Welcome to the *South St. Paul Voice* History Archive
April 20, 2017
By Lois Glewwe

In the summer of 2004, Tim Spitzack, the publisher of the *South St. Paul Voice* newspaper, approached me to ask me if I would consider contributing a 750-word monthly history article to his new venture of bringing the city a new local paper. I agreed and have submitted a story every month from July of 2004 through May of 2017. Those articles from July 2004 through December 2016 are included here. As it turns out, that means that I’ve written almost 138,000 words about our fair city in the last 11 years. I will add 2017 as soon as December of this year comes to an end. As long as Tim has an interest, I’ll keep finding things to write about.

It’s been a great adventure and I’ve met many wonderful people and had the time to dig more deeply into the details of historic events that were perhaps glossed over in the South St. Paul Centennial History of 1987 and even in my most recent published book, *South St. Paul: A Brief History*, which was published by the History Press in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015. I’ve received hundreds of emails and phone calls thanking me for sharing these stories and I’ve totally enjoyed being a part of the Facebook page that is called Conversations of History in South St. Paul. Who knew there were so many more stories to tell?

For those of you using this document, a couple of tips. First of all, women are generally listed in the index by the name that they are most known as. In other words, if they were married when they accomplished whatever I’ve noted them for, they will be listed under their married name. Women’s maiden names are included after their first name with no special punctuation. Married names are in parentheses when the woman is listed in the index by her maiden name.

The index is just one tool. If you are looking for something particular, use word search to find general info that might have not made the index. For example, if you are trying to find out about all the historical monuments in the city, you’ll find them in the index under their specific title, but if you just do a word search for monuments, you’ll find every time when that word is used in the entire document.

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The Dakota County Historical Society has permission to post this compilation on their website https://www.dakotahistory.org. You can search the index or the articles or just waste some time perusing the years of articles and hundreds of photos that are posted there.

Finally, thanks so much for your interest, support, contributions, questions and assistance as I’ve looked for specific information. South St. Paul is a unique place – there really is nowhere like it and I’m so pleased to have had the opportunity to share your stories for posterity.

Lois Glewwe
Kaposia Days is here again! South St. Paul has been celebrating this annual event since it was founded as one of the many U.S. Bicentennial celebrations of 1976. People who are from South St. Paul often know about Kaposia Days including what the name Kaposia means and why the city’s summer festival has such an unusual name. Others who are new to the community may have no idea of the meaning and significance of Kaposia, pronounced ka-po-jha.

The word is from the language of the Mdewakanton Dakota and is the name of a specific band of Dakota from the area around Mille Lacs who settled on the eastern banks of the Mississippi in what is now St. Paul by the early 1800s. Some historians translate the word Kaposia as meaning “fleet footed while playing lacrosse.” Others have applied a more generic meaning such as “not encumbered by much baggage,” or “traveling light.” In any event, the word is meant to convey a people who moved frequently and quickly.

Like most Dakota groups, the Kaposia band did not live in one village year round but traveled in large hunting parties or gathering groups that would relocate for weeks or months to other areas in pursuit of food such as cranberries, muskrat or other game. In the early 1800s, the Kaposia band numbered as many as 1200 people. By the 1850s, approximately 300 people were considered part of the Kaposia community.

At some point between 1826 and 1834, the chief of the Kaposia band moved his village to the west side of the river in what is now South St. Paul. He chose a site on the banks of the Mississippi between the two major ravines that cut high into the bluffs. Today’s residents may identify the location as being between Butler and Bryant Avenues.

The village consisted of several structures including the bark-walled houses used by the Indians during the summer months and the winter teepees that they used when they were on the move. Government teachers and missionaries had lived at Kaposia since the 1830s and built several one and two-story houses and school buildings in the village. High on the hills above these humble dwellings were the burial platforms of the Dakota. Beneath the ground, generations of remains of earlier native dwellers could be found along the top of the bluffs and on the hillsides from one end of South St. Paul to the other.

The Kaposia band was led by a succession of prominent chiefs, all called Little Crow by the whites. It was the last Little Crow, Taoyateduta or His Red Nation, who was assassinated in 1863 because of his role in the Dakota Conflict of 1862. Taoyateduta has been written about extensively by historians because of his complex personality and intelligence. Many of his speeches, delivered at treaty signings in Minnesota and at
important gatherings of political leaders and statesmen in Washington, D.C., have been translated and admired because of his eloquence and clarity of thought.

Taoyateduta was born into the Kaposia band sometime between about 1810 and 1820. When he was a young man, his mother took him with her and returned to her people near Lac Qui Parle in western Minnesota. It was at Lac Qui Parle that Taoyateduta came to know Rev. Dr. Thomas S. Williamson and his sister Jane. Dr. Williamson had been with the Dakota people since 1835 and Jane had joined Thomas and Thomas’ wife Margaret at Lac Qui Parle in 1843. When Taoyateduta’s father died in 1845, Taoyateduta ultimately took his place as chief of the Kaposia band.

One of the ways in which the young chief sought to improve the quality of life for his people was to invite the Williamsons to join him at the Kaposia village in South St. Paul. He wanted them to open a school there and help him prevent the negative impact that the liquor dealers in St. Paul were exerting on the men of the band.

Dr. Williamson and Jane set up a successful school for the children of the early settlers and the Indians at Kaposia. Additional government teachers such as John Aiton and Sylvester Cook were also assigned to the village and detailed records were kept of attendance, reading ability in the Dakota language and progress in learning to speak and read English.

Of all the Dakota villages along the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers in Minnesota, Kaposia seems to have been one of the most integrated and cosmopolitan settlements in the area. Several of the leaders of the Kaposia band learned to read and write at the Williamsons’ school and many Kaposia women intermarried with the government farmers and early traders who were based at Kaposia.

As the earliest riverboats made their way up the Mississippi River to St. Paul, many travelers wrote about their experiences visiting the village at Kaposia. Minnesota’s first schoolteacher, Harriet Bishop, spent a night with the Williamsons on her way to St. Paul in July of 1847. The annual meeting of all of the workers of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions was held at Kaposia in 1848 and other prominent visitors often came for more extended visits.

Taoyateduta sent at least two of his children, Wowinape and Emma, to live at the Williamson home for several months in 1849. Other leaders of the Kaposia band followed suit by encouraging their children to attend school and learn not only their own language but also the skill of reading and writing English and performing mathematical tasks that benefited the tribe in its dealings with the fur traders and government officials. The result was a generation of Dakota people and white people whose lives and experiences were intertwined culturally and economically for almost a quarter of a century.

Caught in a world that was changing more quickly than he could control, Taoyateduta signed the Treaty of Traverse de Sioux in July of 1851 and agreed to move his people to a
newly defined reservation along the Minnesota River in 1853. Life for the Dakota was never again as independent, free and traditional as it was during their years along the Mississippi River.

Within weeks of the departure of the people from their traditional village, government officials and developers laid claim to the land around Kaposia Village. The first meeting of the Dakota County Commissioners was held at the village in 1853, and for a time, Kaposia was even considered the county seat. When the City of South St. Paul was founded in 1887, several voices suggested that the new town be named Kaposia in honor of its first inhabitants.

Although others won that battle and South St. Paul became the city’s official title, the community has always been proud of its first name - Kaposia. The South St. Paul High School yearbook is *The Kaposian* and the school song still proudly spells out K-A-P-O-S-I-A to encourage team spirit. The city’s premier recreational area, Kaposia Park, is of course named for Mdewakanton founders and most recently, the City has erected a new pedestrian bridge linking the walking trails of the park to the Dakota County Regional Trail along South St. Paul’s riverfront.

R.E.A.P., the River Environmental Action Project, is raising funds to install a new original sculpture depicting Little Crow and his people at the entrance to the new trail head and Taoyateduta himself is honored as one of the charter members of the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence. His picture and biography are featured in the exhibit in the Central Square Community Center in South St. Paul, along with over 100 other prominent local people.

As the community gathers to celebrate this year’s Kaposia Days, it is appropriate to reflect on the native Minnesotans who fished the river, hunted the hills, played games on the bluffs and left us with a legacy that is not only remembered but honored in the single word - Kaposia.
First published in the *Illustrated News* of January 29, 1853 this copy of an engraving provides a glimpse of how Kaposia village appeared 150 years ago. Looking south toward Inver Grove, the artist portrayed the village on the western banks of the Mississippi between two of South St. Paul’s most magnificent ravines which are identified today as Butler and Bryant Avenues.

One of the most enigmatic and intriguing characters of early Minnesota history, Taoyateduta or His Red Nation, became infamous as the dreaded Little Crow, leader of the renegade bands of the Mdewakanton who instigated the U.S. Dakota War of 1862. This photo is believed to have been taken only a few days before the conflict began near the Lower Sioux Agency in western Minnesota.
Every newcomer to South St. Paul soon asks a friend or neighbor what that big old building is down on Concord Street. Depending on the responder’s knowledge the answer might be that it used to be a hotel or a bank or city hall or some kind of stockyards building. In truth, all of those answers are correct. The Exchange Building on Grand and Concord has been all of those things and more.

Built in 1886 as the headquarters for Alpheus Stickney’s new St. Paul Union Stockyards Company, the Exchange Building was an impressive addition to the rows of ramshackle taverns and boarding houses that were springing up along Concord Street.

The newly created South St. Paul City Council met in the Exchange Building until July of 1890 when their new City Hall opened at the top of the Grand Avenue hill. A basement bar in the turreted building received the first liquor license granted by the city in 1887. The Exchange State Bank was founded in the building in 1888, and by the 1940s, over 90 commission firms, livestock offices, banks, and other brokerage and transportation firms were packed inside the five-story structure. The hallways bustled with people hurrying back and forth as deals were cut and the ever-present sound of the stock market’s ticker tape machines provided a constant clatter inside the high-ceiling hallways.

Then, as hundreds of storefronts, barrooms and businesses were demolished on Concord Street in the 1970s to make way for new development, the St. Paul Union Stockyards Company moved into new facilities across Concord Street. The hallways of the Exchange fell into darkness as the landmark building awaited a new owner and a new purpose.

The South St. Paul HRA purchased the building with the hope that a developer would be found to renovate the structure into the cornerstone of the new downtown. No one could have predicted that it would be more than twenty years before the Exchange opened to the public again. (The accompanying chronology highlights the major proposals and events involving the Exchange from its establishment to the present day.) The glorious old structure has been many things in its long history and continues to hold promise of becoming a viable part of the community once again in 2004.

Saint Paul Union Stockyards Livestock Exchange Building Chronology
1886  Construction begins
1887  The Exchange opens for business
1977  The St. Paul Union Stockyards Company moves across Concord Street and the Exchange Building is up for sale.
1979  The Exchange and the adjacent Stockyards Bank building are placed on the National Register of Historic Places
1979  The City approved a development proposed from Colonial Properties to turn the building into restaurant and office space.
1980  The Colonial Properties project failed and Morris Kloster took over the property.
1985  The HRA constructed the parking ramp across Concord Exchange as an incentive to potential developers.

January 1988  Lancer & Associates proposed renovating the Exchange into luxury apartments. The proposal was accepted by the City and the HRA but vetoed by the Mayor. Although the veto was eventually overturned, Lancer & Associates withdrew their proposal in December 1988.

January 1991  Morris Kloster died and his estate donated the building back to the HRA in exchange for payment of $84,000 in back taxes.

September 1991  The HRA took over the building and commissioned a reuse study by Miller Dunwiddie Associates that was completed in the spring of 1992. The HRA spent several thousand dollars repairing the roof, shoring up the portico, removing asbestos and removing an underground storage tank. All of the floors were cleared of thousands of dead pigeons and other vermin that had infested the building.

June 1992  The public was allowed back in the building as the Dakota County Historical Society conducted group tours during South St. Paul Kaposia Days. The City held a public meeting in July 1992 to discuss the possibility of renovating the building for use as City Hall.

July 1995  The Chamber of Commerce and the HRA opened the building again for development tours. Pigeons had once more infested the building, additional vandalism had occurred and no new development options were presented.

October 1995  A Town Meeting sponsored by R.E.A.P. once again addressed the issue of redevelopment.

March 1996  Duane and Martha Hubbs approached the HRA with a development proposal to renovate the structure into the Castle Hotel.


January 2000  The Castle Hotel declared bankruptcy and closed.

October 2001  Richard DeFoe purchased the Exchange and announced plans to open it as a restaurant and nightclub.

June 2004  The City granted Richard DeFoe a liquor license for Valentino’s.
In November 1886, four months before South St. Paul was incorporated as a city, *Northwest Magazine* published the first images of the St. Paul Union Stockyards Company’s impressive new Exchange Building. Rising on the corner of Grand and Concord Streets, the five-story building designed by architect C.M. Reid was a monolithic testament to founder Alpheus Stickney’s belief that his fledgling livestock company would be successful. Shown here under construction in 1887, the old Exchange remains today as one of South St. Paul’s only remaining architectural links to the city’s historic past.
The Neighborhood Schools of South St. Paul
By Lois Glewwe,
September 2004

When approximately 3600 South St. Paul school students head for classes this September, they will continue an educational tradition that began in the city over 150 years ago. The first students gathered in the home of John Aiton in the Kaposia Indian Village as part of Dakota County’s new school system that had been established in July of 1853.

Over the years, South St. Paul created a strong tradition of neighborhood schools where students learned, played, studied and formed friendships with boys and girls who lived in the same part of the city. Many South St. Paul residents even today identify themselves by which elementary school they went to. Some will always be from Wilson; others proudly claim their allegiance to Washington, and still others boast that they had the good fortune to attend Jefferson.

At the height of South St. Paul’s population in the mid-1950s, there were 6,000 students in grades K-12 in public school and hundreds more in the city’s three parochial schools. Then, in 1969, Swift & Company shut down its meatpacking operations in South St. Paul and by 1979, Armour’s had also closed what had once been the largest meatpacking plant in the world. People were forced to leave South St. Paul to find work and enrollment in the city’s schools declined steadily over time. During that period, and into the subsequent decade, four elementary schools and the city’s junior high school closed.

Today’s elementary students choose whether to attend Lincoln Center, which was built as the city’s new junior high school in 1951; or to go to Kaposia Education Center, built on the site of Washington School which closed in 1993. Parochial students attend St. John Vianney or Holy Trinity. Public school students in grades 7-12 attend classes at South St. Paul High School.

For those who recall the intense pride and loyalty that came from attending a neighborhood school, the following is a quick overview of the old schools of South St. Paul:

**Wilson.** Located at Outlook and Stickney Avenues. Originally the site of Simon School which opened for classes in January of 1890. Renamed Roosevelt in 1903; replaced with the new Wilson School which opened on April 11, 1917. Closed 1971 and used for district offices; demolished 1983. Currently the site of the Wilson Heights residential development.

**Lincoln.** Originally located at 15th and Bryant Avenues. Opened for classes in 1887. Closed at that location and rebuilt on 15th and Thompson in 1908. Closed in 1986 and currently owned by Dakota County, operating as Thompson Heights.
Central. Opened as Stickney School on the site of the current high school in 1887. Replaced in 1907 and closed as an elementary school in 1974. Became the first Central Square Community Center which has undergone many renovations and additions in the past thirty years.


South St. Paul Junior High. Originally on the site of the old Stickney School in 1911; new building on 4th Street and 9th Avenue in 1951; closed in 1980 and leased to Dakota County. Reopened as the current Lincoln Center in 1986.

South St. Paul High School. No classes above grade six until 1897. First graduating class was four young women in the spring of 1908. Central was Central High School when it opened in 1907 and many changes and additions have been made over the years. Auditorium and athletic field completed in 1930. Additions to the high school were made in 1961 and the new athletic field to the north of the bridge opened that year. Additional renovation and construction have occurred at the same location for the past 40 years.

Parochial Schools

Holy Trinity. Opened in the fall of 1953 on 6th Avenue South and 7th Street. Still offering grade K-6 education.

St. John Vianney. Opened fall of 1955 on 17th Avenue North and Bromley; still offering grades K-6 education.
South St. Paul’s first Washington School was located where Concord Street meets I-494. The tubular fire escape on the side of the building is remembered as a fun slide to ride by the students who attended the school from 1908-1929.

High on top of the hill at Stickney and Outlook, South St. Paul’s Simon School opened for classes in January 1890. The building was replaced by a new structure and renamed Wilson in 1917. The sight is now the Wilson Heights residential development.
South St. Paul’s Cemeteries - Scary and Solemn
by Lois Glewwe
October 2004

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, when hundreds of school children went “trick or treating” on Halloween night, one of the important rites of passage was to make it safely from Marie Avenue to Second Street North, passing between the gates to the city’s two cemeteries on 15th Avenue North without being grabbed by a Halloween monster. Having a big, spooky, old cemetery in the center of the city was just one of the special things about growing up in South St. Paul.

Today the number of “trick or treaters” has dwindled to the point where only a handful of kids even know what Halloween used to be like and the rolling hills of South St. Paul’s two cemeteries are more solemn than scary for this generation of school children.

Still, these two resting-places in the heart of the city do reflect a certain timeless mystery and heritage that captures over a century of South St. Paul’s history. It was October 29, 1897, that a group of local businessmen met to address the need for a public place of burial for the rapidly growing community. Although South St. Paul was home to several churches, none had available land to set aside as a burial ground. It was decided that a board would be formed to purchase property and create a place where people of all faiths could be interred.

Charles W. Clark was assigned the task of finding an appropriate site and he came to the new Oak Hill Cemetery Association with a recommendation to buy 40 acres in Blocks 5 & 6 of Marshall’s Addition, the land spanning Marie Avenue to Second Street North and 15th to 17th Avenues North. The board paid $550 over three years for the property. At the time, the plot was quite a few blocks “out of town,” rising above the city as its highest point.

The first funeral was held at the new cemetery on January 27, 1898, when five-year-old Arthur Irvin Hanson who had died of “laryngitis” was buried. The cost of a grave plot was originally set at $4.00 for adults and $2.50 for children. It was raised to ten-cents per square foot the following year. Clark was directed to plant fifty trees in the new cemetery in the spring of 1899 and gradually the paved drives meandered up the hill shaded by the mighty oaks.

In 1911, the members of the St. Paulus German Lutheran Church purchased the property directly to the east of Oak Hill Cemetery and established the German Lutheran Cemetery. Today that cemetery is maintained and operated by Luther Memorial Church and burial is open to all faiths.

One of the intriguing and unique things about Oak Hill Cemetery is the variety of ethnic names and backgrounds interspersed with the usual Scandinavian surnames that prevail
in Dakota County burial grounds. Along with those Croatian, Serbian, Romanian and Polish names are many gravestones bearing little glass-covered photos of the deceased. Through a photo taken at their wedding or a portrait made on a meaningful birthday, the image of the loved one is captured for all time on their personal monument.

Behind the memories set in stone is a record of South St. Paul history. The names of civic leaders, pioneers, business owners, teachers, coaches, pastors and working men and women of the city provide a timeless tour of the “Who’s Who in South St. Paul.” One of the most meaningful sections, established in 1930, is set aside servicemen and women from the city who have died. The site, marked by a monument in 1949, was originally created to honor the body of an unknown serviceman that was found on a train in 1930.

In the 1970s, many of the cemeteries’ beautiful old trees were lost to Dutch Elm Disease but replacement efforts in the last 30 years have gradually restored the shady branches that line the roadways. South St. Paul’s cemeteries are a peaceful haven in the midst of a busy city, each stone and every name calling to mind the story of this amazing river city and its memorable and unique history.

Left: Many monuments in Oak Hill Cemetery bear glass-encased photos of the deceased. This stone marks the passing of Barbara Stoll, 1850-1925.

Right: Several grave markers at Oak Hill include photographs of the deceased in happier days, such as this stone with a picture taken on the couple’s wedding day.
Behind the Curtain - Stories from South St. Paul Election Booths
by Lois Glewwe
November 2004

Unlike its more rural neighbors, South St. Paul began life as a fully incorporated city, rather than as a township where elected supervisors met once a year to decide where the next road should go through. The main reason that South St. Paul was established was because of the arrival of Charles Clark and Alpheus Stickney, who came to the muddy banks of the old Mississippi River in 1886 with dreams of creating the next Minnesota metropolis. Their presence and the foundry and livestock industries they established made it necessary for police, fire, taxation, planning and election policies to be put into place in time for the new city that was born on March 2, 1887.

Right from the start, politics in South St. Paul was front page news across the metropolitan area as squabbles and feuds between the farmers in the western portion of the city and the tavern owners and commission men who saw the city’s future success in the livestock market and related industry. Before the new city was even two years old, most of the elected officials got up and walked out to go create their own City of West St. Paul in 1889. Then, less than two years later, accusations of corruption, misuse of city funds and other improprieties prompted many in South St. Paul to seek annexation to St. Paul. Although the annexation move was defeated when the vote took place in the middle of a blizzard in February 1891, the controversy, divisiveness and letters to the editor the possible annexation provoked set the stage for the next century of civic elections.

Among the more interesting elections during the city’s 117-year history, is the one held on June 6, 1905. The vote was to approve or deny several changes to the city’s charter. What made the vote of interest is that women were not only allowed to vote, but their votes were tallied and reported, although not counted in the outcome. A total of 46 women voted that day, more than 15 years before women could vote legally in the United States.

The roster of names of those who served in the early years of South St. Paul government will be familiar to many who live in the city today. George Wentworth, for whom Wentworth Avenue is named, was on the first South St. Paul City Council. John Simon of Simon’s Ravine, now Kaposia Park, served on the Council in 1888 along with Frederick J. Waterous, founder of the Waterous Company that still makes its home in South St. Paul. Charles Clark, founding patron of Clark Memorial Church, was elected Councilman in 1893 and served as Mayor of the City from 1911 through 1917.

The first woman elected to public office in South St. Paul was Dorothy Rund Jerhoff, who was voted into the post of city treasurer in 1945. Helen Healy became the first woman elected to serve on the City Council in 1953. It was another twenty years before a woman again was chosen for a seat on the Council when Karen Frownfelter was elected in 1975. During that same term, Virginia Lanegran was appointed to the Council and was
subsequently elected to several terms. Kathleen Gaylord joined the Council in 1985 as the fourth woman to serve. The fifth woman elected to the Council in South St. Paul was Katherine Trummer in 1987. She became the first woman mayor of South St. Paul when she defeated the incumbent in 1989. Katherine Trummer was subsequently defeated by fellow Councilmember Kathleen Gaylord in 1992. Gaylord served as Mayor until being elected to her current office of Dakota County Commissioner. When Beth Baumann was elected Mayor she became the third woman in a row to serve as the city’s top elected official.

As mentioned earlier, the importance of women’s voices in civic policy was recognized in South St. Paul as early as 1905. When the U.S. Congress ratified the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote on August 26, 1920, South St. Paul women became the first in the country to vote legally when the city held a water bond election early on the morning of August 27. Fox Films and the Saturday Evening Post were reportedly on hand to record the success of South St. Paul’s suffragettes who proudly cast their first legal votes that bright morning in South St. Paul.

Controversial politics, vociferous debates, late night meetings, closed door sessions, and year after year of fascinating political discourse made the front page of the South St. Paul Daily Reporter a hugely popular paper at the height of its circulation in the 1920s through the 1950s. Today’s citizens are more likely to follow the Council’s actions on Town Square Television than in a daily newspaper, but one thing remains true. Hometown loyalty, fierce pride, staunch political stands and a desire to serve the people are all traits that continue to exemplify those individuals who are willing to give of their experience, time and talent to provide effective civic leadership.
South St. Paul’s first City Hall was built in 1890 and rose impressively at the top of the Grand Avenue Hill where Lawshe Park is today. It was demolished in 1953 to make way for the current municipal building further up the hill on Third Avenue North.

South St. Paul allowed women to vote as early as 1905, although their votes were not counted in the final tally. Women in the city had worked alongside men in the yards since the late 1800s and had been property owners and heads of families for many years. The These working women, like those pictured here, joined forces with the wives of the powerful bankers, commission men and stockyards executives to ensure that South St. Paul were the first to vote legally in a city election on August 27, 1920, the morning after Congress ratified the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote in the United States.

Memories of Christmas Magic
Holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas evoke warm and wonderful memories of long ago days. For someone who grew up in South St. Paul, this time of year calls to mind the magic of winters long ago. Perhaps it is the moonlit silence of being the last one to take a final twirl around the outdoor ice rink after a late night skate under the stars. For others it could be the bright winter sun, and cold, snowy thrill of a slippery sled ride down the Jefferson hill. Some will remember winter as a frozen-toed hike home from Wakota Arena after South St. Paul won the most important game of the season. Still others will recall the joy of snuggling up next to the fireplace at the South St. Paul Library on the day they unveiled the Christmas collection of children’s books with stories from around the world. For this writer, the season brings back to life a magical Christmas visit that happened right on 15th Avenue South many years ago.

Christmas for me when I was a child was a wonderful time that I anticipated with joy. Learning my lines for the Christmas program at church, decorating the tree, looking through the Montgomery Ward Christmas catalogue for toys and helping Mom bake cookies were my daily chores.

I remember one special Christmas, however, when there was only one gift that I really wanted even though I knew it was something I could never have. It was the most beautiful Tiny Tears doll ever and it belonged to my cousin, Lynda Patet, who was older than me and quite grown up. Sometimes Lynda would let me hold the precious doll when I was at her house, but never for very long, and she always made sure that Tiny Tears was put safely back in a secure place after my brief time with her.

I don’t know why it was that particular doll that captured my attention but I can still remember today the intense longing I had to bring that particular doll home to my house.

Christmas Eve that year arrived just as a soft, beautiful snow began to fall. Mom bundled me into my winter coat even though my parents and I only had to walk across 15th Avenue to get to my grandma and grandpa’s little house. The family would crowd into their tiny living room to open our presents and eat Grandma’s dark, molasses-sweet fruitcake filled with raisins and currants.

I had so many gifts to open I couldn’t even count. As the only child around (none of my troublesome nieces and nephews had been born yet) I was in my glory. But when the night came to an end, I still had an aching desire in my heart for Lynda’s Tiny Tears.

It wasn’t long before I grew sleepy and Daddy soon picked me up, pulled and pushed me into my coat and lifted me up to carry me home to bed. As we headed across the street to our house, Daddy stopped and became quiet. He looked up into the snowy starlit sky and said, “Ssh, wasn’t that the bells of Santa’s sleigh I just heard?” I perked up my sleepy head and stared into the darkness. “I think he just flew over our house,” Daddy said. “Be
still and listen.” Sure enough, in my sleepy head, the sound of sleigh bells rang far away and I could imagine that I saw the hooves of the reindeer as they rounded the skyline just a moment ago. I had forgotten all about Santa in the excitement of opening presents and now all I could do was stare up at the snowy sky in wonder.

Daddy looked down and smiled and we continued our walk across the snow filled street to our house. As we approached the steps to our front porch, Daddy suddenly stopped and I heard him take a deep gasp. He pointed down to the steps. “Look, Lois, I was right - these must be Santa’s footsteps.”

Right there on the snow-covered steps to our little front porch were big deep footprints left from what must surely have been Santa’s big boots. They led to the side of the porch and I could see that over in the corner was a gray and blue doll buggy with a bright red bow tied on the handle.

