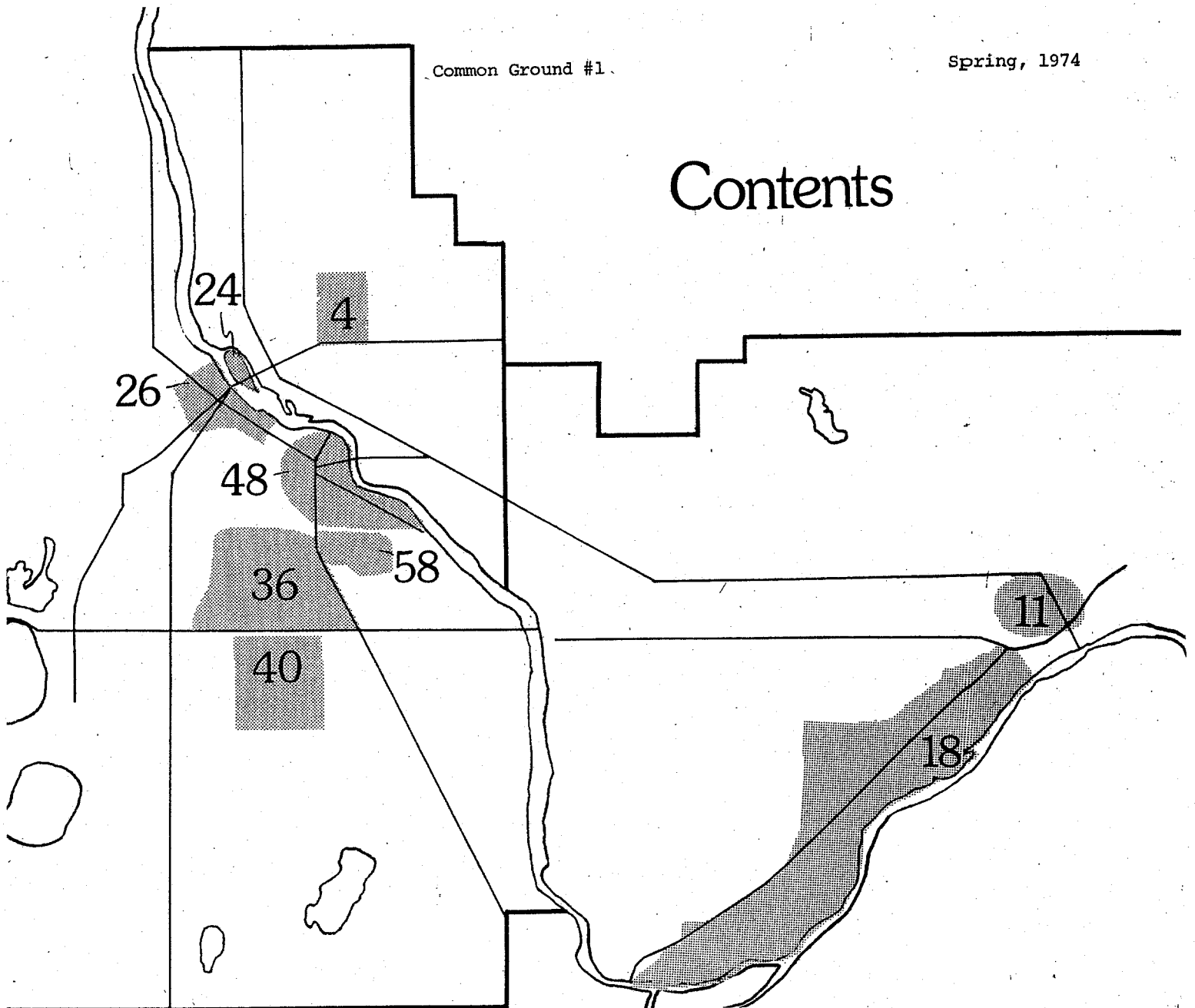
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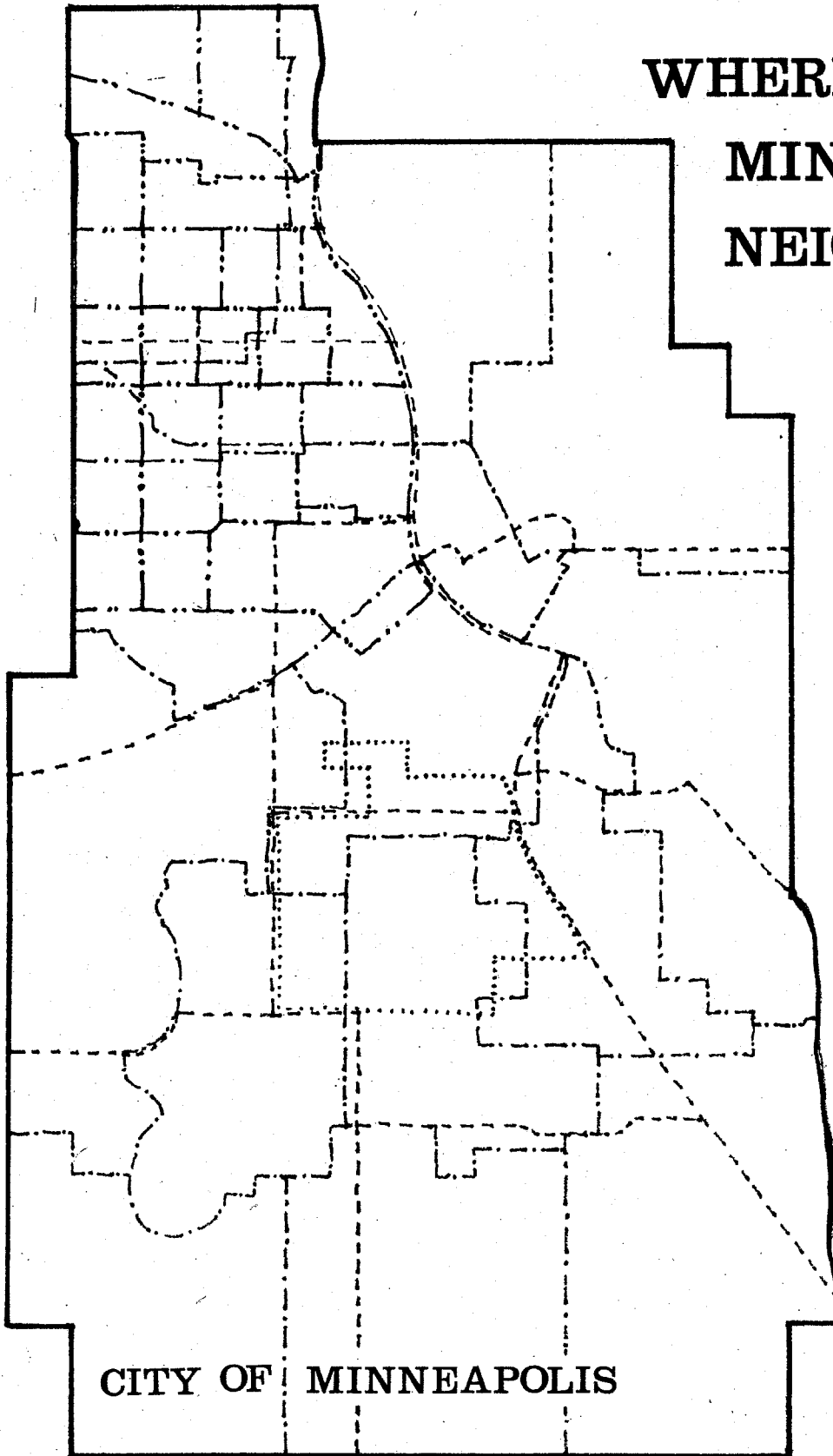
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# WHERE ARE THE MINNEAPOLIS NEIGHBORHOODS



CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS

Map by Scott Helmes

“Community”  
Boundaries

Model Cities

Census Tracts  
(24 of 128)

Ward Boundaries

Other Divisions

Description by Scott Helmes

Try to locate a single set of boundaries on the map opposite this page which defines the neighborhood where you live. Can you find the boundaries for any Minneapolis neighborhood you can think of? If you're like me, the 4 boundaries shown and the others listed below, divide and confuse even the fuzzy boundaries most of us use to define the neighborhoods in which we live.

These multiple, criss-crossing, crazy-quilt boundaries, defined by the institutions we pay taxes to maintain, serve to divide us from our friends. When neighborhood folks have a common problem, we will probably be forced to deal with different bureaucratic mechanisms because we live in different districts, wards, etc. These boundaries may be some of the reasons why neighbors have difficulty working together on a common problem or thinking of the neighborhood as a cohesive social unit. If, however, we perceived our neighborhoods as cohesive units, we could challenge institutional controls in order to work together on shared concerns.

Doing the history of neighborhoods is one way of helping us understand the areas where we live as important social units. Doing "neighborhood history" will not in itself result in the control of institutions which currently chop up neighborhoods (as the map illustrates). However, it may encourage us to at least consolidate neighborhood and institutional boundaries and perhaps learn to make decisions with our neighbors about schools, renewal plans, etc., rather than continuing to allow bureaucrats to make these decisions for us.

by Lynn Hinkle

The ten "community" boundaries reflect the general areas of Minneapolis defined by the City Planner's Office. The City Planners have also loosely defined the boundaries of several "neighborhoods" within these defined community boundaries.

The Model Cities project is one of 18 areas in Minneapolis designated as an urban renewal area. This is in addition to the 38 public housing projects presently in Minneapolis, and several "tax increment" development districts.

Census tracts are shown because of their extensive use in quantifying demographic and sociological data. The census is also used to determine federal allotment of money. As you can see, these boundaries have little connection with the Planners' boundaries, political divisions, or urban renewal areas.

The ward boundaries are very important in a city that has a strong city council/weak mayor political system. There are usually 11-23 precincts in a ward. You can easily see that the political system does not relate to the other systems in the city. For example, the Model Cities boundaries encompass 4 different wards.

For purposes of at least comprehending even the simple divisions, other more complicated districts were not illustrated. For example, in Minneapolis there are 61 different zoning classifications scattered hodge-podge throughout the city.

Minnesota Special School District #1 has approximately 130 separate locations of educational facilities. With the three new complexes this still does not significantly reduce the number.

Other important functions which serve to both confuse and divide a city are: Public Libraries (18); Parks and Recreation (50); Maintenance Field Centers (5); Public Works (15 departments); Fire Stations (28) and Police Precincts (6).

This map also does not include the divisions made by Hennepin County concerns, such as: commissions, police, judiciary, health, welfare, renewal, etc.; nor state: licensing, taxation, employment, highway, education, legislature.

Add this to the concerns of the Metropolitan Council, the United States Government, and large independent institutions (University of Minnesota), and you can see why it's difficult to think of neighborhoods, much less think of neighborhoods working together.



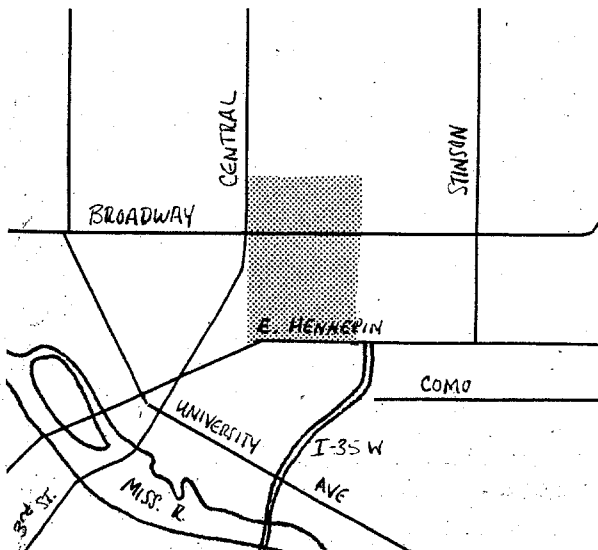
# THE BELTRAMI NEIGHBORHOOD REMEMBERED

Article and Photos by Barry Morrow

"One woman interviewed said that Maple Hill was 'so complete for your needs'. This self-sufficiency is possible because of the presence of essential components, including a school, church, settlement house, park, small, independent businesses as well as taverns."

-from The Maple Hill Community 1915-40 by Lisa Knazan

Beltrami is a neighborhood, a small pocket community of some five hundred homes in Northeast Minneapolis. It is also a unique ethnic community rich with history. The Swedes were the first to settle; later came the Italians, Poles, and other ethnic minorities. Some fell into the "melting pot"--others did not. Today, few remember Swede Alley, mainstreet for the Nordic immigrant. Tomorrow, perhaps, few will recall Beltrami Park, once a Civil War cemetery, now a growing park and recreation center.



Three or four generations can still be found in many Beltrami homes. The neighborhood is as colorful and complex as ever, but the cultural community is changing--both in face and in spirit--and the young are leaving without the knowledge of their own heritage.

Faced with the prospect of losing the past entirely, the residents of Beltrami, through a community council, challenged themselves with the task of recapturing and documenting their history as they remembered it. The Beltrami Ethnic History Project, conceived and directed by the community, resulted in "The Neighborhood Remembered," a video tape production of the history of Beltrami as told by its residents. The tape not only includes oral history, but descriptions and exhibitions of forgotten cultural activities as well.

The project attracted community volunteer help from students' groups, professional sources from the community and the University of Minnesota, and from residents in general. At regularly scheduled meetings of the resident council the video tapes, recorded up to various points, were reviewed with residents suggesting additions, deletions, other changes, and creating outlines for future shooting schedules. Distribution of the tapes has been varied. In addition to showings within the neighborhood, local schools have used the tapes as curricula during Human Relations Week. Other groups, such as the Italian-American Club, have desired special showings at some of their functions, and the Minneapolis Public Library has expressed interest in obtaining a copy.

The Beltrami Ethnic History Project not only introduces video tape as an excellent

## The Little Italian Store

A little Italian grocery store stands right in the heart of Beltrami  
 A well-known family, for many a year, have owned and operated this place.  
 You are always greeted with, "May I help you Honey or Dearie?"  
 As they scurry about, both Louie and George, with a happy smile upon their face.

No matter what you run out of, Delmonico's will always have it in their store  
 Be it a birthday card, a padlock, or even an old fashioned fly paper  
 They also deliver Ricotta, Mozzarella or Romano right to your back door  
 They'll make you a deal on bananas, apples and grapes, you'll like very much

If you want Italian beer, coffee, a cigar or a quart of spaghetti sauce  
 Just go see Louie or his brother George, at 1112 Summer Street  
 They'll greet you with a smiling face, you'll never find them cross  
 And for you folks that don't know about Delmonico's, go see, and have an Italian treat.

by Glenny Raines

community tool, but also draws the neighborhood closer together in understanding and appreciating its past--preserving community tradition that might otherwise have been lost. The Beltrami of today has a new set of dreams, as well as a host of complex and ever-increasing problems. Transcribed from "The Neighborhood Remembered," recollections of the past and forecasts for the future are recounted here as Beltrami residents speak about neighborhood life:

### Long Ago

"We used to call it Dog Town. That side of Broadway was New Boston, and this side was Dog Town."

"We called it Dog Town because we used to have a dog pound behind the school, and we all had dogs."

"We used to call it Little Italy, too!"

--conversations over  
 cookies, Senior  
 Citizens Group

### Origins

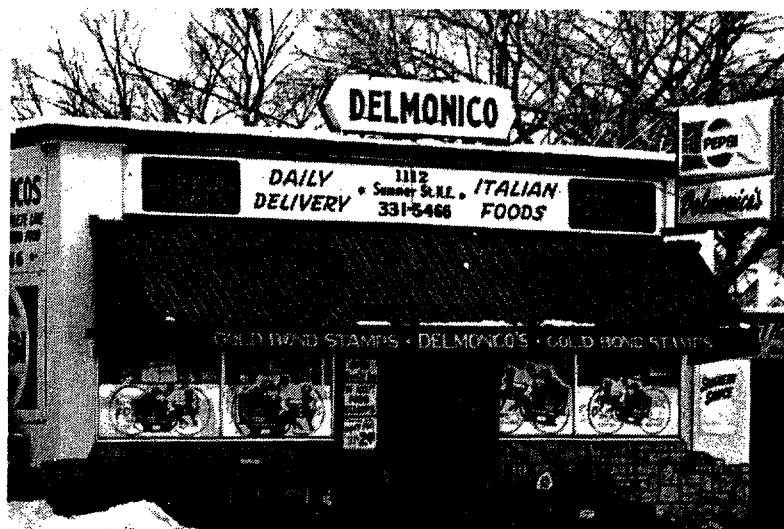
May: "Money! They heard there was a lot of money in America, so they embarked on the trip to find all this fabulous wealth."

Stella: "We came here mainly to escape poverty; it was hard in Europe. In our case it was to escape the political sort of thing. My father was very unhappy with the Russian domination of his section of Poland, and that's why he came to this country, and my mother followed him."

Frank: "We asked my Dad, 'How long did you

"One resident mentioned that some people went to George Spano, a grocer, for counsel and to borrow money, for he had acquired some profitable property. ...In the '30's, he said, one could not get a loan to build in the neighborhood because it was considered economically unsound. Some built in the neighborhood through private financing, but not through banks. There was land for sale and there were some open lots, but it was considered a poor risk."

-from The Maple Hill Community  
 1915-40 by Lisa Knazan



6

and Ma go steady?' and he told the story of how he met my mother. My Dad was a bachelor in his thirties and word had come to him that in Cumberland, Wisconsin a family with seven daughters had come there. Three of them had been picked, but there were still four that hadn't been picked over, or asked for their hand. So my dad got himself all slicked up and took the train to Cumberland. Now my mother got word that this Sicilian with the curly moustache from Minneapolis was coming all the way out there, and he had been told about her. So she hid upstairs while my dad spoke to my grandfather and everything, never saw a picture, never even said hello to her... and made plans to come back that following spring to get married. Which they did."

Sam: "I come from Italy. I come from Italy 1910. I worked for the city of Minneapolis 31 years. I cleaned the streets. We didn't

name--if they saw the first grade they were lucky. They had nothing but just plain living!"

May: "We were looked down on. We were called (should I say it?)...dagos, wops, guninees... and foreigners. Yet we were all good, hard-working people, but our inability to speak cast us into these categories. It was hard for us to get work, except hard labor."

Filipo: "Nobody hardly had to work in the wintertime. They all stayed home. But I had a job. I was working for a Swede. And one day--it was a Sunday--this guy starts 'Yak-itty yak yak' with his friends. I couldn't understand--they didn't say a word in English 'cause they didn't want me to catch on. Well, I found out later. I was out of a job. The Swede put the other one in and laid me off."



Homes Facing Beltrami Park on Filmore



Typical Hand-Built Homes on Pierce

have no machinery in them days. When I first start working we only had one truck with three wheels!"

Ann: "Long ago, most of the men were on the railroad or laborers, and the men that could get jobs in the flour mills thought they had a 'big job'!"

#### Poor Times

Stella: "The language was a barrier; it was poor times. There wasn't jobs like there are today. Some of them couldn't even write their

#### Changing People: Their Crafts and Customs

Stella: "On the right of us was a family of Andersons--they were Swedish. And there, when we were kids, we would go and learn a little bit of their speech to know what they were talking about. And in these Swedish homes were always the most beautiful things made of straw, and they impressed me as a child, so I would learn from Mrs. Anderson how to make her straw figures.

Slowly as the neighborhood aged and these people started passing on, the other nationalities moved in. An Italian family moved in about two doors down, and then slowly but



surely our Italians took over the neighborhood. As far as the Poles go in this area, there were quite a few families, but they were very poor, and again, the language was a barrier. They were sort of an underdog--a real minority at the time. But they brought alot of crafts. Every family, I don't care how poor they were, brought along alot of their religious things. Poles were highly religious. If they didn't have money to buy things, they made them. The picture above my chest is made from little, tiny pieces of paper all cut up. Anything that they could get that was colorful, they would piece together and make pictures reminiscent of their old country. The Italians were wonderful, too. Many years ago, as a kid, I saw Mr. Rusciano whittling away in his front yard. He carves just beautifully out of wood. And Mr. Pelegrino was a shoemaker in Europe, and he brought his little shoemaking shop here. He made the most beautiful shoes."

back to the home the people would start coming and again they'd roll up the rug, and sometimes they braced the floors so that the dancing wouldn't cave the floors in. People didn't give gifts, but if you were a very good friend you'd pin five dollars to the baby's dress, if you were just a regular friend, maybe three. But ordinarily you pinned one dollar.

The weddings, of course, were in the home. For weeks and weeks we'd sit and make sandwiches which would be passed around in cardboard boxes to the people who were sitting around in all the rooms. But everyone came. They brought the kids, and the babies would lay on the coats on the beds. Everybody had a good time--these were customs brought from Italy, and this is what my parents did, and this is what I did."

*"The desire and financial means for the establishment of a church in the neighborhood in 1938 was extremely meaningful to the community because it was through its efforts that it came about. It was significant also in that it further cemented bonds to the specific geographic area of Maple Hill....This is a different phenomenon than the establishment by outside individuals or groups of settlement houses in several locations throughout Minneapolis...."*

-from The Maple Hill Community 1915-40 by Lisa Knazan



Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic Church

Dorothy: "The Italian people were great for having parties. They would have an accordion, banjo, mandolin, and a guitar, and they'd get together in somebody's home on a Saturday night, and they'd roll up the rugs and they'd dance to the wee hours of the morning. They'd pass around peanuts and sandwiches--no coffee, wine."

When a child was going to be baptised, the parents would go from house to house and the father would say, 'We're having our child baptised, would you like to come?'. The godfather and godmother took the baby to the church and they furnished all the clothes for the baby--from the shirt out. When they got

### The Unforgettable Dinner

Sam: "They used to call him Big Joe, and he lived in a little cottage under the trees. He used to entertain people and make us laugh, and everybody liked him. He had a dinner, a big dinner. He told somebody to bring five gallons of wine, and he said, 'I've got three or four rabbits that I'll cook and we can eat them'. Fine! Well, after we had the dinner he starts in, 'Meow-meow-meow!' Well, one guy couldn't take it--he started to throw up, and we all had to run out 'cause he was gonna kill everybody. He invited us for a rabbit dinner and we ended up having a cat dinner. It was good...we had a hell of a good time."



Margaret Barry Settlement House 1920

*"Accounts are varied in that some say all groups frequented the Barry House, and others say mostly Italians or mostly children. In all cases, though, what comes through is the more than peripher-*



Margaret Barry Settlement House 1974

*al importance of the Settlement House in the lives of the residents, contributing, through its role as a permanent institution, to the maintenance of community."*

-from The Maple Hill Community 1915-40 by Lisa Knazan

### The Margaret Barry House

Mrs. H: "I knew her myself. I knew Margaret Barry that built the settlement house. She was a very nice person, and she used to teach the boys that had just come from Europe, worked here a year or so, and then were called into World War I. When they came back they all came back to her just as if she was their mother. She taught them how to read and talk English. They were very proud of that, and they thought an awful lot of her."

May: "She was a school teacher--she immigrated from Ireland. She was an Irish school teacher, and her husband was a lieutenant on the police force."

Antoinetta: "We had mass at the Barry House for years. We used it for everything. I knew the old lady, too. When Mrs. Barry died, I went to her funeral. She kept a good house. She was a good woman; she helped all the poor people."

May: "I was about 12 years old when Mrs. Barry came around and started what she wanted to start--this building. She started teach-

ing us sewing in a one-room flat she rented from some family. She begged, borrowed and stole until she built her place, and we thought it was elegance itself--which I still do. She had crafts and cooking, and she taught the mothers how to sew for their families, to cook well-balanced meals, which nobody ever did--you know, you just cooked whatever you could. Let's put it this way; we were poor."

Stella: "We were fortunate in the neighborhood to have the Barry House sponsored by the League of Catholic Women, who were a very wealthy group of women at the time. They kind of considered us an underprivileged neighborhood, and they poured their monies into us. We were all Catholic, but there was no Catholic Church at the time, so Mrs. Barry decided we should have a church of our own--not have to go to neighboring churches. So on Sundays she would bring a priest into the neighborhood, and every Sunday morning we'd have mass--in Mrs. Barry's settlement house."

(POST SCRIPT: The Margaret Barry House, after fifty years of service, was put up for sale in 1972. A new community center was built on the former Maple Hill Cemetery.)



Maple Hill Cemetery - 1900

M.H.S. Photo

### Maple Hill Cemetery

May: "Well, that park was Maple Hill Cemetery when we came here--that was many, many, many years ago." And when I was in school, two fellows, on a dark, moonless night, decided they didn't want the cemetery, and so they took all the old stone markers and threw them all down the side of the hill. A short time afterwards they both sickened and died, and of course, our mothers said that was a curse for disturbing the dead. This was an old Italian belief, and being children, we believed them--our mothers would know all that stuff.

"I can remember them digging up the graves there when they were moving the bodies to other cemeteries. And we would watch them. In those days the caskets were covered with glass, and as the men were digging we'd hear the tinkle of the glass breaking. Being kids, we watched all that. We were fascinated. Just the skeleton would be left, and in those days they buried them with lots of jewelry, and I remember the men picking up watches and rings. I wouldn't watch it today, but I think a child is fascinated by all that gruesome sort of stuff."