Daddy put me down quickly and told me to see if Santa had left something for me. I approached the buggy carefully - almost afraid at this evidence of a visit from a sky-flying Santa. Daddy kept encouraging me though and as I peered into the side of the buggy, I could see that there was something tucked deep under the covers. Daddy told me to see what was there and as I carefully drew the baby blanket down, I was absolutely and totally stunned to find Lynda’s Tiny Tears doll. She was dressed in a blue velvet coat and bonnet with her silk pink dress underneath and her wonderful little pink shoes tucked away inside blue velvet boots. It was the very doll I’d longed for and I will never forget the awesome sense of joy and wonder that flooded through me.

How had Santa known? How had he convinced Lynda to give her up? Who had made her the beautiful blue coat? I turned to Daddy with a look of total and complete happiness and he quickly hugged me to him and turned to bring both me and the beautiful buggy into the front door where I could unbundle my new Tiny Tears and play with her beneath our brightly lit Christmas tree until falling asleep and being carried off to bed. Even today, so many years later, I still recall how happy I was at receiving an unexplainable gift, delivered to me by a father whose footprints bore a remarkable similarity to the trail of prints left by the never seen Santa Claus.

As families gather for South St. Paul celebrations this bountiful season, may each one capture the magic, remake the memories, and come together to give a child an unexplainable gift that will never be forgotten.
The author with her 1952 Christmas bounty. Little girls in the 1950s were given toys that would echo what they would be when they grew up - moms and homemakers. The gifts included a washing machine with its very own wringer, a doll bed, an ironing board and of course a set of dishes and two dolls.
The Story of the South St. Paul Library  
January 2005  
By Lois Glewwe

One of the things that makes South St. Paul unique among its neighboring communities is its gracious and grand old public library. Generations of South St. Paul residents have fond memories of curling up in one of the big chairs in front of the old fireplace to read a new book just pulled from the shelves. Although the fire no longer flames and the old fashioned library chairs are long gone, the sense of excitement, discovery and adventure that readers find among the stacks is still as strong today as it was when the library opened on November 11, 1927.

Just as South St. Paul was the first city in the area to have a high school, it was the first city to have a library. As early as 1890, the public school teachers in the city held fundraisers in order to establish two city libraries in the community, each with a collection valued at $125.00. It was not until 1916, however, that the City took action to establish a library commission. That group, made up of male and female leaders in the community, immediately turned their efforts toward building a new library. The Stockyards Company donated two lots on the northeast corner of Third and Marie Avenues and the Carnegie Foundation pledged $10,000 toward the project.

The project came to a halt for three years, however, as World War I took over the resources and attention of the community. As the war came to an end in 1919, the library commission once again approached the Carnegie Foundation and were pleased to be able to announce that $25,000 would be received for the new South St. Paul Public Library. As they awaited funding and plans for the library, the commission established temporary space in the Fitzgerald Building on the north side of Grand Avenue for the first public library. Miss Cornelia D. Plaister of Dubuque, Iowa, was hired as the city’s first librarian and agreed to begin her work on February 1, 1923.

Plans for the establishment of a permanent library building once again were derailed with the Carnegie Foundation pulled out of the project, deciding it was impractical. Several groups in town began to campaign for a library bond and a special election in January 1923 was held to approve funding. The move was defeated by nine votes. The city fronted another bond election on June 21, 1926, and this time, the $25,000 bonding election was approved. Dakota County pledged another $7,500. Construction soon began on the new building which was to be named The American Legion Memorial Library, in honor of the veterans’ group that had worked tirelessly for many years to raise funds for the project.

The official dedication of the new library was held on November 11, 1927 and immediately the building became a bustling center of activity. Story hours and summer reading clubs became part of every child’s life and hanging out at the library after school was the social highlight of the day for high school and junior high students. Beginning in August 1961, the city’s collections were also carried to every part of town by the bookmobile.
By that time, the charming old library was bursting at the seams with books piled on top of books as the number of volumes increased. It became clear that an addition was needed and the portion of the building to the south of the 1927 structure was constructed and dedicated on April 25, 1965.

Today’s library continues to hold a unique place in civic history as it is the only city-owned and operated library in Dakota County. Residents benefit from having full access to all county library services but also are able to preserve the hometown feeling of the historic local library. Like all of the nation’s libraries, the collections now include full access to the Internet, collections of videos, DVDs and other media and a wide variety of publications and services that were unheard of 77 years ago when the South St. Paul Library became a vital and treasured part of the community.

The South St. Paul Public Library, originally known as The American Legion Memorial Library, was built as the result of years of dedicated fundraising, bond issues and public interest campaigns held by a group of citizens and veterans who believed the city deserved its own library. The original portion of the building pictured here, was dedicated on November 11, 1927.
The Old South St. Paul Stockyards
February 2005
by Lois Glewwe

It’s been almost sixteen years since the wrecking ball swung its mighty arc over the towering chimneys and massive brick walls of the old Armour plant on South St. Paul’s Mississippi River banks in 1989. The plant, often proclaimed as the largest meatpacking plant in the world, opened in 1919 and closed in 1979 after sixty years of serving the community and the world. Just a short distance up the river at Grand Avenue, Swift & Company’s many buildings dominated the north end of the stockyards. Swift’s opened in South St. Paul in 1897 and closed in 1969 with most of the packing plant structures destroyed soon afterwards. At the period of highest production in the 1940s, the two plants employed thousands of people from all over the area with men and women working in a wide range of positions from office clerk to slaughterhouse supervisor.

In addition to the meatpackers’ extensive operations, related industries such as banking, insurance, trucking and the ever present wheeling and dealing of the commission firms provided employment for generations of South St. Paul residents. A high school girl’s first job might be in the Exchange Building as a typist while her boyfriend would look forward to a summer job with the cowboys and cattle of the stockyards. A young man, fresh off the train from New York after traveling to America from Croatia, could find a job immediately on the hot, bloody lines of the slaughterhouses. Traffic jams on Concord Street (now Concord Exchange) tied up cattle trucks, private cars, delivery wagons and armored bank vans from dawn until well after dusk on any day of the week.

Farmers, cattle growers, commission men, bankers and newly arrived immigrants from all over Europe mingled in the grocery stores, restaurants, taverns and boarding house entryways that lined both sides of Concord from Armour Avenue to Bryant. South St. Paul was a stockyards town with all of the smells, sights and success that being a center of commerce meant to a growing city in the early 1900s.

Today, an entire generation of South St. Paul residents has grown up without any firsthand experience of the meatpacking industry. There is still the auction barn; there are still a few acres of pens; and livestock are still brought to market in South St. Paul, but the scale of today’s operation cannot compare to the overwhelming impact the plants of the past had on every aspect of community life.

A list of a few of the significant developments that happened in South St. Paul because of the presence of the meatpacking industry includes the following:

- The plants attracted thousands of immigrants from Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Poland and other European countries to the city, creating South St. Paul’s unique mix of ethnic groups with their own neighborhoods, halls and churches.

- Women were able to be independent, earn money and own property in South St. Paul because of the availability of employment. This is believed to have led to the
powerful suffragette movement in the city that resulted in South St. Paul women being among the first to vote legally in the United States in 1920.

♦ There were banks on all four corners of Grand and Concord in the 1920s and 1930s, attracting wealthy investors and speculators, violent gangsters and lawbreaking bootleggers who brought their business to South St. Paul. Their role in the city’s development has had a long-lasting impact on South St. Paul’s reputation in the metropolitan area even to the present day.

♦ Residents, even those who did not work in the livestock markets, came to identify with the plants, named their high school team the Packers, and celebrated summer and winter with the popular civic groups known as the Hook ‘Em Cows.

♦ Because of the rapid population growth and economic success of the livestock industry, South St. Paul was able to establish the area’s first high school, first public library, first citizenship program and other innovative community and educational opportunities long before neighboring cities.

♦ Being “Cow Town” also came with the aroma of the yards as the smell of cattle and manure floated on the breezes day and night. For many, that often-remembered scent was simply known as the smell of money.

Today the tree-lined avenues of Hardman and Armour lead to the rapidly growing Bridgepoint Business Park which dominates the riverfront where Armour’s and Swift’s once rose. The old Armour’s gates still stand as a monument to a long ago time when cattle was king and South St. Paul’s claim to fame was its single industry. The city has survived the dramatic changes in the meatpacking industry and diversified its manufacturing and industrial base in order to provide today’s residents with employment opportunities once again.
Cattlemen in wagons and automobiles met on Armour Avenue in this early 1920s photograph. The teamsters and draymen were lined up as far as the eye could see along the side of the stockyards. The Armour’s plant, pictured on the left with the two chimneys, was built in 1919, closed in 1979, and torn down in 1989 to make way for the eventual redevelopment of the area into today’s Bridgepoint Business Park.
City Within a City: The Stockyards of South St. Paul
March 2005
By Lois Glewwe

Note: In last month’s issue of the South St. Paul Voice, several important aspects of the presence of the world’s largest stockyards in the city were described. That discussion continues this month as we look at the impact the yards had on city services and community life.

The City of South St. Paul was incorporated in March of 1887, less than one year after Alpheus B. Stickney founded the St. Paul Union Stockyards along the banks of the Mississippi River in the new city. From those early days on, the City and the Stockyards were bound together by economic, political, social and physical connections that persisted well into the post-World War II era.

When South St. Paul was split into two by the departure of the men who would go on to found the City of West St. Paul, the Superintendent of the Stockyards, Mr. W. Denney was the first to serve as Mayor of the city as it is known today. He served two terms and influenced many of the decisions that were made as the city began to establish itself as a viable enterprise in Dakota County. A roster of elected South St. Paul officials during the first 50 years of the city’s existence echoes the personnel lists of the Stockyards Company, the commission firms and the packing plants.

This is not to say that the meatpacking industry took advantage of its political clout only to achieve its own ends. In many ways, the City and the South St. Paul School District were beneficiaries of the industry’s involvement. It was the St. Paul Union Stockyards Company that paid for many of the first citizenship classes held in South St. Paul schools for newly-arrived immigrants. The businesses in the stockyards also paid for their own fire and police protection and are cited as donating equipment, including vehicles and fire trucks, to the city over the years.

One reason to reflect on this ages-old relationship is because of the impact that major events in the industry had on the rest of the community, both economically and in terms of public safety. Three particular events in the history of the stockyards are examples of this interdependence.

The first event began on March 16, 1948, when the workers at Swift & Company, Armour & Company and Rifkin & Sons went on strike, forming picket lines which succeed in suspending operation at the packing plants. The entire city became a hotbed of violence and controversy as officials from all levels of state and national government attempted to enter negotiations with the striking workers. It was not until armored tanks of National Guardsmen rolled down the Grand Avenue hill and into the gates of the Swift & Company entrance to the yards that the drama and danger of the strike came to an end after 67 days. In many ways, the divisiveness of the strike, which not only pitted
management against worker but family against family, changed South St. Paul’s relationship with the yards and its related industries forever.

The second event which emphasized the impact the yards had on the city occurred a little over two weeks later, on Memorial Day 1948, when the pens and sheds and fence posts of the massive stockyards went up in a devastating and memorable fire. It took nine pumpers, 206 men and two days to extinguish the blaze which consumed one-ninth of the total stockyards property as well as 88 railroad cars and 40 head of cattle. Smoke filled the entire area along the riverbanks and the pavement of Concord Street was too hot to walk on during the terrible fire. The cause of the fire was never determined but fortunately not one life was lost during the blaze.

The third event which dramatizes the significance of the stockyards on the city is actually a recurring event that happened every time the Mississippi River overflowed its banks and sent waves of water onto the flatlands of the yards. City crews joined employees of the yards as they tried to save the livestock and move huge numbers of cattle to higher ground above the stockyards during the floods of the early 1900s. Citizens often contended with loose steers and panicked pigs fleeing the rising water. The most dramatic of the floods occurred in the early 1950s when hundreds of Twin Cities residents poured into the city to watch the devastation the rising water brought to South St. Paul. Ultimately the flood wall projects of the early 1960s ended the flooding that caused such damage but it was city crews and city volunteers who stepped forward to assist the businesses of the stockyards industry in surviving the river’s force in the decades prior to the controls of more recent decades.

As we look back on our city’s heritage from the vantage point of a redeveloped stockyards area and a community that knows little today of its meatpacking history, it is important to remember the interdependency that existed between the packers and the people of South St. Paul for the first eight decades of our mutual existence.
For nearly 80 years South St. Paul was a “company town” and when a flood hit the riverbanks bordering the pens of the stockyards, hundreds of cattle fled to the backyards and relative safety of the city’s residents. Whether it was a devastating high water flood such as this one pictured in 1897, a devastating fire or a divisive labor strike, the city and the stockyards were always closely connected with political, economic and geographic ties.
“Fire! It’s a fire!” The urgent shout would resound through the city as shopkeepers and residents spread the word to farms and neighborhoods, calling over back fences and ringing anyone with a telephone in an effort to round up the volunteer firefighters of South St. Paul. The brave men would drop everything they were doing to race down the Grand Avenue hill to don their firefighting gear. Some would hitch up the horses, others would haul the heavy pumper to the team while still others would grab the hand-pulled hose cart. The doors to the garage would spring open and the members of South St. Paul Volunteer Fire Department would race up the hill in the hope that they would find a source of water sufficient to fight the fire that they had been called to defeat.

Children would run to the street corners to wave and watch the mighty steeds and the struggling men as they pulled their heavy load. People along the way would crowd into doorways questioning, “Where’s the fire? Is anyone hurt?” If all went according to plan, a local well would be found where the cotton hoses of the cart could be connected to a source of water sufficient to feed the pumper and douse the threatening flames of fire. More often than not, however, the firehouse secretary would later write in elegant penmanship in the company’s record book, “This fire beyond the reach of water.”

Unfortunately that was the tragedy behind many of the city’s major losses to fire in the years between 1888, when the first volunteer fire company was formed, and the establishment of a city water supply west of the river in 1903 when the first public hydrants were installed. Boarding houses built of wood and the little shanties strung along the side streets where residents roasted their supper over open flames contributed to the potential danger as did the lard and rendering plants with barrels of combustible liquids that dominated the ramshackle plants in the stockyards. Even after the arrival of public water, major blazes destroyed city landmarks such as the Grand Hotel at Central and Concord and the Highland Roller Rink at 17th and Bryant in the early 1900s.

The city’s earliest efforts to battle the blazes began with the creation of three engine companies in 1888. Engine Company No. 1 was established on a lot donated by John Kochendorfer on the east side of Central Avenue just above Concord Street. Company No. 2 set up their engine house in the stockyards and Company No. 3 was apparently assigned some space at the Riverside School near what is now I-494 and Concord. The first steam equipment was purchased in August 1888 from Waterous Engine Works, located in the northern end of South St. Paul known as South Park. The company’s founder, F.J. Waterous, served as South St. Paul Fire Chief from 1889-1892.

As the city’s population increased, it became apparent that establishing firefighting capability was of prime importance and in 1907, a tax levy was approved to fund the city’s first firehouse on the north side of Grand Avenue for a total cost $6,206.00. The South St. Paul Fire Department was stationed at that site until the current municipal building was built in 1954.
It was not until 1921 that the fire chief and one man were paid moderate salaries and a system of 48-hours on and 24-hours off was initiated. In 1936, the city adopted the Civic Service system and South St. Paul firefighters have been paid city employees since that time. Because of the massive impact the meatpacking industry had on city services, the stockyards company established and hired their own firefighters who were the first responders to fires that broke out in the yards.

Today the horse-drawn and early motorized apparatus of the early firemen has been replaced by state-of-the-art equipment and the South St. Paul Fire Department serves the city not only by fighting fires, but by providing emergency medical assistance and transport, water rescue, housing inspections and a vast array of other vital services. In its long 117-year history, South St. Paul has lost only two firefighters. George Carleton was killed in a fire at the yards in 1892 and Jay Bloemers died in 1968 when a ladder rig collapsed during the clean-up efforts following a fire at the Coast-To-Coast store on North Concord.

The South St. Paul volunteer firemen pictured here posed proudly with the city’s first motorized equipment, a 500-gallon Waterous pumper purchased in 1916. The pumper is on the right above, in front of the South St. Paul Fire Department building that housed the firefighting forces from 1908 until 1954. The building was on the north side of Grand Avenue about halfway up the hill. Waterous Engine Works opened in South St. Paul in 1888 and is one of the city’s largest employees today.
The 1937 Ahrens-Fox Model H-T piston pumper shown here was purchased for $13,000 when South St. Paul voters approved a special proposition on June 15, 1937. In 1987, the 50-year-old pumper made the trip back to South St. Paul for an appearance in the city’s Centennial parade. Owner John R. Gambs, of Lafayette, Indiana, is a collector of old engines and had found and restored the vehicle several years earlier.
The South St. Paul Police Department was created on March 22, 1887, when the new Council enacted the city’s first ordinance. Protecting South St. Paul residents was then, and continues to be, of prime importance to city officials. Unlike neighboring farm communities where the most significant crime of the year might be a stray cow breaking through someone’s fence, South St. Paul has always been a hotbed of crime, corruption and often violence. Dozens of taverns, gambling parlors, boarding houses and beer halls lined Concord Street and although many new arrivals to the city rapidly became productive employees of the livestock industry, others saw the bustling riverfront city as an opportunity for illegal activity.

Mayor Joseph Lawrence was named the first Police Chief in March 1887, a common practice in the early years of city government where the Police Chief was a name-only position. Mayor Lawrence appointed two men to patrol the streets of the city and keep the peace. Those early officers worked for a South St. Paul that was really two distinct cities. There were the rapidly expanding residential neighborhoods on the hills above Concord where families worked hard to establish themselves as responsible citizens and there was the “Strip,” the stretch of Concord Street where people went to drink, dance, gamble and socialize.

Keeping the peace was a challenge and one of the first purchases approved for the Police Department by the City Council was a ball and chain that would prohibit an unruly prisoner from escaping. A little wooden structure on the northeast side of Central Avenue was obtained as a police station but within a year or so, a new facility was built in the stockyards to house the jail cell and serve as the station for the officers.

Ten different men were named as Police Chiefs in the first 13 years of the city’s existence; some served a few weeks and others a few months. The lack of stability led to ongoing charges of corruption and whenever the political tides shifted at City Hall, a new Police Chief would be appointed. The first individual to bring any tenure to the position was John J. McCormick, who led the department from 1901-1909, when he went on to become a Dakota County Deputy Sheriff. It was under McCormick’s leadership that some official structure began to be imposed on the operations of the police department.

One of the most significant events which impacted the police in South St. Paul took place on January 16, 1919, when the federal government enacted the Volstead Act, prohibiting the manufacture, sale or transport of intoxicating beverages. Overnight, one of South St. Paul’s most vital sources of revenue, its bars and taverns, were forced to close. Police Chief Frank Challberg, who had been appointed in 1911, saw the community through the first few months of prohibition, but was forced out of office when returning World War I veteran Bernie Baker was elected Mayor. Andy Robinson became the Chief of Police for the next two years but it was Police Chief Truman Alcorn who ran the police department during the final decade of prohibition from 1923 to 1933.
The 1930s ushered in an era that began with the final years of prohibition and the main
tears of gangster-style crime in South St. Paul. It is estimated that there was more cash in
the City of South St. Paul on any given day in the 1930s than anywhere else in the
country. The livestock and banking industry dominated all four corners of Grand and
Concord and it was not uncommon to see the big black sedans of the gangsters racing up
the Grand Avenue hill with the police right behind them. Although major crimes were
relatively few, shootouts, illegal gambling, intimidation and corruption were rampant
along the infamous Concord Street strip.

Police Chief Louis Fuller spent 19 years as a police officer before being appointed Acting
Chief in 1940, and then Chief in 1947. He remained as head of the department until
August 31, 1962, and saw the city through the post-World War II years that brought
significant new residential and commercial development to the community. Eventually
the stigma of past corruption that was synonymous with South St. Paul began to fade
away and the past decades of the police department have been marked only by continued
improvements in the quality and professionalism of services provided to the community
by the Police Department.

In the next issue of the *South St. Paul Voice*, several of the more dramatic and memorable
crimes of the past decades will be discussed as we reflect on how the community and
police services have changed in 118 years.
Five of the men in this 1920s photo served as Police Chief at some point in their careers. Seated, left to right: John Yeamen Sr., Louis Fuller (Acting Chief 1940-1947 and Chief 1947-1962), Truman Alcorn (Chief 1923-1933), Norman Dieter (Chief for 12 days in 1933), and Leon Burch. Back row, left to right: Fred Schulze, Henry Whaley, Edgar McAlpine (Chief 1933-1940), George Albrecht (Chief 1921-1922) and Victor Johnson.
Today’s crime blotter in the South St. Paul police department is marked with its share of violence but a double homicide and a shootout at the Post Office would no doubt cause quite a stir if they happened in the community in 2005.

The same was true of South St. Paul when the crimes mentioned occurred. It was a sleepy Sunday night in May of 1910 when Commission man Patrick Gibbons murdered his wife Nellie in a fit of wild jealousy and then shot and killed the St. Augustine’s Catholic priest he suspected of being her lover. The crime rocked the city as people reacted in shock. Rumors flew up and down the streets. Could it be true? Was the handsome Father Edward J. Walsh really involved with 42-year-old Nellie McGowan Gibbons, the mother of seven children at the time of her death? It was simply too awful to comprehend!

Patrick Gibbons never attempted to deflect any guilt and readily admitted to his crime when he fled the priest’s home after the deadly deed and ran into one of his own sons on the way down the hill to City Hall. “Son, I have just shot the priest,” he cried and the poor boy soon was to learn that his mother, too, had lost her life on that fateful night. Gibbons was ultimately declared innocent by reason of insanity and committed to the asylum at St. Peter. It isn’t known what happened to the Gibbons’ children but the sad story of that day is captured in the two death certificates that appear on facing pages in the old record books at City Hall. Nellie McGowan Gibbons on the left page and Edward J. Walsh on the right. Cause of death: Homicide.

It was a few years later that South St. Paul, like the rest of the country, entered into the era of Prohibition. The enactment of the Volstead Act by the United States Congress on January 16, 1919, meant that it was illegal to manufacture, sell or transport alcoholic beverages. While the law put many taverns and innkeepers out of business, it also spawned over a decade of the most violent and corrupt underworld of illegal activity that Minnesota or the country had ever seen.

South St. Paul was often at the heart of the action as gangsters in their big black sedans showed up on Concord Street to wheel and deal in the business of moonshine, illegal gambling and other secret schemes. Today’s image of the romantic “Bonnie and Clyde” gangster clan is a far cry from the reality of life in South St. Paul during those dangerous days. Many recall diving for cover as shots were fired by the G-Men chasing Ma Barker’s gang or members of the Dillinger bunch up the Grand Avenue hill and west on Marie Avenue to evade arrest.

On one such day in August of 1933, six heavily armed bandits escaped with $30,000 in cash taken from bank messengers in front of the South St. Paul Post Office on Concord Exchange. South St. Paul police officer Leo Pavlak lost his life in the tragic attack and Officer John Yeamen was seriously wounded. The gunmen began firing as the bank messengers, Joe Hamilton and Herb Cheyne, were carrying the payroll delivery from the
train. They were forced to drop the money bags on the Post Office steps as they dived under a truck for safety when the shooting began. A spray of bullets flew up and down Concord Street with more than 27 slugs striking the post office or shattering windows. Rumors spread quickly as speculation arose concerning the identity of the gunmen. Police Chief Edgar McAlpine sought assistance from the Minneapolis Police Department in tracking down the men who were believed to still be in the area. No one was ever arrested for the crime.

The community’s shock soon turned to grief as they mourned with the family of Leo Pavlak, who had been killed so violently at the young age of 35. His widow and two children were honored at Pavlak’s funeral with a full double line of officers standing in respect. Jack Yeaman remained on the force until retiring in 1960, but his wounds from the attack left him disabled for much of that time.

The machine gun which Officer Leo Pavlak had been carrying at the time of the attack was stolen by the bandits on the day of the robbery. Identity of the killers was never achieved but the gun was located by the F.B.I. when they raided the New Orleans stronghold of gangster Alvin Karpis, a partner of Ma Barker and her boys. It is currently in the possession of the South St. Paul Police Department, a grim reminder of the tragic day in 1933 when an officer was gunned down on a busy city street.

Left: Leo Pavlak was killed on August 30, 1933, by gangsters believed to be from the Alvin Karpis gang as they successfully robbed two local bank messengers of a $30,000 payroll delivery.

Right: Father Edward Walsh was 35 years old and serving at St. Augustine’s in South St. Paul when he was brutally murdered by local business man Patrick Gibbons in May of 1910. Gibbons had killed his own wife Nellie just moments before in a fit of wild jealousy, believing that she and the priest were romantically involved.
On August 19, 1937, Louis F. Johnke, 49, an employee of the Cudahy Packing Plant and a resident of South St. Paul, died at the West Side General Hospital of a strange poisoning. He had been ill since June 18. His widow Beatrice survived him as did two married daughters. The Johnke’s lived in a modest home on the hill above Concord Street where the historic monument at Butler and Concord now stands.

The Dakota County District Attorney at the time of Johnke’s death was Harold Stassen, an up and coming Republican politician from South St. Paul who was being groomed to run for the position of Governor of Minnesota. One of the young attorneys who worked for Stassen’s law firm was Harold LeVander. As news of Louis Johnke’s death from a “strange poisoning” crossed their desks, both men began to investigate the details of the unusual case. There were rumors spreading throughout the city that Beatrice Johnke had been seeing another man and that two of the Johnke dogs had died mysteriously prior to Louis’ death. The Dakota County Coroner ruled that Louis Johnke’s stomach be removed and sent to the University of Minnesota for analysis.

The local papers began to provide coverage of the investigation which eventually led to the arrest of Beatrice Johnke for murder on October 9, 1937. Beatrice, then 41 years old, and a grandmother, was reportedly a flamboyant defendant whose demeanor and appearance would rival any Court TV “star” familiar to viewers of today’s coverage of celebrity trials.

To make the story even more interesting, Beatrice Johnke’s “paramour” was a handsome young man named Carl Sandgren who was nine years younger than the defendant. Sandgren worked for the WPA in Como Park and testified in the Dakota County courtroom of his affair with a woman he knew as “Lavon Darlon” before she ever admitted that she was married to Louis Johnke. He denied any knowledge of Louis’ death but did testify that Beatrice had told him that her husband was trying to kill himself and had been hospitalized several times.

Also adding local interest to the trial was the fact that Beatrice Johnke’s defense attorney team was made up of Vance Grannis and Lawrence Lenertz, local South St. Paul attorneys who had been appointed by the court to defend the accused. Both men were in their late 20s, were from long-established local families and were well-known in the community and the county.

With a dramatic, attractive female defendant and four powerful young, handsome attorneys as its stars, the trial soon attracted the attention of the Twin Cities media and eventually the national news agencies. Headlines rang out every day with reporters filing
from the halls of the old Hastings courthouse. Reporters described what Beatrice was wearing, and offered detailed descriptions of her expressions and responses.

The trial lasted from January 10, 1938 until the jury was sent to deliberate on January 26, 1938. Some expected a quick verdict of guilty and nothing was done to arrange for a long jury stay in Hastings. On January 29, the judge called in the attorneys and reportedly discussed a little used, but legal option of putting the jurors on a diet of only water in order to force a verdict. By that afternoon, the jurors had been out for over 70 hours.

Suddenly, at 3 p.m. on January 29, 1938, the word was sent out that a verdict had been reached. It took about two hours to get the attorneys back to the courthouse and to assemble the court. Harold Stassen, who had led the prosecution was not able to be present and sent Fallon Kelly to take the verdict in his place.

After more than 60 ballots and votes that reportedly ranged from 10-2 to a 6-6 tie, the jury had finally ruled Beatrice Johnke not guilty. The media was stunned and immediately reporters began filing news stories about the Stassen/LeVander loss to the Grannis/Lenertz team.

Of course, as history will record, Harold Stassen did go on to become Minnesota’s youngest governor and Harold LeVander took the governor’s office later in his life. Both Vance Grannis and Lawrence Lenertz continued successful law careers in South St. Paul. Beatrice Johnke, the dramatic defendant who had her 15 minutes of fame in 1938, led a life of quiet seclusion after the dramatic trial and soon disappeared from sight.

A Personal Note about the Players…

In the fall of 1996, Vance Grannis, Sr., who was then 88 years old, asked me to stop by to talk about the most famous trial he’d ever been involved in. I agreed and I’ll never forget the irony of the situation. Mr. Grannis was watching the O.J. Simpson trial on TV in his gracious South St. Paul home and he was totally intrigued in the machinations of that judicial exercise. As O.J. played in the background, Vance pulled out a box of 60-year-old newspaper clippings and trial transcripts and proceeded to tell me the story of Beatrice Johnke and the death of her husband.

Of course, the irony lay not only in the fact that O.J. was on TV, but in the fact that my uncle, Harold Stassen, was the prosecuting attorney who lost the famous Johnke murder trial. Vance Grannis continued to be proud of the fact that he’d beaten Harold Stassen at a pivotal time in their young careers. I admitted to him that Uncle Harold had never mentioned the Johnke trial to me, even though I had lived in his home in Pennsylvania and had discussed several other cases with him. Over the subsequent years before Vance Grannis died in 1999, and Harold Stassen in 2001, I had many conversations with both of them about Beatrice Johnke and the “strange poison” that took the life of her husband in
1937. Both men went to their graves convinced that what they knew to have happened was the truth and nothing but the truth.

To this day, I have no idea what really happened to poor Louis Johnke on that fateful day in August of 1937, but his death led to what is certainly one of the most fascinating murder investigations that ever took place in South St. Paul.
The South St. Paul Hall of Excellence
August 2005
By Lois Glewwe

In just a few weeks, the sidewalks of South St. Paul will be filled with school children on the way to the start of another year in local elementary schools. The halls of the High School will bustle once again with hundreds of teens and Marie Avenue will again become the mecca of after school gatherings.

For South St. Paul residents, however, it may be wise to keep an eye on those students with a careful consideration of just where they’re headed!

The reason for that observation is that South St. Paul has a long and proud history of producing people who grow up to change the world in many ways; people who have spent their lives in the pursuit of excellence.

In 1987, as South St. Paul entered into a year-long celebration of its 100th birthday, the South St. Paul Centennial Commission founded the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence as a way to inspire the young people of the community to aim high and go after big, unbelievable dreams. The creation of the Hall of Excellence and the exhibit of the inductees at Central Square Community Center was prompted by the realization that South St. Paul, a relatively small and not particularly wealthy community, had produced dozens of people all over the world who had accomplished astonishing feats in the areas of science, politics, technology, civic leadership, community development, literary and visual arts and education.

The process of identifying and recognizing those individuals began with a search for financial support to find a location to showcase the photographs and biographies of the honorees. Bremer Bank, founded in South St. Paul as Drover’s Bank in 1912, stepped forward to pay for the renovation of an old meeting room of the Central Square Community Center. With a display designed by Bill Lucking, who was then with James and Company and who later served as Executive Director of Progress Plus, a dramatic and meaningful exhibit area was established. New conference tables, chairs, podium and signage were developed and the new space was named the Centennial Room. The forum of recognition was named the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence in honor of Drover’s Bank founder Otto Bremer.

Open nominations for those to be recognized began to be accepted from the public early in 1987. The requirements were that the nominee, living or deceased, had to have established an ongoing and significant relationship with the community of South St. Paul at some point in their lives and then gone on to achieve excellence in all of life’s pursuits. It was not necessary to have graduated from South St. Paul High School or to have been born in the city.

An overwhelming number of nominations was received and the Centennial Commission agreed to limit the first year’s ceremony to 50 charter members. After weeks of
anonymous balloting, the first 50 were selected. Those who were living were notified immediately and invited to attend the induction ceremony. Relatives of the deceased honorees, who were to be honored posthumously, were also invited to the event. Photos were gathered, copied and framed; the display panels were upholstered; invitations were sent and the biographies of each of the 50 charter members were developed and prepared to be displayed in the new Centennial Room. In November 1987, the first ceremony occurred and the photographs were unveiled to an admiring audience.

As the Centennial came to an end that year, the Centennial Commission became inactive but the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence was established as an ongoing recognition forum under the financial sponsorship of Drover’s Bank. For the next ten years, individuals from the community served three-year terms as members of the completely anonymous selection committee. The public continued to submit nominations and all nominations received were reconsidered each year so that only one nomination for an individual was necessary. Each year a meaningful ceremony was held to add honored individuals to the exhibit.

Finally, after 10 years and 90 total inductees, the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence held its last induction ceremony in 1997. In 2002, the entire exhibit was moved into the new Centennial Room at Central Square Community Center where it continues to prompt comments and questions from those who attend meetings in the room or who find themselves examining the photos of all of these outstanding individuals. People have often said that they have been in the middle of some kind of public meeting in Centennial Room when tempers began to flare or people began to complain about the city or the school district. In more cases than not, many report that just looking up at the faces of these civic minded leaders who are honored on those exhibit walls has prompted them to calm down, find a consensus and move the community forward.

Each of the biographies in the notebooks in the room also provides words of inspiration and advice for today’s students. Many echo the thoughts of the exhibit founders that nothing can stop you if you dream big dreams and go after big accomplishments. The message is clear: your hometown will be behind you and proud of you and help you find your way to the best you can be.

The 90 honorees in the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence are listed below. Their biographies and photos are available in the exhibit at the Central Square Community Center:

Bob Adams
Earl C. Arneson, Sr.
Margaret Bateman
Bernard V. Beadle
Otto Bremer
Remus Nicolae Bretoi
Darrol Bussler
Norris K. Carnes
Mitchell V. Choban
Charles W. Clark
O. Edmund Clubb
John Joseph Coates
Robert E. Corniea Sr.
Kathryn McWilliams Crim
Lyle Devine
Dave Durenberger
Charles Fairhurst
Wilbur M. Fisk, Sr
Charles Fitch
Henry B. Gackstetter
Wallace M. Gebhart
Fannie Gilbertson
Arthur Gillen
Henry Glewwe
Rollin B. Glewwe
David L. Grannis Sr.
Macha Vance Grannis
Vance B. Grannis, Sr.
Robert E. Hansen
R. J. Happe
Viorica Bretoi Hawley
Helen Healy
Errett W. Horst
Melany Lynn Hunt
Carol Lee Johnson
Alice D. Brandt Jones
Tom Kaliszewski
Fallon Kelly
George F. Kramer
Lyle Lamphere
David A. Lanegran
Fred E. Lawshe
Harold LeVander
Iantha Powrie LeVander
Little Crow/Taoyateduta
Earl R. Lowe
Thomas A. Lowe
Mary Vavro Mazar
Margaret McAndrews
Charles D. McDermott
David R. Metzen
Floyd “Butch” Metzen
On November 30, 1846, a small band of Presbyterian missionaries from Ohio were welcomed to Kaposia Village (now South St. Paul) by the new chief, 26-year-old Taoyateduta, called Little Crow by the whites. In the group was Jane Smith Williamson, who had been teaching the Dakota people in the mission school since she came to Lac Qui Parle, Minnesota, in May of 1843 to join her brother, medical missionary Dr. Thomas S. Williamson and his family. Jane was 43 years old, never married, and barely stood five feet tall.

For the next eight years, the Williamsons lived among Little Crow and his people, teaching them to read and write in their native tongue while also helping them learn to speak and read English. The Chief, who was known for his wild ways as a young man, signed a temperance pledge in 1849 and welcomed the government farmers and missionary teachers who believed that they only way the Dakota people would survive the changes that were to come with the arrival of hundreds of settlers was if they learned to farm and received an education.

Jane’s years at the village were filled with the work of keeping the school and mission house in good order. Her letters tell stories of daily tasks such as doing the laundry and taking care of the many Indian children whose parents left them with the Williamsons for months at a time while the band went west in search of much needed game. Kaposia was a popular stopping off place for dignitaries who were headed to St. Paul and points west and “Jane’s girls” as the young Dakota women were known, were also happy to sing one of the beautiful old hymns that Jane had painstakingly taught them in the Dakota tongue.

In July of 1851, the Mdewakanton Dakota, including Little Crow’s Kaposia band, signed the treaty that sold their remaining land to the government, except for a 10 mile strip on the north and south sides of the Minnesota River from just west of New Ulm north to Yellow Medicine near present day Granite Falls, MN. The Kaposia residents remained in the area that is now South St. Paul until the summer of 1854, when they were required to leave to set up a new village on the Minnesota River. The Williamsons went with them and Jane soon found herself teaching school at the new mission house at the northern end of the newly formed reservation at Yellow Medicine.

She spent another eight years there, working with many of the sons and daughters of now grown students she had first known at Kaposia Village. She carried nuts and candies in
her apron pockets for the little children and she was known to often be singing hymns or humming the tune to a favorite religious anthem while she worked. Everyone called her Aunt Jane and dozens of little Dakota girls all over Minnesota were named Jane in her honor.

On August 18, 1862, Minnesota found itself torn apart by bands of hostile Dakota who began an attack at the Lower Agency and soon ravaged the area around New Ulm, killing hundreds of settlers and burning farms as they went. The Williamsons at first refused to believe that they were in danger but their many Indian friends convinced the family to flee. For Jane the entire experience must have been impossible to understand. Their old friend Little Crow, who had learned to read and write English and Dakota at the Williamson mission as a young boy and who had even left his own children with Jane for months at a time, was now accused of leading this tragic conflict that would not end well for anyone.

The aftermath of the war, its impact on Minnesota and most especially on the Dakota, is a long, tragic tale. For Jane, the 1862 Dakota Conflict made it impossible for the mission to operate as it once had and she remained in St. Peter, teaching Sunday School, helping with Thomas’ family and working with the poor even after both Thomas and Margaret Williamson passed away. Then, in approximately 1881, when she had begun to lose her eyesight, Jane once again headed west. This time her destination was the Yankton Reservation in Greenwood, South Dakota, where her nephew, John P. Williamson, had been serving the Dakota people since following them on their exile to South Dakota after the 1862 Conflict.

Jane lived the final 14 years of her life there on the banks of the muddy Missouri River and was 92 years old when she died on March 24, 1895. She is buried in the Greenwood Cemetery on a slight hill that rises above that windswept prairie. Her life, her legacy, her courage and her belief in the spirit of the Dakota people never wavered.

Jane Smith Williamson was born in Fair Forest, SC, on March 8, 1803. She became a schoolteacher in Manchester and West Union, OH, and helped her father, a Presbyterian minister, save dozens of escaping slaves on the famous Ohio Underground Railroad before coming to Minnesota Territory in 1843. Jane taught English and Dakota to the Mdewakanton people of Kaposia Village from 1846 to 1854.
The Kochendorfer House – South St. Paul’s Oldest Building
South St. Paul Voice
October 2005

The oldest existing structure in South St. Paul is hidden behind a shelter of trees high on a hill above the Kaposia Park Ravine. Built in 1879 by John Kochendorfer, the red brick home is the longest continuously occupied residential property in the city and the oldest know structure in South St. Paul. While the house itself is a remarkable example of 19th century style and structure, it is the Kochendorfer family and the legacy of the property that makes it eligible for a place in city history.

John Kochendorfer was born in Illinois in 1850. His parents, John Kochendorfer, Sr., and Catherine Lechler Kochendorfer, came to America from Germany in 1848. In 1862, they moved to Minnesota and settled on a farm in Flora Township near present day Redwood Falls. By that time, the family also included Rose, age 9; Katie, age 7; Maggie, age 5; and baby Sarah. On August 18, 1862, the Kochendorfers became one of the hundreds of families who were attacked by a group of hostile Dakota Indians who were ravaging the area around New Ulm in what became known as the U.S. Dakota War of 1862. In the space of a few days, it is estimated that as many as 450 white settlers, traders and soldiers were killed. No death toll has ever been confirmed for the Dakota.

Like many of the settlers, the Kochendorfers knew the Dakota people who lived near them on the Lower Sioux Agency Reservation. They often visited with them and shared food. When a Dakota man showed up at the house on that fateful August afternoon, Mr. Kochendorfer greeted him cordially but it wasn’t long before he noticed that a group of other Dakota were gathering on the horizon. Mr. Kochendorfer took a spot outside the house and prepared for trouble but had barely a moment to react before he was shot and killed. As he fell, he yelled at John to take the girls and run. As 11-yearpold John gathered his little sisters around him, he heard his mother’s terrible screams and then a devastating silence which made him realize she was also dead. John knew that the baby Sarah was hiding under the bed but before he could get to her, she was snatched up and killed by one of the Indians. John quickly grabbed his three little sisters’ hands and they all ran as fast as they could to escape. They didn’t stop until they were nearly seven miles away from the farm where they were found by a group of settlers who were trying to reach the safety of Fort Ridgely. The group took the Kochendorfer children with them to the fort where over 150 settlers, mostly women and children, were being housed in poorly equipped barracks in the hope that they could survive what they now realized was war with the Indians.

John took care of his sisters for two weeks at the fort until all of the children who had been orphaned were taken out under military escort and brought to various friends and relatives in St. Peter and St. Paul. John and Maggie were taken in by Gottfried Schmidt, whose farm was located where Bethesda Care Center is in today’s South St. Paul, and the other two girls were also welcomed into area homes.
John married Philopena Bach in 1877 and settled on 50 acres of land that Gottfried gave
the young couple. Two years later John built the gracious brick home that still dominates
the hill above 19th Avenue north. The Kochendorfer farm was known for raspberries,
blackberries and strawberries and John was able to provide for his family which
eventually included three boys and two girls. John was a powerful leader in the early days
of the township and served as the first town clerk, as a member of the board of education
and as city assessor.

For the children in the neighborhood around the old Kochendorfer place, the rolling hills,
orchards and berry patches became known as Kochie’s Hill, a treasured place to play.
John Kochendorfer passed away on November 25, 1933, but the family continued to live
in the home for another half century. By the 1980s, however, the acres surround the
gracious old homestead were sold for residential development. A group of citizens
formed an organization called Save our Sites (S.O.S.) and tried everything they could to
preserve Kochie’s Hill as a public park but their battle was lost to the bulldozer.
Fortunately, the house itself, once home to a survivor of what has been called the worst
day in all of Minnesota’s history, still stand and remains a lovely private residence in
today’s community.

The bright-eyed little boy standing with his family in this photo from about 1860 is John
Kochendorfer, who grew up to become one of the founders and civic leaders of South St.
Paul. John’s parents, Catherine and John Kochendorfer, Sr., are in the photo with, left to
right, daughters, Maggie, Katie and Rose. Another daughter, Sarah, was born to the
family after this photo was made. On August 18, 1862, Catherine and John
Kochendorfer, Sr., along
with the baby Sarah, were
killed by hostile Dakota
during the tragic days of
the U.S. Dakota war.
Eleven-year-old John
Kochendorfer managed to
save his three little sisters
by grabbing their hands
and running away from
their homestead for more
than 7 miles when other escaping settlers found them and got them to safety at Fort
Ridgely. Photo Courtesy: Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, Minnesota
One Town - Three Governors  
November 2005  
By Lois Glewwe

There aren’t many Minnesota communities that can boast of producing even one Governor but South St. Paul can lay claim to three individuals who attained the highest office in the state: Harold E. Stassen, Harold LeVander and Minnesota’s current governor, Tim Pawlenty. All three were elected as Republicans even though South St. Paul voters more often than not select Democrats to represent their interests at the State Capitol.

Harold Stassen was born in 1907 on his father’s farm in West St. Paul. In 1929, he married Esther Glewwe, whose father founded Glewwe’s Groceries in South St. Paul in 1905. Stassen opened his first law practice in South St. Paul in 1929, and was elected Dakota County Attorney in 1930, a position he held until being elected the youngest person to ever serve as Governor of any state in the country in 1938. The state did not provide a Governor’s Residence in those years and Harold and Esther continued to live in South St. Paul on Fifth Avenue North and then in a new home they built at 744 Stewart Lane. It was at their South St. Paul home that they entertained dignitaries from around the world. The house, and its many modern conveniences, was featured in a *Ladies Home Journal* photo spread in January 1946 and *LOOK* Magazine was in South St. Paul to photograph and eight-page story on the Stassen family and their home in August of that year.

Governor Stassen resigned shortly after being elected to his third term and went into active duty in the U.S. Navy in 1943. His lengthy public service in subsequent years included his work as a founder of the United Nations in 1945, President of the University of Pennsylvania, 1948-1952; member of President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s cabinet from 1952-1958, and founder and partner of Stassen, Kostos and Mason law firm in Philadelphia, from 1958 until 1978. The Stassens moved back to Minnesota that year and spent the final years of their retirement at their home in Sunfish Lake. Esther Stassen died in October 2000 and the former Governor passed away in March of 2001 at the age of 93 years.

Harold LeVander was born in 1910 in Swede Home, Nebraska, and came to Minnesota with his parents at the age of two years. He graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1935 and joined Harold Stassen’s South St. Paul law firm that same year. He served as Assistant Dakota County Attorney during the same years that Harold Stassen was County Attorney. When Harold Stassen moved to Philadelphia, Harold LeVander became the lead attorney in the firm that became known as LeVander, Gillen and Miller of South St. Paul.

Harold LeVander married Iantha Powrie, whom he met while attending the University of Minnesota. They made their home in South St. Paul, eventually building the lovely house on top of the hill above Thompson Avenue. Harold LeVander was elected Governor of
Minnesota in 1966 and served from January 1967 through January 1971. The LeVanders lived in the Governor’s Residence on Summit Avenue and Iantha LeVander was responsible for the renovation and preservation of the home during her years as Minnesota’s First Lady.

After leaving the governor’s office, Harold LeVander returned to his law practice in South St. Paul and passed away in March of 1992, at the age of 81. Iantha LeVander currently makes her home in Inver Grove Heights.

South St. Paul’s third Governor is Tim Pawlenty, who was elected to the State’s top position in 2002. Governor Pawlenty was born in 1960 and grew up in South St. Paul, the youngest of five children. His mother died of cancer when he was 16 years old, and shortly afterwards his father lost his job. Tim Pawlenty became the first one in his family to go on to college and worked his way through college and law school, graduating from the University of Minnesota.

Tim Pawlenty married Mary Anderson of Edina, Minnesota, in 1987, and both practiced law for several years. Mary Pawlenty was appointed a district court judge in 1994 and currently serves as a judge in the First Judicial District. Tim Pawlenty entered politics through service on the Eagan City Council before being elected to the Minnesota State House of Representatives in 1992. He served 10 years as a legislator, including four as House Majority Leader, before being elected Governor in 2002.

Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty grew up in South St. Paul and graduated from South St. Paul High School before going on to the University of Minnesota and obtaining his law degree. He was elected Governor in 2002.
Harold E. Stassen, on the left, is pictured with the Queen of Snows from the Winter Carnival, seated, and with Harold LeVander on the right. The photo was taken at a South St. Paul Hook ‘Em Cow banquet at Southview Country Club in the 1930s. Both men were South St. Paul attorneys, city residents and civic activists before and during their years as Governor of Minnesota. Harold Stassen was Governor from 1938-1943 and Harold LeVander from 1967-1971.
Hidden History - What Did that House Used to Be?
December 2005
By Lois Glewwe

In a relatively small geographical area like South St. Paul, buildings, streets, natural land formations and houses often undergo changes and alterations that give them completely new identities over the passing of more than 150 years of history. In the South St. Paul Voice of October 2005, I wrote about the Kochendorfer house on 19th Avenue North as the oldest building in the city. It stands exactly on the same site and appears almost as it looked when it was built in 1876.

Other buildings hide history behind renovated facades or have been moved from their original sites, making it more difficult to trace their roots in our community heritage. One of those buildings is Patricia Nida’s house at 109 11th Avenue North.

Today the house is nearly hidden behind a lofty pine and attracts no significant attention from passersby. At least portions of the current home, however, are alleged to be part of the humble log cabin built in 1856 by pioneer Paul Hartnagel and his wife Susanna. The Hartnagel came to America from Germany in 1853, and arrived in the area around what is now South St. Paul that same year. In 1854, when the land transfers specified by the Treaty of 1851 were enacted, it became legal for white settlers to lay claim to land on the west side of the Mississippi River and Paul Hartnagel was one of the earliest settlers to build a cabin on the site.

It was a perfect spot to establish a new future. Close to the original site of the cabin, on what is now the north side of Marie Avenue between 10th and 11th Avenue South, one of the area’s most abundant natural springs flowed freely. The native people of the area had used the spring as a source of drinking water for years and as white settlers arrived in the area, the Hartnagel homestead became one of the few places to find fresh water on the bluffs above the river.

Marie Avenue in those early years was one of the Indians’ favored routes to Fort Snelling and travelers to and from Hastings and Mendota to the Mississippi used the road. Early histories also indicate that a group of traveling Indians would occasionally set up a teepee near the spring next to the Hartnagels’ cabin and stay for some time.

Emily Hartnagel, who was born in 1852, grew up in the log cabin and married Josiah Kocher in 1868. The couple established their own home in the pioneer cabin and Emily recalled for early historians how the family always kept a tin of cookies on hand for the Dakota travelers as they made their way to the fort. Emily and Josiah Kocher had two sons, John Kocher, who worked for the railroad in South St. Paul, and Dr. William Kocher, who was a well-known veterinarian in the city. John Kocher raised his family on 13th Avenue North, but William, who married Maud Ralson in 1916, remained in the home on 11th Avenue North. William’s aunt, Alice Hartnagel Engle, lived with the family until her death in 1926, and William’s widow Maud was still the owner of the home in 1949, nearly 100 years after the Hartnagels had arrived in the area.
At some point in the long history of this heritage home, 11th Avenue North was graded for a city street and the house was moved to the west where it is located today. The famous spring, which was covered over when the City of South St. Paul began to provide public water service to the community in 1903, came close to erupting when construction workers began digging the foundation of the medical office building which was constructed on the site nearly five decades later.

In 1960, Olga McQuerry purchased the home at 109 11th Avenue North and her daughter, Patricia Nida, subsequently raised her own three children in the historic home. No one in today’s busy community would ever recognize the house as a historic landmark, but hidden behind its modern stucco façade are the memories of a pioneer family who made their home here in the earliest years of South St. Paul’s history.

The log cabin pictured here was built in 1856 by Paul and Susanna Hartnagel and at least portions of the walls and foundation of their humble home are said to be part of the house that stands today at 109 11th Avenue North in South St. Paul. The Hartnagel family dog is pictured in this early photo with, left to right, Arthur, William, Edward and Theodore Hartnagel.
The house has undergone significant renovations in the past 150 years. In the 1940s, it looked as it does here with a front porch, fenced hard and gabled roof. Patricia Nida, whose family has owned the house since 1960, recalls being told that the house was moved from the center of 11th Avenue North to its current site when 11th Avenue North became a graded city street in the early years of the 20th century.
Many South St. Paul residents begin their morning with a stop at The Coffee Exchange. The little red brick building at 234 South Concord Exchange seems to have occupied its charming corner for decades. With its white picket fence and friendly outdoor café area, the establishment is popular with customers and neighboring business owners.

Inside, the aroma of fresh-baked bread and a variety of hot beverages wafts over the shiny countertop as patrons enjoy looking at the old-time photos on the wall. For many, a glance at one of those pictures is the first clue that this building had a long life before it anchored this bustling corner of South St. Paul.

In the photo, the little building is at the heart of South St. Paul’s first industrial area at 818 North Concord, several blocks away from its current location. The name of the business is prominently displayed above the entrance as the So. Park Foundry and Machine Company.

How did the old foundry office become a coffee shop? The story involves several businesses, community leaders and innovative thinkers who had a desire to save South St. Paul’s historic buildings.

The tale begins with Charles W. Clark, founder of South Park, that region of the city that extended from Wentworth to Simon’s Ravine (now Kaposia Park). Clark came to this area of Minnesota in 1886, when it was part of West St. Paul Township, and established his own community at Bryant and Concord. Clark was a realtor from St. Paul and he saw his land along the Mississippi River as the perfect site for industry, especially for manufacturing. In order to encourage successful and speedy development, Clark approached several national manufacturing firms with offers of free land in exchange for their establishment of new buildings and new jobs in Clark’s community.

The South Park Bolt and Bridge Works, later known as the South Park Foundry, was established in South Park in 1886. They built the little red brick structure now known as The Coffee Exchange that same year. Charles Clark served on the board of the Foundry and was instrumental in attracting other businesses to South Park including the Holland and Thompson Manufacturing Company from Troy, NY; the Warner and Hough Machine Company of St. Paul; and the Waterous Engine Works Company from Brantford, Ontario. (In 2006, Waterous is South St. Paul’s largest employer.)

The various industries established by Charles Clark on the waterfront north of Wentworth were a good counterpart to Alpheus Stickney’s stockyard operations which were established to the south during the same timeframe. Over time, the various ironworks companies established in the late 1800s merged to become the South Park Foundry in 1893 and all of the firm’s operations were consolidated at the little red brick office building in 1911.
Six years later, in 1917. Charles Bester founded Bester Brothers Moving and Storage Company in the yards of the Foundry. The business of moving was a good fit for the South Park Foundry which remained as one of South St. Paul’s largest employers until 1948. Bester Brothers moved their office into the foundry building and ran a rapidly growing and expanding business out of the little brick structure until 1995. Bester Brothers moved to South St. Paul’s new Bridgepoint industrial park that year and continues in operation at that location today.

The little foundry office building stood vacant after Bester Brothers relocated and city leaders and citizens interested in historic preservation expressed concern about what would become of the office building. Many were aware of its historic significance, but it stood on a piece of land that was a valued location for new development. The South St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority bought the former Bester property, including the little red brick building, in the late 1990s and began to prepare to develop the site.

It was at that time that Jim Kamish decided to do what he could to preserve the foundry office building. He purchased the structure and moved it to South Concord Exchange. Kamish opened it as a coffee shop in 1999 and sold the business to current owner Lisa Bridges, who opened The Coffee Exchange on July 27, 2004. Jim Kamish told her about the history of the building and encouraged her to keep and display the many historic photos that adorn the walls of the popular coffee shop.

So it is that in 2006, 120 years after it was built as one of the city’s first office structures, the little foundry building welcomes a diverse and thoroughly modern clientele to enjoy homemade pastries, sandwiches, coffee and tea.
The Coffee Exchange at 234 South Concord Exchange in South St. Paul is one of the city’s oldest buildings. Erected as the office for the South Park Bolt and Bridge Works in 1886, the little red brick structure has been moved, renovated and transformed several times in its 120-year history.