### Auld Lange Syne

Stella: "Oh, the main thing in the 1960's was that doggone freeway coming in here and that disrupted everything. We were kind of a battling neighborhood then because there were people who bought recently, and all they could think of was the profit they'd make from their homes. But those were people who bought recently, and all they could see was a new home instead of their old home, and they didn't care. But there are all these older people who worked piece by piece constructing these homes, and there they are--having to move out and give them up. There were many like that, and fortunately now one by one they're kind of passing on, but that was heartbreaking. That's the one thing of the 60's that will be with me for the rest of my life, because I lived in fear of that for my mother. She didn't ever want to leave this neighborhood. She wanted to stay here until she died. I think one thing highways do and others forget is that there are human beings and when they get that age and they've worked hard and strived for something, that they should at least be allowed to live the rest of their lives in their house if they are at all able



Filipo: "The freeways erase the country. I had a nice neighborhood, now there's nobody there. Some dead, some move away, some freeway take them--they had to go to get out of there. What are they good for?"

Sam: "That's too bad--the freeway had to take all the old-timers, all the old people who been here for years. I had a brother lived on Lincoln Street, they took the house six years ago now and they still ain't doing nothing with it. They ruined this neighborhood as far as that goes--the freeways ruined this neighborhood. All the people have to go--they kicked them out of here."

Frank: "Well, one can never know until you've experienced it--when you're old and hand built your homes and everything. I can think of four or five people that it brought on their deaths."

### Inherit the Past, Create the Future

How do you see the future; for Beltrami, for yourselves, and for the children who live here?

"What kind of future? You mean the ones we're gonna have or the ones they gonna have?"

Well, let's talk about you first.

"Oh, they've got alot of good things going for us, yes...."

"What kind of future do you think anybody 65 and over has? Nothing!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that...."

"You look at statistics and see!"

"Well, I'm kind of optimistic. I think we'll see the days come back when families got together and everybody was one....When people enjoyed each other and status didn't mean a thing."

--Conversations over  
cookies, Senior  
Citizen's Group, 1972

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*Barry Morrow, caretaker of the Margaret Barry Settlement House for the last 8 months, is a photographer at the U of M and is also employed at the University-Community Video Center. He observed that, "...in gathering some of the experience of these people onto paper, I realize that my perspective is not the same as those who lived them. Therefore, I chose not to write with the collective 'we'."*



## The Early History of the Black Community in Saint Paul And How to Research It

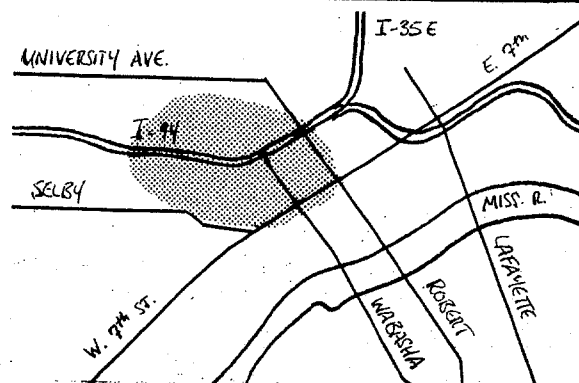
by Steve Trimble and David Taylor

A community such as St. Paul offers a unique opportunity for researching local Afro-American history. For most of its early history the Black community in Saint Paul was numerically small considering other northern urban centers, and it was more geographically contained. The literacy rate for Blacks was substantially higher than the national literacy rate for Blacks and almost every Black male was employed, usually in service re-

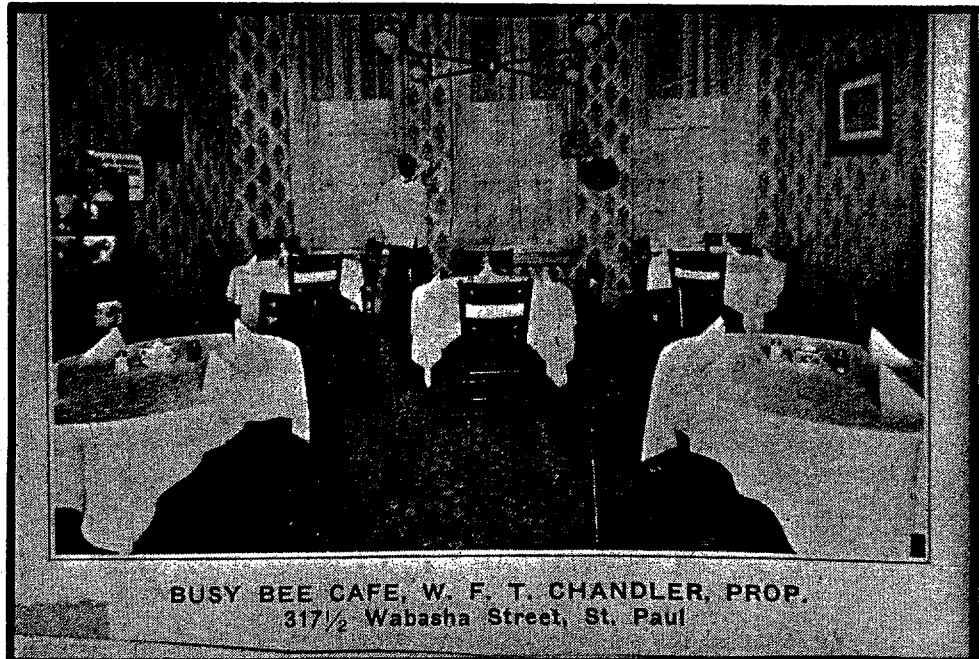
lated jobs or unspecified private businesses. After the turn of the century the community could even boast of a small but important group of professionals.

It was a stable area, judging by the strength of its internal institutions: the Black press, the Black church, and social/cultural groups and fraternities. The Appeal newspaper was noted for the strength of its

*"Unfortunately, little has been written about this community's past. Until recently racial antipathy towards Blacks was responsible for their exclusion from local and state histories. Subsequently, only fragmentary records, some personal papers and holdings of the Appeal, a weekly Black newspaper (1885-1923) are all that can be found in the Minnesota Historical Society."*



last page:  
a popular Black  
singing group.  
MHS photo.



BUSY BEE CAFE, W. F. T. CHANDLER, PROP.  
317½ Wabasha Street, St. Paul

this page:  
two early St. Paul  
Black businesses.  
Minnesota Historical  
Society photos.

editorials, its wide circulation in the upper midwest, and its longevity especially at a time when many Black journals failed financially. The community's Baptist and Methodist churches, well organized and well attended, kept a watchful eye over the public and private morality of their parishoners. The Black community was not without its mutual aid societies which attempted to organize the resources of the community to stave off the cost of funerals and the loss of income to widows and fatherless children. More importantly, over a period of years many social clubs and literary societies that attended to the intellectual and recreational needs of the community were established.

Unfortunately little has been written about this community's past. Until recently racial antipathy towards Blacks was responsible for their exclusion from local and state histories. Subsequently, only fragmentary records, some personal papers and holdings of the Appeal, a weekly Black newspaper (1885-1923) are all that can be found in the Minnesota Historical Society.

According to the Appeal, among the approximately 100 permanent dwellers in the city in the 1850's were tailors, truck gardeners, carpenters, barbers, a wood and coal dealer, janitors, teachers, postal employees, firemen, clerks, plasterers, whitewashers, and



STORE OF MADAM H. HART, MILLINER  
425 University Ave., St. Paul

a large number of hotel and restaurant workers. Little is known of these individuals and their stories remain lost.

Incomplete as it is, available written material established the fact that Blacks have been in Minnesota a long time. Fielding Combs, Sr., is said to have come to the state

*"There was a Mr. Farr who 'shaved all of the pioneers of St. Paul'...."*

*"One of the more prosperous men was D.E. Talbert who was a cook at two different hotels; after one of them burned, he turned to whitewashing and over the years accumulated 'quite a bit of property.' "*

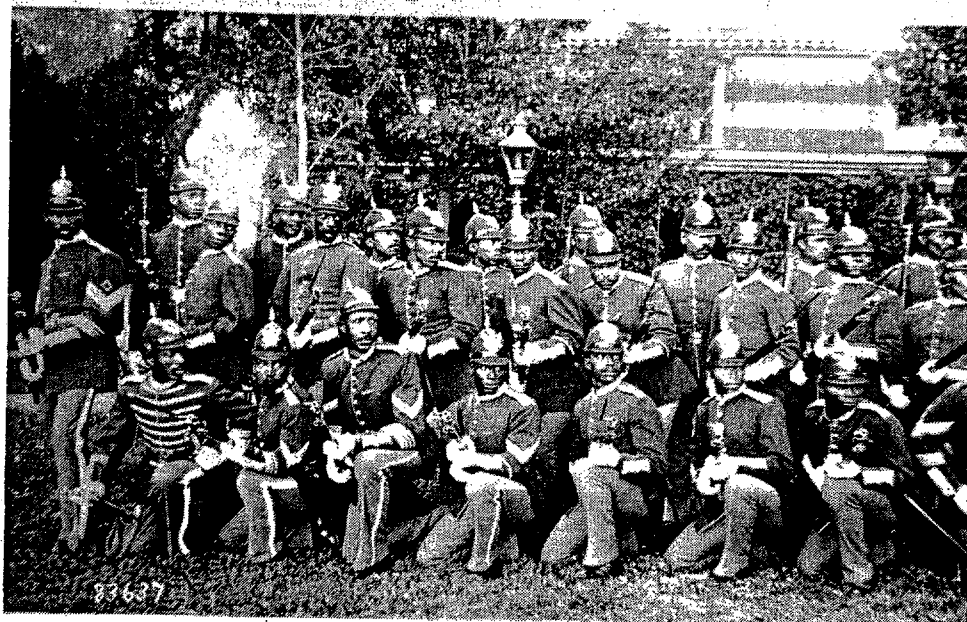
to fight with General Sibley in the 1850's. According to one newspaper article, there were many Negro residents in the earliest days who came North working in and around the steamboats, but few stayed through the winter. The names and a little information about some of the pre-Civil War residents are available. There was a Mr. Farr who "shaved all the old pioneers of St. Paul", and William Taylor who was killed in the Indian war of 1862. One of the more prosperous men was D.E. Talbert who was a cook at two different hotels; after one of them burned, he turned to whitewashing and over the years accumulated "quite a bit of property". J.K. Hilyard first arrived in 1856 from Pennsylvania and was later to run a successful clothing repair shop and became a community leader.

In 1863 a steamboat with freed slaves arrived from the South. According to the Pioneer Press of 1887, "their arrival excited a little opposition among the white laborers," but a large group stayed and found jobs in the area. The Appeal had a slightly different version of the episode. According to a 1900 obituary notice of Robert Hickman, one of the leaders of the migrants, "He, with a number of others, came to Minnesota May 6, 1863 and, as they were not allowed to land in St. Paul on account of prejudice and hostility, they went to Fort Snelling."

### The Role of the Black Church

With the arrival of the ex-slaves came the development of what was to be a strong church-oriented community. In the beginning, groups of people met in private homes, but by 1870 Pilgrim Baptist Church had been built on Cedar Avenue, and soon afterwards, St. James A.M.E. church was founded. From the very beginning, the church was vital to the community, functioning not only in the spiritual realms, but also as a source of family recreational activity, with a series of fairs, festivals, carnivals and parties. In many cases these gatherings were also fundraisers for buildings, furnishings, or equipment needed for the congregation. The churches also served the much needed welfare functions in the early days, providing help for those in financial distress. Each church had a benevolent society and special collections were often taken for those who were ill and out of money or for funerals of members who had died.

"...members of the 25th Infantry are credited...with the opening of the Mars Lodge of the 100F in the 1870's."



r: the 25th Infantry Regiment at Fort Snelling. MHS photo.

The fraternal lodges and their auxiliaries were other important self-help groups that were vital to the functioning of the early community. Apparently the Black troops stationed at Ft. Snelling were instrumental in the germination of the lodges, and gave them strong support for a number of years. Specifically, members of the 25th Infantry are credited in an 1889 obituary column (of-

*"Ignored by the White press, the Black community had need for a vehicle by which the community news and social events could be transmitted."*

ten a good source of information) with the opening of the Mars Lodge of the I.O.O.F. in the 1870's. In these organizations, the men and women would get together socially, give parties, and support each other in various ways. They would sit up with those who were sick, help people find jobs, and pay their final respects by marching together in the funeral processions of their comrades.

Often the lodges and the churches would work together. In October 1890, the Mars lodge announced a benefit for both Pilgrim Baptist and St. James in appreciation for the help received from the churches in the past. Among the entertainment planned was a vocal contest between the two churches' choirs for a set of music books. The revenue generated from the admission was to be equally divided. There were also annual sermons given for the lodges. In 1892, for example, Mars Lodge "formed a procession at the corner of Cedar and Third Street and marched to Pilgrim and Baptist Church, headed by the Farr band of Minneapolis."

The Black church helped serve not only the recreational and spiritual needs of the Black community, but its cultural needs as well, with the formation of literary societies. In these societies, Black men and women gathered to discuss current political ideas, listen to readings and speeches, or participate in debates. The purpose was educational and social in the eyes of the editor of the Appeal. In announcing the formation of one such literary society in 1887 he stated his hope that "every young man and woman who has the advancement of the race at heart, will attend...and organize a society, the effect of which will be seen and felt in this community."

## The Black Press

The Black church was one of the two principal institutions responsible for the development of Black community life. The other was the Black press. It remained for the Black press to weld this heterogeneous population into a conscious collectivity of mutual concern and effort. The Black press came into being to fill a serious communications problem in the Black community. Ignored by the White press, the Black community had need for a vehicle by which the community news and social events could be transmitted. Moreover, to combat the growing tide of proscriptive legislation, the Black community was in need of a medium by which they could channel their grievances to the White community. In fulfilling these needs the Black press helped to mold the Black community into a cohesive social and political entity.

The Black press served many other functions. In its columns Blacks were accorded recognition for personal achievement. Black leadership was encouraged and Black politicians given a forum. People were encouraged to purchase from Black businessmen. Notices of community meetings, concerts, recitals, picnics, births, deaths, and national Black news help to create a sense of community identity without which a viable community could not exist.

The First all-Negro Choir, St. Peter Claver Church. Minn. Historical Society.



First all-Negro Choir of St. Peter Claver Church organized 1887.  
 Rev. John T. Anderson  
 Front Row—Mary Pitt, Emma Foster, Deborah, Claude, Joseph, Charles  
 Mattie McGhee, Rev. J. T. Anderson  
 Back Row—Addie Tabor, Eva Harris, Mattie Shepard, Charles Miller  
 Revs.—Joseph Harris, Budie King, Allen French



as the dismissal of the entire force of Black waiters because of a fight between two of them. The weekly paper clearly felt that the police force discriminated against Black people, making false arrests; the "foreign elements" of the force were singled out as the most brutal.

A particularly prominent case occurred in 1887 when William Hazel was refused service at a local restaurant. He took the owner to court and won a victory. The Appeal praised his actions and asked its readers to contribute to the court costs involved. Various groups, such as the Minnesota Protective and Industrial League and the Afro-American League of St. Paul were formed in the pre-1900 period to unite the "city's" Black population in a fight for equal rights.

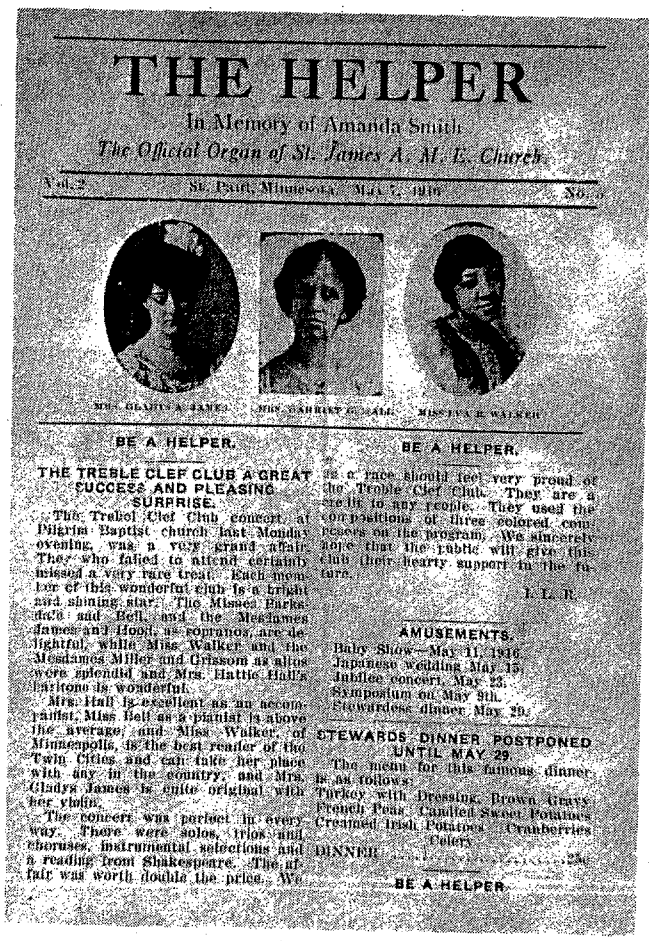
The Black community of the city was even prominent nationally when it launched its campaign to raise funds to test the constitutionality of the Tennessee "separate coach" act. In addition to the legal forays, the Black middle class leadership worked toward securing decent employment. For a time in the early 1890's a "committee to get jobs for Afro-Americans" was very active and was successful in gaining positions. Each successful effort was mentioned in the Appeal which urged its readers to patronize the supportive business.

By 1885 there were over a thousand Black residents of St. Paul; this population had developed into a gradually cohesive stable community of business people and others working in service related trades.

While it is easy to see the general outlines of the history of the Black community in the Appeal, what can be found out about the individual people who were the moving force behind the various political and economic developments?

Information about some of the leading business and professional people is easy to find. There was W. A. Hazel, manager of a stained glass company. He was an activist and was well respected by others in the city, as is shown by his invitation to read a paper before University of Minnesota architecture students in November, 1891. Harry Shepherd, a locally-noted photographer, had a thriving business, and displayed his work at the State Fair. Frederick L. McGhee arrived in St. Paul in 1889 and was "the first colored man to practice at the bar of the Supreme Court of Minnesota". He took on many civil rights cases and became nationally known.

A more limited amount can be learned about the rest of the community. In some cases



Front page of The Helper, from St. James A.M.E. Church in St. Paul. MHS photo.

Cursory glancing at the pages of the Appeal reveals a number of community events. In the late 1880's an annual picnic celebrating the liberation of the slaves of the West Indies was attended by one thousand people. An Emancipation Proclamation celebration was held in the same era, jointly sponsored by the Black citizens of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In 1888, a large crowd attended a concert and ball for the benefit of the Chemical Engine Company #4. The dinner, speeches, dancing, and seventeen musical numbers reflected the pride the community felt in this all Black unit of the city fire department. While only bits and pieces of such events are available in the written records, a careful piecing together of these and the information that old-timers can provide gives a fairly good outline of the dynamics of the beginnings of the Black community.

Racism was often discussed in the pages of the Appeal. One frequent topic was the White press's use of words such as "coon" or "darkie" which stigmatized the whole race. Specific events were also given notice, such

obituaries give the only knowledge of some people. While Black women are not mentioned as frequently in the Appeal, there are some shreds of information that reveal some of their involvements. One short article noted

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*"...most elderly women have a working knowledge of community genealogy. At a twinkling of an eye they can provide the names of offspring and descendants of old established community families complete with running social commentary."*

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that Minnie and Bessie Farr were the "only two Afro-American teachers in the St. Paul Public Schools." Mrs. Mary Mink, apparently a widow, made her living running the Hotel de Mink at the corner of Fourth and St. Peter. "She had," the paper said, "worked hard to maintain a first class house....her rooms are large, airy and comfortable, and scrupulously clean and neat. Her dining room is a model of neatness, and her cuisine is par excellence." Women such as Sara Hilyard took over businesses at the death of their husbands; others started their own ventures, opening beauty salons or hair care establishments.

### The People

The daily lives of countless others whose names seldom appeared in the newspapers have to be approached in other ways. Demographic information concerning the St. Paul Black community is readily available. Population density, educational achievement, literacy rates, employment characteristics, incidence of property ownership, and the general state of community health can be distilled from census data. The movement of people from the downtown area to Summit-University can be followed by tracing individual shifts in residency in the yearly city directories. Moreover, the state of its political consciousness can be measured through voting records, campaign literature and the community newspaper. However, a complete understanding of the internal dynamics of this community is missing. In the quest of this elusive data, contemporary researchers have had to go directly to the community residents, utilizing whatever unorthodox research techniques now available to piece together the fragmentary remains.

Understanding Black culture and community life is important to effective research. Familiarity with residual Africanism in Black community life, the oral tradition, the importance of the extended family, the importance of religion, etc., is a prerequisite. Central to the success of researching in the Black community is an understanding of the Black woman's role as the community griot.\* Afro-Americans, not unlike their African counterpart, have developed a fine oral tradition. Family histories, genealogy, community history, social commentary and social/moral sanctions are transmitted orally. Given this state of affairs every septuagenarian and/or octogenarian is a virtual treasure trove of factual information.

### The Black Woman As Black Historian

The Black woman has often been sited for her role as the perpetrator and preserver of Black culture. Deprived of a sense of identity in a male dominated society, the home, the family (nuclear and extended) and cultural pride were her sources of psychological security. As the preserver of the culture she kept the home, educated and socialized the children and provided them with a sense of identity before a social system which tried to deny them of one. The ability to trace ones' relatives back in time and place became an important means of individual legitimization and pride even for those children considered illegitimate by law. Hence the importance of genealogy as transmitted orally. Because the family was an integral part of community life regardless of the economic status, often family histories and community histories are interrelated.

Although Black men can be important sources for community history, their knowledge is usually confined to politics and demographic information. Moreover, there is ample evidence to show that in the past the Black male's concern for identity, legitimization,

\*A griot is a West African village elder trained in the history of the village, clans and extended family groups. Because of the absence of written languages and formal education, these men were trained from an early age in the history of the village and surrounding territory. Depending upon the size of the village there may be several griots, each specializing in the history of several clans. The more celebrated griots could recall events more than 300 years distant. The whole process is done orally accompanied by special music.

family name and background were not as great nor psychologically as necessary as for the Black woman. On the average the Black woman lived longer than the Black man. Fortunately, if the husband, son or father was a prominent member of the Black community the chances are great that his papers will be kept and preserved out of sentimentality by the mother, wife or daughter. These papers are usually passed on from mother to daughter until discovered by researchers and/or destroyed by relatives.

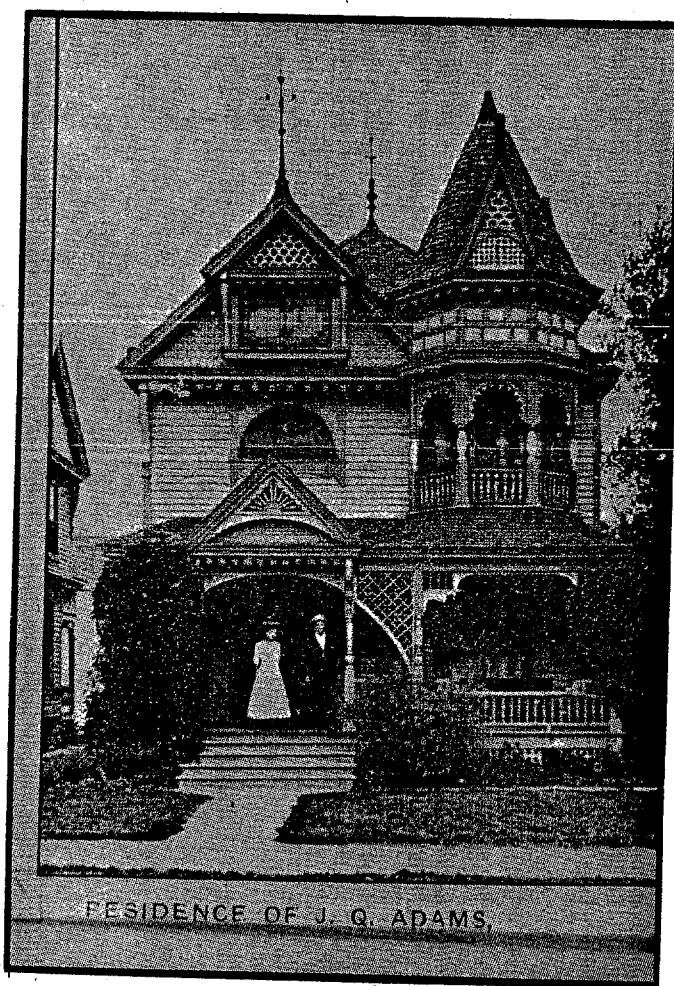
By inclination the Black woman, without formal training, tends to be a better social historian. The saving of newspaper clippings, church bulletins and publications, circulars announcing community events, birth and death notices, back issues of Black newspapers and journals, pictures, letters, old books, family bibles, and organizational records constitutes a rich and varied primary source of local community history. In addition most elderly women have a working knowledge of community genealogy. At a twinkling of an eye they can provide the names of offspring and descendants of old established community families complete with running social commentary. If the ability to recall such data is beyond their capacity, they will refer to another reliable source, usually another elderly woman.