Charles W. Clark established the South Park Bolt and Bridge Works at 818 North Concord Street in South Park in 1886. Later known as the South Park Foundry, the business was one of the city’s largest employers until 1948. The office for the foundry was headquarters for Bester Brothers Moving and Storage as of 1917 and is known today as a modern coffee spot, complete with drive-through window, for area workers and residents.
The House that Disappeared
February 2006
By Lois Glewwe

In recent issues of The South St. Paul Voice I have written about hidden history sites in the community, structures that are among the oldest in the county but which have been transformed, moved or renovated and are no longer recognizable as important historic landmarks. Among those that we’ve talked about are the Hartnagel log cabin and the South Park Foundry Office Building. In this issue, we will discuss the history of the house that disappeared.

From 1880 until 1988, the southwest corner of Dale Place and Concord Street in South St. Paul was the site of an imposing gabled home that F.M. Libby built on the farm where his wife Harriet and her first husband, Sylvester Cook, had lived since 1850. Today the corner is owned by Dan Grevas, whose Photography Studio was built on the property in 1995, and the historic 1880 home is no longer there.

The story of the house and the corner it occupied begins in 1848 when Sylvester Cook came to the Dakota village of Kaposia as a teacher at the Dakota Mission. There he met and married another teacher, Harriet Newell Pettijohn. Their daughter Luella, born in 1851, was one of the first white children born in the area that would become South St. Paul.

Harriet Cook, who was from the prominent Pettijohn family of the Ohio River Valley, was given several acres at the corner of what is now Dale Place and Concord in South St. Paul by her brother Jerome Pettijohn in exchange for some acreage she owned in Ohio. The Cooks settled on their new farm and had four more children before Sylvester Cook died at the age of 33 years on December 22, 1858, leaving Harriet a widow with a huge farm to manage and five small children to raise.

Harriet married Furber M. Libby, a settler from Canada, in about 1861, and they had three children of their own. Libby became a prominent and successful area farmer and in 1880, he built Harriet a substantial two-story brick home on their property. The Cook and Libby children grew up, married and began to raise their own families. The house remained in the family until 1912.

By that time, Concord Street was home to dozens of businesses and boarding houses as the livestock industry attracted hundreds of newcomers to the community. The Libby House, by then identified as 1106 South Concord, remained a private residence and although its attractive stucco and matching shutters disguised its origins as a brick farmhouse, the distinctive gabled roof revealed its identity.

Over time the area around the house continued to change. The property immediately to the north of the house became the home of the Golden Steer in 1959, a popular area dining establishment for more than 30 years. Additional development in the area brought commercial and industrial facilities to the neighborhood as the city’s economic base grew.
and diversified. During South St. Paul’s celebration of its 100-Year Centennial Celebration in 1987, the Cook/Libby house became a stop on history bus tours and was often mentioned as one of the oldest structures still in use as a residence in the area.

Then quite suddenly one day the house was gone and the corner was available for new business development. A few months later while I was driving on South Concord in Inver Grove Heights, I suddenly stopped my car in amazement - there it was - the house from Dale Place, right across from Kamish’s in Inver Grove, looking as though it had been there forever. It was history recovered and a fun find for a local historian.

The old home, with its rich history of South St. Paul’s earliest residents, was purchased and moved to a vacant lot on South Concord in April 1988. In one of those interesting twists of fate, the original inhabitants of the property and the house, Sylvester Cook, Harriet Cook Libby and Furber M. Libby, are buried in the old Union Cemetery in Inver Grove, just up the hill overlooking the site where their historic home stands today.

This photo, taken in the late 1880s, includes the two-story brick home built by F.M. Libby for his wife Harriet on what eventually became the southwest corner of Dale Place and Concord in South St. Paul. The house, built in 1880, remained on the site until April 1988.
**Libby House 2006:**
Today the Libby home, one of the oldest continuously occupied residences in the area, still stands at its new location on South Concord in Inver Grove Heights.
March 2nd marks the 119th anniversary of the official acceptance of the charter that created the City of South St. Paul in 1887. Today’s area residents are familiar with the name and with West St. Paul and North St. Paul, other cities that chose to align themselves with the capitol city of St. Paul rather than with something unique or characteristic of their location.

In the case of South St. Paul, however, the city came close to being known by at least two other distinctive names in the years prior to 1887.

From approximately 1826 to 1852, the northern portion of what is today South St. Paul was known as Kaposia, the main village of a successive line of Mdewakanton Dakota chiefs known as Little Crow by the whites.

When the Dakota were forced to move to western Minnesota, Jane Williamson, a Presbyterian missionary and teacher, filed a claim of ownership on the Williamson mission house at Kaposia as well as the surrounding acreage in 1852. Some historical records indicate that Jane, a single woman, adopted two orphaned Mdewakanton children in order to be identified as a head of household and thus able to legally own property. By the fall of 1852, however, the Williamsons had moved up to Yellow Medicine where their new mission was built near the relocated villages of the Dakota.

On March 29, 1853, Jane Williamson wrote a letter to Andrew Robertson, a government farmer still living in the area of the Kaposia village. Mr. Robertson had lived in the area since 1837 but was also about to follow the Dakota to the west. Jane wrote: “You will find me ever willing to cooperate in your plans for the improvement of the village. I shall cheerfully bear my proportion of the expense of having it laid off into lots, whenever it may be deemed expedient to do so. I shall consider it a privilege to make a donation of whatever lot may be considered the most suitable site for church or schoolhouse. Ought not the place to be surveyed? If so, please have it done. Were it not for the hope of having you nearer, and the interest we feel for the Dakotas, I should be sorry to hear you are thinking of leaving (must I say Saint Andrews? Pardon me when I say I should prefer Kaposia, Dakotaville, or something to continue the memory of the poor Indian) but it does seem very desirable that as many vacancies as practicable be filled with men who regard the interest of the poor Dakota.”

Saint Andrews? It is likely that Mr. Robertson, who had been in the area longer than nearly any other white settler, was preparing to name the new town site after himself. Jane Williamson needed him to keep an eye on her property and later in the letter directs him to contact attorney Henry Masterson in St. Paul who will protect her holdings once the Robertsons come west. Undoubtedly she was appalled to think that he was going to
name the town after himself but she had to withhold strong judgment since she needed
his assistance in taking care of business in St. Paul.

Apparently nothing came of the Saint Andrews township and Jane Williamson sold the
Kaposia site to Franklin Steele for $3,000 in 1856. Steele was a brother-in-law of Henry
Sibley, Minnesota’s governor, and is renowned in Territorial history for wheeling and
dealing his way into ownership of most of what became the City of Minneapolis.

The next owner of the site of the Kaposia Village was Addis E. Messenger who had
arrived in the area in 1853. He filed a pre-emption claim against Franklin Steele for the
Kaposia Village property and was successful in gaining ownership. Messenger and his
partner Sherwood Hough of St. Paul filed a patent for a new town site on the land and
called it Kaposia. The new town was divided into forty-two blocks, with each lot
measuring 50 feet by 150 feet. Five streets were platted running north and south and 10
streets running east and west. Several lots were sold and efforts were made to improve
the site and establish a new city. The town of Kaposia exists on Minnesota maps from
1858 until 1878 when the site was officially vacated.

It was another eight years before anything occurred to change the identification of the
little river town. The next name change happened in 1887 when a group of local
businessmen and farmers approached the Minnesota legislature with a request that the old
West St. Paul Township be incorporated as an official city with the name of South St.
Paul. Thus it is that the current city is not Kaposia, Dakotaville or Saint Andrews, but
simply and forever South St. Paul.

The City of South St. Paul was established in March 1887 and the first city hall was built
on the top of the Grand Avenue hill in 1890. The building, pictured here in about 1942,
was demolished in the early 1950s and replaced with the current Municipal Building.
Today the site is Lawshe Park, named for the founder of the Dakota County Historical Society.
Hidden History - Under Our Feet
April 2006
By Lois Glewwe

It has been several years since local newspapers in South St. Paul were able to proclaim the discovery of human skeletons when crews were breaking ground for roadways, buildings and housing developments. For generations of South St. Paul residents between the 1880s and 1950s, however, the unintentional excavation of the bones of long-deceased native people was a common occurrence.

Whose bones were being discovered? The most well-known band of Dakota that lived in South St. Paul were the Kaposia Mdewakanton, who made their home on the west side of the Mississippi from about 1826-1853. They used burial scaffolds atop the bluffs above the Mississippi River to honor their dead and ultimately interred those bodies in the remains of prehistoric burial mounds after their time of grieving.

Maps of burial mounds of the city published in 1911 document the fact that dozens of large burial mounds from 1,000 to 800 years ago existed atop the bluffs. The early people who created these mounds were not ancestors of the Dakota who lived in Kaposia in the 19th century but were descendants of the prehistoric aboriginal population of the Upper Midwest who roamed the area thousands of years ago.

Once the Dakota sold their land in 1851 and were relocated to the west, the white settlers who poured into Dakota County often simply plowed the mounds under after gathering a few arrowheads.

In South St. Paul, however, a small group of dedicated, interested and educated people felt strongly that the burial sites represented a heritage that needed to be honored and respected. Rather than ignoring the significance of the unearthed skeletons, several South St. Paul people stepped forward to create an official reburial site.

Among them were Charles Clark, founder of South Park at the city’s north end in 1886, was one of the most avid believers of this approach. He and Bernie Andrus, an early developer, preserved several skeletons unearthed by excavation. On October 19, 1938, bones from the graves that had been disturbed were re-interred at a funeral service atop the bluff on Highland Avenue overlooking the Central Avenue ravine where those bones were found. The site was appropriately marked with a bronze plaque mounted on a large boulder on the site.

In August 1958, more graves were unintentionally unearthed on Bryant Avenue during excavation. Joseph Klecatsky, founder and owner of the Southern Funeral Home in South St. Paul, came to the spot and immediately gathered the remains for the purposes of giving them an honored burial. Klecatsky reassembled the skeleton and a few weeks later, the individual was buried at the Highland Avenue site. The ceremony was attended
by descendants of Taoyateduta or Little Crow, who was the last chief of the Kaposia people at the South St. Paul location.

In 1974, Rein Werner, well-known local photographer and historian, wrote an article on the burial mounds of South St. Paul. (“Burial Places of the Aboriginals of Kaposia,” by Rein Werner, Minnesota Historical Society, 1974) He provided maps and drawings of eight locations throughout the city which either had been burial sites, or which he believed were still undisturbed mounds.

Werner documented a site with five mounds north of Bryant Avenue between Summit and Concord. It was excavated for the sale of sand and gravel in 1885 and contained the graves of 19th century Dakota as well as earlier peoples. It is now the site of the Summit Avenue Apartments.

Eleven mounds existed on the east side of Third Avenue across from the South St. Paul City Hall and were arranged in a row from Marie Avenue at 2nd Avenue to Southview Boulevard and First Avenue. This site is now the Dakota County Historical Society, the South St. Paul Library and residential properties.

In the south end of the city, three mounds were located off of Poplar Street above Concord and to the east of Henry between Spruce and Poplar. Another single mound existed to the east of Dale Street at Eldridge. This area is now Buron Lane and is a residential area.

For today’s area residents, the only place where one can visit and experience undisturbed mounds is Mounds Park in St. Paul. The early people who created those mounds are the same people whose burial sites once crested the bluffs from one end of South St. Paul to the other. Today their legacy to local residents has been hidden to history and lost for all time except in the humble, but well-intentioned efforts to honor them with a small monument atop one of the bluffs in the area they once called home.
The plaque on this stone on Highland Avenue in South St. Paul is placed in honor of the remains of aboriginal and Dakota people whose graves were discovered during excavation in the early years of the city. The unearthed bones were re-interred at this site in official ceremonies in 1938 and another in 1958. A series of burial mounds, erected approximately 1,000 years ago, once dominated the bluffs above the Mississippi River from Annapolis to South Street in South St. Paul.
A few weeks ago the City of South St. Paul learned that the stockyards property on the banks of the Mississippi had been sold and would soon be redeveloped for use as commercial/industrial space. The departure of the final vestiges of the stockyards industry marks the end of a significant period in the city’s history.

An equally dramatic change in South St. Paul’s history happened in the 1960s and 1970s when more than 100 buildings on Grand Avenue and Concord Street were demolished to make way for a new vision of what South St. Paul was to become. It has now been almost two generations since South St. Paul residents poured onto Concord Street to buy clothes, cars, groceries, or to stop to have lunch and a cold beer.

Today’s residents head east to what is now called Concord Exchange for only a few reasons - the Post Office, Globe Publishing, Valentino’s, Il Trevino, the liquor store and a handful of businesses which still exist on what used to be the old bustling downtown Concord Street “strip.”

As early as 1916, however, Concord Street in South St. Paul was one of the most economically successful and popular shopping areas for the entire Twin Cities. If we were to walk out of the South St. Paul Library in 1949 and head down the Grand Avenue hill toward Concord, we would encounter the following roster of diverse businesses:

106 Grand - Archie Perteet Cleaners
107 Grand - Myers Jewelers
108 Grand - Carmel Corn Shop
109 Grand - Gil’s Hotel
110 Grand - Stephen Theros Shoe Repair
111 Grand - Thomas Goswitz Optometrist
115 Grand - Kramer Realty Company, Irving Beaudoin Lawyer and Paul Thuet, Lawyer
203 Grand - Inter-City Automotive and Supply Company
204 Grand - William Carmody, Inc.
205 Grand - Joe’s Clothes
In the Schulte Building: Alf Joyce Lawyer and Delof Johnson, Physician; Grannis and Grannis attorneys; Family Service of St. Paul and Ralph Studios
206 Grand - South St. Paul Tobacco Company
209 Grand - Brown Cleaners and Dyers and Grand Shoe Repair
214 Grand - South St. Paul Fire Department
215 Grand - Hollywood Theater
217 Grand - Charles Lewis, Confectionery
222 Grand - Bessie Fitzgerald Beer
As we reached Concord Street, the following businesses would have been open:

112 Concord - Woog Recreation Bar and Café - bowling
118 Concord - Nord-Warner Company farm implements
119 Concord - George Bahner beer
120 Concord – Gamble’s Store
126 Concord - South St. Paul Tire & Battery
127 Concord – Coast-To-Coast Store
130 Concord - Mega Liquor Store
130 Concord - Theo Stevens Barber Shop
131 Concord - National Tea Company
132 Concord - Matt Gisch and Son Plumbers
134 Concord - Silver Inn Beer
133 Concord - Egkquist Bakeries
134-1/2 Concord - Glewwe Cab
135 Concord - Anderson Hardware and Paint Company
136 Concord - John’s Restaurant
137 Concord - Aaron Fryer Surplus Store
137-1/2 Concord - Alvin and Arthur Boelter, Barbers
138 Concord - Rogowski Clothing
139 Concord - Consumers Linoleum Company, King’s Hotel
140 Concord - Swanson’s Paints
141 Concord - Harris Jewelry and South St. Paul Camera Shop
142 Concord - Northern States Power Company
143 Concord - Lyle Olson Auto Supplies
144 Concord - Square Deal Market
145 Concord - Sears Roebuck & Co.
Anderson Building - George Christiansen Dentist; Burt Allan, Insurance; Choban and Wing Realty and Insurance, Fred Curtis Lawyer; Dakota County Veterans Service Office, John Kuntz and the County Welfare Board.
146 Concord - Stockyard Inn Liquors and Peter L. Liakos Restaurant
147 Concord - Brand Department Store
148 Concord - Salets Department Store
149-53 Concord - Grand Building with the Grand Furniture Company; Kelly LeVander & Gillen, Lawyers; Elmer Ryan, Lawyer; South St. Paul Civic and Commerce Association; Vavro School of Music and Dancing.
150 Concord - Hook 'Em Cow Bar and Café
150-1/2 - United Packinghouse Workers of America (CIO Local 167, Local 160 and Local 74
151 Concord - Gilbert Linnell Jeweler
When we reached the Exchange Building - now Valentino’s - over 70 companies would have been listed on the 1949 tenant list. Back on the street, we could stop by:

207 Concord - Agricultural Markets Publishing and Gillen’s Liquor Store
209 Concord - Green’s Drug Store
209-1/2 Concord - American Legion Dugout Club; Rupert Connor, Barber; and Mrs.
Marjorie Schwanz Beauty Shop
211 Concord - Globe Publishing Company
213 Concord - Blumenfeld Men’s Clothing
217 Concord - Evald Bakken Liquors and Log Cabin Restaurant
219 Concord - Ben’s Restaurant
221 Concord - Priebe Motor Service Filling Station and Rolle Insurance Agency
222 Concord - Jay Kline Chevrolet
227 Concord - Rocco’s Café
227-1/2 Concord - South St. Paul Hotel
229 Concord - Murray Barber Shop
231 Concord - South St. Paul War Surplus Center
233 Concord - Page’s Eat Shop
235 Concord - South St. Paul Daily Reporter
236 Concord - Federal Building
237 Concord - Motor Parts Service Company and Mady’s Bowling Center
241 Concord - M. Charlebois Sheet Metal
242 Concord - Chicago Great Western Railway Company - Freight Depot and Passenger Station
243 Concord - B&L Alignment Service
244 Concord - City Loan Company
245 Concord - Tupek’s Tavern
246 Concord - Gallivan’s Liquors
247 Concord - Country Kitchen
249 Concord - George Nicholoff Barber
250 Concord - Mrs. Rachel Hall, Barber and Donald Mattaini Liquors
251 Concord - Happy Jack’s Bar and Robert Bjeletich Furnished Rooms
253 Concord - Swan’s Liquors
255 Concord - Deerings Super Service Filling Station
We still haven’t even reached Wentworth on our imaginary stroll long Concord to the north. Another 49 business establishments are listed between Grand Avenue and Wentworth in 1949 and still another twenty or so businesses on Concord between Wentworth and Bryant. An additional 60-some businesses existed south of Grand Avenue on Concord.

Traffic on Concord Street in 1949 was bumper to bumper every week day and during the Saturday shopping period. Thousands of people from all over Dakota County poured into the city to shop. At one point over 80 liquor licenses were approved on the city license books.

Nearly all of these buildings, except for the Exchange Building, the Post Office, and Globe Publishing were razed during the most dramatic period of redevelopment that South St. Paul ever experienced. The reason for the demolition was to attract new expansive businesses with better facilities. Unfortunately, as both of the city’s major meatpacking plants closed during this same decade, South St. Paul was not able to attract the new businesses which were supposed to replace the old taverns and shops of the early 1900s. Today, 25 years after the last of the demolition projects, as South St. Paul says goodbye to the stockyards, the city is finally beginning to realize the benefits of diversifying its tax base. For many residents, however, this roster of businesses, bars and hotels will bring back memories of good old days that mark a memory and a time that will never be equaled in the city’s history.

It’s impossible for today’s South St. Paul residents to imagine Concord Street as it was in 1949. This photo, shot to the north from the old Exchange Building (Valentino’s) on the lower right, includes only a few of the dozens of businesses that once occupied South St. Paul’s downtown shopping district.
South St. Paul residents are proud of their public parks and the many recreation opportunities that are available for sports, picnics, leisurely walks, biking and even disc golf. Many people may not be aware of what a long and rich history the city has of preserving, protecting and promoting public land for the sole purpose of outdoor enjoyment.

The first Committee for Parks in South St. Paul was formed on July 8, 1905. One of the most significant accomplishments of the Committee was to recognize the city’s unusual topography and see the deep ravines and steep bluffs not as a handicap but as a natural wonder. One of the most dramatic areas extended along the Mississippi River from Butler Avenue south to the bend in the river north of Bryant Avenue. This area, once home to the Dakota families of Kaposia Village, was owned by John Simon in the early 1900s. Although the forested and hilly terrain was beautiful, it was not practical for farming or development. John Simon, born in 1844, was a Civil War veteran who came to what was then West St. Paul Township in 1870. He and his wife Anna had five children by 1895: W.B., Albert, Walter, Frank and Addie. In 1889, John Simon was elected to a three-year term as Alderman for the new City of South St. Paul.

At some point during the next few years, John Simon apparently sold or donated over 80 acres of the land he owned at the north end of South St. Paul to the City of South St. Paul. The Simon family is no longer listed in the area in subsequent U.S. Census reports but the area that current residents know as Kaposia Park continues to be called “Simon’s Ravine” by long-time city residents.

The plunging ravine and steep bluffs of the park opened half way up the Butler hill to a gently rolling plain that was a natural site for picnics and ball games. Children loved to play in the babbling brook that flowed from the west all the way to the Mississippi River. Many stories have been recorded over the years of mysterious assemblages of round stones in the shape of winding snakes and other animals that had been left behind by the Dakota people when they were relocated to the west in 1854.

By the mid-1930s, South St. Paul’s Parks Committee recognized that Kaposia Park was a valuable treasure. Through the federal Works Progress Administration program, South St. Paul was able to build a rustic but expansive and charming pavilion on the highest hill above the Kaposia Park Ravine. Dedicated on July 18, 1937, the pavilion has been the scene of hundreds of weddings, family reunions, Scout camp gatherings, family celebrations and even served as the first meeting place of St. John Vianney Catholic Church in 1946. Generations of South St. Paul children have raced across the weathered hardwood floor of the pavilion, shouting with joy as their cries echo across the broad ceiling. Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Campfire Kids, church groups and school classes have
gathered around tables in the vast pavilion to work on crafts on one of those days when rain forced campers inside. High school teens have attached themselves to the safe benches along the walls under the eaves waiting for that perfect partner to ask them to dance at summer sock hops. Families and friends recall perfect summer nights around one of the fire pits that adorn the park watching the flames, roasting marshmallows and imagining the silent night which seems to hold the mystery of the Dakota people who lived in these forests for so many years.

In 1990 the South St. Paul Celebrates 2000 Committee obtained state grant funding to replace the roof of the old pavilion and additional funds were solicited to repaint and restore much of the interior. R.E.A.P., the River Environmental Action Project, spent several summer seasons creating and mulching an extensive trail system through the ravine. The City Parks and Recreation Department installed the first of the now extensive disc golf courses in the early 1990s and hundreds of players now descend on the park every evening and weekend to wind their way through a magnificent natural backdrop to a challenging and fun sport.

Most recently, R.E.A.P. has commissioned an American Indian artist to create a commemorative sculpture that will be installed at the newest entrance to the park off of Concord just south of Butler at the Simon’s Ravine trailhead. Hundreds of memorial paver stones have been donated at $100 apiece by citizens and civic groups to add a historical element to the most recent improvement to Kaposia Park. Trails now allow hikers to walk the full length of the old Indian village from Thompson Park in West St. Paul all the way to the river on paved trails.

Kaposia Park is the jewel in a strong system of parks and summertime fun that the city’s founders brought into existence over 100 years ago. Enjoy that heritage this summer!
that dominates the bluffs above the old Kaposia Indian Village.
In June of 1976, South St. Paul residents were invited to be a part of the very first South St. Paul Kaposia Days. The festival, named in honor of the first Native American village located on the banks of the Mississippi River in the community, was one of the innovations that thousands of American communities embraced as part of the United States Bicentennial celebration. Darrol Bussler, founder of the Kaposia Days festival, re-introduced the community to its riverfront and rejuvenated its spirit for the first time in many years. The innovations that were brought to the forefront for the Bicentennial led to more than 20 years of civic action in terms of reclaiming the river for the people of the community and enhancing South St. Paul’s awareness of its heritage.

Many of those Bicentennial events that cities produced in 1976 no longer exist, but South St. Paul has continued to expand and embrace its summer festival of fireworks, softball, cheese curds and of course, the traditional parade with bands, floats, politicians, beauty queens, clowns and candy.

South St. Paul is no stranger to festivals. The city has enjoyed generations of summer events that were designed to promote the city’s business community while also providing recreation and entertainment for residents. One of the earliest events that brought the community together to celebrate was the Junior Livestock Show. Established in 1918, right after the end of the First World War, the show brought 4-H youngsters to town every year until 1965 when the event was moved to the state fair grounds. Hundreds of future farmers and livestock growers won awards and auctioned off prize-winning cattle. Lambs and hogs were added to beeves in competition in 1919 with poultry welcomed for the first time in 1924. The only time the show was cancelled was in 1946 when a polio epidemic made the assembly too dangerous for the youngsters.

In 1939, South St. Paul became home to another annual festival, the South St. Paul Stampede, which was held on the July 4th weekend. Billed as “the biggest rodeo in the Midwest,” the event featured local rodeo riders like the Keene brothers.

In 1950s, civic groups came together to revive the traditions of the Hook ‘Em Cows and Hook ‘Em Cow Days were celebrated with parades on Concord Street, auctioning of the largest steer and neighborhood parties throughout the city.

In 1987, South St. Paul was 100 years old and from January-December of that year, the city celebrated its heritage with more than 20 public events. A birthday party in March 1987 at City Hall included blowing the old Swift & Company shift whistle for the first time in nearly 25 years. Kaposia Days that year included the return of the 1937 Ahrens-Fox fire truck which had been preserved by a collector in Ohio who brought it back for the Kaposia Days parade. In August, over 14,000 South St. Paul High School graduates
were invited back to town for a three-day All-Class, All-City, All-Family Reunion that culminated in a Family Parade with floats, convertibles and marching units celebrating those whose ancestors had been in the community for 100 years. The final event of the year was the New Year’s Eve Ball at the Dakota County Museum where people dressed in costumes from the past and danced to a century of South St. Paul music.

Community celebrations like the Centennial or Kaposia Days, are not only fun for families and residents but provide a community with the opportunity to create memories that include both the resonance of a city’s past and the potential for a community’s future. When generations of residents gather on a street corner to watch a parade, they exchange smiles, laughter, and jokes as they juggle for curb space. In South St. Paul, those juggling for room on the parade route in 1918 included Serbians, Croatians, Romanians and those who had been in the area for years. In 2006, those juggling for space on the parade route will include Hispanics, Somalis, Laotians and again, those who have been in the area for years. A parade, a celebration, a summer event - it’s all meant to bring us together in celebration of what hometown means.

South St. Paul has always been a supporter of civic festival, parades and events. This photo, taken on Concord Street in front of the old Exchange Building, is of the Hook ‘Em Cow Days Parade in 1954. For the past 30 years, South St. Paul has celebrated Kaposia Days, an offshoot of the civic pride and loyalty that has encouraged volunteers to produce public celebrations since the city was founded.
Armour & Company
From Gates to Prosperity to Gates of Memory…
August 2006
By Lois Glewwe

In recent weeks, the South St. Paul City Council approved plans for a new business development area within Bridgepoint Park along the city’s riverfront. As part of that plan the old Armour Gates on Armour Avenue west of Hardman will be saved and incorporated as part of the new development.

For many South St. Paul residents, the red stone structures recall memories of the days when over 3,000 workers a day entered the Armour & Company meatpacking plant by walking or driving past those humble stone pillars. Further to the north, the Swift & Company gates at Grand Avenue marked the entrance to work for another 3,000 workers who headed to South St. Paul’s meatpacking mecca every day for more than 70 years.

As early as 1897, the year that Swift’s opened their expansive and impressive slaughterhouse and packing plant in South St. Paul, Armour’s was being courted by Minnesota packers. New Brighton stockyards owners tried to get them to come to their city, but the local residents complained of the stench and did not support expansion of the meatpacking industry in their community. Nine years later, in 1906, General Mark D. Flowers of the St. Paul Union Stockyards Company offered Armour & Company $1M in shares of common stock, $500,00 in bonds plus 20 acres of land in the stockyards if they would come to South St. Paul.

Armour’s did not accept the offer but a few years later the threat of war in Europe, prompted by the overtures to what became World War I, made it necessary for America to address the problem of feeding what could be thousands of American troops abroad. Armour’s was offered federal subsidies to expand and the stockyards in South St. Paul were a natural choice for that growth. In 1915, Armour & Company began building its massive four-story plant at the South St. Paul stockyards, opening for business in 1919.

For the next 60 years, the Armour & Company plant was proclaimed worldwide as the most modern meatpacking plant in the world. From the bloody floors of the slaughterhouse to the sterile tables of the packaging plant, Armour’s competed every day with Swift’s for production numbers and sales figures. The two plants combined employed between 6,000 to 8,000 workers on any given day by the 1940s when WWII production resulted in 24-hour round-the-clock operation in order to feed the country and the troops.

Two products, Swift & Company’s Prem and Armour & Company’s Spam were shipped all over the world to the armed forces during WWII. Some commentators reported that because of those two products, manufactured in South St. Paul, Minnesota, American troops were the strongest and most powerful of any in the world during those dark and
difficult times. The domestic economy also flourished and by the end of the war, South St. Paul was positioned for growth and stability as the exciting and modern world of America in the 1950s lay ahead.

It was not until the early 1960s that the entire livestock industry began to face impending change. Growers in Montana and further west no longer saw the need to ship truckloads of cattle to the east and began to establish regional packing plants in their own agricultural areas. The same thing began to happen to the cattle growers around Chicago and over time, the need for huge, centrally located slaughter and packing operations was no longer viable.

Swift’s was the first to go, closing its doors in 1969. Ten years later the last shift exited the work floor at Armour’s and the massive old plant stood silent and empty, useless to a changing economy. Hardman Avenue was moved to the east; the future of the city began to move from heavy industry to diversified commercial and manufacturing, and for a decade the rising towers and empty slaughterhouse floors of Armour & Company were victims of both vandals and potential developers who saw the 40 acres of riverfront property as a potential boon to the city.

In 1989, the city was finally able to obtain ownership of the plant and the wrecking ball hit, marking the move toward a new use for the Armour’s site. The main location of the plant remains on the market today but it is now surrounded by vibrant, healthy, growing industries which bear little resemblance to the livestock industry. Even as that growth continues, the lofty, powerful brick gateposts of the old plant stand an appropriate vigil over the place where so much of South St. Paul’s history began.
The 1919 Armour & Company gates are pictured above surrounded by the modern day disruption of new construction. In recent weeks, the South St. Paul City Council has opted to save the old stone pillars as part of a new industrial development to be located on the site of Armour & Company which was a major employer in the city from 1919 to 1979.
As South St. Paul High School students return to classrooms this month, they will be reminded of the fact that the Class of 2007 is the 100th graduating class - a centennial celebration that most Minnesota school districts will not experience for years to come. Throughout this school year, we will look back on the history of South St. Paul Schools, particularly its High School, as we celebrate this landmark year.

In 1907, South St. Paul was just beginning to blossom as an economically viable river town with a solid commercial and industrial base. The city had been incorporated 20 years earlier and had survived the loss of half of it land base and most of its school facilities when an argument caused a complete split in the city. Half of the elected officials walked out and formed the City of West St. Paul in 1889. The community had also survived the serious threat of annexation by the City of St. Paul that arose in 1891 because of accusations of corruption linked to bankrupt South St. Paul city coffers.

South St. Paul came through these challenges by closing ranks, joining hands and concentrating on the growth of the livestock market by welcoming the bankers and the commission firms who were part of that industry. The city leaders had worked to establish a commercial base which produced more than 80 bars on Concord Street by the early 1900s. Those establishments served the needs of dozens of boarding house residents and slaughterhouse workers who arrived alone and lonely from the poverty of Central and Eastern Europe in the years prior to WWI.

Beyond the growth of the Concord Street “strip,” however, was the growth of South St. Paul as an educational and civic leader in Dakota County. With its rapidly growing population, significant employment opportunities and the promise of expansion of the meatpacking industry as rumors of Armour & Company’s imminent arrival spread, South St. Paul was one of the most prominent cities of Dakota County in 1907.

For local families, the education of their children had always been one of the most important goals of their life in the city of South St. Paul. The very first public, i.e., non-missionary, school in the city, was established at the site of the former home of the Kaposia band of Mdewakanton Dakota people in the home of John Aiton in 1853. When South St. Paul was incorporated in 1887, the new city council was pleased to hire Christian Zinck to construct five new schoolhouses throughout the city. The first superintendent was hired in April of 1887 and by November of that year the new schools were named, dedicated and ready for students.

The structure of American society in those years meant, however, that it was extremely rare for a child of working class or middle class parents to attend school beyond 8th grade. Most boys went to work by the age of 13 or 14 and even girls could find viable employment before they reached their teens, often in family-owned businesses.
Just as the livestock industry influenced other aspects of South St. Paul’s development for generations, it was the presence of wealthy commission men, powerful bankers and others who had come to the city to profit from the livestock industry which made it possible for South St. Paul to open a public high school decades before any of its neighboring communities.

Because of the donations of those wealthy men, and largely due to their influence on the politicians of the time, South St. Paul began construction on one of the most modern high schools of the day in 1905 and opened the doors to students on January 23, 1907.

The first class of South St. Paul graduates consisted of four young women from well-known and prominent families in the city. Over the next five decades, however, South St. Paul High School opened its doors to thousands of students not only from the local community but also from West St. Paul, Mendota and Inver Grove. The 2007 centennial celebration of our high school is not only commemoration of a century of education, but also cause for South St. Paul residents to reflect once again on the model of civic leadership that our city projected for all of the townships and villages in Dakota County.

Four young women made up the first graduating class of South St. Paul High School and six years later, the senior class of 1913, pictured above, continued to include only girls. Many women attended high school because one of the most common professions open to them was teaching, a job which required a high school education. Most boys, unless from wealthy families, went to work by the age of 13 or 14 in the years prior to the First World War. It wasn’t until the 1920s that young men were encouraged to complete their high
school education and go on to college or university. The 1913 class above is pictured with School Superintendent D.E. Hickey. Although not identified in this photo, the graduating class of 1913 included Florence Amundson, Ethel Brown, Mary Dorzinski, Mabel Hallberg, Margaret Kelly, Anna Manning, Elizabeth McDonnell, Marie McDonough, Vivian Rich and Lillian Weir. One young man, Milton Joyce, graduated but didn’t show up for the class photo.
“On the Road” in the Good Old Days
October 2006
By Lois Glewwe

The roads of South St. Paul will be filled with strolling festival-goers as the annual “On the Road Again” festival once again brings booya and beer to Southview Boulevard on October 7. The “road” we celebrate on the first Saturday in October is Southview Boulevard, a name the stretch of street has claimed since the earliest days of the city in 1887. One block to the north is Marie Avenue, always the dividing line between the north and south house numbering system, but originally known as Maria Avenue in 1888.

Besides those two well-known thoroughfares, however, today’s residents would be hard pressed to find their way around if only the original street and avenue names were given. To find South St. Paul High School, for example students would need to head for Prospect (Second Street North) and Leicester (Seventh Avenue North), and in order to locate the current School District offices, people would be looking for Westminster at Maria (Marie & Fifth Avenue).

It was the South St. Paul Commercial Club that convinced the City Council to apply a uniform numbering system to the streets that ran north and south in 1909. Beginning with the former Langley Avenue at the edge of the bluff, the city simply numbered the avenues from 1st to 23rd. The streets were also renamed, with the old Augusta re-identified as 2nd Street South and other names changed both to the north and south of Marie Avenue.

Early city leaders needed to apply order to the free-flowing Indian trails which were once the only identifiable pathways through the area that became South St. Paul. When the first white settlers arrived to stake their claims on the bluffs above the Mississippi, the St. Paul Hastings Road was one of three marked roadways. Now known as Concord Street, the old dirt trail had carried traffic from St. Paul to Hastings since the early 1800s.

Another winding path, known as Hartnagel Road, extended from the river up what is today the Grand Avenue hill to Marie Avenue and out across the fields to Oakdale and beyond. This was a Mdewakanton Dakota trail that was the only overland path to Fort Snelling in Mendota. Another of the oldest routes is today identified as Bryant Avenue. It was on this steep pathway that Big Thunder, the chief of the Kaposia band, was killed when he followed his horse cart up this hill in 1846 and was struck by a bullet misfired from his own rifle which was lying in the back of the wagon.

The earliest buildings and development in South St. Paul took place on Concord Street between Wentworth and Butler. The street names in that neighborhood, then known as South Park, have for the most part remained unchanged since 1887. It was in the relatively new development of the central part of the city that the early names such as Luverne, Sibley, Marshall, Wabash and Clifford were replaced with more practical numerical designations.
In addition to name changes, of course, today’s city streets bear little similarity to the dusty dirt ruts that crisscrossed the community. It was not until the 1920s that any roads were graded with machinery and not until the late 1920s that Concord and Grand became the first tarred streets in the city. The speed limit on the old Concord Street, because of dust and danger, was eight miles an hour in the 1920s. One of the most common sights on the old Concord Street was the water wagon, a horse-drawn cart that carried a huge tank of water covered with punched holes that released water onto the dusty roadway to make it possible for automobiles to navigate the soft dirt roads.

In the 1950s, yet another challenge concerning city roads faced the city hall officials. With the creation of Oak Park, the completely modern suburban community that Mike Kassan and others began to build on the old farmland north of 21st Avenue, city leaders once again confronted winding roadways that didn’t lead from north to south but wound their way through a lovely but unusual pattern that earned it the name “Tangle Town.” The developers had the right to name their own streets and city leaders could only be grateful that at least the names of daughters, cousins, wives, brothers and parents such as Earl and Caroline, were laid out in alphabetical order!
Thousands of city residents and visitors will gather on Southview Boulevard to enjoy the 2006 “On the Road Again” festival. Few will remember when the main site of the festival between 11th Avenue and 14th Avenue on the south side of Southview was Waldhauser Lake, pictured above in the early 1930s. It wasn’t until after World War II that this area was filled in and developed for commercial and residential use. “On the Road” in those days would more aptly be named “On the Water.”
When this year’s South St. Paul High School senior class members receive their diplomas in June of 2007, they will become the 100th graduating class to receive that distinction. An exhibit of photos and memorabilia highlighting the school’s history has been installed at South St. Paul High School. (It is open to the public and well worth the visit. Visitors are asked to stop by the office to sign in before being directed to the hallway outside of the auditorium to view the exhibit.)

The display captures the changes in society, culture and community over the past ten decades. It also prompts some long-time residents and high school alumni to reflect upon how other things really don’t change very much. South St. Paul High School still produces great hockey teams, outstanding speech and debate students, remarkable test scores and scholarship winning students who go on to achieve excellence throughout their lives.

One aspect of South St. Paul High School history that isn’t covered in the exhibit is the partnership of the High School and the South St. Paul Americanization Council during the years from 1919 until the beginning of World War II. The Council was founded by High School Principal William Scott, sponsored by many South St. Paul businesses and backed by School Superintendent D.E. Hickey.

The purpose of the Council was to provide an opportunity for immigrants to America attend night classes at the High School where they were taught to speak, read and write English. They were also given copies of the citizenship examination and taught enough history to enable them to be successful in obtaining their citizenship papers. By 1922, twenty-one nationalities were represented in the classes and hundreds of adults achieved not only their citizenship but high school equivalency degrees as well.

South St. Paul has been a city of immigrants since its founding in 1887. The population figures of 1895 record 2,135 residents, 904 (42%) of whom had been born somewhere outside of the United States. The majority were Germans, with 1895 figures totaling 409 for that group. Swedish immigrants numbered 201; with 40 Norwegians and 10 Danish listed. One hundred Irishmen were in the listing along with 45 English immigrants and 11 Scots.

By 1905, just ten years later, the total population was 3,458 with 2,108 (60%) listed as foreign born. The most significant change in the numbers by this time reflected the arrival of three new groups - 42 people from Poland; 11 from Bohemia and 9 from Austria. Twenty-five years later, in 1930, the number of immigrants from Romania, Poland, Yugoslavia and Austria helped increase the city’s population to 10,009.
Although it was the availability of employment in South St. Paul’s rapidly growing livestock industry that attracted the newcomers, it was their desire to build a new life in America that prompted them to immediately send their children to school and to seek an education and citizenship for themselves and their families. After putting in long, backbreaking days at the meatpacking plants, the adults in the family would assemble at the High School after dinner to face the challenges of learning a new language and adapting to the expectations of life in America.

Each year during the 1920 and 1930s, an Americanization Dinner to honor the new citizens was held at the high school. Sponsored by local businesses, including the meatpacking plants and commission firms who employed so many of the newly arrived workers, the event often featured a meal prepared by the “Domestic Science” class (later known as Home Economics). The Mayor would speak on behalf of the City to welcome and congratulate the new Americans. Others in town provided table favors or gifts and musical groups from the countries represented in the citizenship class would perform.

In March of 1931 the celebration at the High School featured the Romanian Choir and Serbian Singers along with the Mexican Orchestra and the Croatian Orchestra. A German-Swiss Yodeler and an Irish Lassie performed as well as Bohemian Dancers, a German Trio and a Polish Singer. “The End of the Rainbow,” a dramatic skit in five scenes was also performed. It featured the journey of the immigrants from the time of their departure for America to their attainment of citizenship in South St. Paul.

Although American attitudes towards immigration and citizenship began to change shortly after the end of the Second World War, for South St. Paul residents, the living, breathing melting pot of culture, costume, language, politics and religion experienced in the community was the center of the city’s life. South St. Paul High School was the place where members of that melting pot looked to find the way to a successful future for their children. It remains the center of new life for newcomers from around the world who came to this town to build a new tomorrow. Some things really do never change.
In 1945, the South St. Paul High School year book published this photo of girls wearing the costumes of the various nationalities represented in South St. Paul. The girls are, front row, left to right: Eleanor Miller (Denmark); Vera Kruesel (Austria); Vlasta Janku (Bohemia); Victoria Palodichuk (Russia); Juliana Funari (Romania); Elena Bretoi (Romania); Darlene Nellis (England). Back row, left to right: Esperanza Gonzales (Mexico); Diana Vujovich (Serbia); Madeline Lulic (Croatia); Henrietta Buys (Holland); Ruth Stenstrom (Sweden); Dorothy La Motte (France); Caroline Popovich (Croatia).
Today’s South St. Paul High School students are preparing to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first graduating class of 1907. Although the high school was opened under the name Central High, it was built on the site of an earlier elementary school which was named for Alpheus B. Stickney, founder of the stockyards company in South St. Paul in 1886. The recognition of Stickney did not prevail when the school became simply South St. Paul High School in 1911, but it is of historic interest to note that both of South St. Paul’s neighboring communities, Inver Grove Heights and West St. Paul, named their schools for other famous “S” men.

Many current South St. Paul residents may not know that South St. Paul was the only one of the three cities to offer education beyond the 8th grade for many decades. West St. Paul did not have a high school until 1952 and graduated its first class in 1954. Inver Grove Township opened its first high school in 1959 and the first class of 19 graduates received their diplomas in 1961. By that time, South St. Paul High School had been welcoming high school students from West St. Paul, Inver Grove, Mendota and other area communities for 54 years.

Generations of farm families in what ultimately became the cities of Inver Grove Heights and Mendota Heights, as well as the Village of Sunfish Lake, often traveled many miles to bring students to the high school in South St. Paul. In the spring and fall, the teenagers would walk to class, but in the winter months, it was necessary for farmers to crank up the engine in an old truck, or perhaps even hitch the team to a sleigh in order to bring students into town for high school.

As World War II came to an end, South St. Paul, West St. Paul and Inver Grove experienced rapid economic growth and residential expansion as the returning troops embraced the image and success of the new American culture. No longer content to remain on the farm, the young families desired suburban style houses and access to shopping and entertainment. State school districting was implemented in 1948 and the new District 197 united the Mendota Heights, Mendota, Lilydale, Sunfish Lake and West St. Paul Districts with parts of Eagan and Inver Grove.

Inver Grove Township did not move as quickly as West St. Paul to open a high school, but it wasn’t long before the newly established District 199 brought students from Inver Grove Heights together in their own district. South St. Paul, because of its fully developed status by the early 1950s, was never aligned with any other city in terms of its district. Instead, it remains Special School District Number 6 with a shared city and school district boundary since the first one-room school opened in the city in 1887.
One of the most enduring symbols of the early partnership among South St. Paul, West St. Paul and Inver Grove, is evident in the naming of Inver Grove’s high school. I.T. Simley was the superintendent of South St. Paul High for 31 years from 1926 until 1957. A renowned educator who was the author of several textbooks, Simley was superintendent to generations of students from West St. Paul and Inver Grove. He became a consultant for Inver Grove Township when they began to talk about opening their own high school. His leadership was so successful that the community honored him by naming their high school after him although he never lived in the community and remained a South St. Paul resident and community leader throughout his life.

In West St. Paul, the naming of their high school in honor of Minnesota’s first governor, Henry Hastings Sibley, reflected the community’s long-time identity with the territorial fur trader. The first Sibley School in West St. Paul was built on Bernard Street in 1887. It was an elementary school until 1940 when it was used only for kindergarten and was finally demolished in 1964. The second Sibley School, a junior high, was built between Butler and Bernard at Bidwell in 1941. Ten years later construction began on the city’s first Sibley Senior High School on the same site. It was 1971 when the current Sibley High School was built near the northwest corner of Highway 110 and Delaware.
If South St. Paul residents had chosen to keep the name of Stickney School when the first high school opened in 1907, today’s Packers could be named after the gentleman pictured in the middle above. Alpheus Stickney was founder of the South St. Paul stockyards in 1886. West St. Paul named its first high school which opened in 1952, after Minnesota’s first governor, Henry Hastings Sibley at left. When Inver Grove established its first high school in 1959, it chose to honor I.T. Simley, pictured at right. Mr. Simley was superintendent of South St. Paul High School for 31 years.
For the past several months, history articles in *The South St. Paul Voice* have focused on the celebration of the 100th graduating class from South St. Paul High School in 2007. The students who will receive their diplomas in June live in a very different world than those first graduates of 1907 experienced. One aspect of high school life which has remained consistent throughout the century, however, is the prominent role the high school campus and its buildings have played as a gathering place for the community.

While hundreds of local residents have lived their entire lives in town without ever having a reason to visit City Hall, it is safe to say that nearly everyone throughout the past 10 decades in South St. Paul has been to the high school, or at least to the high school campus for an event or activity. Dance recitals, community theater performances, graduations, civic meetings, adult variety shows, award ceremonies, voting polls and even local beauty pageants have used the high school auditorium as their venue.

The first high school, which opened in 1907, was replaced with a new structure in 1911, and by 1917, additional expansion led to the opening of the first student cafeteria at the high school. One hot dish, such as soup, creamed potatoes or macaroni and cheese was offered to the 50 students who lived too far away to go home for lunch each day. In March of 1921, a $350,000 bond issue was passed which allowed the construction of a new junior high and another expansion of the high school. When the new addition opened in 1923, it was described in area papers as one of the best facilities in the state.

The natural ravine below what is now 4th Street North was a city dump until Sam Ettinger and a group of residents and school leaders brought together the resources to reclaim the site. Ettinger came to town in 1922 as athletic director and started the first South St. Paul High School football program that same year. The area formed a perfect arena for sporting events when it was cleared in 1930 and thousands of residents still gather there for summertime fireworks, spring graduation processions, softball tournaments and fall football games. In 1977, the football field was named in honor of Ettinger, who had remained as football coach until 1968.

It is remarkable that the civic and school leaders of 1930 were able to hold firm to their desire for an outstanding and sustainable structure when they began construction of the first high school auditorium. The country was in the throes of what is known as the Great Depression. Although meatpacking provided more secure employment than many other industries, most families in the city struggled through years of financial hardship. Still, in 1929, a 12-room recitation hall was added to the high school and by the spring of 1930, the impressive auditorium with its elaborate art deco panels over each portal was under construction.
Inside the foyer with its lofty ceilings and impressive detailing, people could view the work of local artist Helmer Lindbeck, who was commissioned by the Works Progress Administration in 1939 to adorn the walls with an original mural in the vibrant and powerful style of the American movement. Seating in the auditorium was as luxurious and elegant as any well-appointed area opera hall or theater. The floor sloped dramatically to the orchestra pit and thick velvet curtains spanned the impressive width of the stage. In every way, the South St. Paul High School Auditorium of 1930 was designed and erected to be the most impressive building in town.

The space provided a dramatic backdrop to the new immigrants who were called to the stage to receive their citizenship papers after weeks of attending night school in high school classrooms. More recently the community gathered in the auditorium after the South St. Paul Educational Foundation Walk-A-Thon to kick off this 100th anniversary celebration of the high school. Through the years the hall has been re-decorated, renovated, refreshed and finally air-conditioned about ten years ago. Little has changed, however, of the stage, the floor plan and the graciousness of the space.

The most recent renovations to the auditorium were completed under the latest referendum. Future generations of city residents will continue to enter the impressive space of the South St. Paul High School Auditorium, raise their eyes to the broad dramatic stage, settle into a comfortable upholstered seat and await the important event, performance or celebration they are there to experience. The high school, its fields and its campus remain in many ways the physical and architectural heart of the community just as they were 100 years ago.

Construction began on the South St. Paul High School Auditorium in 1930 even though the country and the community were in the difficult years of the Great Depression. The
high school, its auditorium and the athletic field, also cleared and opened in 1930, have served as the heart of the community for generations of South St. Paul residents.
Graduates of South St. Paul High School who will receive their diplomas during the traditional graduation march in June of 2007 have experienced a far different high school life than the students of many earlier decades. They will be the 100th graduating class from South St. Paul High School and many come from families where their parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents are South St. Paul grads. Others have more recent ties to the local community or have come to South St. Paul for high school and reside in other cities.

While the location of the high school, parts of the building and many of the traditions remain the same, American culture has changed in ways both significant and trivial. One traditional event which continues each year is the Junior/Senior Prom. Today’s students, however, would no doubt be shocked to learn that the South St. Paul Daily Reporter, the city’s premier newspaper for more than 60 years, published a complete list of prom attendees every year right through the early 1950s. The list was alphabetical by the boys’ names, with the name of their date following. The theme of the spring prom in 1941 was “A Mexican Garden.” Robert Farley and his eleven-piece orchestra played for the grand march, which began at 9:00 p.m. in the gymnasium of the high school.

Those same 1941 students would soon experience the trauma of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and bid farewell to dozens of their classmates as they left for service in WWII. By 1947, 37 South St. Paul high school graduates or would-be graduates had been killed in that war. The community and the high school gathered to commemorate a plaque in their honor following a special concert in honor of “Boys Who Died in Military Service Who Attended South St. Paul High School.”

Vocational education is another aspect of high school which continues to the present day. Many current seniors have had the opportunity to participate in enhanced technical and vocational instruction during their high school years as they prepare for future careers. The students of earlier years had similar but different opportunities. One of the most popular vocational courses offered from the 1920s through the 1960s was in meatpacking. Students were dismissed to work in the early training centers sponsored by the packing plants and later at the Dakota County center on Grand and Concord where learning how to cut meat was the main course offered.

Other students had the opportunity to learn the construction trade by building houses in South St. Paul. Beginning in 1918, under the guidance of Reinhold.O. Werner, Fred Lawshe and William Porten, South St. Paul High School students were responsible for construction of several residential properties in the city as part of their curriculum. Several homes on Sixth Avenue North were built by high school boys and another is reportedly located on 11th Avenue North. Homeowners paid for the materials but all of the labor was performed by the boys as part of their high school education.
In October of 2006, I had the opportunity to meet with the students who are producing the 2007 *Kaposian*, the yearbook for this year’s senior class. As we talked about what history means in general and what the history of a school means, they shared other things that have changed in terms of their school experience. One thing they mentioned is that family structure has changed significantly since 1907. Today many students come from single parent homes or live with other relatives because their parents are not living in a structured environment. Racial diversity exists in 2007 which would never have occurred in the early decades of South St. Paul High School. Gender equity and gender identity are dealt with every day in personal and community situations.

We agreed that while it is fun to look back and laugh at the poodle skirts, knickers and hairstyles of 100 years of high school, a more important story is how a community and a school have responded to the changes in American culture and society over a hundred years. War, ethnic diversity, racism, gender, economic status and a desire to fulfill one’s personal dreams are things that every student dealt with in 1907 and which every student deals with in 2007. Some things never change.

Students who were participating in the South St. Paul High School Junior/Senior Prom of May 1941, were pictured in the *South St. Paul Daily Reporter*. Accompanying the story of the prom was a complete guest list of couples who would be attending the social event of the spring. Top photo, left to right, are: Edward Lehmann, junior class treasurer; Bernice Guertin, Lois Peterson, junior class vice president; and Max Sanford. Bottom photo, left to right, David Meckel, junior class president; Phyllis Turnblom, Mary Jayne Eret and Louis Zem, senior class president.
Over the past several months, readers of the *South St. Paul Voice* have had the opportunity to learn about the history of South St. Paul High School, which will graduate its 100th senior class in June of 2007. The significance of the local high school as a gathering space, as a source of citizenship education and as a storehouse of experiences for 100 years of South St. Paul students has been discussed.

Another of the significant ways in which the local high school has impacted the community is through individual teachers. In South St. Paul, 19 of the 90 individuals who have been honored as members of the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence were educators; 12 of them were teachers at South St. Paul High School. They include: Bernie Beadle, Darrol Bussler, R.J. Happe, Alice Jones, Fred Lawshe, Eva Olson, Ralph Page, Adolph Roiseland, Steve Silianoff, Charles “Lefty” Smith, Mary Williamson and Doug Woog.

Although it is not possible to provide extensive information about each one, it is interesting to recall these individuals, many of whom were around long enough to welcome three generations of local families into their classrooms. In this issue, we will reflect upon those teachers who are no longer living:

**Bernie Beadle**, 1898-1994, taught biology and science at South St. Paul High School from 1928-1948. He was the first to teach meatpacking and also established the school community gardening program in the city several years before the more well-known Victory Gardens of World War II.

**R. J. Happe**, 1907-2005, completed his college degree in Cleveland before coming to South St. Paul High School to teach speech, debate and English in 1937. His leadership of the local high school’s award-winning speech and debate program extended 34 years until his retirement in 1971.


**Fred Lawshe**, 1884-1971, is known as the founder of the Dakota County Historical Society in 1939, but he began his work in the community as a shop teacher at South St. Paul High School in 1918. He continued teaching industrial arts while expanding the role of the Historical Society and accomplishing the establishment of the first facility to showcase local history.
Eva Olson, 1880-1979, came to South St. Paul in 1910 as an elementary teacher but by 1913, she was teaching at the high school. A short time later she became principal of Central School, a position she held until her retirement in 1948. Miss Olson was the founder of the local PTA and perhaps most well-known for her work in providing English language and citizenship classes to newcomers from Europe who poured into South St. Paul in the early years of the 20th century.

Ralph Page, 1893-1979, came to South St. Paul in 1923 as an industrial arts teacher and athletic coach. He remained on staff for 40 years and was instrumental in starting the first Packer hockey team in 1945.

Adolph Roiseland, 1905-1972, came to South St. Paul Senior High in 1933 as a woodworking and industrial arts teacher. In 1946, he became principal of South St. Paul High School, a role he held until his retirement in 1970.