Local Black community history is more social/cultural in its orientation than political. Again it is the Black woman who was responsible for establishing many of the social clubs, literary societies and religious affiliated social service groups. This is not to deny any organizational attempts by the Black men. However, more often than not, it was the Black woman who molded the socio-cultural milieu. Although passing reference to social groups and functions are found in the Black press, the actual organizational records and other documents useful to contemporary researchers remain in the hands of community women. Often these records remain forgotten in basements and attics long after the demise of these organizations.

An example of the utility of the Black woman in researching local Black history is the story of Adina Adams Gibbs of Minneapolis. Mrs. Gibbs was born in Saint Paul in 1894 and lived in the Twin Cities area for most of her life. She is the daughter of John Quincy Adams, editor of the Appeal newspaper, the first successful Black journal in Saint Paul. Because of her family's social position in Saint Paul she was in a position to observe the best of its social life. Important personages such as Booker T. Washington, Willian E.B. Dubois, William Monroe Trotter and others of national importance

were entertained at the Adams' residence at 527 St. Anthony. In addition to thorough knowledge of the Black community social life at the turn of the century, Mrs. Gibbs kept intact many personal papers of her late father. These papers have been subsequently turned over to the Minnesota Historical Society and a taped interview with Mrs. Gibbs placed in the society's oral history collection.

Residence of J.Q. Adams, editor of the Appeal. Minnesota Historical Society photo.



DAVID TAYLOR is a native of St. Paul and is a faculty member in the history and political science department at St. Olaf College. He is currently working on a dissertation about the Black community of St. Paul.

STEVE TRIMBLE came to Minnesota in 1969 from Kansas and now lives in the Summit-University area. He teaches oral history to high school students in St. Paul.



Minnesota Historical Society photo of Irvine Park

# OLD PRIDE IS AWAKENING

## A HISTORY OF ST. PAUL'S WEST 7TH STREET AREA

by Kathy Vadnais

West 7th is a viable inner city neighborhood in St. Paul. Latent pride is awakening--as if the dragon shaped West End community is flexing its muscles recalling days past and testing the air for days future.

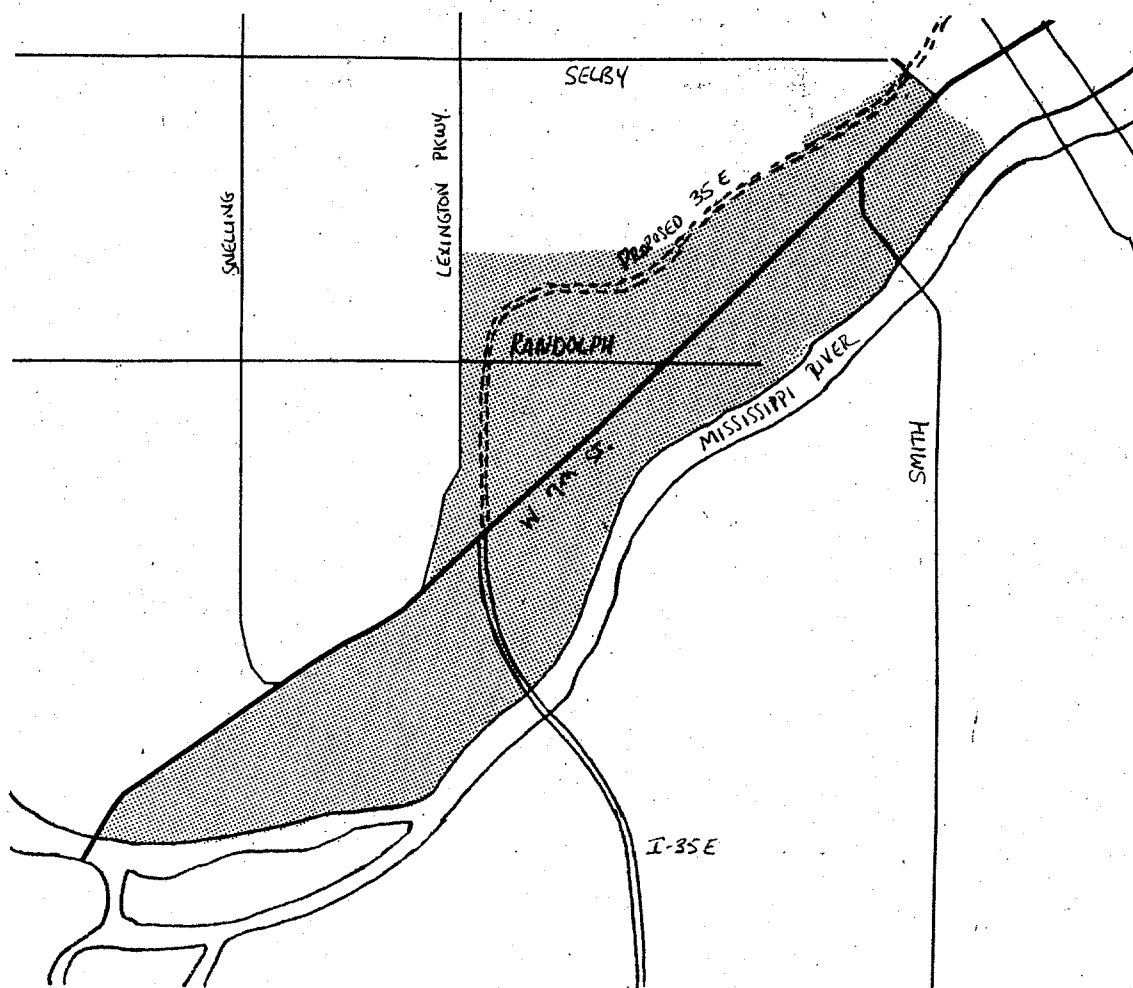
The area is experiencing some tangible results after four years of trudging through meetings and frustrating bureaucratic decision making. Which, for all accompanying hazards, has brought West 7th to a point of awareness in community development.

### Irvine Park

West 7th's history is unique and colorful. The homesteads of the 1800's developed along a throughfare called Fort Road which linked Fort Snelling on the west, with what has become downtown St. Paul on

West 7th's eastern extremity. The homes lie along a bluff above the Mississippi that dips down to downtown where the founding fathers established two levies. Houses developed around these two boat landings until one site succumbed to the stronger competition. The second area still remains: Irvine Park. And recently, with the strange twists of fate, neighborhood renewal almost razed the site until a State Historical Society researcher came in with eleventh hour information identifying this quaint spot as the oldest existing cluster of homes in Minnesota.

Thus Irvine Park, after a few frenetic months of bureaucratic procedures, has become the first site in Minnesota on the National Historic Register. This nomination brings the area under State Historical Society jurisdiction and avails it of



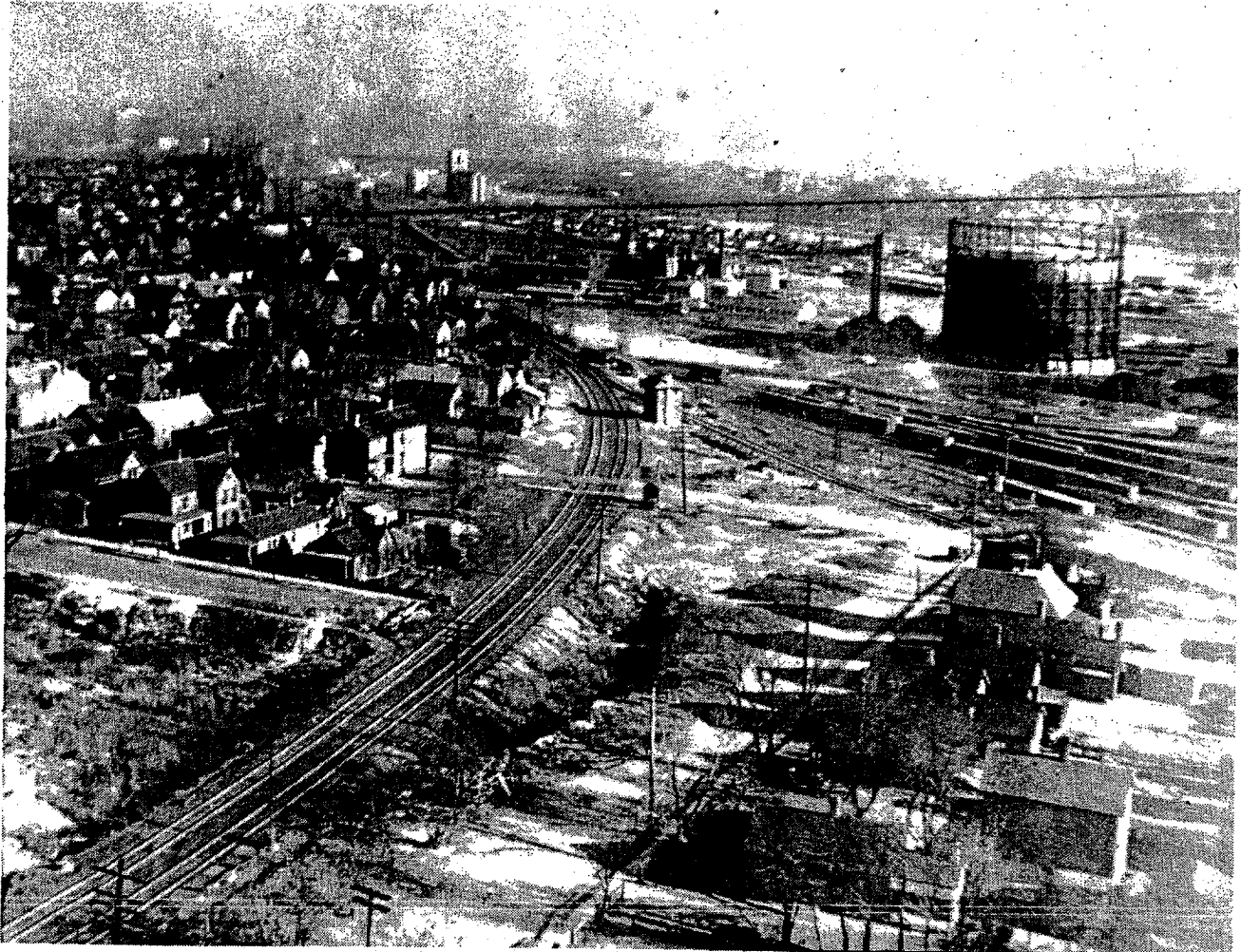
federal funds for restoration and preservation. More importantly, this chain of events has brought the past face to face with people who were oblivious to its beauty. Possibly West 7th residents had been too close to "old" buildings to appreciate true history, and were, therefore, susceptible to the Housing Authority recommendation to acquire the area and change it to modern housing.

West 7th's heritage comes from its location between the Fort and Downtown. In the late 1800's Irvine Park and the nearby Seven Corners intersection thrived as a hub of business and recreation. Carriages of city mayors, newspapermen, statesmen, jurists and commerce leaders rolled past. One of St. Paul's three hotels, the American House, overlooked the Corners, acting as a depot for the St. Anthony Stage, site of the Territorial Supreme Court. Henry David Thoreau, on occasion, stayed at the hotel.

Alexander Ramsey, Minnesota governor,

1860-1863 and U.S. Secretary of War, 1879-1881, built his elegant mansion within these historic blocks. Nathaniel P. Longford, credited with discovering Yellowstone geysers, resided nearby. Frederick Driscoll, an area newspaperman, is one of the founders of the Associated Press. Dr. Justus Ohage lived in the Park and became famous for the first liver and gall bladder surgery. The first State brewery was built in the area. The German Athenaeum served its nationals just as the Mazurka Hall did for the Jewish people. Little Sisters of the Poor built their facility for poor in 1883, and continues in the area with plans to expand in 1974.

In this eastern, and older part of West 7th near Seven Corners and the Park, the homes are closer together on narrow streets. Boulevard greenery is non-existent. However, on the end near the Fort the homes are newer and spread out into more livable patterns.



Union Depot Yards - Aerial View of West 7th Street Area - 1924

- M.H.S. Photo

While the history is pleasant to recall and this area has obviously bustled since the 1850's, there is no way to hide its recent decline. A windshield survey along the West 7th thoroughfare, looking beyond its crazily angled buildings down the old Bohemian, German and Irish residential streets, shows considerable deterioration. Add this physical presentation to census figures and there's no room for argument.

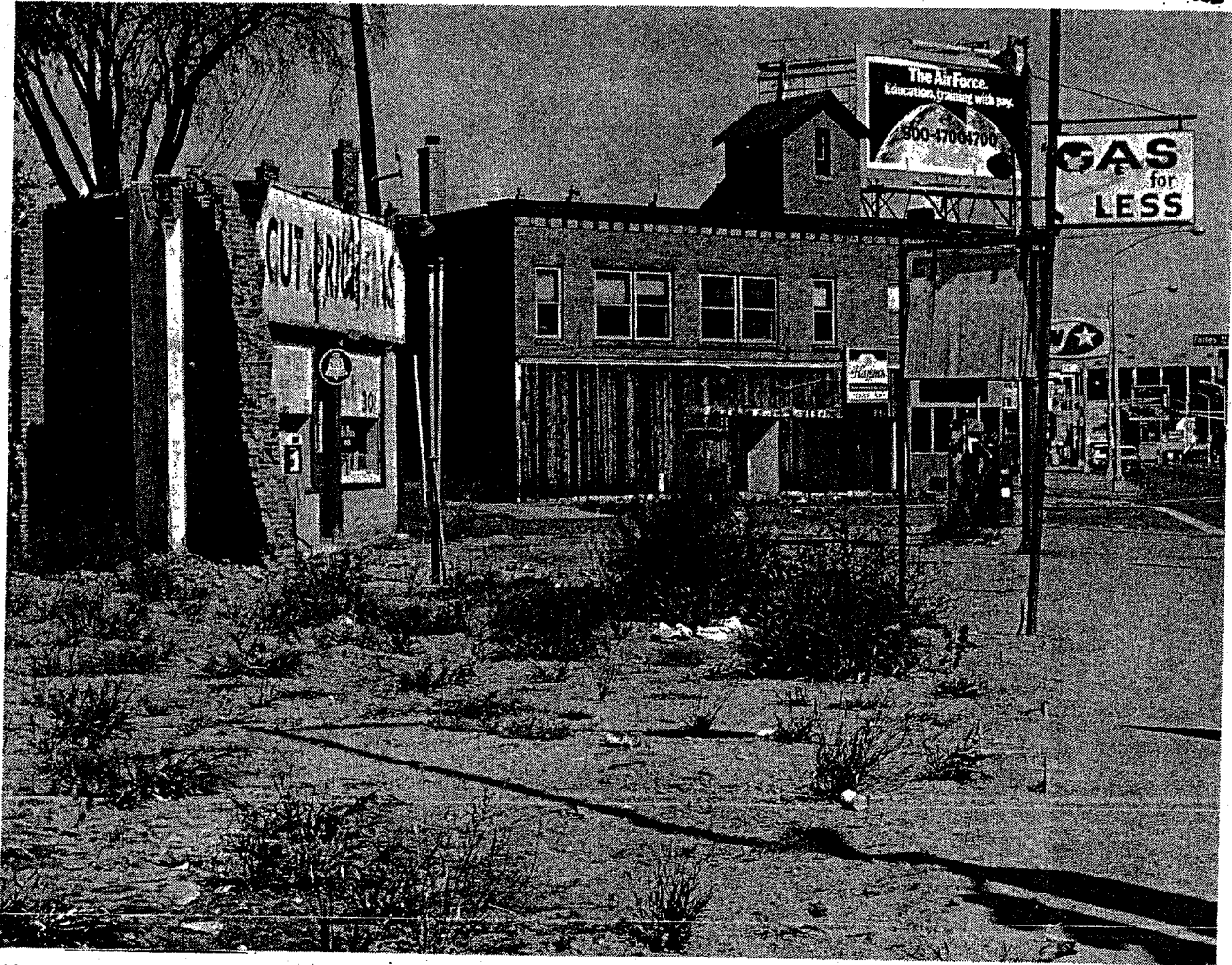
## Economic Decline

Since the 1940's West 7th has been going downhill economically. Old timers in the area, who comprise one third of the population, recall a busy avenue with enough small business to serve and employ the populace. They'll tell of the bank and men's clothier, the neighborhood grocers, and local drug-stores. They'll discuss the West End Comm-

ercial Club as the meeting place. And, no doubt, they or a relative worked for one of the two major employers, Omaha Railroad shops or Schmidt's brewery.

When the older residents of West 7th try to pinpoint the events which contributed to the economic decline of the neighborhood many will think of when the Omaha Railroad merged to become the Chicago Northwestern in the late 1940's. The merger had quite a large impact on many people. About 1400 local employees transferred to workplaces outside of the community. As one West 7th railroader put it, "We were still employed, but cashed and spent our paychecks in other parts of town." Within a few years the West 7th bank and several stores which depended on the lost railroad commerce closed their doors.

Another factor which helped to weaken this



West 7th Street today at a main intersection

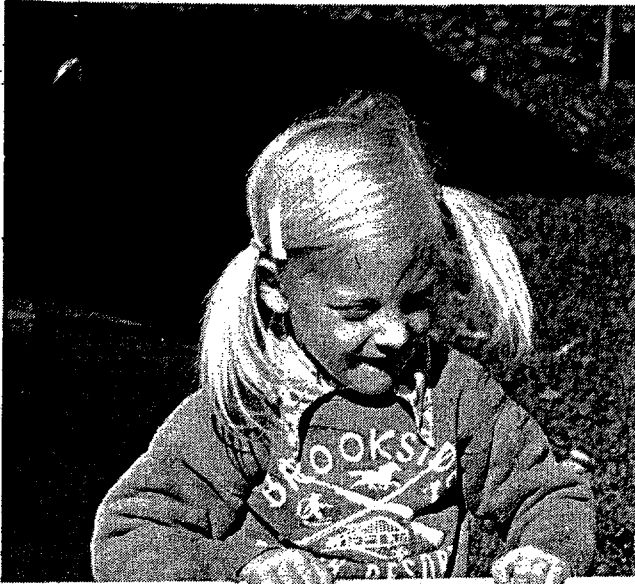
small community's economy was that local people changed their grocery buying habits from small community businesses to more competitively priced chain stores. As new modes of transportation developed, people could leave their community to reach these chain stores easily.

Two modes of transportation have played different roles in West 7th's history. Early in the century, jobs at the nearby Omaha shops encouraged people to remain in the area, even though automobiles and buses have made it easier for residents to spend their income outside the neighborhood. Now, about 200 homes in the neighborhood have been removed and the residents relocated to clear a path for construction of I-35E. The West 7th Street Association has formally denounced completion of the freeway on the grounds that it will further damage the area with noise and air pollution, as well as

devaluation of real estate. Residents in Protest over I-35E (RIP 35E) is comprised of an ad hoc group of West 7th residents and members of associations from three adjoining neighborhoods. RIP 35E opposes the freeway. The group frequently faces antagonism from blue collar neighbors who insist that the freeway should go through to provide construction work and because they aren't used to fighting encroachment by a government agency such as the highway department.

## New Neighborhood Spirit

Well-intentioned organizers, part of the 1960's Great Society Programs, gave way to neighborhood input via the Target Area Advisory Council, TAAC. While the group was rather informal as governing boards go, the net result was to give residents a taste of parliamentary procedure and consumer power. Decisions on priority efforts such as working



RAT

HOT

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222-1276

226-7166



Sign posted on vacant building relating a successful Federation campaign to have the vandal attracting firetrap demolished.

toward a permanent community center, working with youth and establishing a clinic were made at TAAC meetings, and then went through the city-wide board.

TAAC proved a qualified success. Since community organization was a relatively new thing, the staff spent considerable time evaluating their role. Sometimes residents themselves were pushed into leadership roles. But most frequently, as in the case of Oneida Community College and Helping Hand Health Clinic, the TAAC staff, particularly two men, pulled the residents along with them.

Although the TAAC board had many resignations from 1971 into 1972, which prevented continuity, most resigned TAAC members retained a desire to improve their community. Many formed themselves into a board to establish a sound and permanent community center (The West 7th Neighborhood Center Board):

Thinking towards the future, all federal monies could end soon, as everyone became vividly aware when Nixon began impounding congressionally authorized money in January 1973. This could eliminate federal funding for community development and housing programs in West 7th. Revenue sharing could disrupt harmony by creating competition for funding. Already the sabre rattling has discouraged TAAC members from attending "useless" meetings, even though they have received two extensions in funds. Many staff people have resigned for more secure jobs, and the office is in a very tentative state.

The Neighborhood Development Program is executing a conscious effort to uplift the spirit of West 7th by tapping the old pride so near its surface. Through the newsletter and by way of mouth, the rehabilitation loans are getting old homes into good condition. People are beginning to put their own money into fix-ups. The housing committee is encouraging people to stay in the area to take advantage of their proximity to the city amenities. The committee supports RIP 35E.

Independent from TAAC, the Neighborhood Center Board or the Neighborhood Development Program, other programs have developed in West 7th. One is a drug and alcoholic halfway house. Another is an old mansion of the Schmidt brewery family serving as an alternative to prison for selected inmates. Both groups participate in other West 7th organizations. In fact, inmates help maintain the clinic in exchange for medical care. Another organization called the West 7th Family Center offers courses and counseling.





Sign posted on vacant building relating a successful Federation campaign to have the vandal attracting, firetrap demolished.

in Transactional Analysis. On specific days it serves as a free babysitting facility, allowing area mothers some free time without children. This concept is quite a success.

After coming this far, everyone agrees that West 7th's future must be guaranteed. Therefore, the West 7th Federation, an umbrella organization of about 20 groups, including the Federal Programs, playground boosters, PTAs and churches, has developed. The Federation's purpose is to organize residents around neighborhood issues such as youth programs, rat control, freeway building, and currently a large development infringement planning to buy out over fifty good homes to build apartments and offices.

Active members in the West 7th Federation and the West 7th Neighborhood Center Board, all abetted by thousands of federal dollars, have become more sophisticated about community development and their relationship to

City Hall and/or other powers that be. With one group acting to motivate residents and the other to coordinate programs, West 7th will succeed in pulling itself away from past deterioration and into a prosperous city community.

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*Kathy Vadnais has participated in almost every phase of West 7th's renewal. She is currently a member of the Neighborhood Development Program executive board, RIP 35E steering committee, Chairman of the West 7th Federation communication task force, President of the West 7th Neighborhood Center board, and a member of the United Fund Board of Directors.*

*Kathy, husband John, sons Steve, Erik, Joel and infant Emmy share interests in this community where they shop, bike and own their own home. Both John and Kathy have served on local boards and are self-proclaimed "suburban transplants" who feel the urban setting has much to offer.*



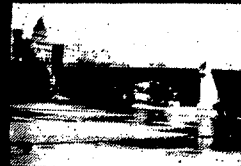
St. Anthony Falls in the 1840's



Mississippi River at peak of Lumber industry in the 1860's.



City of Minneapolis and Nicollet Island 1860's



East Hennepin Commercial District at turn of century



Twin City Machine Co. - Present Durkee Atwood location.



West Island Ave. in 1856.



West Island Ave. in 1956.



Nicollet Island Aerial - 1968



East Hennepin in 1958.



Detail of Lerner's Island Grocery in 1950's

# A PICTORIAL HISTORY

Pictures selected from a slide presentation prepared by Barry Morrow for the East



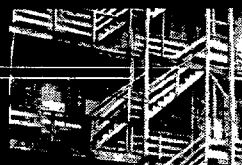
Mission Line sometime in 1950's



Nicollet Island landmark.



East Hennepin on the Island in 1950's



Rear of East Hennepin Buildings - demolished 1973.



Island Grocery



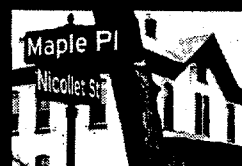
Typical limestone warehouse on the Island's East end.



Sole Island gas pump on West Island Ave.



Durkee sawmill plant on the Island's East end.



164 Nicollet St.



Old Luxury townhouses - Eastman Flats. Flop house in 1960's



One of 2 cycle shops serving the area.



Many Islanders still cycle to work in the area.



Trains at Mpls. Cold Storage - Account for some IS. noise.



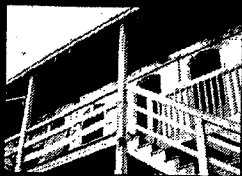
Rear of P.A.C. Headquarters - demolished in 1972.



De LaSalle H.S.



W. Island Ave. and Maple St.



The rear of 167 Nicollet St.



Guss - 181 E. Nicollet Ave.



Poochie - Guss "found him in the man's ads."



Guss and Poochie's place.



Doris + Kelley Ambrust's at 155 E. Is. Ave.



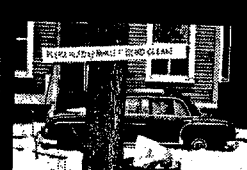
Doris Ambrust - Chairperson of the Nic. Is. East Bank P.A.C.



Barn behind 167 Nicollet St.



POLO



Island irony of broken down ironing board & Clean up sign.

# OF NICOLLET ISLAND

Bank-Nicollet Island P.A.C. in an effort to save the island from redevelopment.



One of many Island animals at 29 Maple.



Model for children's theater in window of P.A.C. headquarters



P.A.C. worker during clean-up campaign



View of 167 Nic. St third sidewalk of children's theater dome



169 Nicollet St.



P.A.C. Swap trade Project



Clutter left by clean-up workers



Winter scene at P.A.C. organic garden and goat pens.