Steve Silianoff, 1922-2005, was a first generation American whose parents were born in Macedonia. A college football start, he served in the US Army from 1942-46 and received his degree in political science at the University of Minnesota after the war. He became a Social Studies teacher and varsity football coach at South St. Paul High School in 1952 and remained on staff until his retirement in 1985 after 33 years.

Mary Williamson, 1898-1979, began her career at South St. Paul Junior High School in 1922 and became a World History teacher at the High School in 1940. In 1944, she was named the High School Dean of Girls and Vice Principal, a role she held until retiring in 1967, after 45 years of service to the school and community.

The many years of service of these honored individual teachers is remarkable both in quality and longevity. Although they are all gone today, generations of South St. Paul residents are still able to recall personal encounters and experiences with many of these honored individuals. For many graduates, the memory of walking into high school and having your homeroom teacher tell you that they had your mother or dad in class was an awesome experience. For a school district and community, the heritage of that longevity is something to be valued.
For 100 years, South St. Paul High School students have been influenced by a diverse and talented group of teachers. Twelve of those teachers are honored by being part of the South St. Paul Hall of Excellence. A few of them are pictured here as a reminder of their influence and longevity over generations of South St. Paul residents.

Happe, R.J.
Jones, Alice
Page, Ralph
Silianoff, Steve
In recent months we’ve had occasion in this column to talk about why South St. Paul had a high school graduating class as early as 1907, compared with our neighboring communities who didn’t offer public school beyond 8th grade until after World War II.

In addition to that distinction, South St. Paul has also been the home of three Catholic schools in its 120-year history. All three schools grew as ministries of the three Roman Catholic parishes which are located in South St. Paul. For a community whose population has remained fairly consistent over the generations, never exceeding 30,000, just having three parochial schools is remarkable.

Generations of South St. Paul public school students grew up going to the same neighborhood elementary school and then met each other for the first time in 7th grade when they became old enough to enter the district’s combined junior high school. Another influx of students happened in 9th grade when the kids from St. Augustine’s, Holy Trinity and St. John Vianney descended on South St. Paul High School as freshmen. Some Roman Catholic families sent their children to Catholic High Schools out of town, such as Cretin, St. Thomas Academy and eventually Brady, but most families went through the experience of watching their sons and daughters enter South St. Paul High School as freshmen when they reached 9th grade.

The first parochial school in South St. Paul was St. Augustine’s. The Parish itself was incorporated on June 11, 1896, and in 1925, St. Augustine’s Catholic School opened. It provided education to students through 8th grade until 1977.

Holy Trinity Parish was established in South St. Paul on November 13, 1924. The Parish school opened on September 4, 1954, for grades 1-8, with Kindergarten added in 1984 and PreK in 1988.

St. John Vianney Parish was established in 1946. Their school, originally named Providence School, opened for grades 1-4 in 1956 and expanded to serve grades 1-8 in 1958. Kindergarten and PreK were added in 1974, and in 1994, St. John Vianney and Holy Trinity entered a partnership to combine their 7th and 8th grade classes.

South St. Paul has always had a relatively small population but its churches, and the religious traditions they represent, have always been numerous. In terms of historic chronology, the early churches in South St. Paul established and built during the first 65 years of the city’s history were founded in the following years:

Clark Memorial Church – 1886
German Baptist Mission/Riverview Baptist/Calvary Baptist – 1887
First Presbyterian – 1890
St. Paulus German Lutheran/Luther Memorial – 1892
Swedish Lutheran /Bethesda – 1894
St. Augustine’s – 1895
First United Methodist – 1915
Holy Trinity– 1919
Grace Lutheran – 1920
St. Andrew’s Episcopal – 1924
Trinity Norwegian Lutheran /Luther Memorial – 1928
Assembly of God – 1943
St. John Vianney – 1946
Concordia Lutheran – 1952

Today, the original German Lutheran Church building on 6th Avenue and 4th Street, the original St. Andrew’s Episcopalian Church on 5th and Southview, and the original Presbyterian Church on 6th and Marie, are all homes to ethnic Christian populations. In addition to these denominations, South St. Paul is home to St. Sava and St Stefan’s Churches, founded in the Orthodox traditions of Serbia and Romania respectively. In 1985, The Word Church opened in what had been Jefferson Elementary School. They brought additional diversity to the parochial school roster by offering Christian education for grades K-12.
For generations of South St. Paul children, St. Augustine’s Catholic Church and the education provided at the church’s parochial school was their only educational experience until they entered South St. Paul Public High School in 9th grade. The church, shown here in 1896, provided parochial education for grades 1-8 until 1977. This original church was on the Southwest corner of Grand Avenue and Third Street North.

From 1925 to 1977, thousands of city children were educated at St. Augustine’s Catholic School. This 8th grade class of 1933, poised for their entrance into the public classrooms of South St. Paul High School, includes:


**Third row**, left to right: Harold Bahner, Violet Fiebing, Virginia Mohrbacher, Margaret Carmody, Virginia Brengman, Jane Burch, Claire Joyce, Angela Horst, Jean Sturgis and Donald Boehmer.

**Fourth Row**, Left to right: George Callas, Charles Padelford, Laurie Laurence, Edward Baueser, Francis Dooley, Clarence Palmer, Chester Cashman, Raymond Hopka and Eddie Jim Plante.

In addition to the many family names that current residents will recognize, two of these 8th graders, Art Gillen and Margaret Carmody (McAndrews) have been honored as
inductees into the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence as was Father O’Callaghan, who passed away in 1946.
Yearbooks and Newspapers: South St. Paul Students WRITE!
May 2007
By Lois Glewwe

Over the past several months this column has reflected on the history of South St. Paul High School in honor of the graduation the 100th senior class in June 2007. One of the reasons that South St. Paul is able to look back on the history of its school is because hundreds and hundreds of students over the past century were involved in documenting the detailed history of every aspect of student life through student newspapers and yearbooks.

South St. Paul High School produced the very first high school annual in 1915. It was the yearbook of the eighth class of seniors to graduate since the founding of the high school in 1907. World War I prevented the publication of annuals for 1916, 1917 and 1918, but the 1919 yearbook laid the basic outline for years to come with sections such as the Class Will, where seniors bequeathed their role in high school to a junior or sophomore, lists of clubs and photos of sports teams. Each senior photo was accompanied by a slogan under their photo, and faculty were included with photos and a list of their credentials under oval portraits.

The 1920 Kaposian expanded the connection of South St. Paul to its roots in the Mdewakanton village of the Kaposia people by using a classic icon of a bonfire on the cover and calling the classes “tribes.” The yearbooks for 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1924, however, dropped all reference to Kaposia and were entitled The Booster in 1921 and 1922, and simply Senior Annual in 1923 and 1924. The drawings which illustrate the pages were generic landscapes done in dark lithographs, a style typical of the 1920s. The Class of 1925 chose to return to the tradition of titling the yearbook The Kaposian and the tradition has been maintained ever since.

The first use of an embossed image of the profile of a Dakota man in either a single feather or full headdress on the cover of The Kaposian was in 1944. Although changed in size and style over the years, the Dakota profile remained on the cover of every yearbook through 1963. From 1964 until 1976, a variety of styles appeared on the covers, reflecting what is identified as the Pop Art or Op Art styles of the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1977, the classic image of the Indian head reappeared and was used again in 1979 and 1983, the last appearance of the iconic profile.

High School newspapers were also an important part of school life and provided an opportunity for students to apply their interest in journalism and photography. One of the earliest school newspapers was called Printshop Paragraphs. It was founded in 1936. The masthead for the first issue of 1937 lists Roman Hapka as editor; Roy Gerkovich and Sam Vujovich, Sr. were assistant editors. George Bordanea was in charge of Art along with Earl Krech and John Vujovich. Sam Vujovich, Jr. and Eddie Kuntz were Humor editors. Many other student newspapers were published at various times over the next decades. Each one provided an opportunity for budding journalists and photographers to test their skills and experience the thrill of seeing their words or photos in print.
Yearbooks and newspapers were not about world news or even community events. They were about the high school and the students who attended class there for three important years. Still, the 1944 yearbook included a section on the unveiling and dedication of The Shrine, a memorial to South St. Paul High School students who had served or were serving in the military in World War II. The seniors of the Class of 1944 were sophomores in high school when the bombing of Pearl Harbor prompted the United States entry into World War II. They had seen many classmates leave school to enlist in the military.

The Dakota County Historical Society Museum and the South St. Paul Library have copies of nearly every South St. Paul High School yearbook ever published. These humble volumes, written, designed and published by students and the patient, faithful teachers who served as advisors, are the most accurate, personal and vital reflections of 100 years of high school history that any community could ever hope to capture.

**UPDATED INFORMATION FROM A READER:** In the May 2007 issue of the *South St. Paul Voice*, this column provided an overview of South St. Paul High School yearbook design and content. The story said that the yearbook of 1944 was the first to bear the image of the profile of a Kaposia Indian man. Marie Bartl Winkel, Class of ’42, let me know that the *Kaposian* of 1942 was really the first to use that honored icon. Her class created the image but manufacturing restrictions during World War II made it impossible for the class to have their yearbooks professionally printed with a leather-bound cover. As a result, the yearbook of 1942 had hand-made wooden covers in which class woodworkers burned the image of the Kaposia Indian profile onto each cover. Few of these wooden covers remain and the 1942 yearbook in the archives at the South St. Paul Public Library has been rebound in a plain cardboard cover with no indication that its original wooden cover image was to begin a tradition that extended in the community for more than 40 years.
The South St. Paul High School yearbook staff of 1920 included advisor, Miss Eugenie Hammond (center). The students listed are Gertrude Swenson, Beulah Smeltzer, Henry Blair, James Seiger, Bernard Heselton, Jean Leitch, Florence Johnson, Carrie Slovik, Forrest Anderson, Andrea Miller, Hazel Palmer, Lucille Stapf, Raymond Muckle, William Elder, Pearl Nolen, Mildred Rudeen, Myrtle Larson, Grace Metz and Orpha Whitman. The yearbook class of 2007 is currently designing, writing and publishing a history of South St. Paul High School in honor of the 100th graduating class of 2007.
Celebration 100 – June 2007 Grads Make History
June 2007
By Lois Glewwe

For the past nine months, the community of South St. Paul has looked back on 100 years of South St. Paul High School. This column in The South St. Paul Voice has reflected on the reasons why South St. Paul had its own high school long before any of the city’s bordering communities. The role of the high school in offering night classes in English and citizenship for generations of immigrants has been covered and the history of the high school campus as a center for community theater, elections, open forums, patriotic ceremonies and sports events has been recalled. Changes in student life, including the kinds of vocational education offered, was one of the topics covered and one issue was devoted to remembering long-time teachers who taught generations of local kids. The move from parochial school to public high school was remembered as an important rite of passage and last month the high school journalists who captured 100 years of history in yearbooks and school newspapers were featured.

The Class of 2007 will make history as the honored group of seniors who will forever be known as the 100th graduating class. Celebrations will take place during South St. Paul Kaposia Days. Many classes are holding reunions in honor of the event and others in town are simply hosting informal parties and events to reflect on the heritage of the local high school. Hundreds of people have visited the exhibit of 10 decades of memorabilia that has been on display at the High School for the past school year.

As this centennial commemoration come to an end, it is appropriate to reflect on how dramatically the world of a high school senior has changed in 100 years. The first senior class consisted of four women: Genevieve Clark, the daughter of a local grocery store owner; Margaret Doyle, who became a South St. Paul school teacher; Hazel Henderson, daughter of a former mayor and Sadie Rooney, daughter of a former mayor and Sadie Rooney.

As they entered adulthood, the only American wars they knew about were the 1776 Revolution, the Spanish American War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War. It would be 7 years before the First World War ravaged the nation and 34 years before America entered World War II. Theodore Roosevelt was president of the United States in 1907; Rudyard Kipling won the Nobel Prize for Literature; and the first Cubist exhibition debuted in Paris that year. The very first Ziegfeld Follies were staged in New York City in 1907, and the first radio program of voice and music was broadcast in the United States. The Boy Scouts had their start in 1907 and it was the first year that the second Sunday in May was established in Philadelphia as Mother’s Day.

In South St. Paul, Swift & Company was beginning its tenth year in the city; it was ten more years before Armour’s began construction of the largest meatpacking plant in the country. Charles L. Kaye was the Mayor of South St. Paul and John McCormick was Police Chief. Joseph Nolan was Fire Chief and the first electric street lights, one on Grand and Concord and another at Rund’s hotel on Bryant and Concord, were kept burning all night long. There was no public library, just three grade schools: Central,
Simon and Riverside, and only six churches. Moving pictures were beginning to be thought of simply as a new form of photography and there were no automobiles on the streets of South St. Paul. There were, however, over 85 taverns along the old Concord street strip that would flourish for another 12 years until Prohibition shut down the sale of alcohol, at least in theory. South St. Paul by then was a hotbed of illegal activity in liquor sales and gambling.

The young women who were in that first graduating class waited 13 years before the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, making it legal for women to vote. It was more than 30 years before married women were allowed to teach school in South St. Paul. It was felt that a woman with a husband just had too many responsibilities to be able to work outside the home. These graduating girls of 100 years ago knew that the next step in their lives was to become a wife and mother. Few women in 1907 went on to college and fewer still entered into professional careers.

Of course, women are not the only ones whose lives have changed in 100 years. It is significant that there were no boys in that first class. Boys who were 18 in 1907 had long ago gone to work, usually after 8th grade, or at age 14, if they were able to remain in school even that long. They would spend their lives working hard to be the sole support of their families. For those who came from lower or middle class families in 1907, college was not even a possibility.

This year the young men and women of South St. Paul’s Senior High Class who don those traditional robes and walk that solemn ceremonial path to the podium to receive their high diplomas enter into a world that is full of possibilities. It would never occur to them that they might not have full and equal rights to vote, to go after any job they wanted, or to be treated fairly in the workplace. One hundred years have made a tremendous difference in the extent of personal choice and freedom that they will experience. Still, despite that freedom and expansion of rights, it is appropriate to also recall that as they walk this path into the future, they do so in the shadow of 100 years of excellence, tradition and heritage that has been South St. Paul High School for generations of graduates.
The 1922 South St. Paul High School Booster, the yearbook for that year’s senior class, ends with this cartoon by Lamont McPherson. As the 100th anniversary celebration of South St. Paul High School is celebrated this month, it is likely that a similar cartoon would capture how today’s 2007 seniors feel, although instead of a library table littered with crumpled paper, they might be napping on top of their laptops, cell phones or Blackberries. It is likely, however, that today’s seniors are just as happy to be done with high school as the seniors of 1907 were. Some things never change.
Summer in the City
July 2007
By Lois Glewwe

As another summer settles on South St. Paul, the evening air carries the scent of hamburgers roasting on the outdoor grill, the sound of kids playing outside long into the warm night, and the soft voices of folks just sitting on their front porches or back decks enjoying a cold root beer float and watching the fireflies. It’s summer in the city.

From the time of the first settlers in the area to the present, South St. Paul’s natural geography has provided opportunity for summer entertainment. Swimming in Seidl’s Lake, hiking in Kaposia Park, and fishing in the Mississippi River were normal summertime fun for pioneer families. As the city grew, parks were established and over time, both private and public ball teams were organized.

The first swimming pool in the city was only of wading depth, but is provided a cool place to play when it opened in 1931. Named in memory of local banker Otto Schumacher, the pool was located on what was then the grounds of the old Central Elementary School, across from the high school on Second Street North. The site is now the east parking lot for the English Meeker Kandt Funeral Home. In 1938, the City of South St. Paul chose the site for the first public pool at what would be known as the Lorraine Park Swimming Pool. By the summer of 1939, the pool was packed with children and families day and night in the summer time. Around the same time, the city began presenting the annual Water Carnival, with queens, penny dives, daring water stunts and contests such as canoe tipping, diving and other challenges. The Northview Pool, at Thompson and 17th Avenues opened in 1956 and has provided months of summer fun to generations of South St. Paulites ever since.

Another tradition of growing up in South St. Paul in the 1950s and 1960s were the Tennis Court Dances sponsored by the Parks and Recreation Department. Junior and Senior High-aged boys and girls gathered on the tennis courts at the elementary schools and high school and danced to live music from the St. Paul Musicians Association or other local bands.

For many Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Campfire Girls, at least one week every summer was often spent at Day Camp at Kaposia Park. All groups learned to pitch their tents, make bonfires, prepare meals outdoors, drink “bug juice” and weave placemats out of dried grasses or take part in other crafts, games and badge projects.

Another place to find children enjoying summer was, and continues to be, the South St. Paul Public Library where the annual Summer Reading Club offered prizes, games and awards to those who read the most books during the summer. Fun themes often included little stickers of “bookworms” that were earned with every book that a child read.
For many children, a sure sign that summer had arrived was the annual Memorial Day Parade which included all of the veterans groups, the high school band and every Scout Troop in town. The first task of the morning for many was to ride their bike down to George Bordanea’s Hill Cleaners on Marie Avenue. For many, many years, they gave away free American flags to every child who showed up. Most of those kids came on bicycles that were decorated with red, white and blue crepe paper wrapped around the bicycle wheel spokes. Some kids had playing cards that they put in the spokes of their wheels. The cards would click louder and louder as the cyclists raced faster and faster up and down the street, squeezing their red, rubber bike horns. It was traditional for the children and their bikes to bring up the tail end of the parade.

As the parade drew near Oak Hill Cemetery, the mood became more somber and everyone stood patiently and respectfully as the speeches were made and the patriotic songs were played. Then, as the high school band launched in to the final song, the bicycle parade would tear down the cemetery hills and back onto the streets to celebrate the first summer holiday of the season.

Many things have changed since the 1950s and 1960s, but even today, South St. Paul families hike over to Marie Avenue to gather at the cemetery on Memorial Day morning. They stand respectfully while a high school student gives the Gettysburg Address and they clap quietly for the local politician or veteran chosen to present that year’s patriotic speech.

The old Lorraine Park pool has been replaced with a splash pool but it and the Northview Pool still echo with the sounds of swimmers. The Water Carnival and Tennis Court Dances have given way to the Softball Tournaments and Street Dances of Kaposia Days, but summer in South St. Paul is still an American classic.
The city’s first public pool was only a foot deep but on a hot summer day in the 1930s, it was a fine spot for kids to keep cool. The pool opened in 1931 and was located on the southeast corner of 7th Avenue & 2nd Street North, across the street from the high school. The children pictured here are now in their 80s, but it wouldn’t be a surprise if some of them were still South St. Paul residents in 2007.
Water, Water Everywhere
August 2007
By Lois Glewwe

The spring and summer of 2007 has brought little rain to thirsty gardens, lawns and parks of South St. Paul. The Mississippi River passes through the community quietly with no indication of how unruly and wild it can become. This was not always the case. As early as 1826, the swollen river forced the Kaposia band of the Dakota People to relocate from the eastern banks of the river in search of higher and dryer land. They came to the west side of the river and established their main village on what became the South St. Paul side of the river for the next 25 years.

The first farmers and settlers in the area arrived in the mid-1850s and quickly learned that the only safe land in the spring and summer was far above the banks of the mighty river which is said to have risen by ten to fifteen feet every spring, sweeping away anything in its path. By the 1880s, when railroad man Alpheus Stickney came to town, it was clear that if a community were to be built on the site, something had to be done about the river.

Stickney spent months supervising the hauling of dirt from the tops of the bluffs on the west side of the river to build up the height of the shoreline in order to accommodate his railroad lines and subsequently the buildings and pens of his stockyard company. At the north end of the city, another early entrepreneur, Charles Clark, also elevated the property adjacent to the river in order to sell land to such firms as Waterous Engine Works, which came to South St. Paul in 1886.

All of these efforts were nearly destroyed in a devastating flood in the spring of 1897 when hundreds of head of cattle had to be freed and driven to higher land on both sides of the river in order to escape the rising waters. Throughout the city’s early years of industrial and residential growth, the floods of spring were a concern to property owners. Residents of the few homes along the river were often evacuated and eventually the city began to ban residential construction within the reaches of the flooding waters. An entire neighborhood along the river flats south of Richmond, made up mostly of German immigrants, was completely demolished in the early years of the 1900s to prevent loss of life and property during the flood season.

As South St. Paul continued to grow on the higher lands to the west, the city constructed huge storm sewers and culverts to carry the runoff from high bluffs through the rambling ravine creeks and down to the river. All of this increased water flow led to water levels that overflowed the river banks in the early 1950s. Two of the city’s most memorable floods were in 1951 and 1952 when water height rose 19.2-feet above normal. The bridge between Inver Grove and St. Paul Park was under water and the stockyards and other industries in the path of the river were nearly lost.

On April 16, 1951, the livestock market in South St. Paul was forced to close and all shipments were put on hold until flood levels dropped. Every able-bodied person in town
was recruited to assist with sandbagging efforts along the river. The Rock Island dike which had been constructed a few years earlier had been further strengthened by increasing the depth of the river channel at the stockyards by 9 feet but the spring floods of the 1950s nearly destroyed both engineering efforts.

One of the most serious challenges was to keep the sewage disposal plant in operation. The plant, constructed in the 1940s, was the only protection against the unavoidable pollution of the river if the millions of gallons of slaughterhouse sewage produced each day erupted into the floodwaters. Fortunately, volunteers and city crews prevented that disaster from ever happening.

In 1952, Central Avenue at Concord Street was completely under water and business came to a standstill in the foundry and manufacturing industries at that end of the community. The crisis prompted the City Council and the Chamber of Commerce to seek federal funding for construction of a flood wall along the length of the river in South St. Paul.

Begun in 1962, the new flood wall provided substantial protection until another wet spring in 1965 brought the river above the protective barrier, sending crews rushing into the stockyards to sandbag around the clock in order to preserve property, livestock and the sewage plant. Over time revisions to the flood wall and the construction of a system of dike and locks along the Mississippi River have presumably brought an end to the danger of spring floods for the community. The memory of a river gone wild, however, is brought easily to mind as one walks the current river trail atop the dike wall and realizes the height and extent of that protective barrier. The words “mighty Mississippi” take on new meaning as the evidence of the city’s not-so-distant watery past is seen in the strength and power of that flood wall.
When the Mississippi River overflowed its banks in South St. Paul in the 1950s, hundreds of curious spectators poured into the community to watch the rising waters. Police occasionally had to set up roadblocks along Concord Street to control incoming traffic. This undated photo is presumably from one of the greater flood years of 1951 or 1952. Sharp-eyed readers may be able to identify the year by examining the spectator cars lined up along Concord.

This 1951 flood photograph was taken looking east from Concord Street down Grand Avenue at the main entrance to Swift & Company. The yards closed on April 16, 1951, and it was several days before the huge livestock operation was able to open for business as usual. In heavy flood years, ever able-bodied person in town was called to the riverfront to help sandbag crucial areas.
Memories of the Neighborhood Grocery
September 2007
By Lois Glewwe

Throughout the history of South St. Paul, many busy mothers relied on the fact that there was a little family-owned store on a nearby corner. As the supper hour approached, Mom would dip into her sugar jar or dig into the lining of her purse for a bit of change. One of the kids would be called inside from playing catch in the backyard and sent to the neighborhood store for a bottle of milk, a loaf of bread or a pound of butter. Often, at least in earlier years, that bit of change wasn’t even necessary. Little Johnny or Sally would just tell the owner to “put it on our bill,” and no money would change hands until Dad got his paycheck and settled up at the end of the month.

The tiny stores which served so many South St. Paul neighborhoods are gone, but evidence of their existence is discovered when one drives through the residential streets of the city. Many former shops, barely disguised as apartments or single family homes, retain the storefront silhouette of earlier days. Others have remained commercial locations, “grandfathered” into their neighborhood locations when they changed from a grocery to a hairdresser or appliance repair shop.

Longtime South St. Paul residents remember not only the location of those little shops, but also recall the people, the smells, and the atmosphere of these family-owned enterprises. My own neighborhood grocery as a child was Lee’s on 12th and Marie. Today’s it’s Ollom’s Appliance but when I was young it was a cool, dark place with smooth wooden floors and a screen door that slammed softly behind you as you entered. Strips of brightly colored sugar pills on white strips of paper, soft licorice cubes in red and black, fat wax lips filled with sweet red nectar and brightly colored packs of mint-flavored candy cigarettes, complete with red paint on the end to stimulate a flame, competed with chewy and gooey green and orange jellied leaves or lifesavers so bright and beautiful that they outshone any other display. Tootsie pops in waxy paper, suckers of every color and big, bright pink wads of bubble gum so sweet it hurt your teeth were lined up in orderly, attractive rows. Almost everything was one penny in price.

In the summer, it was unlikely that even the best candy treat could convince a child to purchase anything except an icy cold, sweet Popsicle from the chest freezer at the front of the store. Popsicles were a nickel and on the wall right by the door, was a metal Popsicle splitter where you dropped your Popsicle in, paper sleeve and all, and the splitter cut it into two separate treats so you could swap one-half of your banana Popsicle with a friend in exchange for one-half of their cherry treat. If you were lucky enough to have a dime, you might splurge on an orange and white Dreamsicle or even a dark Fudgesicle or chocolate-covered ice cream Cheerio.

Besides the candy counter and the enticing freezer treats, the shelves behind the long wooden counter were heavy with canned goods, jams and jellies, soup selections and
staples like fresh bread and flour and sugar in paper bags. There were no lines, no carts, no looking around to decide just which type of canned peas to purchase. The shopper just told Mrs. Lee what they wanted and she would pull it off the shelf and drop it into a brown paper bag. She would then ring up the tiny amounts on the old cash register, announce the total and either put it on account or accept cash payment on the spot. The door would slam once again and the shopping experience was completed for that day.

More than 75 different locations with over 100 different names are listed in city directories as neighborhood groceries or meat markets in the first century of South St. Paul history. One of the oldest neighborhood groceries opened as Lehmann’s at 345 Fourth Ave. S. in 1921 and was most recently known to residents as Neiderkorn’s. Today the lot where it stood until a few months ago is being prepared for a new home site and the neighborhood grocery is no more.

Still, for generations of South St. Paul residents, the memory of shopping at the corner store is strong and seeing that old echo of a storefront on a residential corner can bring a sudden desire for just one more taste of a sweet banana Popsicle.
Many former neighborhood grocery stores can still be found in South St. Paul. At top left, Kisch’s Grocery, 300 7th Ave. S., is an apartment building today. At top right, Meyer’s Ice Cream Parlor and Grocery, 304 2nd Ave. S., is a private home in 2007. At bottom left, the interior of Jerry Mikacevich’s Meat Market at 459 3rd Ave. S. is pictured in 1935. The store is pictured at the lower right as it appears today in its current use as apartments. More than 100 grocery stores, meat markets and candy shops flourished in South St. Paul throughout the city’s history.
Bridge Collapses in South St. Paul – 95 Years Ago This Month…
October 2007
By Lois Glewwe

The headline in the Saint Paul Dispatch of Tuesday, October 15, 1912 announced “Train Plunges into River; 1 Dead, 2 Hurt. Engineer Charles C. Cramer, South St. Paul. Body not recovered.” As Minnesota and the nation continues to mourn the loss of life in the collapse of the 35W Bridge, it is appropriate to reflect on South St. Paul’s own bridge collapse nearly a century ago.

The tragedy occurred when the Stockyards Terminal Railway Company Bridge across the Mississippi River collapsed as an 18-car train filled with livestock headed across the river from Dayton’s Bluff to the stockyards in South St. Paul.