Residents answer to renewal plans.



Canning Project



Resting Place.



Stone Arch Bridge demolition



L.S.C. Hennepin Commercial District demolition



Demolition of the Stone Arch Bridge



Construction of Twin Bridges, signals "renewal" victory.



# Radicals and Idlers

by David Rosheim

*Dave Rosheim is a "part-time" writer living in South Minneapolis.*

Gateway resident finds the first spring sunshine, 1959. MHS photo.

*By 1963, the dust had settled and the demolition was done. The Metropolitan Life Building, the Minnesotan and St. James Hotels, the bars and flop houses of Washington Avenue, all were gone. And today, more than a decade later, the scene is still mostly one of desolation, despite the new, and sometimes lovely buildings placed randomly here and there like fortresses. The cleared spaces are occupied by parking lots, and they empty toward evening. This is the end result of a process that began at the turn of the century when the old Gateway, the original city center of Minneapolis, first became known as Skid Row. This was in the time period of 1900-1914....*

As early as 1910, there was almost no family population in the lower loop district. The retailing and financial centers had moved up Hennepin, Nicollet, and Marquette Avenues. Construction in the Gateway came to a virtual halt.

The big stores such as Dayton's and Donaldson's drew the shopping crowds now to

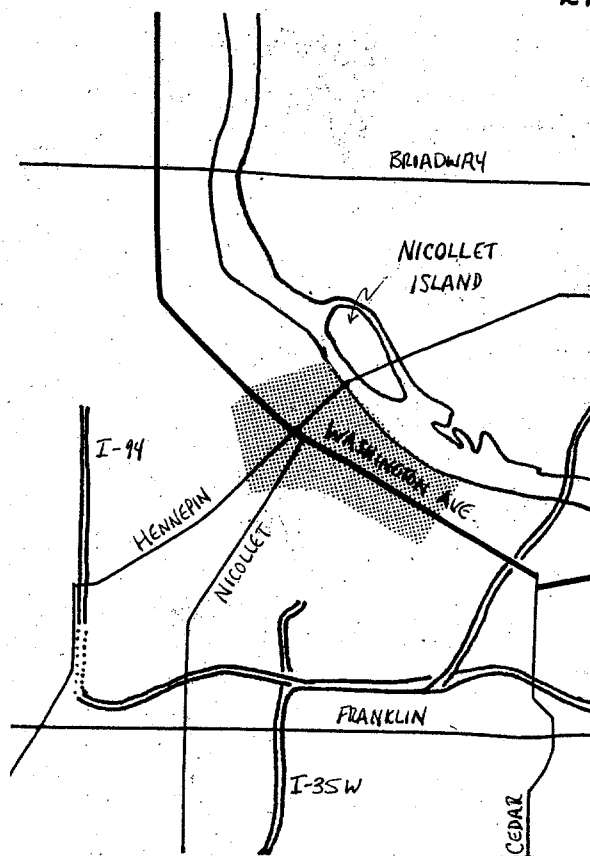
6th and 7th Streets on Nicollet. The banks were on the same streets crossing Marquette. The best theatres had moved into this area also. The people who were well-off had increasingly little to do with the lower loop, save for random illicit activities. In the first decade of this century, the lower loop had packed into its blocks 109 liquor stores, bars, and saloons, and 113 flophouses and hotels.

The old gateway to Minneapolis was now known as Skid Row.

Technological advances in lumbering had displaced the older, slower workers who could not keep up with the pace of new machinery. These men needed a place to live. They settled in Skid Row. Also moving in were the rowdies from the rough parts of town (such as Hell's Half-Acre, between 8th and 9th Streets, and 2nd and 3rd Avenues). As the banks, fine stores, and the center of civic government left, a vacuum was created which these jobless and displaced individuals promptly filled.

Many lumber companies were leaving the

## The Appearance of the Skid Row 1900 - 1914



*"Radicals and Idlers" is excerpted from the upcoming book, The Decline and Fall of the Gateway -- A History of the Minneapolis Skid Row, by David Rosheim. © by David Rosheim. Printed with permission of the author.*

state. A few retained central offices in Minnesota, but mill after mill terminated the processing of white pine. In 1914, the production of lumber in the state was only half that of 1905. More men were made jobless by this process, and found their way to the Skid Row of Minneapolis.

With them came the migratory workers, harvest hands in the summer, and the railroaders. The railroaders recruited section hands right in the Skid Row from offices near the depots. Besides job opportunities, there were saloons and more saloons, pawnshops, burlesque theatres, and flophouses. And there were also the prostitutes from the previous century, whose thinning ranks were strengthened by young recruits.

Proper Minnesotans were now growing very conscious of the rough, idle, and profane men who were filling the streets of the lower loop.

The Gateway had assumed the character which it would retain for fifty years or more. From Indian dancing grounds to mil-

itary cow pastures to proud business district, it had now become stigmatized as Skid Row. Even in this guise its composition changed, as will be seen.

In the book American City, Charles Walker says of the workers of that era, "Wages in the lumber camps ran from 15 to 30 dollars a month in good times and from 6 to 12 dollars in bad. On the drive, jacks got two dollars a day. They worked Thanksgiving and New Year's, but Christmas was a holiday. Efforts to turn this into a working day met with mutiny.

Life in the railroad camps in the great era of railway construction was not far different in point of hygiene, hardship, discipline, bachelorhood, and wages. Often when the drive was over, and his money gone or 'socked away', as sometimes happened, Jack took up railroading until the next season, or waited until the harvest for a job on a bonanza wheat farm. Most...had taken a crack at all three professions and some cultivated them in rotation as 'migratory workers.'"

The Gateway had the employment agencies to which men flocked for these seasonal jobs. So many men sought work that in 1915, for instance, a Minneapolis report- ed seeing several thousand men sitting a- long the curb in Bridge Square. They were packed so closely together that the obser- ver doubted that he could put a newspaper between their elbows.

#### FREE LUNCH -- THE "GOOD OLD DAYS"

The growing social problems presented by the skidding Gateway were reflected in the city's papers of the year 1904. I chose this year because it is squarely

"Even more ominous for the more impoverished habitues of the lower loop was the prohibition of the free lunch."

within the "good old days" of allegedly unfettered high times. My research indi- cates that there were fetters, though only occasionally applied. For instance, in the old Minneapolis Journal of March 12, 1904, it was reported that a disorderly house at 251 Hennepin Avenue was ordered closed. The proprietress, a Miss Cora Cameron, was sentenced to 60 days in the workhouse by Judge H.D. Dickenson. The Police Superintendent, a Mr. Conroy, was highly pleased with the judge's action. Five women who resided there received fines of ten to fifty dollars, a certain Miss Holbrook received the stiffest sanction.

In the same issue, an ad appeared which urged those who sought cure for drink to interest themselves in Orrine, a Scient- ific Cure for Drunkenness, and a simple, home remedy, to boot.

Even more ominous for the more impover- ished habitues of the lower loop saloons was the prohibition of the free lunch. At a hearing on March 18, 1904, C.M.M. Stock- ing, the president of a Gateway rescue mis- sion, spoke up against the custom, saying it contributed to shiftless behavior. He pointed out that about 400 men in the area

lived on free saloon lunches for 3 to 4 months of the year.

In the same article, a former roustabout claimed, "I finally braced up, quit drink- ing, went to work and started paying for my food. It now makes me shudder to look back at the days when I kicked my heels around saloons and waited for a free meal to be set out. Many need something to force them to straighten up."

When quizzed as to his opinion of the change, one of the best-known of the "bis- cuit-grabbers" of the Washington Avenue district said, "It's just another case of people buttin' in where they had no call to. They'll yell like hell as soon as the boys begin tappin' 'em up for lunches at the kitchen door, and that's what it'll come to, sure as shootin'."

But on March 25th of 1904, the mayor signed an order prohibiting free lunches anywhere in the city, even in the fancy spots downtown. A newswriter rhapsodized, "Goodbye to the succulent sandwich, the saucy sausage, the patent pretzel, the buoyant bean, and those strong and healthy cheeses which continue to make life sweet to those otherwise given to gloom."

Meanwhile in that year, the superinten- dent of the Workhouse set up an anti-jag program to get his wards free of alcohol and its evils. One of the first partic- ipants was a chap named Workhouse Kelly (Frank Kelly). He was more than 60 years old. He had not been out of the Workhouse for more than a week at a time since 1893. Mr. Kelly had some doubts, but said he'd give it a try. He was worried that he might lose his taste for drinking after the treatment. The program's first grad- uate was a John Jones, formerly of Chicago. It was reported that all alcoholic poison had disappeared from his system.

In that same March of '04, the city authorities closed down a saloon. It was situated at 201 Washington Avenue So., and owned by Oscar Aalbue. The reason given for its closing was the fact that it ad- joined a theatre, thus creating intimations of immorality. There were also suspicious wineroms at 244 Nicollet and 315 Washing- ton Avenue So. Wineroms were private chambers where patrons could allegedly enjoy a drink, and a woman, too. These es- tablishments lost their licenses.

The month went on and a robbery was re- ported at Weline McCaskey's Excelsior Sa- loon at 117 Washington Avenue So. A person



Arcade at Gateway Park,  
1950 (?). MHS photo.

“Proper Minnesotans were now growing very conscious of the rough, idle, and profane men who were filling the streets of the lower loop.”

or persons stole fifteen dollars worth of wine and cigars and five dollars from the saloon's slot machines. Another robbery emptied the pockets of an Iowa businessman by the name of J.C. Jorgenson when he was robbed of nearly 1200 dollars in the Union Station at the end of First Street. Such incidents further lowered the reputation of the Gateway.

FREER WORKERS -- THE WOBBLIES ATTACK  
SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A wholly different aspect of the Gateway caught the public's attention with the appearance of radicalism among the transient workers. Many considered it criminal, and many others saw it as necessary and heroic. The organization behind it was the famous Industrial Workers of the World. This was the IWW whose members were known as "Wobblies." It had set up its headquarters in Minneapolis. From the city it sent its organizers among the harvest hands, to the great bonanza wheat farms, to the lumber camps and the Iron Range.

The philosophy of the IWW was this (or, is this, since the organization survives in a skeletal way): "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.

"This radical worker's movement is not recognized in the smug official histories...."

There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people, and the few, who make up the employing classes, have all the good things of life.

"Between the two classes, a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth, and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.

"...These conditions can be changed and the interests of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all."

The IWW was formed in another midwestern city, Chicago, and in a few years had gained several hundred thousand adherents. Minneapolis was an ideal location for it to operate because of the large, floating mass of workers, many of whom were sympathetic to radi-

"The Bum on the Rods and the Bum on the Plush"

(An old Wobbly Song)

The bum on the rods is hunted down  
As the enemy of mankind,  
The other is driven around to his club,  
Is feted and wined and dined.

And they who curse the bum on the rods  
As the essence of all that's bad  
Will greet the other with a winning smile,  
And extend the hand so glad.

The bum on the rods is a social flea  
Who gets an occasional bite,  
The bum on the plush is a social leech,  
Bloodsucking day and night.

The bum on the rods is a load so light  
That his weight we scarcely feel,  
But it takes the labor of dozens of men  
To furnish the other a meal.

As long as you sanction the bum on the plush  
The other will always be there,  
But rid yourself of the bum on the plush  
And the other will disappear.

Then make an intelligent organized kick:  
Get rid of the weights that crush.  
Don't worry about the bum on the rods,  
Get rid of the bum on the plush.

"One of the old I.W.W. standards was a song about the radical hoboes who 'rode the rods' or, in other words, rode for free underneath the old-time freight cars...."

"Attitudes such as these, although laudable, and in essence correct, were certainly not designed to win the radical hoboes among the middle classes, or, least of all, among the local constabulary...."

--David Rosheim



cal thoughts since they were victimized by low pay and poor working conditions. Despite its dramatic growth, the IWW virtually vanished during and after the First World War due to massive government repression.

These were the most formidable radicals on the doorstep of Minneapolis, and they did some good. The workers learned to be more militant strikers, for one thing. This sort of movement is not recognized in the smug official histories, or the city brochures, but it was indisputably there.

#### FREE FARE -- SCRAPING BY WITHOUT WORK

What sort of conditions prevailed in the cities of that time for these radicals and wandering workers? We know or can guess at the crude work accommodations of lumberjacks, for instance, with their bunkhouses. What about between jobs?

In an illuminating book called Skid Row USA, by Sara Harris, one finds opposite remarks by an old-timer, an old Wobbly named Cussin' Cassidy. He was interviewed in the mid-1950's, and said, "Today's flops ain't nothin' to rave about, but in them days it was worse. Take this one house I still remember. They used to let you sleep on shelves that were built all around the room for a nickel. Also, you could sleep on a bench or else on the floor. Sometimes my body got so sore, I used to spend an extra two cents. They used to charge seven cents for a hammock. Well, believe it or not, except for the hammock, things was just as lousy on the seven-cent floor as they was on the nickel one. There wasn't no towels on the seven-cent floor. Ain't that something? There was only one sink in there, too. It sure was filthy. Fifty, sixty, seventy guys used it all the time. They got no soap. Everybody stunk. I hope you won't be like them other writers say hoboos is dirty. I wonder how clean they'd be theirselves if they lived in a dive like I done."

Despite such living conditions, many men had no choice but to stay in flophouses while looking for jobs. In 1913, economic affairs had taken a downturn, producing a great number of unemployed in the Minneapolis Skid Row. Mayor W.G. Nye thought that there were too many and that they were a potential menace. He ordered the police to be more severe and pick them up on charges of drunkenness and vagrancy. He also warned saloonkeepers not to sell liquor to intoxicated or partially intoxicated persons.

These measures did reduce the number of Gateway idlers, but many remained. The city fathers did not seem to recognize the fact that there were more men seeking jobs than the regional economy could absorb.

A census was taken of these men which showed there were 1200 jobless 'idlers'. 500, however, were revealed to be legitimate workmen who were merely waiting for a decent job offer. A number of the men were radicals inciting others not to work for substandard pay. The papers of the day were not at all sympathetic to their cause.

The Journal reported incidents of the police crackdown: "Twelve men were arrested early today by patrolmen Kommers and Long on Bridge Square where they lay sleeping on the curbing or in the alleys, and who refused to promise to go to work today in case they were released by the policemen. They were sent to the Workhouse on sentences varying from five to forty-five days. None of them was given the option of a fine.

"One intoxicated man was seen in a doorway at Second Street and First Avenue South.

"...I hope you won't be like them other writers says hoboos is dirty. I wonder how clean they'd be theirselves if they lived in a dive like I done.' "

He was peacefully slumbering. One of his comrades passed him and gave him a kick, mumbling at the same time, 'Wake up, you fool; there's a policeman coming. Do you want to go to the works?' The man hurriedly got on his feet and slunk away."

This is the typical treatment given the huddling unemployed of that time by the free press. Notice the subtle attempt to tie them with criminal elements; the clever use of descriptive verbs such as "mumbled" or "slunk." With public relations like that, I'd probably slink, too.

Meanwhile the migratory workers continued flooding through the district. An interesting side-light to this flow of ready labor was the existence of at least 40 hiring halls in the 1913 lower loop. By the 1950's, only a dozen remained. The common practice at these halls was to put up notices from, for instance, wheat farmers.



Thomas and James Martens in front of their employment agency, 1920. The postoffice presently occupies this site. Hennepin County Historical Society photo.

These would say when the harvest was expected and how many men they needed. The potential workers would then gather around the notices and decide whether or not to go. A newspaper picture of one of these halls shows a placard reading: "Montana, Free Fare--Threshing Hands, \$3.50 a day, Minot, No. Dakota, Free Fare, 7 pm."

The free fare was itself something of a reform. Many times previously, men had been obligated to pay their own way, and had arrived at their destination only to find that all the jobs were gone. With the free fare, a man could at least avoid losing money on the proposition. Also, at one time, men had to pay the employment bureaus for promised jobs, which sometimes didn't materialize, and that money, too, was lost. This abuse had been largely curbed by radical pressure and increased government regulation. By this time the federal government had taken charge of some of the job distribution.

The Minneapolis Journal of July 28, 1915 has a sad tale of an agent who was in charge of distributing these jobs. "There are about 40 idle men in Minneapolis who would not take a job unless it was offered to them on a silver platter--and perhaps not even then.

"This is the opinion of George Weaver

and E.W. Stearns of the immigration department, who are now in charge of the federal labor distribution service in Minneapolis. The jobless 40 were lined up in the office yesterday.

" 'How many of you really want work?' asked Weaver.

"Forty hands shot in the general direction of the ceiling.

" 'Fine,' said Weaver. 'Now here's a nice job on a farm near Minneapolis, \$35 a month with room, board, and washing. Who wants it?'

"The silence was so thick it could have been cut with a knife. Weaver offered another at \$40 a month. Still there was nothing doing. And then he pleaded, advised, and exhorted them to take ten jobs that would pay \$2.00 a day. As before there was silence that was annoying. Weaver then expressed himself freely and 40 men of leisure filed out of his office. There are about 50 jobs still awaiting claimants."

Once again, the press failed to understand the fact that these jobs may have been deficient in the matter of pay, and that the silent crew may have had it in mind to make enough to live through the winter. What is interesting about this

article is the date and the diminished number of idle men. By this time, there was a fair-sized war going on in foreign parts, in fact, in quite a few foreign parts, and the economy was not yet formally involved.

FREE BRICKS -- THE CITY OBLITERATES THE UNPLEASANT

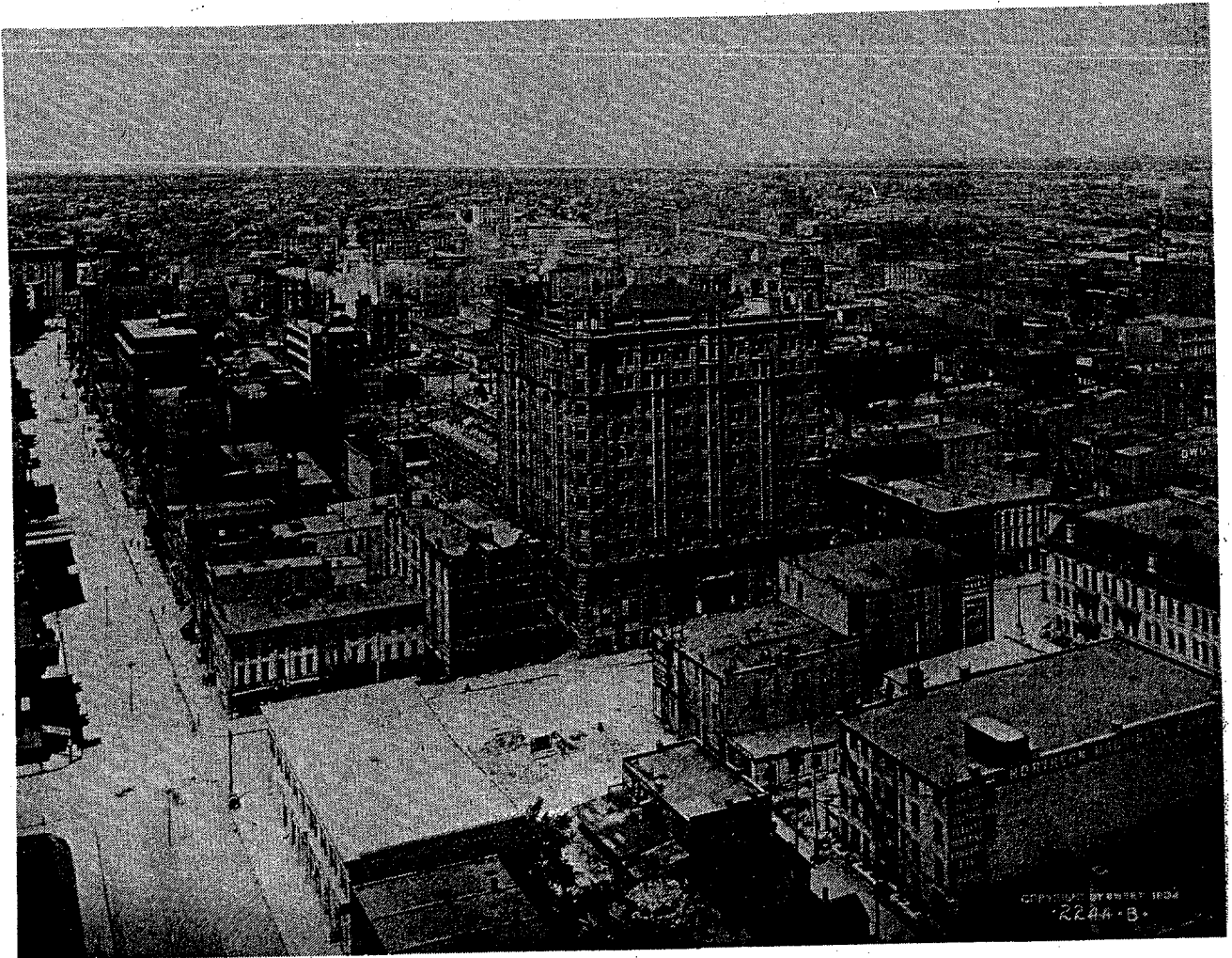
At about this same time the city government noticed the fairly rapid deterioration of the lower loop. The city fathers especially wanted to do something about Bridge Square where many of the alleged idlers and radicals had been going about their anties-

"Unshaven saloon-goers watched workmen attack the old walls with crowbars until thirst overcame their curiosity."

establishment shenanigans. In addition, this part of town was by that time extremely vintage. In the 1870's, these blocks had consisted of decorous business establishments. Now, however, they had undergone a seachange due to the increasing flood of unemployed and retired persons.

To return to the fall of 1913, early efforts at upgrading the Gateway through demolition were proceeding. The condemned Athenaeum was going down. Unshaven saloon goers watched workmen attack the old walls with crowbars until thirst overcame their curiosity. Passing businessmen in an automobile also gazed disinterestedly. Other Bridge Square structures were cleared as well. One idea of the city authorities was to bring up the general character of the district by placing a park where these old buildings had stood, thus creating a pleasant green space. The old city hall also fell before this advancing plan, along with the original First National Bank building.

Birdseye view of Minneapolis, showing the Metropolitan Building, 1904. 4th St and 2nd Avenue are in the foreground, the Gateway and Skid Row in the background. MHS photo.



While these demolitions were removing some of the cheaper hotels, the "wandering boys" looked for new places to dwell. One place they found was a boxcar called simply "Number 210041". It had stood in a siding near the Union Station railroad yards and was visited temporarily by about sixty men for a week before it was moved. A frustrated railroad detective had spent all that time chasing men out of it, only to discover that more men, often the same men, were back inside it the next time he came around. The times were hard.

FREE PRESS -- THE KAISER VS. THE SALOON

The world had been puttering around in peacetime far too long, people in European chancelleries apparently decided. Of course, there had been dust-ups like the Boer War, and the United States had had a bully adventure in Cuba and other places during the Spanish-American War. Many Minnesotans had gotten in on that one in 1898. And in June of 1914, there was a lot of action down in Mexico. Minneapolis eyes were focused south of the border through the reporting of the city papers. The Journal published maps of scenes of Mexican contention where Carranza, Huerta, Zapata, and the redoubtable Pancho Villa were wholeheartedly blazing away at various combinations of *federales* and *bandidos* and whatever gringos decided to get mixed into the fray.

"The Gateway became involved in WWI three years before the US government officially did."

Sometimes Texans got involved against their will when Villa or somebody would make protective incursions onto American soil.

This was so interesting to the Minneapolis press that the Journal played down the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Serbia, on June 29, 1914.

The story, and its ramifications, disappeared from the Journal for a month, with the exception of an editorial on Serbian nationalism. In fact, the Journal was running warm human interest stories on the sons of Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, and their wives and mistresses! The paper was very much interested



1854 -- The original neighborhood. This land eventually became Bridge Square (see lower photo on next page). MHS photo.

1869 -- Northern Pacific Railroad surveying expedition returns to Washington Ave. MHS.



in the affairs of aristocracy. Inexplicably, newspapers still are.

Of equal importance in the June 29 issue was the fact that the Minneapolis city government was closing down four nightclubs in the lower loop. There had been some questionable activities in these places involving women of a lewd and lascivious nature. The front doors were officially padlocked. A following article indicates the city fathers' irritation at the fact that the customers of these disorderly nightclubs continued their patronage by using the backdoors and rear windows. Strong sanctions were urged.

Strong sanctions were also urged against Serbia by Austria-Hungary. A stiff ultimatum was sent to Serbia which contained a lot of humiliating conditions which were considered unacceptable even by the Minneapolis Journal. This appeared in the issue of July 27, 1914. From then on the headlines grew bigger and grimmer and more apocalyptic in tone, as indeed they should have been.