Engineer Charles C. Cramer, 37, of 207 Fourth Avenue South, South St. Paul, reportedly was blinded by a thick fog at 6:40 a.m. as he began the crossing and did not see that the bridge had been opened to allow the passage of the steamer Hiawatha. Limon Tibbetts, engineer of the bridge, sounded the whistle to indicate the opening, but suddenly saw the train leap out of a thick bank of fog and drop into the river.

A huge crowd poured into the area as the cries of the injured and crippled animals rose over the city. Fireman Frank Weber of Inver Grove and Switchman James Garvin of South St. Paul suffered head injuries and were rushed to St. Joseph’s Hospital in St. Paul in the automobile of Dr. J.E. Campbell of South St. Paul, who had been summoned to the scene. According to the Dispatch, Jacob Hames, Conductor, and Switchman Edward Marschinke, who were riding in the caboose, had no inkling of what had happened until they felt the sudden lurching forward of the train as the engine dragged the heavily laden cars into the river.

The reporter wrote: “Beneath all this pile of dead animals and broken rolling stock lies the battered and broke Engine 10 and somewhere in it the workmen hope to find the body of Engineer Cramer. The cab is crushed to a pulp.”

It was estimated that 300 head of livestock perished. Volunteers swarmed over the site to try to carry and prod the cattle, sheep and pigs into the water in the hope that they would swim to safety. A number of animals had to be killed because of the severity of their injuries but the reporters indicated that approximately 100 animals were saved due to the efforts of volunteers.

Two local men, Edward Horbeck and Thomas Thompson of South Park (the north end of South St. Paul), reportedly aided many of the animals ashore and guided the exhausted lambs and calves onto their boats to bring them to the shore. A wrecker with a steam derrick was to arrive on the scene shortly and begin the work of what was still being called a rescue of Mr. Cramer.
In many ways the reporting of this tragedy 95 years ago is similar to the stories in local and national media in recent weeks. Just as today’s journalists bring interest to the topic by covering related events, a headline in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* of October 15, 1912, reads “Suburb Tragedy Stricken: South St. Paul the Scene of Three Violent Deaths Within a Fortnight.”

The unidentified reporter wrote that “the suburb of South St. Paul has reached a state of nervousness which nearly approaches a panic.” The cause of this state was three deaths and a fourth near-fatality, including a homicide, a manhunt, and an attempted suicide plus two accidental deaths with two weeks.

The first and second events were the murder of Mrs. Anna Blazich by Ivan Wiskic and his subsequent attempt at suicide in the jail at South St. Paul. The third was the death of a 14-year-old boy, Perry Covington, who died from an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound. The boy’s body was laid out in the undertaking rooms of South St. Paul Hardware on Grand Avenue. The other event noted that week was the funeral of Andrew Sandquist, former City Councilmember, contractor, maker of concrete blocks and, according to the reporter, a “self-made man” who came to South St. Paul in 1889 at the age of 40 years. The Sandquist home on Concord Street was the first to have an indoor hot water plant and electric pump.

These local events, including the October 15, 1912 bridge accident, were nearly overshadowed by the fact that on the day before, presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt was injured when he was the victim of an attempted assassination in Milwaukee. The assailant, John Schrank, shot the candidate of the Progressive Party. Roosevelt, with the bullet lodged in his chest, continued on with his campaign schedule and only agreed to enter the hospital when he began to feel tired. The bullet was removed later than night.

Ninety-five years have passed since October 1912, but it is clear that the stories, the reporters, the tragedies and the outcome of notable events have changed very little.
Minnesotans have become familiar with bridge collapse photos in recent days. South St. Paul experienced a bridge tragedy on October 15, 1912, when the Stockyards Terminal Railway Company bridge between Dayton’s Bluff in St. Paul and the South St. Paul Stockyards gave way killing the Engineer and sending 300 cows, steers, lambs and pigs to their death in the Mississippi River. The individuals pictured above are unidentified but the dramatic impact of the incident is captured in these photos.
Ken Burns’ documentary on World War II was broadcast on Twin Cities Public Television for several weeks in September and October. For many South St. Paul families, the images and narratives from the series brought back powerful memories of those years from 1941 to 1945. Like Lucerne, Minnesota, one of the four communities featured in the documentary, South St. Paul said goodbye to men and boys who were drafted or joined the military. Some came home; many did not.

One of the differences that Americans faced in World War II, as opposed to any of the conflicts in which the country has been involved since that time, is that every citizen was required to give up normal everyday activities and products in order to support the war effort. Food and gasoline rationing impacted everyone as ration stamps were required to purchase many previously abundant food goods such as sugar, eggs, coffee, flour, butter and meat. It was common for automobile owners to give up the tires on the cars and store their vehicles on cement blocks until the end of the war. With gasoline at a premium, driving was a luxury few could afford.

Children were also involved in many ways. Collecting tin and scrap, or even donating parts off of their bicycles was a common Saturday activity. The two R’s – Rubber and Records – were constantly being collected throughout the community. Gathering huge sacks full of milk weed pods was another way children participated. The milk week silk was a substitute for the Kapok used in life preservers. Children worked alongside their parents in Victory Gardens, where the produce that was grown was sent to feed the military forces.

Women’s groups and church organizations did their part by knitting socks and scarves and afghans for the troops. Many in the city served as Air Raid Wardens. They met monthly, took first aid training and conducted black-out drills. Others headed up the effort to sell War Bonds and . Dozens of people went door-to-door collecting money for the military. Hollywood celebrities crisscrossed the country promoting the sale of war bonds. Ingrid Bergman was one of the stars who visited South St. Paul in November 1944.

A shrine displaying names and photos of students who had left school to join the military was erected at South St. Paul High School at the beginning of the war. After the war a list of the deceased who had attended the High School was displayed. It listed 37 former students whose lives were lost in the war: William Ely, Alfred Moe, Newman Burt, Robert Cashman, Conrad Hendricks, William Kropelnicki, LeRoy Anderson, George Rutter, Frank Kiesow, Paul Miller, George Vrchota, Alton Heuer, Sam Miller, William Krovchuk, Albert Knorr, John Karhula, Herman Litz, Richard Grisim, Clarence Holt, Anthony Eger, Howard Schult, Robert Engfer, Lawrence Brotzler, Walter Fraser, Earl Check, Helmuth Rabold, Emil Kassan, Victor Wawro, William Rapp, John Piekarksi,

The war impacted South St. Paul’s economy as well. Wages were frozen at the packing plants but production tripled as demand for food increased. Both of the major meatpackers, Swift’s and Armour’s, provided canned meat for military ration kits and shifts worked round the clock at both plants. Hundreds of women took over jobs in the industry that had previously been held by men and although their wages were never increased to match what the men had made, they acquired skills and training that they would not have had access to if the war had not occurred.

South St. Paul’s VFW honored the first local soldier to die in World War II, Harry Hansen, by naming their post the Gallagher-Hansen Post #295. Both the VFW and the American Legion were instrumental in bringing home the bodies of soldiers buried overseas so they could be interred near their families. Oak Hill Cemetery is the site of the 1949 memorial erected by the VFW in honor of those who died in service. The plots around the memorial are reserved for veterans.

Each Memorial Day, the VFW honors all veterans with a ceremony at Oak Hill. What began as a ceremony recognizing those who served in World War II, now includes others from the Korean War, Vietnam, the Gulf War and of course, most recently, those who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.
This huge poster stood at the western end of Grand Avenue where Lawshe Park is today. It was then the site of the City Hall and it listed the names of local citizens who had purchased War Bonds and Stamps in 1944 and 1945. The smaller type at the top of the sign says: “The boys are doing their duty at the front. Let’s do ours at home.”
One of the reasons that South St. Paul is able to look back on its history with accuracy and accountability is because of the ongoing presence of a daily or weekly newspaper. The City was incorporated in March of 1887 and enterprising publisher William R. Todd distributed the first issue of the city’s first local paper, the *South St. Paul Journal*, on March 26, 1887.

That Saturday paper was published once a week out of offices at South Park in the north end of the city. Stories in that first issue included a listing of the Dakota County budget and the proceedings of the South St. Paul Council meeting of March 5, 1887, that body’s first official session as newly elected officials. A column of real estate transfers was included as was the obituary of Joseph Bandet, an old settler of Mendota who had come to Minnesota in 1850.

William Todd became a well-known figure in the newly established City of South St. Paul, serving as Chief of the Fire Department and as City Controller for a number of years. As Controller, however, he was often in the center of controversy as the new city struggled to establish itself on a sound financial basis and it wasn’t long before another newspaper hit the streets in direct competition to Todd’s *Journal*.

Although the competitor, the *Telegram*, published in St. Paul Park was short lived, a few months later Arthur D. Moe began publication of the *South St. Paul Daily Reporter*. The first issue debuted on January 17, 1891. Moe lost no time in accusing Todd of unfair practices and illegal activities and Todd in turn criticized the *Reporter* for selling out to business interests. In March of 1891, Todd was asked to resign as City Controller and a fire at his newspaper offices on May 4, 1892 put him out of business. The *South St. Paul Daily Reporter* was named the city’s official paper just two months later.

The daily local paper thrived for the next several years under Moe’s management. When he left in 1902, Gustavus Swift of Swift & Company took over the publication for a time but the job of editor and manager was soon given to Edward L. Ogilvie. Two editions were published each day, a market edition and a home edition during the 1930s. The market edition concentrated on the livestock industry while the home edition covered the schools, government and other local events and family news.

Frank Luhrs took over as president of the *Reporter* in 1934 and the paper continued to thrive with two daily editions packed with display ads, photographs of local events, syndicated national columnists and detailed coverage of social happenings. During World War II, the *South St. Paul Daily Reporter* brought local readers news of local soldiers and published lists of those missing and killed in battle. As the war drew to a close and television news made its appearance in the 1950s, competition for the daily paper’s advertising dollar grew more severe and on July 16, 1953, the last edition of the *Reporter*
as a daily paper was published. It continued as a weekly publication and was able to maintain its competitive place in local advertising.

In 1954, Frank Luhrs sold the paper to John Tilton, owner of a group of papers based in Hopkins and in 1967, Carroll Crawford purchased the newspaper, changing its name to the *South St. Paul Sun*. By 1987, the paper was published under the name of the *South St. Paul Sun Current*, published in Bloomington. Today, it is one of a group of dozens of local Minnesota papers and is delivered free to every home in town as the *South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights Sun Current*. Distributed within its pages once a month is the newest newspaper to arrive on the streets of the city, the *South St. Paul Voice*.

Long-time South St. Paul residents recall the daily and weekly *Reporter* and original *South St. Paul Sun* papers fondly, remembering such beloved social reporters as Luella Jarvis and photographers like Dave Petek, who documented the history of the community for generations of readers and families during the 1950s to the 1960s. In those simpler times, families could count on seeing their children’s graduation honors, scholarship success, sports accomplishments, weddings and first child birth announcements featured in the pages of the paper. Full page obituaries of locally respected citizens and detailed coverage of local news events attracted loyal and faithful readers and subscribers.

Today, even major city dailies like the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* are facing challenges from the Internet and a culture that is too impatient to receive daily news in a print format. Still, for many in South St. Paul, there is nothing so satisfying as finding that local paper in their delivery box and settling down with a cup of coffee to see what’s happening right here in our own backyard just as residents were able to do 120 years ago.

Caption: South St. Paul’s first newspaper was the *South St. Paul Journal*, which issued its first edition on March 25, 1887, just three weeks after incorporation of South St. Paul as a city. The handwriting at the top indicates that this issue was filed in the office of the city clerk of South St. Paul, Noah S. Groff, as the first issue of the city’s first official newspaper.
The Silver Screen in South St. Paul – Going to the Movies
January 2008
By Lois Glewwe

It’s been 26 years since South St. Paul residents have been able to go to the movies in their own city. It was in 1982 that the South I and II movie theaters became an MGM Liquor store next door to what was then Wells Fargo Bowling Alley on Concord and Wentworth. Today the location is the Big Discount Liquor Store and Wells Fargo is The Wells.

Although people all over America still go to theaters to watch movies in 2008, the cinematic industry is perhaps one of those aspects of American life that has changed most dramatically in recent years. When the movie industry hit middle America in the years before World War I, the silent films were intriguing, not only for their plot lines, but because people had never seen moving images. In 1915 Emil Gardie opened the very first movie house and vaudeville theater in South St. Paul at 153 North Concord. His Dreamland Theater offered state-of-the-art visual entertainment for that time period. There was no such thing as television. Having a radio was still a rare sign of status and watching moving images on a screen was one of the most amazing developments of the modern era.

In 1922, a new theater was built on the south side of the Grand Avenue Hill in South St. Paul. Known as The Ideal, it was managed by Emry Eckberg for over 20 years. It was the first location in this part of the Twin Cities where ads proclaimed it as the place “Where You Can Always Hear Perfect Talking Pictures.”

Ed Rubin took over the theater and renamed it the Hollywood after World War II. Managed by Phyllis and Robert Gilgrist, The Hollywood offered much more than movies. The stage was used for Amateur Night on Mondays, Bank Night on Wednesdays and offered free dishes on Tuesdays to anyone who attended the Tuesday night special. Going to the movies in these years of the 1940s included a live emcee like local celebrity Roy Ellsworth, who opened every major movie at the Hollywood for years. In those days, the theater didn’t enhance their income by providing popcorn and drinks. Instead, moviegoers made sure to allow enough time to stop at Charlie Lewis’ Confectionary Shop next door to the theater for caramel corn and a bottle of pop.

In the 1960s, the theater was known as the Hillside and it was open every night and for several matinees on the weekends to show top running movies. Many local residents recall the ancient upholstered seats of the old theater and the real popped popcorn with butter that could be purchased for 10-cents a box. Although the seat springs might be broken, there was something about the dramatic wind-up of the old projector and the loud blast of music that announced the movie one was to experience was somehow often more meaningful than today’s pristine and small-sized visual experience in a strip mall multiplex movie theater.
Every neighborhood in the Twin Cities had at least one movie house in the 1940 and 1950s. For South St. Paul residents, there was the Hillside on Grand Avenue or if the movie being shown wasn’t the one to see, you could always go to West St. Paul to the West Twins or to the West Side Astor Theater (on Robert and Concord) to see top rated films. The West Twins on South Robert Street is long gone, but the old West Side Movie House still dominates the corner at the intersection of Robert and Concord/now Caesar Chavez Boulevard. It stands across the intersection from the Art Deco building that is falling into ruin while still proudly proclaiming its origin as the Riverview Commercial Club.

In addition to local downtown movie houses, South St. Paul, West St. Paul and Inver Grove residents enjoyed their own drive-in movie theater, The Corral, at the intersection of Mendota Road and South Robert where the Southridge Shopping Center is located today. The big neon sign advertising The Corral showed a cowboy with animated chaps roping a steer. It was a hot spot for teen dating, but also a wonderful place for a little kid to watch a great Disney movie on a hot summer night in the safety and comfort of the family car while the scratchy sound box gently wafted the music of Cinderella into the night air. Admission for a carload in the 1950s was often less than 50-cents per person and the foot long hot dogs in the refreshment stand were 75-cents.
The Hollywood Theater, on the south side of Grand Avenue in South St. Paul, was not only the best place to see first run movies but also sponsored Martha Logan home economics lectures for women. Sponsored by Swift & Company, Martha Logan was a fictional character like Betty Crocker, created to promote company products. The women above are lining up for one of those special presentations. Today the location of the former theater is approximately where the driveway is for Wells Fargo Bank. The shop sign on the right advertises the location of Charlie Lewis’ Confectionary Shop where everyone stopped for caramel corn and a soda pop before entering the movie house for an afternoon matinee.
From Farm to Freeway – South St. Paul’s Far North End
February 2008
By Lois Glewwe

The city boundaries of South St. Paul, unlike many of its suburban neighbors, never provided developers with acre after acre of farmland that could be easily transformed into town homes and condos. By 1960, South St. Paul was platted and divided into 40-foot residential lots and commercial areas from north to south and east to west. There were just a few acres on the city’s far north end that were still dedicated to farming. It was a lovely spot where fruit trees and berry bushes grew to maturity on the gently rolling hills that formed the city’s border with West St. Paul.

The residents of this special spot were descendants of some of the earliest settlers of Dakota County. The center of their social life was the old Wilson School on Stickney at Outlook. Their neighborhood grocery was Weir’s store at Concord and Bircher. While the rest of the city often seemed focused only on urban growth and expansion, the families of this northern neighborhood treasured the winding and wooded trails that crisscrossed the fields of the western border.

One of the prominent families of this part of South St. Paul was the Brotzler family. Jacob Brotzler married Margaret Leidig at the Salem Evangelical Church in Inver Grove Township in 1892 and soon purchased a farm on Butler Avenue at South St. Paul’s north end. The house sat high on a hill overlooking acres of flowers and berry bushes which spread their way to the Mississippi River on the east. Jacob hauled the family’s water from the lake at Thompson Park. Trained as a landscape gardener in Germany before coming to Minnesota, Jacob was one of the designers who created the “Gates Ajar” floral sculpture at St. Paul’s Como Park.

Jacob and Margaret Brotzler had 12 children, 10 of whom lived to adulthood. Two of their sons, George and Charles, settled on land in the same area as their parents. Charles raised vegetables and root crops while George grew strawberries, raspberries, currants and gooseberries.

These families of the northern neighborhood were dismayed and concerned when plans for Highway 52 began to be discussed in the early 1960s. Officials felt it was important to alleviate traffic on Robert Street and wanted to add another bridge across the Mississippi River to the east of Robert Street. The residents of South St. Paul’s last farmland north of Butler were told that their homes were being condemned. They were given the option to buy their own homes back if they wished to move them to new locations. They were given 120 days to make a decision. Some residents chose to walk away with the market price for their property and their homes were torn down or moved.

Others, like Gladys Brotzler Rosvold, the youngest of George Brotzler’s children, and her husband, Don Rosvold, moved their home just a short distance to the west in order to keep their lovely home from destruction. A new home was to be built for Gladys’ parents.
on what was to become Waterloo Avenue, but sadness lay in the fact that the family’s original home, built in 1928, was not moved, but completely demolished by the state to make way for the freeway.

The other loss that produced sorrow was the complete destruction of the wild woodlands where more than 20 magnificent ancient oak trees were destroyed in one day even as the orchards and berry plots were graded into nothing more than cavernous sites for asphalt roadway. The beautiful and natural pond on Waterloo was filled and eliminated as a wetland space. The area was also the site of ancient burial mounds established by the ancestors of the Mdewakanton Dakota people who settled in the area generations before the freeway plans became reality. Arrowheads and evidence of early residents were common finds during the Highway 52 construction.

The development of the freeway created an interesting and odd twist in South St. Paul’s city border definitions. There are only a handful of homeowners on the west side of Highway 52 who are residents of South St. Paul.

Current South St. Paul residents travel Highway 52 dozens of times each week and perhaps cannot imagine the city without that major traffic artery. Still, it could be meaningful to pause for a moment, look up at the bluffs on the freeway’s west side and remember the rolling farm fields and beautiful berry bushes that were once part of the Brotzler family estate.
Caption 1: The white building on the left in this photo is the barn for the George Brotzler property. The white house on the right is George’s parents’ home. Jacob and Margaret Leidig Brotzler settled on the northern fields of what is today South St. Paul’s far north end in the 1890s. Their home, berry fields, orchards and beautiful views of the Mississippi River were taken by the State in order to construct Highway 52 in 1971.

Caption 2: Jacob and Margaret Leidig Brotzler were married in 1892 in Inver Grove Township. They settled on the beautiful rolling fields north of Butler Avenue in what
became South St. Paul in the 1890s. In 1971, the family’s original farm and their sons’ farms were taken by the State of Minnesota in order to construct Highway 52. Pictured in this photo are front row, left to right: Maria Brotzler; Jacob Brotzler; Anita Brotzler Wille holding her first child, Helen Wille Karp; Paul Brotzler; Margaret Leidig Brotzler; and Anne Brotzler Sioris. In the back row, left to right are: Karolyn Brotzler Prosser; Elizabeth Brotzler; George Brotzler; Frederick Brotzler; Charles Brotzler; Margaret Brotzler Church; and Lydia Brotzler Buckman. George’s daughter, Gladys Brotzler Rosvold, still lives on the original Brotzler farmland at the northern end of South St. Paul on the west side of Highway 52.
Eating Out – South St. Paul Restaurants
March 2008
By Lois Glewwe

In 1987, when the Centennial history of South St. Paul was published, over 85 locations were listed as local bars and restaurants in the city’s first 100 years. Today only a handful of eateries remain and no one would deny that city residents are more likely to find themselves eating out in West St. Paul or Eagan than they are to find a place for dinner within South St. Paul’s city limits.

The loss of a solid commercial center with a variety of restaurants and bars happened as South St. Paul went through redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s. Dozens of the old cafes and bars were demolished to make way for new business which never materialized. The closing of the city’s two major employers, Swift’s and Armour’s, led to a time of economic crisis and it has only been in the last 20 years or so that the city has seen some new arrivals spanning the food service industry from Burger King to Il Trevino, to the Black Sheep, to the newest manifestation of the old Wells Fargo Bowling Alley as Mattie’s.

Many of the early restaurants and bars that energized South St. Paul’s food and entertainment industry in the heyday of the city’s commercial growth are fondly remembered by early residents. For the commission men and bankers of Grand and Concord, Aller’s Café, Nick’s, Sweeney’s and the Hook ‘Em Cow were popular spots for lunchtime burgers and nights on the town. Further to the south on Concord, the old Lincoln Hotel was the largest of several cafes and bars that most recently were identified as The Buckboard Saloon and neighboring lunch spots.

Most of South St. Paul’s early dining establishments were on Concord Street, including such early ethnic spots such as Paula’s Cocina, one of the first Mexican restaurants in Minnesota. A few restaurants opened “on the hill,” such as the Greystone Grill, which is today the same building as the basic structure of English Meeker Kandt Funeral Home. High school students, staff and teachers could patronize several cafes on Marie Avenue during lunch hours in the 1930s to 1950. Gericke’s Drug Store, now South St. Paul Family Chiropractic, had a lunch counter and the Southern Maid, later known as the Hilltop and eventually the Bon Ton, at 607-609 Marie Avenue, sold sandwiches, milk shakes and lunchtime favorites. Some of the best hamburgers in town were offered at the Marie Avenue Eat Shop at 415 Marie Avenue in the 1930s and 1940s.

In the years following World War II, South St. Paul saw the arrival of pizza restaurants and Chinese eateries. Wong’s Chow Mein opened in 1951 after buying the city’s first drive-in restaurant, Tony’s Root Beer, and moving the little shop across the street to the west side of 13th Avenue South where the restaurant remains in business in 2008. Frankie’s Pizza is the first spot in town to offer the new Italian treat. It was located at 375 North Concord by the mid-1950s. South St. Paul’s Dairy Queen at 602 Southview also opened in the 1950s and still provides cool cones and treats to the community today.
T&T Galley opened as Tiny’s and later was known as Chief’s at 901 Southview. This popular spot is also included on the list of those early 1950s spots which serve breakfast and lunch to local diners today.

In 1959, the city’s first fine-dining supper club opened when Ed Lehmann turned his father-in-law’s gravel pit at what is now Highway 494 and Concord into the Golden Steer. People from all over the Twin Cities traveled to the elegant establishment which naturally advertised itself as the source of the best steaks in the area.

Redevelopment was impacting every mile of Concord Street in 1970 when Hank Mattaini built the Channel House at 600 North Concord. It was one of the most elegant dining spots in Dakota County for a number of years, and one of the first businesses to acknowledge that South St. Paul was located on the Mississippi River channel. Additional fine dining arrived when Drover’s Inn opened The Burgundy Room, where white linen and fine crystal greeted local diners.

The Golden Steer experienced a decline in the 1990s and the restaurant and bar closed although the hotel continued to operate. Red Leonard of Fury Motors purchased the old supper club in 1998 and relocated the dealership to new facilities on the site in 1999. The etched glass panels which were created and installed as part of the supper club’s décor in 1980, have been preserved in the offices of today’s Fury Motors. The Burgundy Room closed in the 1990s and today’s manifestation of the old Drover’s Inn, the South St. Paul Hotel and Convention Center, caters to private parties and no longer is open to the general public.

One of the most intriguing restaurant stories in town is that of the old Channel House at 600 North Concord. It is the oldest sit-down, eat-in restaurant in the city which is still in operation today. City Clerk Christie Wilcox has kept track of its various manifestations and was gracious enough to share them with us for this article. How many can you remember?

Channel House 1970-73
Captain Roberts 1974-76
Crow’s Nest 1977-78
Italian Horn 1979
The Porter House 1980
John Caffé’s Café 1981
Overlook Café and Bar 1982
Cattlemen’s Club 1983-84
Greenstreets 1985-1989 (August)
Preemo’s 1989-1990 (August)
Bentley’s on the River 1990-1992 (May)
USA Spirits on the River 1992
O’Kenney’s 1994-1995
Sahara International 1996
Box Car Joe’s 1997-1998
A.J.’s by the River 1999
Shark’s By the River 2000
Night Star 2001
La Esperanza 2003-present

One of the first restaurants in the city was the South St. Paul Restaurant at 152 North Concord, owned by Joseph Matczynski. Joe and his wife Margaret are pictured in the doorway and Anton Matczynski is standing next to his nephews Irvin (Butch) and Leonard who are enjoying a ride in a goat cart, one of the common experiences staged by local photographers to encourage purchase of their prints.
This month’s closing of the stockyards in South St. Paul will bring an end to what was the economic foundation and community soul of the city for over 120 years. Generations of South St. Paul families built homes, sent kids to college and prospered under the middle class American dream because of the stockyards. During the peak decades of the local livestock market from the 1930s to the 1960s, over 6,000 people reported to work on the riverfront acreage every morning.

Some worked in the bustling Exchange Building on the corner of Grand and Concord where the bankers, commission firms, sellers, buyers and agents wheeled and dealed from dawn to dusk. Others reported to offices in the USDA inspection center. Many spent years in the pens, moving cattle, sheep and hogs through the elaborate system of shoots and alleys that only long-time drovers, buyers and commission men could understand. Thousands worked in the packing plants; Swift’s and Armour’s were the largest but there were many smaller but no less successful slaughter and processing plants throughout the yards. Still others were employees of the Saint Paul Union Stock Yards (SPUSY). Executives, secretaries, clerks, mailroom helpers, janitors, ad designers and attorneys showed up every morning with the chefs and kitchen workers, who provided the food service necessary to support such a massive operation.

With its own fire and police services, the stockyards was a city within a city. Although many families in town never had anyone in their family who worked there, the presence of the livestock industry and the wealth and reputation it brought to South St. Paul impacted the lives of everyone in the community. South St. Paul high school teams are called the Packers in honor of this founding industry and many city residents will find themselves explaining why the city had a reputation for smelling like manure, especially on hot August afternoons when the wind was blowing just the right direction.

To many, however, that famous smell was the smell of money, representing a solid and secure employment base to a growing community. As South St. Paul says farewell to the industry which shaped its success, it may be helpful and interesting to provide a timeline of developments:

**June 30, 1886** - The St. Paul Union Stock Yards was founded by Alpheus Stickney in South St. Paul, MN.

**November 1886** – Plans were published for the St. Paul Union Stockyards Livestock Exchange Building on Grand and Concord. Construction was completed in 1887.