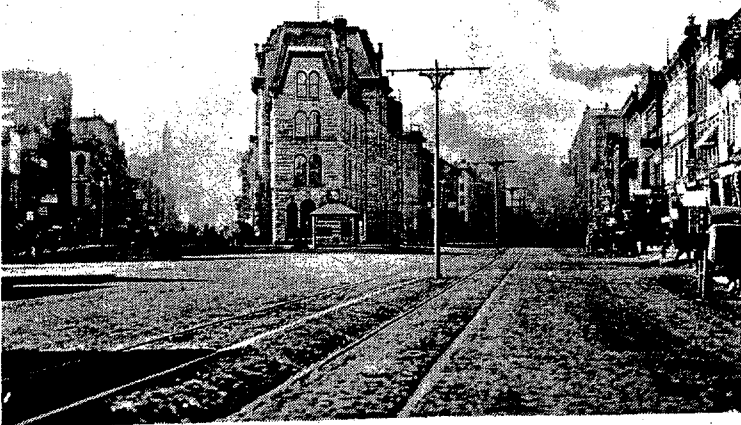
While Europe prepared for war, the Journal was bothered by the fact that all their laborious reporting of the Mexican strife was for naught because the readers were now more interested in the doings of the major foreign powers. The Gateway had also made the switch, and it became involved in World War I three years before the US government officially did. Two patriotic Austrian immigrants decided to return to their homeland to fight for Franz Josef, their Kaiser. They left a First Street saloon on their way to the train depot and were attacked by unidentified Americans (or immigrant Serbians) who were either patriotic themselves, or else, extremely thirsty. The two would-be Austrian troopers were left without a penny. Their lives, as I see it in long retrospect, were undoubtedly saved by this heist, unless they reached the boat in New York through charity. Truly Minneapolis was not slow to involve itself in the dramatic developments of the new century.

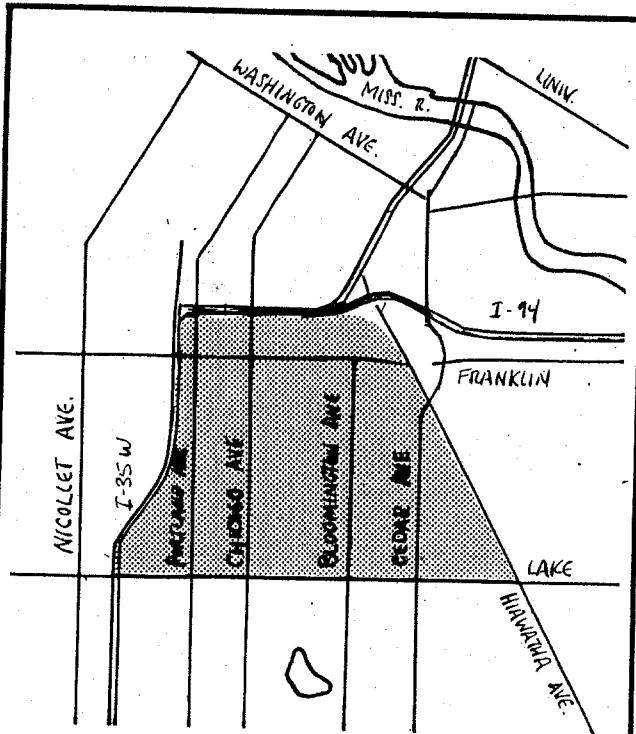
After the First World War began in August of 1914, the number of transients in the Gateway diminished. More food was raised, more harvest hands were employed and the war industries began to gear up to supply arms to the Allies, and eventually, to our own armies. Prohibition and wartime restrictions were soon to stretch their desiccating hands into the lower loop altering it for all time. The Skid Row had many lively years left to it, but it never regained its boisterous pre-war character, not even after Prohibition's demise in 1933.



1885 -- Washington Avenue, at 2nd Ave So. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

1890 -- Bridge Square, intersection of Nicollet and Hennepin, at the west end of the Hennepin Avenue bridge. MHS photo.





# PHILLIPS NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

a brief history  
by Jeanne Teigen

On January 16, 1962, the first meeting of the Phillips Neighborhood Improvement Association was called to order at 8:00 pm in the library of Greeley School by Mr. Wally Gronberg. According to the minutes of the first meeting, "The group is to be composed of homeowners and residents looking to the future for the betterment of this area, working for community conservation and improvement."

Through the years the goals have varied but the primary goal has always been to retain the residential character of the neighborhood, which seems like an easy goal to achieve but actually has demanded a great deal of vigilance and effort.

Two of the things making Phillips Neighborhood attractive to residents are its close proximity to the downtown area and the availability of many different kinds of institutions. The latter also has been a threat to the retention of the residential nature of the neighborhood. This became apparent to the Board of Directors of PNIA in January of 1969. At their Board meeting they had representatives from each of the five hospitals that had joined to form the Minneapolis Medical Center, who came to present their plans for the future of the Center.

It was readily apparent to the Board that the future plans included considerable expansion of the plants as well as many ancillary services. They were planning to acquire several blocks that contained homesites for residents. They also included in their expansion businesses and churches that would have to be removed. Following their presentation, the Board of Directors discussed the plans and decided the only course of action open was to limit the expansion of the hospitals in the area. The Board proceeded to draw up a map with specific boundaries, limiting the hospitals' expansion. These boundaries were voted on at the General meeting in February and this information was passed on to the Policy and Planning Council (P&PC) of the Model Neighborhood. Eventually, the hospitals were contained in the boundaries that were proposed by PNIA.

Also in 1969, the Board became aware of a new nursing care home which was proposed for the Chicago-Franklin area. PNIA had previously designated the Chicago-Franklin area as a commercial node. Additionally, upon checking into the nursing care facilities in the area, they found that the Phillips Neighborhood had better than 50 per cent of such homes in Minneapolis. Therefore, they decided to oppose the construction of this facility. The necessary action was taken at a Board meeting and at the General Meeting



"The primary goal has always been to retain the residential character of the neighborhood, which seems like an easy goal to achieve but actually has demanded a great deal of vigilance."

photo by Carl A. Peterson

following, and on the strength of that recommendation, the proposal was turned down by the Model Neighborhood and the City Planning Commission. The proposal was later changed to a 21-story apartment building for senior citizens on the same site. PNIA, realizing the dearth of such facilities in the area, supported the proposal. However, it died for lack of federal funding.

One of the major problems in the Phillips neighborhood is the amount of through traffic from the suburbs to downtown Minneapolis. Because of the suburbanites' desire to get downtown as fast as possible, three freeways were proposed through the Phillips neighborhood. The residents have thus far succeeded in holding the construction to one and are hopeful that they will end up with no more than two freeways.

It was also proposed by the Minnesota State Highway Department to close 24th Street when the Hiawatha freeway is constructed.

PNIA wrote letters opposing this because there was no other through street between Franklin Avenue and Lake Street. They felt that 24th Street was needed for fire and police protection as well as for the convenience of school children. The Highway Department has now changed its plans and will keep 24th Street open across the freeway.

The 35W freeway became a barrier between the eastern and western portions of the St. Stephens parish and because there were no cross streets between Franklin Avenue and 26th Street, considerable difficulty was encountered in getting to church and school. They felt that at least a crosswalk at 24th Street would be helpful and PNIA wrote letters supporting their request. The crosswalk has been completed.

In 1966 PNIA was instrumental in starting the drive to obtain a Model Cities Demonstration Project in Minneapolis. In 1967 it became a reality and PNIA has had many of



photo by Carl A. Peterson

"The Phillips Junior High School is presently enjoying a new pool which was proposed by PNIA and subsequently pushed through the Model City and City Park and School Boards to become a reality last year."

l to r: Jeanne Teigen, Signe Anderson, Helen Gatton, and John Taif, all members of the PNIA, at the groundbreaking for the South High Housing Project.

Photo by Carl A. Peterson



its members involved in the Model City committees. The area designated in the demonstration project included the Phillips Neighborhood as well as a considerable part of south Minneapolis. Model City has dealt with many of Phillips Neighborhood's major problems, such as, housing and crime.

Early on, PNIA decided that it did not want to have wholesale clearance of deteriorating property with the resultant building of large areas of new buildings that often-time become instant slums. They preferred rather to rehabilitate the old structures as much as possible. With the help of Model City, their desires have been carried out.

Housing conditions will continue to be a major problem until the number of owner-occupied houses increases or until taxing is reversed and punishes landlords for deteriorating property instead of rewarding them with write-offs! A trend appears to be developing of people returning from the suburbs

to the inner city. One recent indication of this trend was the 1200 applications submitted for the 212 units at the South High Housing Project.

Although the majority of PNIA members do not have children in the neighborhood schools, the schools have been uppermost in their minds. PNIA has fought long and hard to improve the schools in various ways as well as the social welfare and recreational facilities in the area. They have supported the efforts of the school PTA's to obtain new buildings and additional facilities at Greeley, Phillips, and South. The plans are now underway for the construction of a school complex at the Greeley site that will include several elementary schools in this area.

The Phillips Junior High School is presently enjoying a new pool which was proposed by PNIA and subsequently pushed through the Model City and City Park and School Boards to become a reality last year.

Photo by Carl A. Peterson

Groundbreaking ceremony for the South High Housing Project, 24th and Cedar Avenue South.





Since the pool was built on most of the athletic field, PNIA conducted a house-to-house survey of residents and owners of the property on the block west of PJHS to construct a new athletic field. The property was acquired and is presently being cleared for a new field. The new South High School has been in use for several years but it took many, many years of planning and effort on the part of many organizations to become that reality.

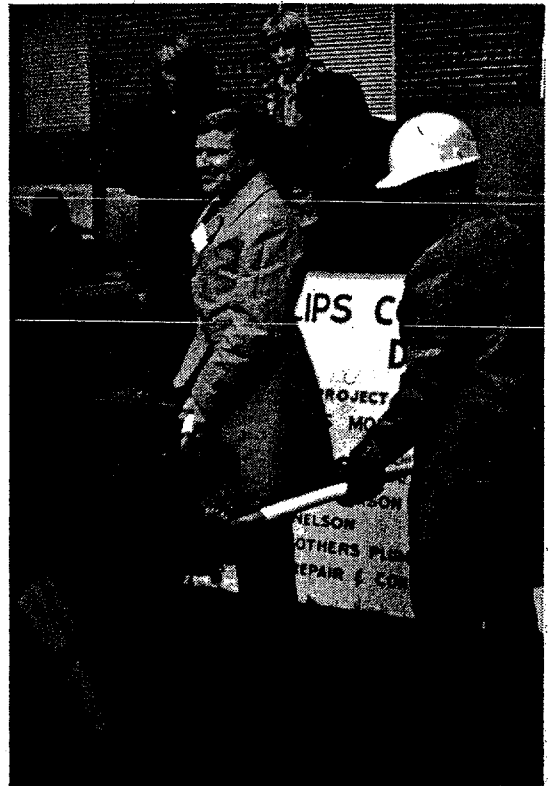
Even though problems are faced and overcome, there are always new and continuing problems. PNIA is still attempting to reverse the zoning designation which raised the permitted density in this area and is still fighting for its primary goal of maintaining a residential neighborhood. It is also attempting to persuade the neighborhood theaters to discontinue showing porno movies. Another item that has been "on the back burner," so to speak, is the matter of the Liquor Patrol Limits. Phillips Neighborhood has a disproportionate number of liquor licenses because of these antiquated and, they feel, unconstitutional Liquor Patrol Limits.

As with any organization, they have some organizational problems: (1) Membership is a continual problem because of the transient character of the neighborhood. Also, because there is still an outward flow of responsible residents to the suburbs. (2) The usual difficulty of getting good turnouts at meetings is encountered. Agendas must be controversial to generate enough interest to get people to leave their televisions. (3) It has been nearly impossible to involve the minority residents of the neighborhood in PNIA. (4) PNIA has been fortunate budget-wise to receive the support of the churches, businesses, and institutions in the area in a very real way--monetarily and with manpower. At various times, letters have been sent to them requesting their support in exchange for a special membership in PNIA and they have responded generously. Also, special recognition must be given to the personnel at Waite Neighborhood House for their invaluable advice as well as clerical assistance throughout the years.

An organization can only be as good as its individual members and PNIA has been fortunate to have a dedicated nucleus of residents--some of whom have been with the organization since the beginning.

In 1972, Phillips Neighborhood Improvement Association celebrated its Tenth Anniversary with a dinner and program. It is now into its second decade and hopes to continue to meet the challenges and provide the best possible life style for its residents.

"PNIA conducted a house-to-house survey of residents and owners of the property west of Phillips Junior High to construct a new athletic field."



Groundbreaking for the Phillips Pool. Rev. Warren Sorteberg, PNIA, and Harry Davis. photo by Carl A. Peterson

*JEANNE TEIGEN is living in the house where she was born. She is a member of Messiah Lutheran Church and a graduate of Greeley, Phillips, and South High School. She has 21 years of service with the Federal Government. Her past duties on the PNIA Board include Membership Chairman and Corresponding Secretary.*

# The Corner Store: Changing with the Neighborhood

By: Mary Brandl, Pamela Costain, Peter Eichten, Mary Heinz

The Powderhorn neighborhood, like other neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul has seen many changes in the last ten years. Single family dwellings have been replaced by apartment buildings and two-and-a-half story walk-ups; an older, more traditional family population is being replaced by a younger, more mobile group of people and by a high concentration of the elderly; and the familiar 'ma and pa' grocery store is gradually giving way to corporate chain stores of the 7-Eleven and L'il General variety. We have chosen to focus this article on the changing nature of the neighborhood grocery store, in particular, because we understand this phenomenon to be symbolic of the larger changes in the Powderhorn neighborhood. We hope to reveal, by examining four grocery stores within a one block area between 34th and 35th Street on Bloomington Avenue, a bit of Powderhorn's history, as well as some possible directions for the neighborhood. Two of the four stores are of the 'ma and pa' variety, one is a corporately owned 7-Eleven, and one is a neighborhood-run food co-op.

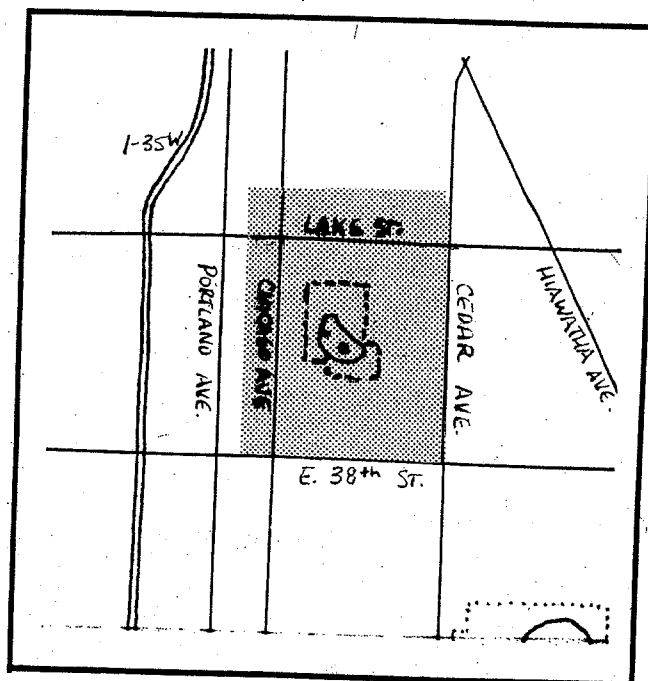
## ROOTS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: THE TRADITIONAL CORNER STORE

The H & H Purity store on the corner of 35th and Bloomington represents one of the few remaining 'ma and pa' grocery stores in the Powderhorn neighborhood. Helen and Ron, the present owner-operators, took the store over just two years ago from two elderly women who found it difficult to keep things going. But the store itself has a history of several owners, dating back more than fifteen years when it was a drug store. According to some area residents, several people were excited when Helen and Ron rented the store-site from Purity Dairy Company and began expanding the existing stock into what it is today. In fact, some residents went into the store and told them how pleased they were at

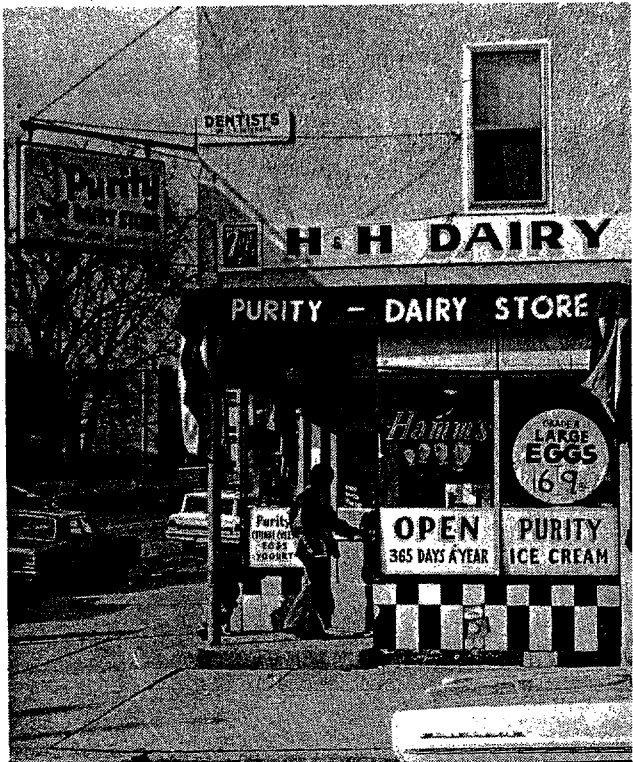
having a growing store still in family hands.

Helen and Ron's store is just one of the many family-operated Purity Dairy stores in the south Minneapolis area. In 1954, Purity bought out the Ohleen Dairy Company and acquired over seventy retail and wholesale milk routes. They continued these until 1961 when they devoted their entire operation to wholesale milk sales through their outlet stores. The Purity stores, all located in the Minneapolis area, are rented out to folks like Helen and Ron, who agree to carry the Purity-Ohleen line of dairy products. No other business arrangements exist between Ron and Helen's store and the Purity Dairy Co.

photographs by Ken Meter



CUSTOMERS AND FRIENDS



H & H Purity Dairy, 35th & Bloomington

Ron and Helen have managed other stores before this particular one, but their history in the grocery business began when they were children. Both sets of parents operated 'ma and pa' stores and Helen believes that this has had some effect on how the Purity store is run. Several part-time employees, who live in the Powderhorn neighborhood, add to the friendly climate of the store. As most shoppers arrive, they hear a warm hello and quickly return the greeting, even as they begin to walk down the aisle picking up groceries. Helen feels that because the same people shop at her store, they begin to recognize other shoppers, and this helps provide a positive atmosphere for business and community contact.

Most shoppers know that they have some influence on what is carried in the store. Helen states that in terms of good business, the store has to try to satisfy the customer. So, when people request a certain item to be carried in the store, Ron really attempts to obtain it.

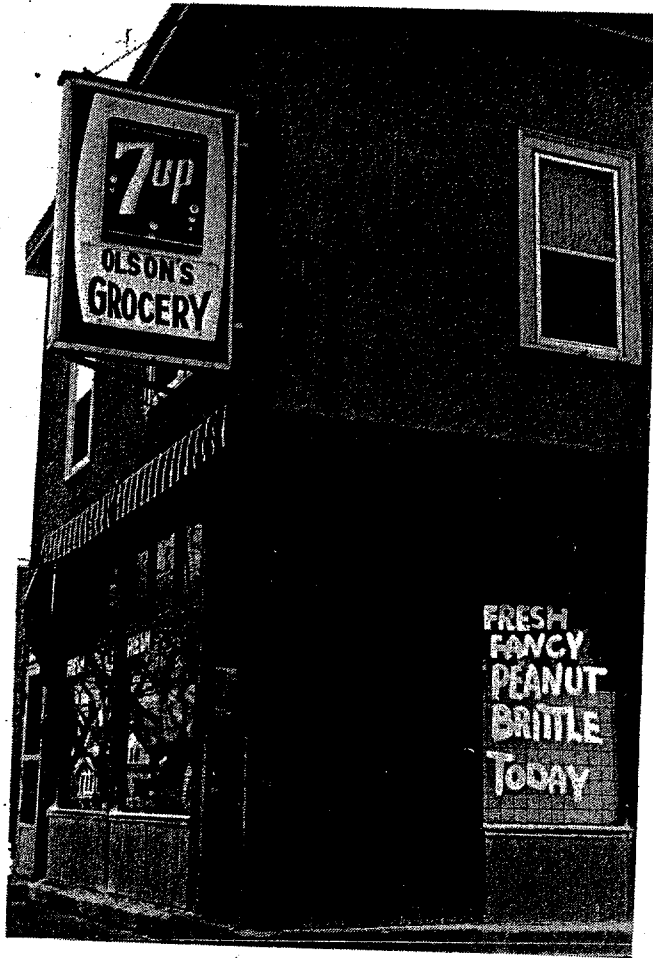
Due to the stable clientele and limited buying in this 'ma and pa' grocery store, the profits are not high. Salaries are paid, but then most of the money is returned to the upkeep of the store and to stock. Helen and Ron say they like the neighborhood and that they have concern for it and its future. But what the future holds for them in making a living at the H & H Purity store is highly unpredictable.

Wally Olson, the owner of Olson's grocery, is in many ways the archtype of the 'ma and pa' grocery store owner. Wally's parents came from Sweden and his father built a house just a few blocks away from Wally's present store and home. In 1948, Wally was a buyer for a fruit wholesaler, but wages were low and the bills high. So at his wife Mildred's urging, he bought the store at 3400 Bloomington Avenue, along with the three lots just south of the store for \$11,000. Two of the lots he sold, and on the one adjacent to the store he built the house in which he now lives. The house, he said, he designed for his two children.

Wally likes to tell about the advice he received when he and his wife opened their store 25 years ago. He went two blocks up to his then nearest competitor, told the competitor that he had no experience in running a store, and asked if he thought Wally could succeed. His competitor replied that he didn't need any experience, that "any dummy" can run a store. To this day Wally claims that "any dummy can run a store". The other advice Wally received when opening his store came from two neighborhood ministers. One advised him never to advertise beer and Wally never has. The other minister told Wally that every morning before opening his store, he should pray for his competition, and Wally has followed this advice as well. In fact Wally says that he loves competition and welcomes it.

Just as Wally loves competition, he loves his customers. In fact, Wally never talks about "my customers"; it is always "my customers and friends". Everyone is greeted with a cheery smile and "hello" when they walk in. He takes time to talk with everyone no matter what their age. He brightens up their day by joking with them and showing his concern for them. Wally also says that a person in the retail store business must be a good listener, and that he's heard more tales of "anguish and trouble" than he'd care to tell.

Wally attributes his success to being cheerful with his customers and being "fair and square" with them. In light of today's concerns for consumer rights, one is inclined to say that Wally is more than fair and square with his customers. If the box of strawberries you are buying looks over-ripe to Wally, he'll give them to you. If the change in your hand is a few cents short, that's O.K. Frequently, he throws in a little extra for his regular customers. Although Wally doesn't deliver anymore, he is willing



above: Wally Olson's grocery,  
3400 Bloomington.

below: Wally and several regular customers.



to get groceries to those who are disabled or shut-in.

Another attribute of Wally's success is his knowledge about operating and stocking a neighborhood grocery. Wally can talk at length about his stock, merchandising, differences or lack of differences between brands, and what turns over a high profit. Wally reports, regretfully, that cigarettes are his single most important profit-maker. One of his store's major attractions is fresh fruit and vegetables which Wally sells close to cost. It takes a great deal of experience to successfully market fresh fruits and vegetables.

Although the new 7-Eleven store will make competition severe, and Wally, at the age of retirement has a comfortable nest egg tucked away, he has no plans to sell the store. As Wally says, he has friends who for exercise and entertainment belong to a health spa, but the store gives him all the exercise and entertainment he needs.

The two individually-owned neighborhood groceries, Purity and Olson's, are long-standing neighborhood institutions. Here people not only shop and share pleasantries about the weather and the Vikings, but also share the problems and events of their lives and their community. The owner of a successful "ma and pa" grocery must be responsive to the neighborhood on two levels. First, because he must have a high enough turnover in stock to meet cost plus make a profit, he must stock the store with items which meet the community's buying needs. Secondly, he must like people and be concerned about them. He cannot compete with the large chain supermarkets in either price or variety of stock, so when a customer makes the "irrational" economic decision to walk the couple of

"Wally never talks about 'my customers,' it is always 'my customers and friends.'"

"Who is 7-Eleven and what is their relation to the Powderhorn neighborhood? 7-Eleven stores are owned by the Southland Corporation, based in Dallas, Texas. Southland is the largest operator and franchiser of self-service convenience retail food stores. In addition, they are a major processor and distributor of dairy products."

blocks to the corner store, instead of taking the car to the supermarket, it is to a large extent because the customer knows the owner and the owner knows the customer, and they are friends. Given these two attributes, awareness of the community's consumer needs and sensitivity toward the community's human needs, and given a neighborhood not already glutted with grocery stores, the owner of a "ma and pa" store has been able to make a comfortable living.

#### CORPORATIONS AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

But the "ma and pa" stores like the ones mentioned above are a dying breed, if a current trend in neighborhood food stores is not reversed. They are not going to be able to compete with the self-service chain stores that are growing in number in the Twin Cities area. (At least 63 new 7-Eleven stores are planned for the coming year.) They have little chance of competing successfully with corporate chain stores, at least over a longer period of time, and it is important to understand why.

The 7-Eleven store due to open the first part of February, located on the corner of 35th and Bloomington, graphically illustrates the problems for the already-existing corner store. The 7-Eleven will divide the market sales of that small area three ways instead of two. (In general, the fourth store, a co-op, does not compete with the other stores in their areas of largest sales--cigarettes, pop, and convenience foods.) Having only one-third of the possible business could cause all three stores to operate at a loss. But 7-Eleven, unlike the other two, has vast resources elsewhere; it can afford to operate at a loss for a long time until the market stabilizes. Because of the 7-Eleven, the Purity store and Olson's will probably experience decreased sales. Over a period of years, this is likely to force their closing, leaving the entire market to 7-Eleven.

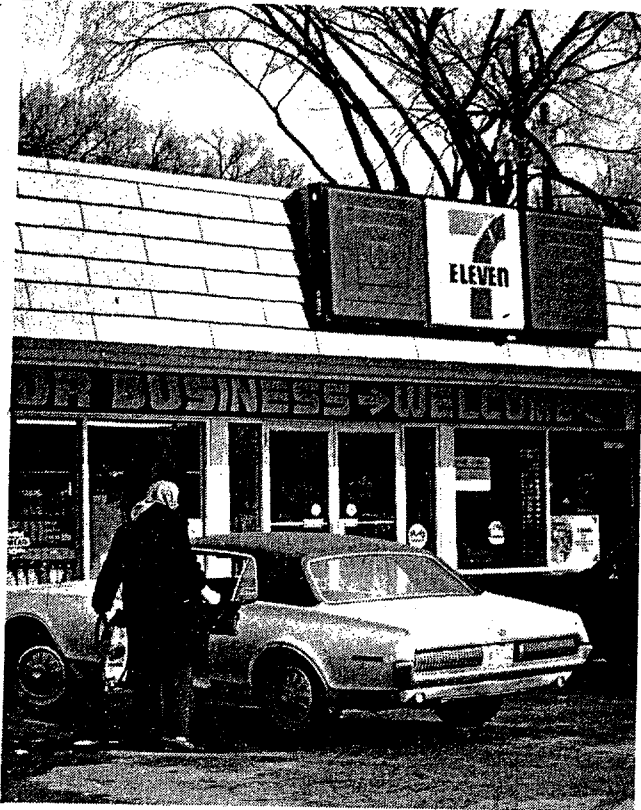
Who is 7-Eleven and what is their relation to the Powderhorn neighborhood? 7-Eleven stores are owned by the Southland Corporation, based in Dallas, Texas. Southland is the

largest operator and franchiser of self-service convenience retail food stores. In addition, they are a major processor and distributor of dairy products. Moody's 1973 Industrial Manual gives this information about Southland:

"At December 31, 1971, it had 4,114 convenience food stores in 34 states, D.C., and Canada doing business principally under the name 7-Eleven, 130 Gristede's and Charles & Co. stores and sandwich shops in New York City Metropolitan area, 207 Barricini and Loft candy shops in 20 states and D.C., and 9 Bradshaws supermarkets in Southern California. It also has 30 dairy processing plants and 89 principal dairy distribution centers operating in 27 states and D.C. Other operations of the company include fleet leasing, manufacture and distribution of fine chocolates and other candies, food additives, basic flavor compounds, fountain syrups, commercial and packaged ice, industrial coatings, cleansing and sanitizing agents and paint." (p. 2551)

Determination of how the profits are spent is the job solely of the officers of the corporation, who are committed to making the largest possible return on every dollar spent. Besides expansion within the states, the corporation has bought half interest in chains operating in England and Scotland (with some stores in Mexico and Wales). There are plans for future expansion in other parts of Europe. Money made at the 35th and Bloomington Store, after normal operating expenses are met, will have little chance of going back into and improving the neighborhood of those who spend their money there.

A point of interest learned from Mr. Jim McConnell, district manager sent from the Texas office six months ago to establish the 7-Eleven chain here, was that none of the stores they are building in the Twin Cities will be franchised; they will be company-



operated, though normally about 40% of the 7-Elevens are franchised. In 1972, a franchise deal with Southland required a franchisee to put up \$2000, and his share of the gross was 45%--out of which he paid salaries and covered losses from spoilage, pilferage, and the like. Southland got 55% of the gross, furnished a fully-equipped store with its original inventory, paid rent and utilities, and mounted a major advertising program. In a company operated store, Southland covers all the costs and pays a manager a straight salary to run the store, possibly with some small commission.

There are advantages for Southland in the company operated stores. Even though they are taking care of all the costs, they are also receiving all of the gross. In addition there is the question of control: the corporation will have less disagreement from a manager of a company owned store than from a franchisee over store policy or the kinds of stock. Southland wants each store to carry a standard stock so that the corporation may purchase in large quantities and more cheaply split the inventory among the stores. For the corporation the advantages of this method of purchasing far outweigh the low sale of some items in a few stores. But for the franchisee, with no back-up advantage to cover the loss from certain items and only one store, this method of stocking is hardly a good one. The franchisee wants items that will sell in a particular neighborhood, not

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"A 7-Eleven in the neighborhood is a qualitative change from the 'ma and pa' stores in more than store design and parking facilities. In the broadest sense it means the introduction into a neighborhood of a multi-national corporation, whose style and purpose offer no vehicle for community input or control."

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a standard stock. The disadvantage, of course, for the neighborhood with a company operated store is that it can have little input in terms of what is carried in the store.

Still another disadvantage for the community is that Southland's hiring policies are regional. They do not try to provide jobs for the area in which the store is located. A manager from one of the already established 7-Elevens in the Twin Cities will be transferred to start this new one. People looking for a job with 7-Eleven must apply at the district office with no guarantee they will get a job at the store in their neighborhood. Applicants must be willing to work at any 7-Eleven in the metropolitan area.

A 7-Eleven in the neighborhood is a qualitative change from the 'ma and pa' stores in more than store design and parking facilities. In the broadest sense it means the introduction into a neighborhood of a multi-national corporation, whose style and purpose offer no vehicle for community input or control. While both the 'ma and pa' stores and 7-Eleven may have maximizing profits as their main motive and concern, the 'ma and pa' stores must consider the community's needs in order to survive. Southland, however, can afford to lose in one neighborhood. It's a good tax write-off anyway!

The introduction of 7-Eleven into the Powderhorn neighborhood both signals and symbolizes the changes that community is experiencing. The question which seems critical at this point is whether those changes will continue to be imposed on the neighborhood from outside or whether the residents themselves will take control of the changes and shape the future of the area. If the neighborhood is to be determined by the residents, two avenues must be explored. On the one hand, mechanisms for stopping unwanted businesses and developments must be devised;

while on the other hand, models of new, neighborhood-controlled businesses must be created.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD DECIDES

Powderhorn Food Community, the food co-op on the corner of 35th and Bloomington, is an attempt at having residents take control of changes in their neighborhood by creating an alternative to unwanted development. Powderhorn Food Community from its very beginning incorporated the ideas of community control and participation. In January of 1972 the first notices appeared in the neighborhood suggesting the idea of a food co-op and urging all those who were interested to attend an organizing meeting. Approximately twenty five people attended, mostly young, but including some senior citizens and middle-aged people. This core group, along with the encouragement of several others, sanded and cleaned, painted and built, waxed and wired, until May 6, 1972, when the co-op proudly opened for business. Since then the co-op has had continued growth in numbers of residents participating in its operation. The stock reflects the co-op members' concern for providing the community with cheap, nutritionally sound food and consists of whole grains, spices and herbs, fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, some acceptable canned and frozen foods, and plants. They carry books on nutrition, cooking whole foods and organic gardening. Community publications may also be purchased there.

Though the reasons for a co-op are as varied as the people who belong to it, there were and are now a few basic underlying assumptions for the existence of Powderhorn. One is the belief that a group of people working together can best define and provide for their needs. In this case the need is

for good, cheap, nutritionally sound food. But the ideas for Powderhorn are broader than that. It is seen as a model of a store motivated by the needs of the people, rather than the consideration of profit. It is seen as another place in the community for neighbors to get to know one another, a place where young and old can meet, talk, learn to trust each other and break down stereotypes. It is hoped that the co-op can be an informational and educational center for the neighborhood. These ideals are being realized in terms of changes in individual resident's lives and perspectives. For instance, at one of their monthly meetings, the Saturday Storekeepers group talked about what the co-op meant to them personally. While one or two had become involved in the co-op because of a commitment to alternative lifestyles and models, the initial involvement of the rest was based on obtaining good, cheap food. All had found that their reasons for working in Powderhorn had grown. Here are a few typical examples:

Joe, who is married and has a grown family, finds working in the co-op a form of recreation. He enjoys the people and the chance to try new and different foods. To Joe the community ideal that Powderhorn represents is especially important. He feels the co-op fulfills a definite need in the community.

Gretchen, a teaching sister, originally came to the co-op for cheap, natural foods. What is important to her now is how the co-op raises social issues which have an impact on the community. Gretchen says that even if

Powderhorn Food Community, 35th & Bloomington

"One of the basic reasons Powderhorn Food Community has affected its members and the neighborhood is its own decision making process.... [Groups of workers are] the basic decision making unit. At monthly meetings...they decide their groups' position on major policy questions facing the store."



the food at the co-op were to cost just as much as at a regular store, she would still be involved because she sees the co-op as a vehicle for social change. Gretchen was the main co-ordinator of Powderhorn's fund raiser for the United Farm Workers. She is planning on moving to the Northside and is already working with a group of people to start a food co-op there.

Laura is single, works fulltime as a medical technician, is interested in nutrition, committed to alternative models, and very active in community affairs. She has found that the co-op has become a larger priority in her life than she expected. The reason, she feels, is because the co-op provides the only non-alienating context in which she meets people who represent a variety of ages and lifestyles. Thus, Laura finds the co-op not only reflects her political commitments, but also is personally supportive and enriching.

One of the basic reasons Powderhorn Food Community has affected its members and the neighborhood is its own decision making process. Even from the start, it had seemed important to provide a formal mechanism for community input and ideas, but how to accomplish that was unclear. When it first opened weekly meetings were tried, but it was found that the same small group of people always attended these meetings and the majority of the people shopping in the store did not have a voice. Then in early summer of 1973, when it became apparent that the burden of responsibility for the store rested with too few people, a new, more de-centralized structure for decision making and responsibility was developed.

The key unit to the new structure is the small work groups. There are twelve task-orientated work groups such as bookkeepers, Monday storekeepers, 'vegetables, etc. A resident, who wishes to obtain co-op food at cost plus 10% (the 10% covers the store's rent, utilities, etc.) instead of cost plus 30%,

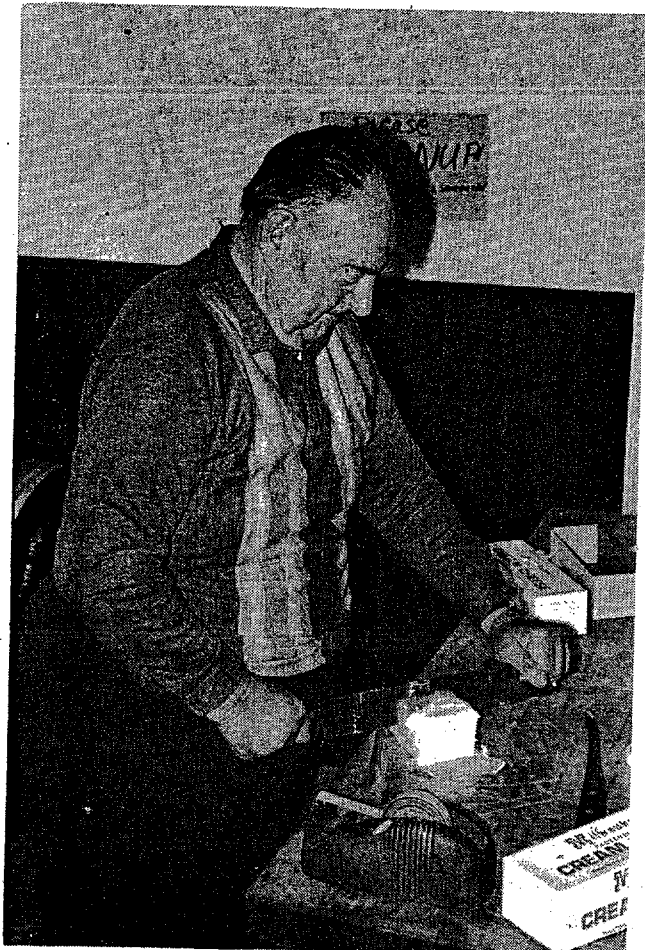
"The introduction of 7-Eleven into the Powderhorn neighborhood both signals and symbolizes the changes that community is experiencing. The question that seems critical at this point is whether those changes will continue to be imposed on the neighborhood from outside or whether the residents themselves will take control of the changes and shape the future of the area."

joins a work group and works an average of three hours a month in the store.

Besides being the basic work unit of the co-op, these groups are also the basic decision making unit. At their monthly meetings, not only do the individual groups plan schedules and work out problems in their task area, they also decide their group's position on major policy questions facing the store. Decisions made through this process include selecting types of stock, buying the building the co-op is in, raising funds for the United Farm Workers by holding a Mexican vegetarian dinner for the community, and joining with other co-ops in a Sustaining Fund (a 1% tax on all items, the money to be used for improvements in the all co-op system).

While the new decision-making structure is still new and has many kinks in it, it has expanded the basis of participation in Powderhorn. Before its inception, about 150 worked in the co-op and of these only 10 participated in making decisions. Now about 200 work and of these about 85-90 regularly attend the work group meetings. This decision

Two members of the Powderhorn Food Community



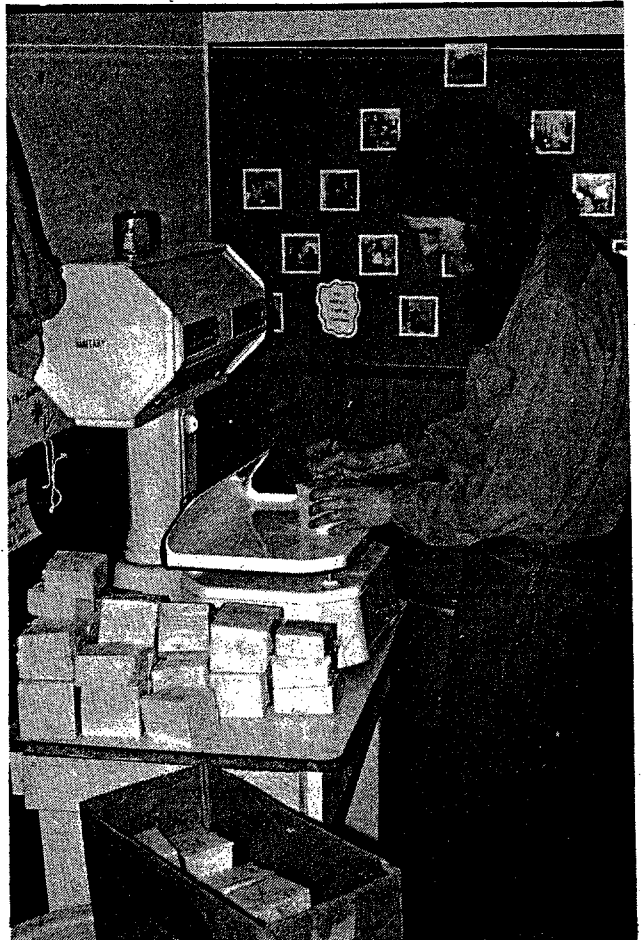


structure has been successful because residents can participate without making a major time commitment. Thus, it allows people to learn to control one specific sphere of their life, the food they eat, at their own pace and, hopefully, to generalize that experience to other spheres of their life.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTROL--PRESENT AND FUTURE

How does a community stop an unwanted business such as 7-Eleven? At present there is no mechanism for the community to decide if and where stores are needed in its neighborhood. Minneapolis did try to control the phenomenon of four gas stations on one intersection. However, the court declared the ordinance unconstitutional. The court said the community could not decide what commercial enterprises it needed, because this was an infringement of the free enterprise system. One must seriously question whether 7-Eleven vs. the ma and pa groceries is any more representative of the American ideal of free enterprise than Standard Oil and Exxon vs. the independents has been.

do their share by cutting and weighing cheese.

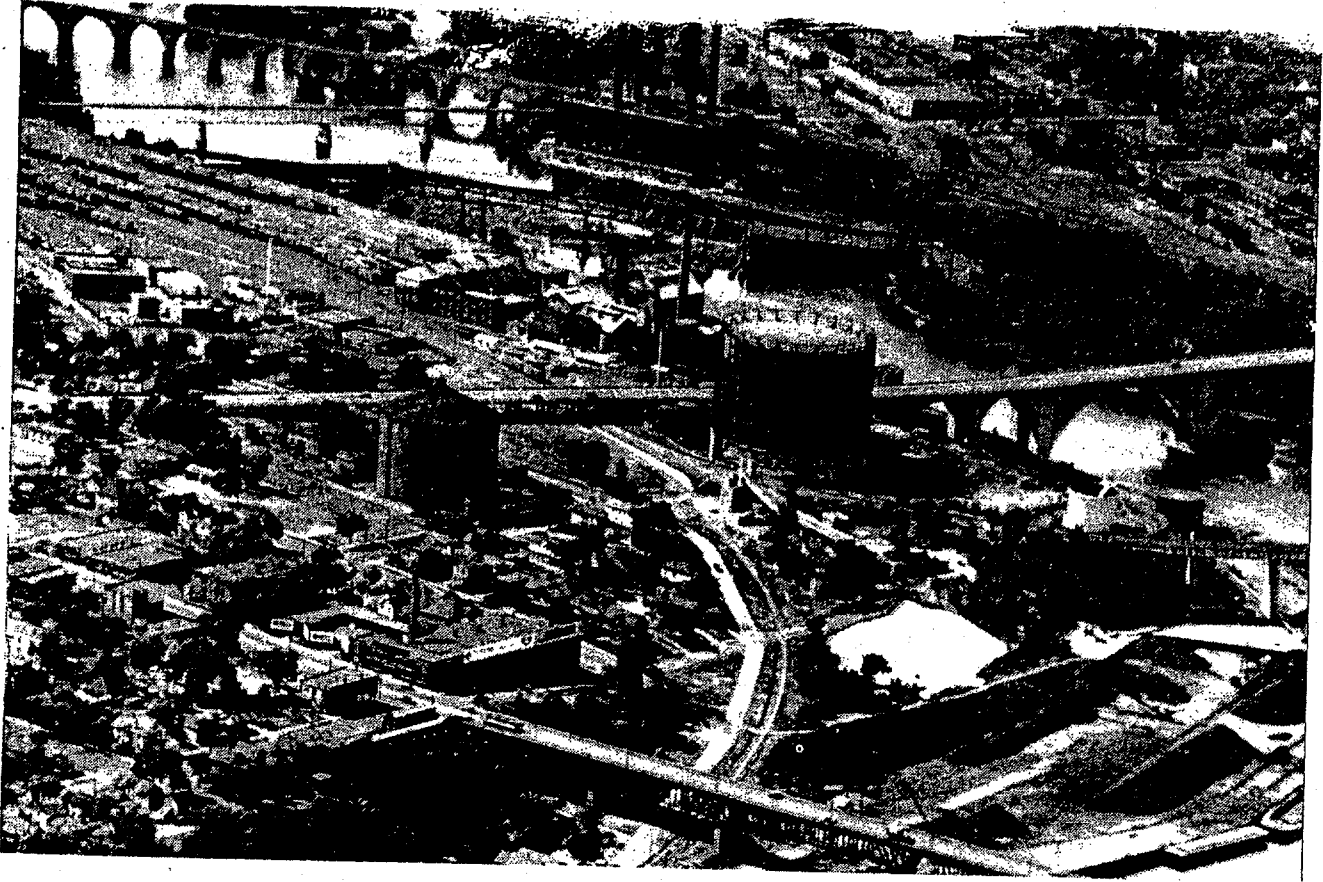


Within this limitation the neighborhood is reacting to 7-Eleven. Powderhorn Food Community is planning an educational boycott of 7-Eleven. Ninth Ward Alderman Zollie Green is writing an ordinance that would require public hearings for self-service chain stores similar to those now required for the fast-food franchises. Unfortunately the hearing can only debate questions of building design, required parking facilities, and the like. At best such a measure could cause a temporary slow-down on the influx by increasing construction costs.

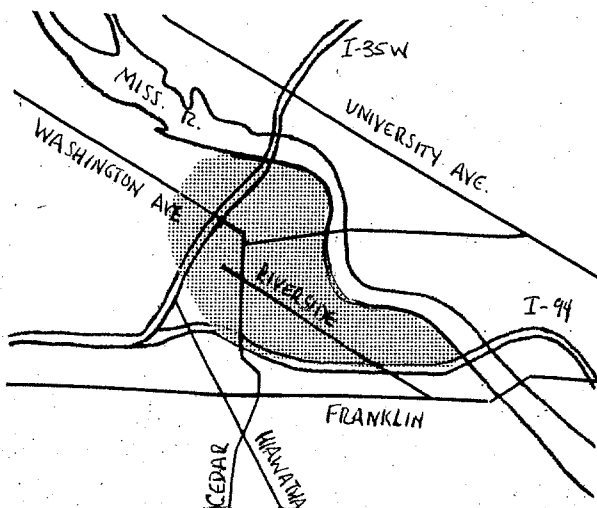
The limited reactive ability of the Powderhorn neighborhood to deal with 7-Eleven is not unique. Powderhorn has been unable to deal effectively with other developments such as the Mann School complex which meant the destruction of sound family homes; the continued replacement of single and duplex dwellings with apartment buildings and two-and-a-half story walk-ups; and the now dormant plans for a regional-size shopping center at Chicago and Lake which would displace 1000 people and create high-density high-rises at the north end of Powderhorn Park. These plans are dormant, not because of the vigorous protest raised by the neighborhood, but because of the recent cut in Federal funds.

The root of the problem for Powderhorn and other neighborhoods like it lies in its lack of mechanisms by which it can control its development. There are mechanisms which can give a neighborhood this power. For instance: the continued expansion and diversification of co-operatively owned businesses; community controlled financial institutions which invest the community's money back into the community instead of in Wisconsin and New York; community development corporations which, using criteria developed by the community, plan and develop industry and housing for the community; community controlled social services such as childcare and medical facilities; and neighborhood councils, governing bodies within the neighborhoods. Only with mechanisms such as these can Powderhorn, as well as other neighborhoods, stop unwanted development and create the kind of development it needs. Only then will Powderhorn be able to determine its own future.

*The four people who collectively wrote this article all live in the Powderhorn neighborhood. They also are members of the Powderhorn Food Community and are active in other neighborhood issues.*



## THE CURLING WATERS: A WEST BANK HISTORY



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West Bank Historical Collective

Unfortunately, due to space limitations, we were unable to print "The Curling Waters: A West Bank History" in its entirety. The unexpurgated version traced the development of the West Bank community from 1766 up to the present, in the same readable style evidenced below. Although we glance at several important aspects and developments on the West Bank during the 1800's, we have chosen to begin our chronicle around the turn of the century and move with increasingly heavy strides into the present.



Olle i Skratthult Troupe in "Lars Ander Och Han Anders Och Deras Barn."

M.H.S. Photo

## The Entertainers

The early Twentieth Century witnessed the heyday of the saloon district on the Boulevard. The relatively unrestricted growth of the saloon trade along Cedar Avenue cultivated a social phenomenon which occurred in few other U.S. cities: *Bond Komik* (literally, farm comedy or peasant comedy), or "Swedish Vaudeville", grew up in Minneapolis.

*Bond Komik* was an evening of drama and music. Early in the evening was a folk-type play several acts in length, almost always containing a group folk dance, and surrounding themes of immigration and life in America or, occasionally, Scandinavia.

Between the acts, the *Bond Komik* stepped in front of the curtain. His repertoire consisted of "olios": humorous songs and monologs, sometimes monologs delivered in rhyme.

The playbill always bore the announcement "Dans efter Programmet" and, when the play was done, the theatre seats were folded or lined against the walls and the actors' band began tuning up for an old-time dance, or *Gammel-dans*, which lasted until the early hours.

Hugo Peterson, whose father owned the J.O. Peterson drugstore on Seven Corners, estimated that on a Saturday night, between 10,000 and 12,000 people would crowd the area halls to hear performers like the Olson Sisters, Thorsten Skarning and the Norwegian Hillbillies; and the Olle i Skratthult Troupe; and later, Slim Jim and the Vagabond Kid, and the infamous Whoopee John Wilfart.

Prohibition was a hardship for the street which had been so long reknowned for its liquor and entertainment. When the Minnesota dry law went into effect in 1918, nearly one third of the Cedar Avenue storefronts were closed.

Most saloons eventually closed; only a few kept their doors open. One of them was the Five Corners Bar, founded in 1903, which became a workingman's restaurant, serving soda pop.

In the neighborhood a thin alcoholic flame was kept burning. On the Bohemian Flats and above, private stills opened in cellars and on rooftops. The basement of Hagen's Wildest Traders on Seven Corners became a speakeasy. When prohibition ended, the people were long past readiness to rebuild.

The neighborhood swelled full with music and entertainment, both equity and amateur.

In 1943, the residents won the Park Board's city-wide community sing contest, held at Riverside Park.

Soapbox politicians sprouted alongside street missionaries on the corners. The I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) was a popular organization among poor Scandinavians, and its spokesmen were many.

Ironically, Swedish vaudeville, which had survived prohibition in high style, began to die out in the late 30's. The live stage in America was dealt a double death-blow by movies and the depression.

In the death of Bond Komik was a portion of the corruption of the community; for the stages of Cedar Avenue had been an organ by which a small American culture spoke to itself, described to itself feelings that were universal within it, and recognized itself.

In 1963, Phil Richter, the proprietor of Richter's Drugs in Dania's remaining storefront, bought the hall from the Dania Society for one dollar "and other consideration". In 1968, Richter sold the building to a new company headed by Keith R. Heller, a former business professor at the University, and Gloria Segal, one of his students. The price of the building was \$110,000.

Some subtle factor in the economics had changed in the intervening five years. To some, it seemed as though the area was about to undergo a re-birth.

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## Grave Mutations

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*"People don't want neighborhood government just for an ego trip. They want it desperately because they want a say in how things should be and what changes should be made--and their instincts on this are absolutely right."*

--Jane Jacobs, author of The Death and Life of Great American Cities

In the 1950's, the Minnesota Highway Department began plans to acquire the neighborhood of blacks and Scandinavians west of the Milwaukee Road tracks for an urban extension of Interstate Highway 35W. A wide swath was to be cut along the north side of Franklin Avenue for Interstate 94, passing east over the river and shattering the quietude of Riverside Park.

At nearly the same time, the University of Minnesota began searching for a west bank site for a training center of business students.

Other institutions were on the march. Augsburg College, St. Mary's (the Catholic) Hospital, and Fairview all had become important economic functions of the city, and were developing plans encompassing the residential areas and their perimeters. The two hospitals began acquisition through condemnation.

In 1958 the University began to acquire land around the old Washington Avenue Bridge. Deeds were slow in coming at first, but when Keith Heller and Gloria Segal bought a foothold in the area, the turnover of property began to speed up.

Gloria and Martin Segal first purchased West Bank land while she was still a student. Legend has it that Gloria bought a small lot to ameliorate her personal parking problems.

The first Heller-Segal acquisition was on the East Bank of the river, a square of tenement apartments called University Court Apartments (the corporate name has shifted continually, and the gnomes used here is the company name known to the residents).

By establishing liberal mortgages for University Court, funds were raised for the acquisition of the first land parcels on the West Bank.

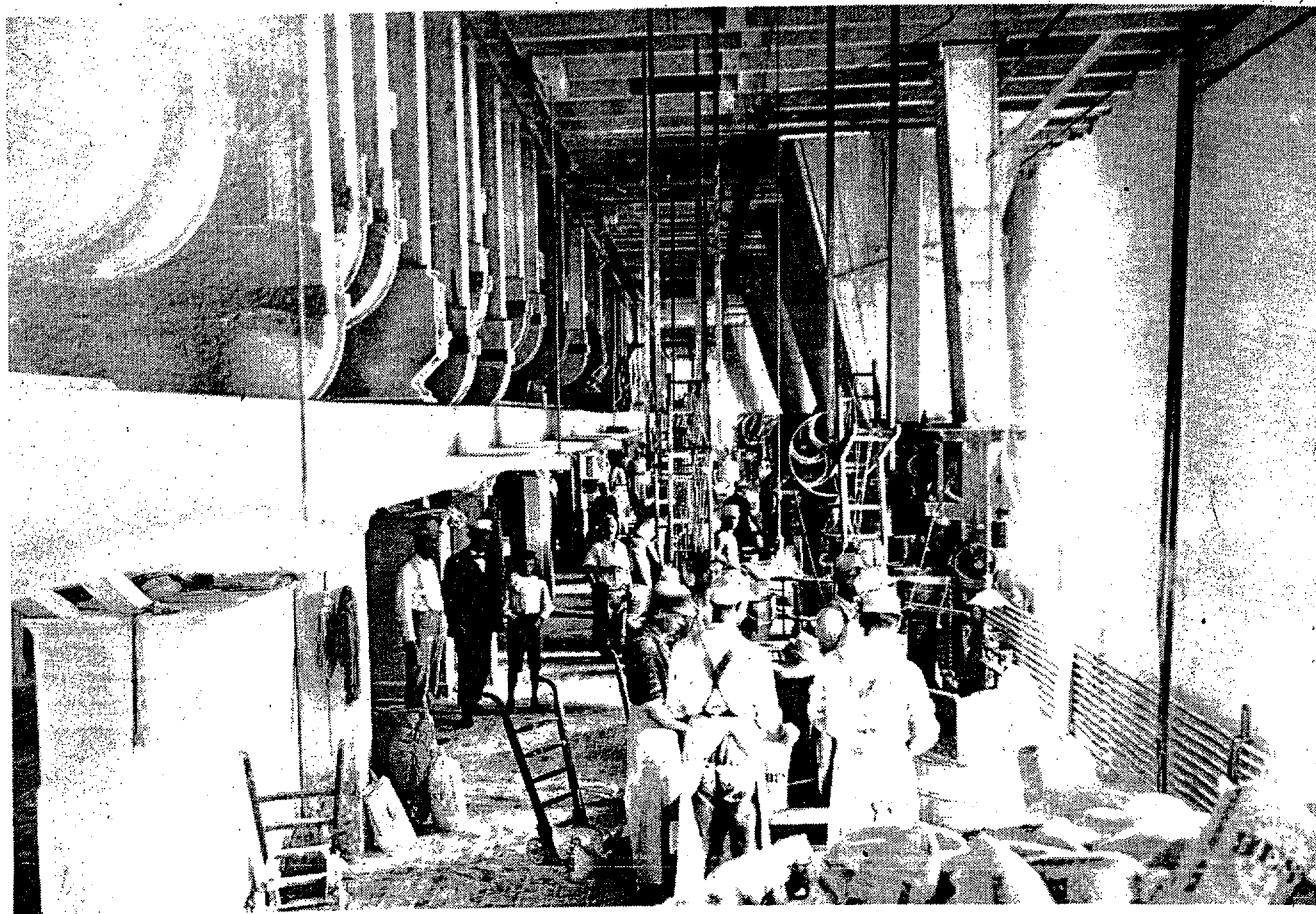
These first parcels were rented to young students, their hair longer than the sock hop generation which had preceded them, and their society somewhat strange to the older Scandinavians surrounding them.

The Scandinavians were not unaccustomed to the proximity of other communities, however. A large Black neighborhood had grown up on the west side of the community, and by the early 1930's extended eastward along Washington Avenue. Like other Black communities in Minneapolis, its growth and culture was ignored, and its history has survived unwritten, only in the memories of its members.

The Black and Scandinavian communities remained largely aloof from each other. Scandinavians speak of their community as ending at Riverside Avenue after 1930, and Blacks seldom ventured south of their neighborhood.

The Black community had its own bars and entertainment. Only a few bars, like the Breezy Point in the 300 block of Cedar, were racially mixed; but the Breezy Point was often the scene of racial conflict.

A more comfortable evening could be spent at the Key Club, north of Washington on 13th Avenue. The Key Club was a Black nightclub, and one of the city's few outlets for Amer-



Young workers at Pillsbury's rebuilt A Mill - 1902

M.H.S. Photo

*"Minnesota histories describe the expressly 'valiant' efforts of the Washburn family to rebuild in the face of tremendous losses. The effort of the community to avert the hardship which followed was no less valiant, though largely unrecorded. While Washburn drew his resources from banks, the community drew from itself. Neighbors found places for the jobless in the lumber yards, factories and mills. The dependents of the four who had died were cared for by friends in the West Bank."*

ican blues music. Muddy Waters was among the artists there, perhaps because his younger brother worked as the club's bouncer. Later, Lazy Bill Lucas traveled to Minneapolis to play at the club with George "Mojo" Buford. Lazy Bill liked Minneapolis, and stayed.

Community relations were sometimes violently strained. Blacks were barred from the white dances at Dania and the Pill House (the Pillsbury Settlement House, destroyed in 1970). In 1963 and 1964 there were large demonstrations at the latter, and in 1965, the Pill House was required to open its doors to Black patrons.

The Scandinavians, themselves long re-

pressed, bore an ingrained resentment toward their Black neighbors, who were kept at an economic level below them. It has not been an uncommon phenomenon of social evolution in this mottled society. As various communities begin to obtain the sort of social esteem they have sought since immigration, they look toward the root of their hardship, displaced among some other group, with avoidance and distaste.

When new, poor students began to populate the Scandinavian neighborhoods, with arcane long hair and living in voluntary poverty, a breach point had been reached.

Efforts were made to merge the two communities. The Triangle Bar invited Maury Bern-

stein, an accordianist whose music bridged the gap between leftist students and Scandinavians, to play there, hoping to woo both cultures.

The Triangle was already a place of mixed interests, regularly visited by Greeks and Ukrainians from North Minneapolis who held impromptu circle-dances on the second-story dance floor. Maury played on a small elevated stage at one end of the floor, surrounded by wrought-iron fence, his music amplified through the pained capacitors of the juke box. Maury opened the door for the folk music culture of the new residents. John Koerner and Dave Ray began to appear at the Triangle.

Soon a coffee house opened up in the triangular building bordered by Riverside and Sixth Street: The Cafe Extempore. The "Extemp" was housed in a collection of old office spaces, each of which quickly established itself as the home of one or another activity. A small stage was set up for live music, across the hall, discussion rooms were filled with long smoky discussions of the upcoming death of capitalist racist society. Chess claimed yet another room, and a lounge filled with pamphlets and newspapers of the new left became a dropspot for those who were waiting for "something to turn up".

More students arrived as residents. They were moved selectively into houses being acquired by Heller-Segal. Some of these early tenants remember being moved progressively through the community, usually with no explanation, being placed in neighborhoods where most of their neighbors were Scandinavians.

When Phil Richter acquired Dania Hall, the dance floor was reopened, but the amplified droning that issued through its walls was not Whoopee John Wilfart. It was rock'n'roll.

The aquarian age had arrived at Snus Boulevard. More of the young moved in, and more of the old Scandinavians moved out.

The inevitable clash of the two cultures fomented a lush market for real estate. It would be unfair to suggest that Heller-Segal intended their gratuitous rent levels as an invitation to block-busting realty. But one homeowner, Marge Shafsky, remembers, "They tried to scare me. (Heller-Segal's representative said) 'What are you going to do when all those hippies come in here and break in and rob you?'"

"I said, 'I ain't got nothing to rob. My husband is sick and I've got to spend all my money.'"

"You know what they said to me? They said, 'There are ones that are dangerous. They're full of dope; they don't know what they are doing. They could come and wreck your property.'"

"I said, 'I trust them in my property.' I've had a lot of hippies in my house already."

Heller-Segal says that Mrs. Shafsky has erred in her recollections.

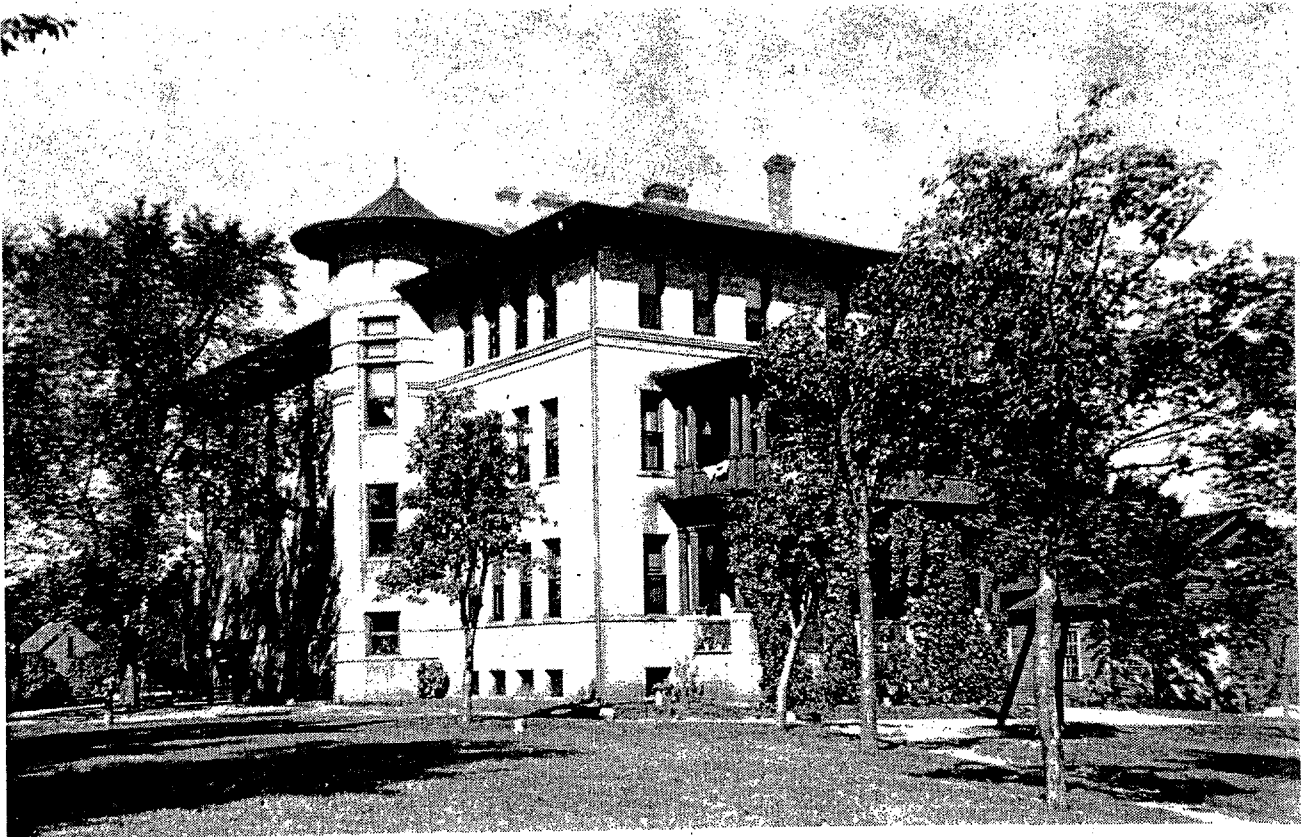
In acquiring the land, Heller-Segal had retained the services of more than a dozen small real estate firms, each working without knowledge of the others. Acting as Heller-Segal's agents, these representatives visited homes and attended public auctions, where they sometimes bid competitively against each other.

By 1967, Heller-Segal had gained a foothold in most of the blocks in the West Bank area, and owned 80 percent of a nine-block area east of Cedar Avenue. On November 19, 1967, they publicly announced their holdings, financed by Northwestern Life Insurance Company and the General Mortgage Investment Corporation to the combined extent of \$2.9 million. At that time, they announced their continued land acquisition intentions.

At about this time the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority (MHRA) was considering an Urban Renewal Plan for the West Bank. The plan encompassed all lands within the perimeter of the freeways then under construction. In June, 1968, they approved a broad plan ("Workable Program") for renewal, and in September the City Council held public hearings. Despite strong and sustained popular disagreement, the renewal plan was passed.

In the same year, Heller-Segal gained possession of Dania Hall. The weekend concerts were stopped, and a Montessori school on the second floor was removed. Gloria Segal made a number of public statements about restoring the Avenue's landmarks. The stairway to the basement dining hall was filled in and cemented. The hall's great iron gate and its attendant turrets were removed, and the doorway to Dania and an adjacent window were covered with cinder block.

Heller-Segal concluded dealings with the Harris Brothers, the only significant land holder south of Washington Avenue, acquiring most of the West Bank lands west of Cedar. Plans for the demolition of the neighborhood and the erection of the first phase of Urban Renewal were commenced.



St. Mary's Hospital - 1907

Minnesota Historical Society Photo

*"In the 1890's the hospital was enlarged from 25 to 75 beds, and a school of nursing begun in 1900. Until that time, patient care was financed by church funds and the city's fund for the poor....After 1900, Fairview hospital rose next to the Catholic Hospital to serve the Lutherans in the area, on whom the Sisters' medicine had less effect....Both these institutions served the larger area of Minneapolis, and charged fees which were prohibitive to the poorer residents of the neighborhood."*

## Heritage of Concrete

*"We became involved in the community. We bought houses with people in them."*

*-Gloria Segal*

The residents of the West Bank were making developments of their own. In January of 1970, the Cedar-Riverside Community Union was formed as a coalition of old and new residents and businessmen interested in self determination and neighborhood control. A few months after its inception, the Union instituted an outpatient therapeutic center on the corner of 20th Street and Riverside, called the Cedar-Riverside People's Center.

The Union mounted a campaign for the election of a Project Area Committee (PAC) for the urban renewal area.

Other groups worked directly in their neighborhoods, turning every available vacant lot along Cedar Avenue into miniature parks.

By 1970, the Extemp had moved through a succession of homes. The coffee house and the adjacent offices of the Youth Emergency Service (YES) were evacuated from quarters on the 600 block of Cedar Avenue by a midwinter fire in 1969 that left the building an ice-encrusted skeleton. In its place, Extemp Park was landscaped and planted. On the 500 block of Cedar, another small park was equipped with playground facilities for neighborhood children. The park stood next to the Electric Fetus, a record store started in 1967 by Dan Foley, a resident of nearby Seward West. Foley moved and enlarged his store from its location at 521 Cedar (the former site of the People's Club) to a three-room storefront across the street. The old location was filled immediately by the Whale, a leather-



A view of Bohemia Flats from the Washington Avenue Bridge - 1910

M.H.S. Photo

*"Washburn himself seldom visited the mill; his offices were in the business district, where he arranged shipping of wheat and meal and indulged in land speculation on the edges of the city. Washburn acquired a large area along the western river shore which remained the last stronghold of Minneapolis squatters. It was given the name 'Danish Flats,' because incoming Danes camped there in the 1860's until houses were available on the bluffs above. Later the flats were named 'Connemara Patch' for a settlement of Connemara Irish who inhabited an area below the bend in the river. Its most enduring name was to be the Bohemia Flats."*

working shop run by a sincere and tireless craftsman named Jonah. The Whale began circulating petitions for better electrical service in the Heller-Segal owned building, so that shoe repair equipment could be installed.

A collective of residents living next to the Heller-Segal rental offices on Fifth Street near 20th Avenue began an elaborate series of paintings on the darkened walls of area buildings. The crew was organized by Blair and Robbie Meyers, and began on their home with a replica of the Beatle's Yellow Submarine. Other images followed. Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band appeared appropriately on the wall of the new Petus, facing the Green.

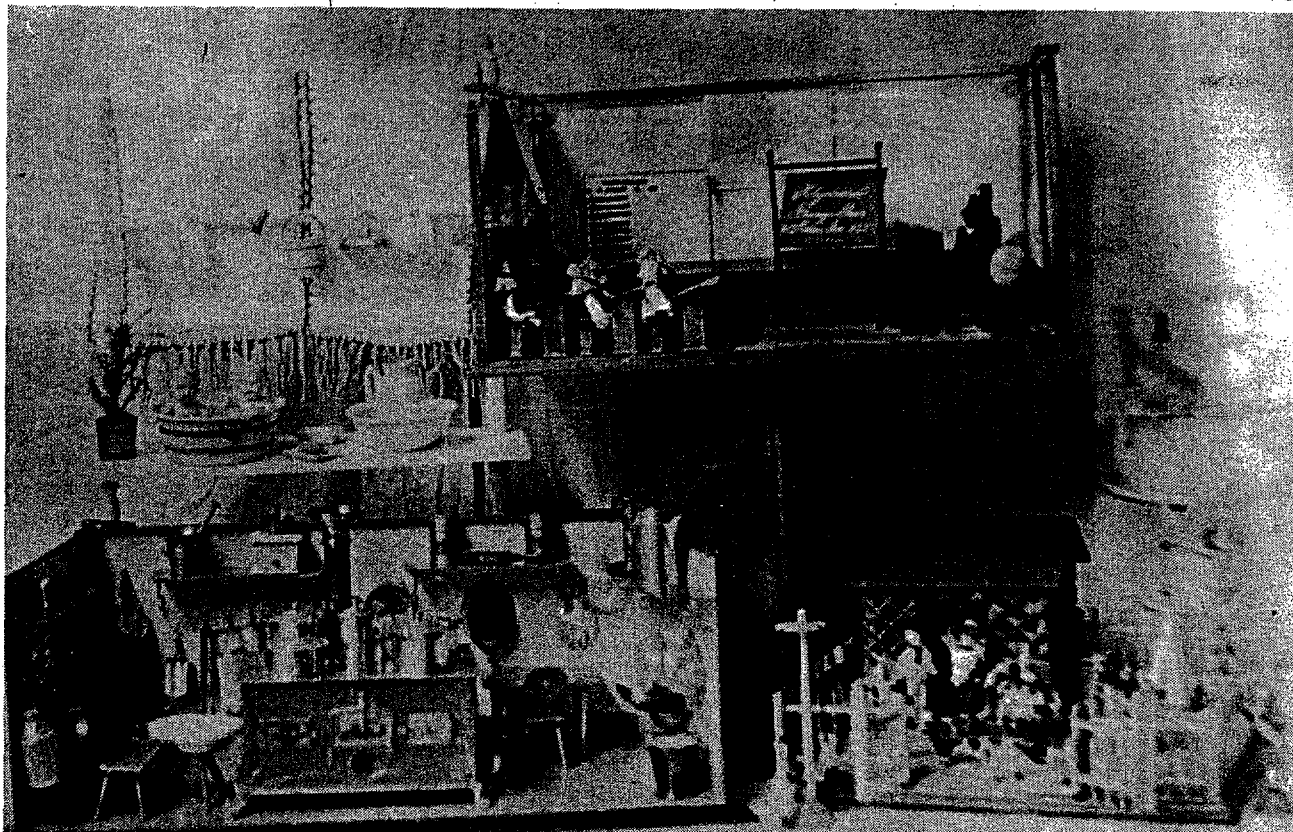
Heller-Segal supplied paint for the collective's labors and, a few months after the paintings were completed, they supplied the Yellow Submarine House with an eviction no-

tice. The house was demolished in favor of a parking lot for Heller-Segal personnel. Blair and Robbie moved out of the neighborhood, leaving their work behind, gratis.

The new residents began to experiment with the philosophy of store ownership. In the spring of 1971, the North Country Co-op opened its doors at 22nd and Riverside. The co-op had grown from an earlier "People's Pantry," which began in one resident's pantry and gradually moved into storefront facilities as its notoriety and the variety of its foods increased.

While the student, young population had been attempting to secure its place as a member of the West Bank community, the developers had been solidifying their hold as owners. Throughout the sixties they had acquired plot and parcel including the gasoline station and two houses of Richard Medvec. Medvec was reluctant to sell to the developers; he had





Holtzermans' Toy Display - 1900

Minnesota Historical Society photo

*"Holtzerman's notoriety grew, and the store began to cater to the city's elite. Its success expanded it: a garden store was opened on the corner of Sixth Street and Cedar, where later the Minnesota Green was to be planted. The outdoor store sold trees, shrubs, bulbs, seeds, tomato plants and a variety of house plants sequestered in a greenhouse in the center of the lot."*

During the winter of '67 he paid a visit to alderman Jens Christiansen. Medvec said he learned well from his grandfather on the flats that it was no good to live on the land, a man had to hold title to the land he lived on. Nonetheless, after repeated visits by agents of Heller-Segal, Richard became uncertain of the eminence of his ownership.

Christiansen told him to sell to Heller-Segal or his property probably would be condemned.

Medvec sold.

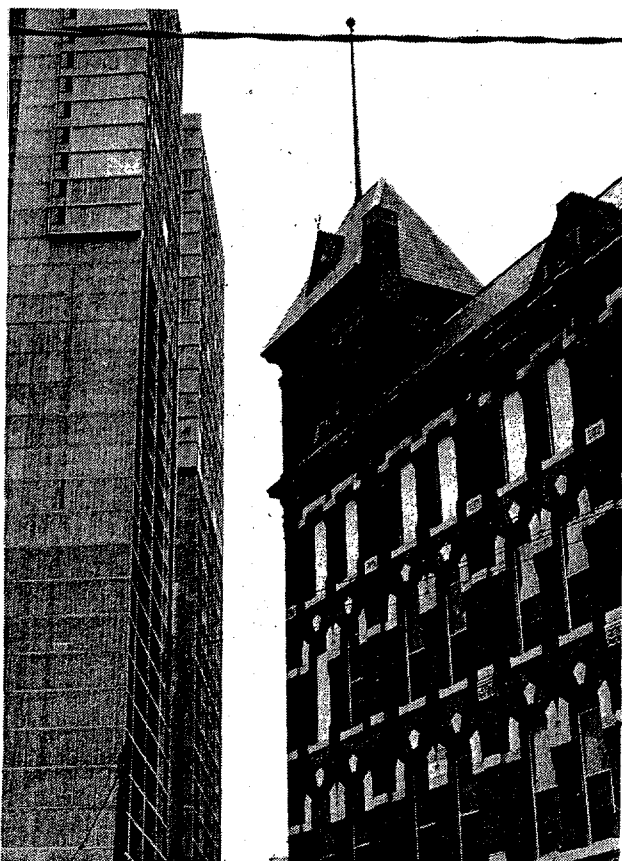
The young people too, created alien, intolerable conditions for some of the older residents. During the summer, large numbers of them gathered around Richter's drugs in Dan-ia Hall, although the dances had long ceased.

The number of older residents continued to dwindle in the 1970's, to about 25% of the population in 1973. The number of young people continued to increase.

A few of the older residents who sold their homes moved into the Cedar High elderly housing complex which had been erected near the site of the old Holtzerman House between Sixth and Seventh Streets.

The high rise buildings had been erected in the late 60's, and efforts were made by the staff and housing authority to locate Minneapolis residents there who had grown up in the community.

Across the street from this complex of buildings, Stage 1 of the Heller-Segal urban renewal plan was begun. Demolition of the old neighborhood, including the Pill House, was carried out in the fall of 1970. In November, the Department of Housing and Urban Development rejected Minneapolis' Workable Program for urban renewal. The document was returned, in part for lack of citizen participation in the project. HUD required the Minnesota Authority to recognize PAC before federal funds would be committed to the program.



Dania Hall 1974

Photo by Ken Meter

*"The newspaper called it a moving speech. It was not without irony. Only a small number of Minnesota Danes had come to Minneapolis. The majority of Danes had established farms in Freeborne, Steele and Brown counties, where they opened a number of dairy co-operatives, the first co-operatives in Minnesota. Dania Hall was an incursion onto Snoose Boulevard. Not that anyone minded--why not work hand in hand? Cooperation made good sense to the immigrant laborers. Such a big building, the sun would set on its tower forever."*

When the guidelines were established in the summer of 1971, the resultant composition of this organ of citizen participation was unique in the nation. Just less than half of the voting seats were elected from among the residents. The rest were disbursed among the area's six recognized developers, and a variety of business and religious organizations. There are no other developers seated on any of the nation's PAC groups.

The PAC election took place in August, and shortly thereafter an Environmental Impact Statement was sent to HUD. The statement, how-

ever, had been prepared in June, drafted by Heller-Segal. The statement was approved on August 30, and \$28 million in federally guaranteed mortgages moved into the hands of the developer.

It was not until the following winter that PAC members learned that a statement had been filed. A large number of the elected members lobbied for a suit to be brought against HUD for its filing of an improper statement. The motion for suit was defeated by a small margin; just over half of the delegates voted against the action.

In addition to the \$28 million mortgage issued by HUD by the passage of the Impact Statement, the developers have found other federal revenue with which to round out plans for the development.

HUD has reserved \$600 thousand in its Legacy of Parks program for the State of Minnesota. In 1972, the city of Minneapolis obtained the entire amount for its use, and conferred it upon Cedar Square West. It was these federal funds, which had been set aside to establish small parks in high-density areas of U.S. cities, which subsidized the building of Heller-Segal's "Plaza-in-the-Sky", a poured concrete roof for the Stage 1 parking ramp. The developers announced their intention, when the concrete park was completed, to bestow it upon the city as a public park.

The city would then become responsible for its upkeep.

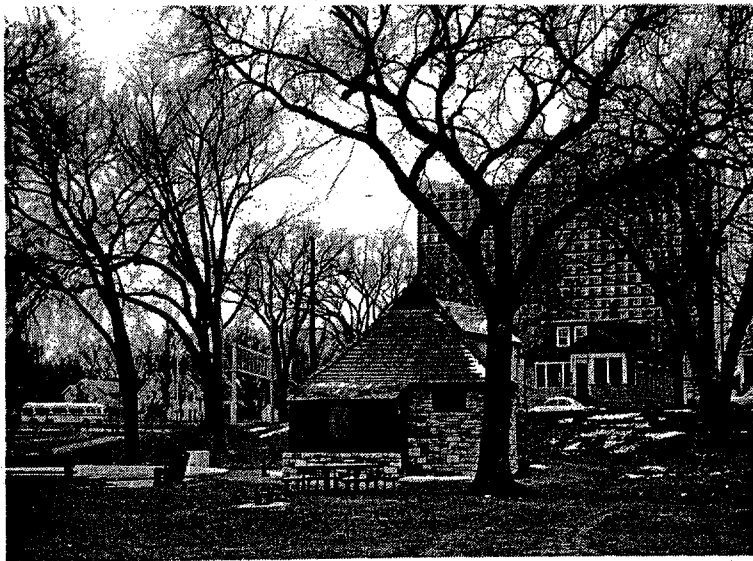
The attendance of PAC meetings began to drop at this time. For many residents, the battle had been lost. By spring of 1972, the structures of Stage 1 were already towering on the sunset end of the West Bank.

The Electric Fetus was evicted and their storefront was remodeled as an Information Center, proselytizing for Stage 1 rental units.

On May 9, 1972, George Romney was invited to attend the dedication ceremonies of Cedar Square West.

Residents began circulating pamphlets at 10:00 A.M. They read, "Secretary Romney is coming to dedicate Cedar Riverside Stage 1. He is not meeting with the people but only with the private investors. We must make ourselves heard. We must have more to say about what happens in our community."

Ray Herje, then Heller-Segal director of resident relations, told the crowd that the dedication was cancelled, and that Romney would not appear. Herje told reporters that relations between residents and Heller-Segal had



Riverside Park today

Photo by Ken Meter

"Look forward for a century, to the time when the city has a population of a million, and think what will be their wants. They will have wealth enough to purchase all that money can buy, but all that wealth cannot purchase a lost opportunity, or restore natural features of grandeur and beauty, which would then possess priceless value, and which you (the park commissioners) can preserve if you but say the word and save them from the destruction which certainly awaits them if you fail to utter it..."

Taken from an 1883 letter from W.H.S. Cleveland to the Minneapolis Park Commission.

always been good, and that he didn't understand why the demonstration had taken place.

The crowds moved into the streets, followed by the police. The two groups moved throughout the neighborhood of Cedar and Riverside for several hours, blocking traffic and doing violence to one another.

Seventeen people were arrested, among them Mary Fraser, daughter of fifth Congressional District representative Donald Fraser, for breach of peace and simple assault. After a final confrontation on the lawn of the People's Center, the crowd and police dispersed, respectively, to their homes and squad cars.

Later that afternoon, a quiet dedication ceremony was held with Secretary Romney in attendance.

The following spring, Heller-Segal received \$175,000 to build an aerial walkway over Cedar Avenue, and to renovate the sidewalks along the Avenue south of the Washington Avenue exit of Interstate 35W.

The money came from the Minnesota Authorities Neighborhood Development Plan, and was removed from a general city fund which would otherwise have gone to other NDP projects, largest among them the rehabilitation of ghetto homes in Minneapolis' Willard-Home-wood district, and for Model Cities rehabilitation. The walkway will eventually link Stage 1 with the rest of the project.

It extends towards Dania Hall from the "Plaza-in-the-Sky", lighting along Fifth Street at the edge of the Five Corners Bar.

The bar's owner, Eddie Paulsen, has lodged suit against Heller-Segal, contending that the land on which the walkway rests, on which Paulsen pays property tax, is his own.

"I'm a little provoked," he said. "I'm protesting this walkway because this is not a federal project, it is a private development, and this walkway is for the benefit of the developers."

"We always have got along. I always have been for this redevelopment, but I don't like--well, let's use the baseball term--it looks like the squeeze play is on. In other words it looks like he's [Keith Heller] trying to squeeze me out, which I resent.... You know, my own tax money is driving me out of business."

*The West Bank History Collective is deeply indebted to Maury Bernstein, the Community Union, the Cafe Extempore, The New Riverside Cafe, Steven Parliament, the Rev. William Teska and Marvin Farmer, for their help and advice on the Curling Waters. Without them there would be no history.*

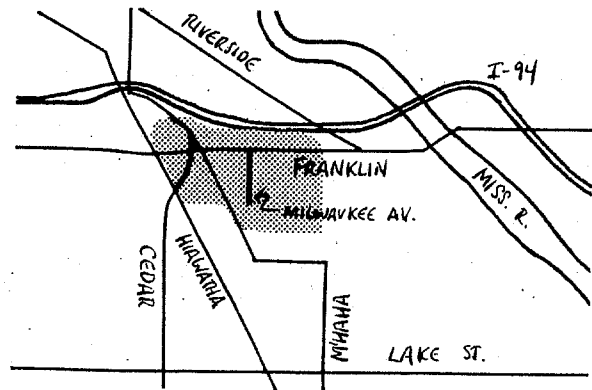
*And we are indebted to Marge Shafsky, Mr. Ostmund, the Thormeys and Eddie Paulsen for remaining in the community and resisting its inevitable decay. Without such people, there would be no future.*

*We hope for some indulgence of our occasional lapses in objectivity. It is, at times, difficult to remain both objective and accurate. The present history is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate in full.*

# SEWARD WEST

## MILWAUKEE AVENUE IN HISTORY?

by Jerry Ravenhorst and Peggy Boyer



The houses on Milwaukee Avenue are not mansions, nor did George Washington or any other famous person that we know of ever sleep or live there. So why then are certain individuals and organizations interested in preserving it for its historic merit?

It depends on how you define history. People who think that only the great and glorious are worth preserving must think that it is only the great men and glorious events that make history. These people seem

Homeowner August Kock standing in front of 2107 Milwaukee Ave., 1900.



to be in control for most of the historic sites we have are mansions, estates, and other awe-inspiring architectural examples such as rococo cathedrals and art deco federal buildings. This is a sticky issue since we Americans are supposed to be anti-aristocratic and to revere the common person. Why then do we keep the aristocrats' mansion with its servants' quarters for posterity rather than the creations of the common people?

The United States was settled by the greatest folk migration in history. Its cities and factories were built by the masses of immigrants who came to America to escape economic dislocation in Europe.

Milwaukee Avenue was built for and inhabited by the common laborer recently arrived from the Old Country. Milwaukee Avenue has great historic merit because it is one of Minneapolis' few intact examples of the lifestyle of the poor immigrant who came to Minnesota when America was the New World.

Milwaukee Avenue has great historic merit because it is one of Minneapolis' few intact examples of the lifestyle of the poor immigrant who came to Minnesota when America was the New World.

## DESCRIPTION

November 7, 1974, will be Milwaukee Avenue's 91st birthday: it was on that day in 1884 that it was officially opened as 22½ Avenue (it did not become Milwaukee Avenue until 1906). At that time it lay on the edge of the city, for 24th Street marked the city's southern boundary; beyond that lay farm lands. East of 24th Avenue were the fairgrounds covering many blocks of what is now Seward East.

The area which includes 22½ Avenue was platted in the 1870's and passed through several hands before William Ragan, a real estate agent, purchased and developed the land. Most of the houses were built in 1885 and the building permits show that Ragan was the contractor and/or owner of almost all of these houses.

The dissection of the area into small, narrow quarter lots is an indication of the speculative nature of the venture. Such land dissection was an attempt to increase the economic return on the land by building clusters of modest houses on small, narrow lots, a method often employed in housing industrial workers at the turn of the century.

Erik Erickson on Milwaukee Avenue near his home, 1973. Photo by Bob Roscoe.

The practice of constructing repetitive housing types also gained momentum as a means of capitalizing on limited-price sales. This sort of cheap housing was in great demand during this time as Minnesota became the settling place for large numbers of immigrants, laborers and tradesmen who needed immediate or interim shelter during their first years after arrival.

## "COPENHAGEN AVENUE"

A long-term resident of the neighborhood remembers when Milwaukee Avenue was called Copenhagen Avenue by people in the area because of an influx of Danes. Recollections such as this are invaluable to the social history of an area because such things are seldom written down and available to the public.

Thankfully many helpful details were recorded in the state censuses. According to the 1895 census, 80% of the residents were foreign born, but many of those native to the U.S. were not native to Minnesota. The majority of the immigrants were Norwegians, with the Swedish and the Danish being the next most populous ethnic groups.



Milwaukee Avenue housed at this time families of five and six people and often, in addition, single boarders.

The occupations listed were craftsmen and laborers. There were carpenters, shoemakers, a butcher, a baker and a butter-maker, tailors, an artist, bartender and stonemason. Several Railroad workers lived on Milwaukee and many general laborers. And since two barrel factories were located close by there were several coopers.

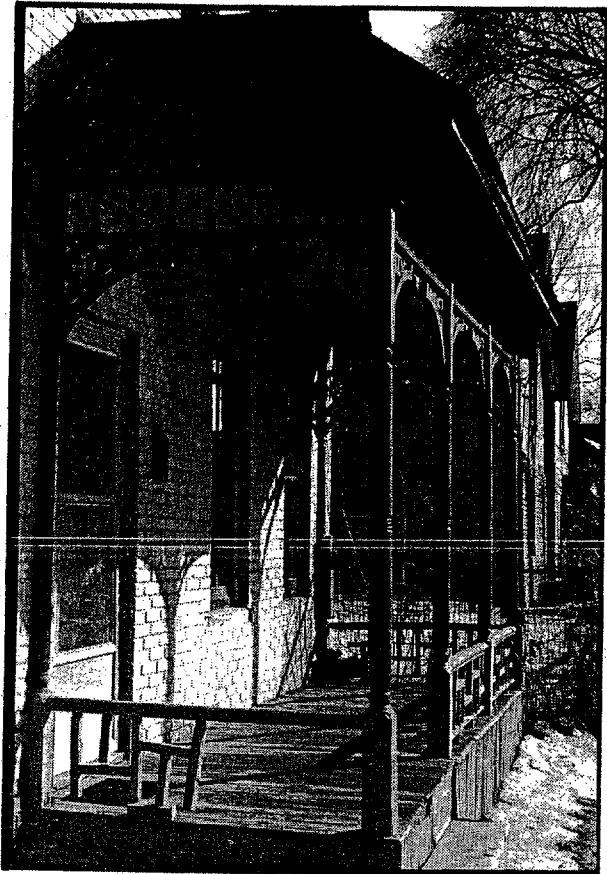


photo by Ken Meter

#### A TEMPORARY HOME

In the 19th and early 20th centuries ownership of the houses on Milwaukee Avenue passed quickly from hand to hand. Also, many of the residents were boarders and renters. This reflects the instability of the newly arrived immigrant.

Milwaukee Avenue provided the temporary housing needed by the newcomers, for rent was cheap and it was located near the "Milwaukee Road" yards and shops and many factories that provided jobs.

According to Erik V. Erickson, the children of the immigrants often became dissatisfied with the lot of their parents and would move to a more desirable neighborhood when they had acquired a higher paying job. He recalls that many left the area to live south of Lake Street.

Thus, Milwaukee Avenue served as a stopping off place for many immigrants. It was a place to get a start, but in the end often a place to leave behind, and perhaps this is one of the reasons the houses were not always maintained in the best repair.

#### MEMORIES: 55 YEARS

Erik Erickson came first to the U.S. through Canada in 1911 by himself; he rode "everywhere" on the rails. He is the longest term resident of Milwaukee Avenue and his memories are rich and varied.

Erik and his family lived originally on 23rd Avenue and 22nd Street East. His rent was \$15 a month, and his wages were 20¢ an hour. He worked between 10 and 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, never seeing his children that first year "in the light of day".

Until World War II, Erik worked as a carman for the Great Northern Railroad. He did not work for the Milwaukee Road (as it is assumed most people in this area did) because in those days they were considered a "jumping jack outfit". That is, one that had frequent lay-offs.

When Erik moved onto Milwaukee Avenue in 1919, his house had no electricity, gas or plumbing. Thus, he began his own rehabilitation of a house considered even then as old. By the mid-1920's he had installed water, electricity and gas. He had even dug his own basement with the help of a block layer.

Erik said at this time the houses were owned mostly by elderly Scandanavian immigrants. The depression and the fact that their children wished to move to more fashionable neighborhoods, south of Lake Street, contributed to the "downhill" trend on Milwaukee Avenue.

Even during this period the banks would not lend money to people who wished to buy in this area.

Between 1920 and 1940, "nothing was done here," meaning bad times and high taxes made improvements impossible. At one time on the total four-block area, only two men had jobs. Public relief was not available to a

home owner but a tenant could receive \$2.35 per week. Erik feels that some relief came to the residents here in the form of lower taxes during the time of Floyd B. Olson's governorship.

Twenty-five years ago Milwaukee Avenue was "kept in order", but Erik feels the large number of absentee landlords has changed this.

Mr. Erickson believes the houses must be repaired and some may have to go but wonders, "where will they put all the poor people? They should keep some low-cost housing."

## Beyond the Avenue: Seward West

The history of Milwaukee Avenue cannot be told in isolation from that of the larger neighborhood of which it is a part. That neighborhood is Seward West. It is an old neighborhood and it is readily apparent to the eye that the years have taken their toll on the small single-family houses and duplexes that are tucked closely together on those narrow lots that give the neighborhood its unique visual character. The reason for the style and arrangement of the housing and the fact that repetitive architecture was often used has to be drawn from the nature and the circumstances of the era in which it was built.

Seward West was built during the 1880's and 90's, a period of extremely rapid expansion and population increase for Minneapolis. The houses in Seward were built typically by small contractors and by the eventual occupants themselves. And, like Milwaukee Avenue, some of the land was developed by contractors and real estate agents who sought to capitalize on a high demand for immediate or short term housing for the newly arrived immigrant making a start. Seward West has always been a working class neighborhood with a high element of transience due to the fluctuating economic condition of the low and moderate income worker. The location of Seward also contains some of the roots of its history.

### TRANSPORTATION REINFORCES SEWARD BOUNDARIES

In 1881, the Chicago, Milwaukee and Saint Paul Railroad extended its line from St. Paul over the "iron bridge" to Minneapolis, and through the Seward neighborhood. This line in fact created the western boundary of Seward, and because the river lay to the east the neighborhood remained a relatively small and confined entity rather than part of the larger Longfellow neighborhood to the south. When the "Milwaukee Road" built its carshops and switchyard so close to Seward (25th and Hiawatha), people were drawn to the area for jobs. Not only did the carshops attract workers, but many factories and industries grew along this major artery of transportation, supplying even more employment. Maps of the time show many industries along the tracks,



East Franklin at the Milwaukee Road RR tracks, c. 1920. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

such as the Sash & Door Co., North Western Stover Works, Minneapolis Harvester Works and other smaller companies.

The 1880s also saw the expansion of mass transit into the Seward area. The horse-drawn trolley system had been extended to service Seward during the early 80's. In 1889, the service was converted from horse power to electricity. Also, in 1889 the Franklin Avenue bridge was completed. Thus, the extension of the transportation networks to this southern edge of the city had an impact on Franklin Avenue. With the trolley line, the traffic crossing the bridge into St. Paul, and with more jobs and people, Franklin Avenue became a hub of activity. The traffic helped to reinforce Franklin Avenue as the northern boundary of Seward West.

#### PERSONAL HISTORY

The above is the history that is found in the plat books, deeds, maps and atlas of the city. But the history of the area is much more the history of the people who live there. The self-concept of the community in

the end tells more of what a neighborhood has been, how it has changed, and what it is now. The following is a personal history of the area by a long-term resident, Mrs. Kay Hartley.

Kay Hartley's family moved to Seward West in 1919. Her father purchased the home on 22nd Avenue that she and her husband Roy now occupy.

While Kay was growing up, before the age of the automobile, people traveled mainly by foot and by streetcar. The Seward neighborhood joined Cedar-Riverside since there was no freeway to divide them. Children from Seward played in Murphy Park, which had a great flat surface for roller skating, an activity which was very popular in those days. Riverside Park offered a toboggan run, another popular pasttime. And in the summer, that park drew people to listen to the frequent band concerts.

Family-owned stores dotted the residential area and lined Franklin and Cedar Avenues. Cedar especially was an active shopping district, offering a wide variety of

Corner of Franklin and 24th Avenue in 1930. Minnesota Historical Society photo.







Corner of Franklin and 24th Avenue in 1974. Photo By Ken Meter.

stores. It also drew people for social affairs. Dania and the Southside halls offered theater performances and dance bands.

A change that has most directly affected Kay and Roy was the construction of the apartment across the street from their house, and which now comprises their view from their porch, where they like to spend a lot of time.

Though their house has been bought by the Housing Authority, they do not want to move. They like their neighborhood and claim that their house, "if left as is would last a lot longer than that new apartment across the street."

Kay believes that urban renewal has put a great hardship on homeowners. She does not agree that all the code changes are necessary for comfortable living. The house has suited her family well through the years, and why, she wonders, must she and her husband be forced to move now.

Kay's sentiments are shared with many older residents who have lived in the area for a long time. Most are leery of the urban

renewal plan which is slated to acquire nearly all the houses in Seward West. They, like Kay, would like to stay here. This is their home, this is where the landmarks of their past and present define their place. And in their affection for the neighborhood and their desire to remain they have a mutual bond with the young people who have moved into the area.

SEWARD WEST IN THE PRESENT

Seward West today is a neighborhood experiencing the anguish of urban renewal. Many of its residents have left and many others wait anxiously or in dread of that letter from the Housing Authority that tells them their home is to be acquired in 90 days.

For the last two years a group of residents has annually sponsored a Seward West Fest, an evening of food, local entertainment and "the Seward West Side Story", a melodrama enacting the issues and personalities involved in the urban renewal process set in allegorical context. It is an event that perhaps best personifies the neighborhood. The turn out is always large, bringing together old and young people, and the play is always the highlight of the evening. Everyone participates, booing at the characters representing the Housing Authority bureaucrats and cheering "Roger Rehab" who

represents rehabilitation. The effect of the Seward West Fest is that it revives the sagging morale of the community which is often difficult to maintain when vacant houses separate neighbors, and endless meetings dull the spirit.

The residents have organized a Project Area Committee which has been negotiating with the Housing Authority to rehabilitate as many of the homes as possible rather than to tear them all down, which was the original plan. And, through a non-profit development which is composed of many community residents, the community is hoping to rehabilitate and build new structures that will provide low-cost housing for the people who want to use their relocation benefits to buy or to rent in the neighborhood. Also, a planning team is working to restore historic Milwaukee Avenue.

Seward West, then, is a community which has a strong identity. Its residents are organized and playing an active role in redevelopment.

One of the reasons for Kay Hartley's affection for the neighborhood is the friendliness of the people. She says the younger people often stop in to visit with herself and Roy.

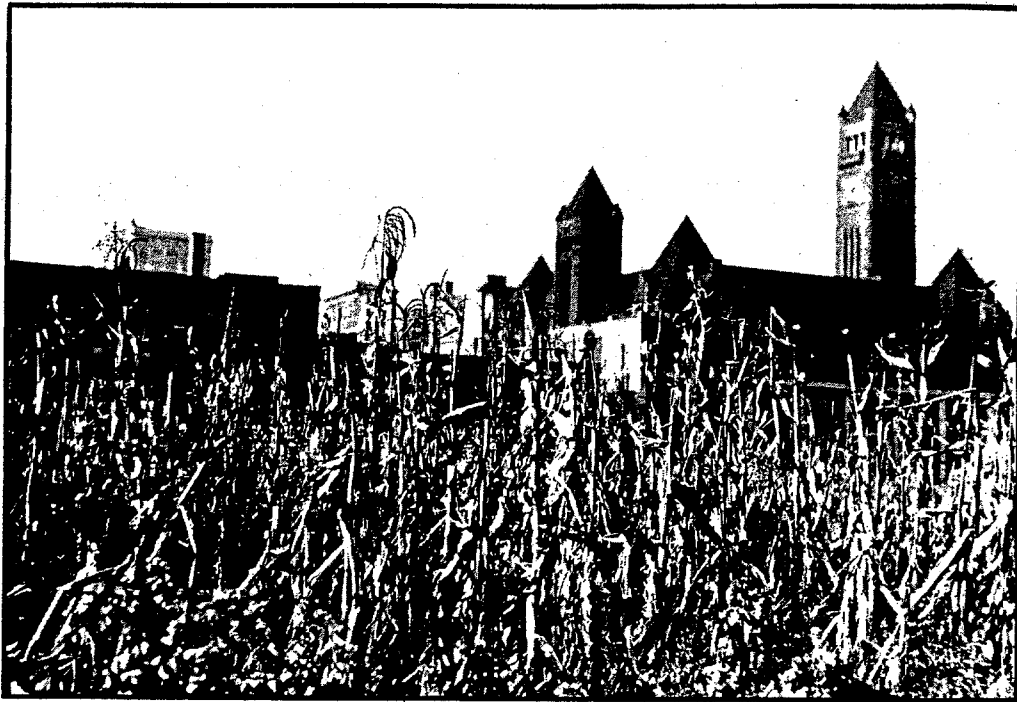
Because the houses are so close together and the private yard space often nonexistent, people meet on the sidewalks, and sit on porches that are not screened in and private, but face the street in close proximity. The Seward community cobb is another generator of neighborhood participation and social activity. The membership is by no means limited to one age group, income bracket, or ideology.

Seward West has its problems too. Urban renewal has been a long painful process. The people have marched in the streets, picketed the Mayor, fought policy issues themselves. And, while there are some people who attend nearly every meeting, there are those who do not even know the difference between the P.A.C. and the H.R.A.

The P.A.C.'s slogan: "Renewal not Removal" is shared by all who do not want to leave their gardens and porches and neighbors and do not want to see the landmarks of their past obliterated. Bob Roscoe, an architect and Milwaukee Avenue resident, believes that if Milwaukee Avenue is rehabilitated it can serve not only as a pointer to our common past, but can also be used as a model for the future. Perhaps this can be said of the whole of Seward West.

photo by Ken Meter





Hennepin County Historical Society Photo

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**SANE FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION AT FOLWELL PARK.** These celebrations are usually fostered by the American Legion Post of the district or a group of business men. The above shows honors being bestowed on W. W. Folwell, the aged and pioneer historian of the State of Minnesota, former President of the University of Minnesota and ex-President of the Board of Park Commissioners. This event marked the formal opening of Folwell Park, a park containing 27 acres in the north section of Minneapolis improved at a cost of \$147,700 paid for entirely by special assessments against the benefited district.

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