**September 30, 1887** – The first trainload of cattle arrived in the South St. Paul yards from Montana. They were fed and watered overnight and sent on to Chicago the next morning.
November 1887 – Fitch Brothers Commission Company became the first commission firm to open in the city.

January 1888 – The Anglo-American Packing and Provision Company opened as the first slaughterhouse in the city. The first hog kill took place that month.

1897 – Swift & Company of Chicago signed a 999-year lease with Alpheus Stickney and made plans to open a major packing plant in South St. Paul. Wallace Gebhart of Swift & Company arrived from Chicago to begin construction of the new plant.

1915 – After years of negotiations, Armour & Company agreed to open a huge meatpacking operation in South St. Paul. Construction began on what was called “the most modern packing plant of its day.”

December 16, 1919 – Armour & Company opened their massive plant covering 40 acres and rising three stories above the Mississippi, with two additional floors underground.

August 8, 1921 – Central Cooperative Commission Association, later known as Central Livestock, opened the first cooperative of livestock dealers in the South St. Paul stockyards.

March 16, 1948-May 22, 1948 – The entire national meat packing industry went on strike, closing the South St. Paul plants until the National Guard broke through the strike lines and restored order. The unions ultimately agreed to a nine-cent an hour raise as opposed the 20-cent increase they had originally requested.

November 19, 1969 – Swift & Company closed their South St. Paul plant.

June 13, 1979 – Armour & Company closed their South St. Paul plant.

Livestock and stockyards operations remained strong despite the departure of the city’s two major employers but without a major on-site slaughter and processing operation, livestock growers eventually began to look to their own local areas for auction and slaughter operations.

During the second half of the 1980s and continuing throughout the past 20 years, city and industry leaders worked together to begin negotiating for reclamation and redevelopment of the stockyards property. The Armour plant was demolished in 1989, opening up the riverfront area for creation of the Dakota County Regional Trail and mixed use manufacturing operations. Years of work with the railroad, private landowners and existing businesses led to the creation of Bridgepoint business park which today employs thousands of workers on the very land where the world’s largest livestock market once flourished.
The South St. Paul stockyards was once home to the massive Armour & Company meatpacking plant, which opened in 1919. To the north of Armour’s two distinctive smokestacks, at the top left of the photo, is Swift & Company, which opened in South St. Paul in 1897. From the 1930s to the 1960s, South St. Paul was in daily competition with Chicago to be named the largest livestock market in the world. Today both Swift’s and Armour’s have been demolished; the area is now Bridgepoint Park and in April 2008, the stockyards themselves will close forever.
South St. Paul’s First (and only) Hospital
May 2008
By Lois Glewwe

One of the more interesting characteristics of South St. Paul is that throughout its history the community has often aspired to economic, educational, civic and financial accomplishments that other suburbs of St. Paul never considered possible. Readers of this column have learned that the establishment of the meatpacking industry in the city led to such significant developments as the opening of South St. Paul High School fifty years before any neighboring suburb considered such a venture. Other first include the first public library and the first public parks system in any community outside of the capital city.

This civic self-confidence led a group of dedicated South St. Paul volunteers to make history yet again in 1962 when the first full-service hospital to exist in a suburb of the Twin Cities opened in South St. Paul.

The effort began in 1945 as the country and the community began to recover following World War II. A group of city leaders, many from the livestock and commission industry, formed the United Communities Hospital and Health Center for the purpose of bringing a hospital to South St. Paul. Volunteers went door to door selling memberships for $10 each as a fundraiser. Andrew Reid served as the first president of the group and local civic leader H.G. Swanson was the first Treasurer. The community rallied and gave strong support to the effort. In 1959, the organization was able to purchase seven acres of land at 19th Avenue North and Thompson. A sign stating “Future Hospital Site” was erected by drive chairman Richard Lilly of First National Bank and the entire city began to visualize the new full-service hospital as a reality.

In those days before managed health care and huge health provider organizations, establishing a hospital meant identifying an administrative organization to provide organizational service as well as securing funding to erect a facility. Father Harold Whittet of St. John Vianney Parish in South St. Paul provided the first key to the administrative question when he encountered Sister Margaret of the Daughters of the Divine Redeemer from Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, while he was on a hunting trip in the Dakotas. Intrigued by the story Father Whittet told of South St. Paul residents who were buying $10 memberships to bring a hospital to their town, Sister Margaret told the popular priest that her order would come to Minnesota and open a hospital in South St. Paul if the volunteers could raise $750,000 as part of the $3 million estimated for completion of the complex.

When Father Whittet returned to the city with this news Richard Lilly spearheaded the wide-ranging funding campaign and within two years, enough support had been assured to make it possible for the cornerstone of the new facility to be laid on September 24, 1961. Hundreds of citizens turned out for the ceremony and donations continued to be received as construction began. The new Divine Redeemer Hospital opened its doors to its first patients on April 25, 1962.
For the first time in history, newborns were registered as being born in South St. Paul; something that had not happened since home births had been supplanted by hospital stays. Most South St. Paul children born between about 1920 and 1962 were born in hospitals in St. Paul. Now mothers and babies were the happy temporary residents of the local maternity ward on Thompson Avenue.

Divine Redeemer Hospital soon provided ambulance service and thousands of local residents appreciated the opportunity to spend their hospital stay in town rather than having to remain in a St. Paul or Minneapolis hospital. In turn, hospital physicians and staff, attracted from across the country to the new facility, moved into South St. Paul were soon involved in the Chamber of Commerce, the PTA and city government, strengthening and expanding the partnership between the city’s first hospital and its long-standing history of civic involvement by industry leaders.

In 1987, just 25 years after its opening, news reached the community that the hospital was to be sold to Health East Corporation. The comforting local presence of the Daughters of the Divine Redeemer came to an end in November 1987. Health East took over the hospital and continued to provide services but only a few years later, in 1994, the hospital was closed and Health East began the transition of the facility into a nursing home. Health East Bethesda Care Center was the new name of the residential care center which is today known as Cerenity Care Center-Bethesda. Extensive renovations of the original hospital building and the construction of extensive new facilities have kept the care center a vital and significant part of today’s employment base and economy. For many in town, however, the complex on the corner of 19th and Thompson will always be Divine Redeemer – South St. Paul’s very own hospital.
Herbert G. Swanson, pictured with two of the Sisters from the Daughters of the Divine Redeemer from Pennsylvania, was the first treasurer and second president of the United Communities Hospital and Health Center. The local organization was founded in 1945 for the purpose of bringing South St. Paul its own hospital. Divine Redeemer Hospital at 19th and Thompson opened on April 25, 1962. Thirty-two years later the hospital closed and reopened as a nursing home under the management of Bethesda Health Care in 1994. Today, South St. Paul’s first and only hospital continues to serve the community as Cerenity Care Center.
South St. Paul First Light Rail Experiment
June 2008
By Lois Glewwe

On May 9, 1888, one of South St. Paul’s founders, Charles W. Clark, invited over 100 dignitaries from across the region to participate in a test ride of the first electric monorail in Minnesota. Clark’s elevated train consisted of a single car that used the new miracle of electricity to ascend and descend along a massive series of steel trestles that had been erected in the ravine between Bryant and Central Avenues. The elevated track reportedly ascended from Bryant and Concord west to 16th Avenue and then turned to the south where it ended in midair after a few hundred yards. According to the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer Press of May 10, 1888, South St. Paul Mayor Joseph Lawrence welcomed the guests to “the youngest city in Minnesota” and shared the following words: “Only a short time ago this was a wilderness and now we are surrounded by all the fruits of electricity. We have the only electric railway in Minnesota.”

The newspaper went on to describe the banquet which was held in the top floor ballroom of the Bryant Block, now known as 1009 North Concord. Many of the attendees spoke, sharing their excitement and vision for the future of elevated rail in the Twin Cities. It was certainly a memorable day for the new City of South St. Paul which had been incorporated just 14 months earlier.

Many of today’s South St. residents are familiar with the city’s famous monorail. Clark Memorial Church on 15th and Bryant, named in honor of Charles W. Clark, has a descriptive plaque on its exterior brick wall describing the monorail. School kids for generations have learned the story of this early claim to fame for the city’s founders. Even after 120 years, however, research sheds new light on the significance of Charles Clark’s venture and the reason that his experimental elevated railway never became a functioning transportation system in the city.

In 1888, South St. Paul was served by three daily metro papers, the Saint Paul Dispatch, the Saint Paul Daily Globe and the then named Saint Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer Press. In the weeks and months preceding the debut of South St. Paul’s monorail, all three carried several front page stories about three companies who were seeking a franchise to erect an elevated rail system between Saint Paul and Minneapolis. The evening before Clark’s test run, the capital city’s governing body had once again put the question on hold as they listened to those in favor of the system and property owners who were opposed to elevated tracks erected in front of their establishments.

All of the companies promised elegant depot stations at the elevated railway stops and predicted that business would improve for landowners in the area. Clark’s South St. Paul enterprise, known as the South St. Paul Rapid Transit Elevated Railway Company, appears to have been affiliated with a firm known as the Enos Railway in presenting the petitions to the St. Paul City Council. The Enos firm eventually received the news that, of the three petitioners, they were favored by most of the elected officials. A vote was taken
to grant a franchise to the firm in July 1888 but a few weeks later, the project faced opposition from the City Council of Minneapolis. As Clark and others continued their efforts to receive a franchise, accusations were made by one of the St. Paul City Councilmembers that he had been offered a bribe by the Enos representatives. The accusation was never substantiated, but within a short time, all discussion of elevated rail franchises disappeared from the daily papers.

For Charles Clark and his local investors and supporters, the inability to connect to an elevated railway that would transport residents to St. Paul and Minneapolis ended their dream of establishing a viable monorail system South St. Paul. The elevated trestle system was knocked down (pieces were still being found as late as the 1970s) and the little monorail car was deposited unceremoniously on the side Bryant Avenue hill up from Concord Street until it was finally removed in 1918.

Today’s proponents of light rail may appreciate the irony in the record of lengthy public hearings and debates which occurred over this 1888 proposal for mass transit. Were some of the St. Paul Council members asking for money from Clark and his supporters before approving their franchise? Were opponents perhaps paying those bribes more readily than those in favor of elevated rail? Is it possible that St. Paul and Minneapolis could have been the site of miles of our very own “EL,” like Chicago and New York? Could South St. Paul have been the first suburban link to that early light rail system?

The answers to such questions will perhaps never be known. What South St. Paul’s rich history will always record, however, is that for one brief period in 1888, the city was home to the only elevated electric railway that ever existed in Minnesota.
On May 9, 1888, over 100 people took a ride on the first and only elevated electric railway system ever erected in Minnesota. The test track extended from Concord Street at Bryant west to 16th Avenue North and then south a few hundred yards before ending in mid-air. Proponents of the system, which was intended to connect to elevated railways in St. Paul and Minneapolis, promised many of the amenities and benefits that today’s light rail developers present to communities where they hope to build. South St. Paul’s celebrated rail line operated for just one day before St. Paul politicians put an end to the dream of a metro-wide electric transit system.
The Muckle Girls and the Grand Hotel
July 2008
By Lois Glewwe

Travelers looking for a place to stay in South St. Paul today don’t have a lot of choices, but for those who arrived in town in 1889, hotels abounded. One of the most impressive locations was the Grand Hotel on the southwest corner of Concord Street and Central Avenue. Built by Hugh Connelly in 1889, the 59-room inn welcomed visitors to its broad front porch and offered a cool night breeze to those who ventured out onto the second floor deck. The fourth floor featured four gabled windows on each side and the hotel’s ballroom and restaurant were popular sites for parties and entertainment.

James Nichols, who managed the hotel with his wife, had a ready-made staff in the “Muckle Girls,” as Margaret Jane Templeton Muckle’s daughters were known. Margaret had married James Muckle in Ireland in 1858 when she was 17 years old. They had seven daughters and one son who survived to adulthood as well as another daughter who died in infancy. The family emigrated to Minnesota by 1880, but by the time Margaret Templeton Muckle arrived in South St. Paul in 1891, she was a widow with five daughters and son John still living at home.

The girls and their brother all worked at the hotel at various times and were well-known and popular residents of this north end neighborhood of South St. Paul which was called South Park. Two other daughters, who had married by the time the Grand Hotel opened, were already living in South St. Paul by 1889, so the entire Muckle family was united in South Park.

Taking care of the hotel’s restaurants, laundry, housecleaning, reservations and other accommodations was a demanding task even for the busy Muckle clan. In later years, the girls recalled that their most difficult task was hauling water for drinking and laundry from the Mississippi River, just across Concord Street.

South St. Paul was a busy economic center in the 1890s. The South Park Foundry industries and the Union Stockyards Company to the south attracted workers from all over the eastern United States and Europe. Entrepreneurs opened bars, boarding houses, restaurants, businesses and manufacturing firms along Concord Street. Concord Street echoed with the sounds of construction, the braying of horses pulling high-wheeled carriages and bustling pedestrians shopping and doing business in the neighborhood.

One of the reasons that the story of the “Muckle Girls” is of interest is that they married into prominent area families and many of their descendants still live in South St. Paul in 2008. The girls’ social events, engagements, weddings and birth announcements dominated the pages of the local newspaper as the Muckles established themselves in the community.
A brief overview of the family history records that Mary Muckle married Samuel Burch and settled in West St. Paul. Jane Muckle married Robert Robinson and became one of the most renowned women in Minnesota history because of her role as a Mississippi River lamplighter for 36 years. Elizabeth Muckle married a man named Samuel, who shared her last name of Muckle. They operated boarding houses in the area and ultimately settled in Chicago. Margaret Muckle became the wife of Joseph J. Grisim, South St. Paul City Councilman, fireman, policeman and eventually Dakota County Sheriff. Agnes Muckle married Thomas Kennedy. He was also a South St. Paul fireman and policeman and served as Justice of the Peace. Martha Muckle married T.J. Kennedy and later settled in Iowa and Mathilda Muckle married Ernest Woodhouse of St. Paul. When the matriarch of the clan, Margaret Jane Templeton Muckle, passed away in 1901, all of her children were in attendance as she was laid to rest in South St. Paul’s Oak Hill Cemetery.

Despite the longevity of the Muckle Sisters in South St. Paul, the Grand Hotel was not to enjoy such ongoing fame. On May 10, 1904, the impressive hotel burned to the ground. Without any public water system to reach South St. Paul’s north end, the volunteer Fire Company was helpless in the face of the flames. The fire began at about 5:00 a.m. and burned at high velocity for nearly three hours. Employees from area businesses formed bucket brigades and did everything they could to save the structure but without connection to a water source, their efforts were futile. Local residents recalled that the cavernous hole left by the destruction of the massive hotel dominated the corner of Central and Concord for many years after the early morning blaze in 1904.
CAPTION: South St. Paul’s Grand Hotel, at left above, opened in 1889 on Central Avenue and Concord Street. It had 59 guest rooms, a restaurant, an elegant ballroom and was the scene of many local celebrations until it burned to the ground in 1904. At right is a picture of the Muckle family. It was the “Muckle Girls,” who made the Grand Hotel guests comfortable by providing them with food, linens and warm South Park hospitality. Back row, left to right: Agnes Muckle Kennedy, Jane Muckle Robinson, Mary Muckle Burch, Elizabeth Muckle and Mathilda Muckle Woodhouse. Front row, left to right: Margaret Muckle Grisim, Martha Muckle Kennedy, Margaret Jane Templeton Muckle and John Muckle.
Eighty-eight years ago, on the morning of August 27, 1920, small groups of South St. Paul women began to make their way to neighborhood polling places to vote. The issue was minor; a water bond bill that most assumed would pass. The occasion was historic because this was the first day in the history of the United States that women were granted and guaranteed equal voting rights with men in national elections. The 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which had been approved by the full U.S. Congress on May 21, 1919, had finally reached the required majority to enact Constitutional change when the State of Tennessee became the 36th State to ratify the amendment on August 26, 1920.

Eighty-seven South St. Paul women turned up to vote the next morning when the City of South St. Paul staged the impromptu water bond election. Both of the major metropolitan daily newspapers as well as three national news services and a California film studio were on hand to record the historic occasion. The women's votes were counted separately from the men in case some last minute challenge to the law was to void their numbers, but that was not to be the case.

Instead, the South St. Paul Reporter ran the following opinion when city elections were scheduled a few months later: “The 1921 city campaign is going to be unlike any other in the history of the town for the simple reason that the women folks will have a direct say in the doings. And the ladies have some ideas as to how affairs ought to be run which don't jibe with those of many of the he-politicians who have had things their own way in times past. Stick around and watch for the thrills.”

It had taken more than 130 years of nearly continuous effort by American women and supportive men to achieve equal voting status for women in every state. Even after ratification, it was not until 1958 that the State of Maryland accepted and enforced the new law. The story of American suffrage for women winds down a trail of interruption and legal challenge. The most intense effort to grant women the right to vote became caught up in the fight to abolish slavery and the Civil War brought a temporary halt to women’s suffrage efforts. African American men in America were subsequently granted the right to vote in 1870 while women of any race fought for that right for another fifty years.

For the South St. Paul community, the issues of women’s rights to own property, to vote and to hold public office were in some ways perhaps more prominent than in other suburban communities. Just as South St. Paul proved to be a leader by opening the first high school and establishing one of the first and most important centers of commercial and industrial development in Minnesota, South St. Paul women were also leaders in the suffrage movement.
One of the reasons for their leadership was that the South St. Paul meatpacking plants offered women economic independence because many jobs in the slaughterhouses were open to both men and women. Although women always earned less than men for the same job, the availability of employment meant that South St. Paul women, who were often immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, could earn enough money to buy their own home and become independent property owners. That status increased the power of their voice in local decision-making. When it came time to fight for the vote, South St. Paul women were there to lead the way.

Their counterparts in South St. Paul society were the wives and daughters of powerful East Coast bankers, lawyers, entrepreneurs and livestock brokers who had come to the booming town of South St. Paul when it bore more similarity to the “Wild West,” than it did to Wall Street. These women from wealthy Eastern families were also leaders in the fight for equal rights in the voting booth. Their mothers and grandmothers had paved the way by fighting for suffrage for generations. Now, in a new place and a new part of America, they seized the opportunity to organize, educate and recruit working women to their cause.

Thus it was that on an August morning in 1920, women from all walks of life and from every social class in the city, came together to cast their ballots in a small-town election that exemplified the way in which American politics...

The South St. Paul Daily Reporter of October 26, 1920, featured this cartoon which reflected the new courtship that the Republicans and Democrats were conducting to gain the support of 27 Million women voters. Women had been granted equality in the voting booth with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in August of 1920. The header to the cartoon reads: “It’s Leap Year – Why Doesn’t She Propose?” The women’s vote continues to influence every American election, including the presidential race in 2008.
Seventy-five years ago, on the morning of August 30, 1933, Concord Street in South St. Paul was the scene of a dramatic and violent gangland bank heist.

Today's residents would find it difficult to imagine, but Concord Street in front of the South St. Paul Post Office on that busy Wednesday morning was jammed with traffic from Wentworth Avenue on the north to Armour Avenue to the south. Livestock brokers, bankers and commission men were in and out of the Exchange Building. The now long-gone Chicago Great Western Railroad Depot just to the east of the Post Office, was bustling as the train from St. Paul pulled in to make a mail and bank drop.

Without any warning the street suddenly rang with the sound of machine gun fire. Within a matter of minutes, one South St. Paul Police officer lay dead and another was wounded and near death. The gang fled out of town in their big black sedan, headed north on Concord Street with $30,000 in cash that they had successfully seized in the tragic crime.

According to local news accounts, the gangsters had been parked in front of a filling station north of the Post Office since 7:00 a.m. Around 10:00 a.m. two bank messengers from Stockyards National Bank, Joe Hamilton and Herb Cheyne, headed for the Post Office with money bags filled with coins. A registered bag of currency was on the arriving train and they were to pick it up at the Post Office and return to the bank. South St. Paul Police Officer Leo Pavlak was assigned to guard them as they transported the money that morning. Another South St. Paul policeman, Officer John Yeamen, was keeping watch in his vehicle, parked in the driveway between the Post Office and the Depot.

As Hamilton and Cheyne came down the steps of the Post Office, they were met by the bandits and forced to drop the bags of coin and currency. Officer Pavlak was confronted by one of the gangsters, who had a pistol in each hand. Pavlak was told to raise his arms which he did. The gangster shot him through the forehead and the officer's body slumped under a volley of machine gun fire. Two other shooters then took aim at the police car, wounding Yeamen severely and pulling him from the car. Hamilton and Cheyne ran for cover, diving under a truck parked at the south end of the building. People screamed and ran madly into shops and restaurants along the street as twenty-seven or more shots were fired wildly into the Post Office and adjacent buildings.

Two of the bandits had been waiting in the Depot Café, a few feet to the north and had ordered a couple glasses of beer. When they walked in that morning, they each set down a case against the game machine at the left of the door. One of the men kept checking the street and finally gave a signal to the other. They grabbed their cases, which fell open to reveal a machine gun and a sawed-off shotgun. A total of five or six men ultimately
joined the gang, grabbed the packages of money and headed out of town in their get-away car.

South St. Paul and St. Paul Police Departments made every effort to capture the killers, but they were never identified. Officer Leo Pavlak’s own machine gun which he was carrying that day was ultimately located by the F.B.I. when they raided the New Orleans stronghold of gangster Alvin Karpis, a partner of Ma Barker and her boys.

The community turned its attention to the families of the two police officers. Leo Pavlak, who was only 35 years old at the time of his death, was survived by his wife Pauline and children, Eleanor, age 11 and Robert, Age 9. Police Officers from across the state participated in the dramatic funeral procession which accompanied his body to St. Augustine’s Catholic Church a few days later. Officer Yeamen returned to the force three years later, but carried many shotgun pellets in his body and was never able to regain his health. Both Leo Pavlak’s son, Robert, and John Yeamen’s son, Jack, subsequently carried on their fathers’ commitment and served lifelong careers as police officers in St. Paul and South St. Paul respectively.
The robbery of August 30, 1933, was the most tragic of South St. Paul’s encounters with organized crime, but it is estimated that there was more cash on any given day in South St. Paul than there was anywhere outside of New York City in those years of the 1930s. The South St. Paul Police Department, pictured here in approximately 1932, was all too familiar with dealing with the mobsters whose cars would race up the Grand Avenue hill or along Concord Street on many mornings, their business in South St. Paul successfully concluded. From left to right are: Leo Pavlak, (the officer murdered in 1933), George Wagner, Art Giguere, Henry Whaley, Frank Farrell, Victor Johnson, Edward Giguere and Fred Schulze. Next to Schulze is John Yeamen, Sr., the officer wounded in the shoot-out. Chief Edgar McAlpine is on the right.
From Couches to Caskets – South St. Paul’s Funeral Homes  
October 2008  
By Lois Glewwe

In the earliest days of South St. Paul, during the 1880s and 1890s, the business of burial was a fairly simple process. Someone in the family of the deceased would hike down the Grand Avenue hill to a furniture shop along Concord Street and order a casket. The wooden box, built in the same shop where new bedsteads, couches, chairs and kitchen tables were constructed, would be delivered to the family home within the day. It was considered bold and inappropriate for any furniture dealer to advertise the sale of caskets or to showcase caskets in their shops, but most had a carpenter ready to prepare the final resting bed for the deceased on a moment’s notice. The loved one’s body, now washed and prepared by family members, would be carefully laid inside the humble board box. The casket was then placed on a sturdy table in the parlor and friends and family would view the body at the home visitation, which might be held on the second or third day after the death.

Then, on the day of the burial, the cover of the casket would be nailed down and the men would load the box onto a livery wagon hired for the day and haul the body to Oak Hill Cemetery, Union Cemetery or the Lutheran Cemetery for interment. A mason or carver was hired to engrave a humble block of stone with name, date of birth and death and the passing of a family member would be complete.

Over the years, the cabinetmakers or furniture purveyors became more and more involved in providing other services and advice to those planning the funeral. Eventually the person who would "undertake" to manage all funeral details and provide funeral merchandise became known as an "undertaker." He eventually obtained and provided all the necessary items for the funeral, including the casket, the wagon, the funeral program, and black-rimmed death notice cards for distribution by the family.

Once it became possible for the undertaker to provide embalming services, the haste was taken out of the burial process and people were given ample time to arrange and prepare for the funeral. The process and practice of embalming in American began during the Civil War, when thousands of dead fell on the battlefields. With no opportunity to ship bodies home or even to confirm positive identity, a few physicians began the process of embalming in an effort to preserve the bodies so that identification could ultimately be confirmed.

The first embalming preparations were arsenic solutions that were rapidly replaced when formaldehyde became available. Representatives for embalming fluid companies would travel the country presenting one or two day schools of instruction in the use of their product. For attending these classes and purchasing a quantity of fluid, an undertaker received a certificate as an embalmer. It wasn’t until the 1930s that state licensing in America became almost universal.
Warren Meeker came to South St. Paul and founded his Grand Avenue Hardware and Undertaking Department in 1906. Arthur W. Shepard provided undertaking service from 1908-1912 and opened a funeral parlor in the city at 213 10th Avenue South in 1933. Both Meeker and Shepard ran funeral parlors at 141 5th Avenue South at various times during the 1930s.

Robert English founded the English Funeral Home on the site of the former Greystone Grill Restaurant at 140 8th Avenue North and he and Warren Meeker became partners in 1951 under the name of English-Meeker Funeral Parlor.

Joe Klectasky operated a funeral parlor in the former Meeker and Shepard location at 141 5th Avenue South in the 1940s. He opened a new funeral home at 706 Southview in 1935 and built the current Southern Funeral Home at 414 Marie Avenue in the mid-1950s.

In 1957, an addition was made to the English Meeker building across the street from South St. Paul High School and Robert English sold the business to Myron and Russell Kandt. Myron’s son, Jeff Kandt, is still one of the owners of the current funeral services business at that location in 2008.

In 2008, more than 100 years since Warren Meeker came to town, South St. Paul still has just two funeral providers who serve the Protestant and Catholic families in a cooperative and gracious partnership.
In the 1920s, the gracious building pictured above was the Greystone Grill at 140 8th Avenue North in South St. Paul, a lunchtime tea shop built across the street from South St. Paul High School to serve the teachers in the community. By 1951, it had become the English Meeker Funeral Home. The building at right, 141 Fifth Avenue South in South St. Paul, was built by Henry Glewwe as Glewwe’s Grocery store and family home in South St. Paul. In later years, Warren Meeker and Art Shepard operated funeral services from the building. At the time this photo was taken in the 1940s, the little storefront was Southern Funeral Home.
The first church in South St. Paul was established when a group of believers began to meet on Sunday mornings in Arthur Clark’s grocery store on the corner of Bryant and Concord Streets in 1886. The St. Paul Congregational Union stepped in to help the early citizens organize a church and Charles Clark donated two lots on the corner of 15th and Bryant for the new location. One of Charles Clark’s neighbors in St. Paul was the famous architect Cass Gilbert, who agreed to design a chapel for the new congregation. The South Park Congregational Church was dedicated on October 25, 1887. Now known as Clark Memorial United Church of Christ, the congregation still meets in their current building on the original land donated by Charles Clark.

From those humble beginnings, the South St. Paul religious community soon grew to include denominations representing Catholics and Protestants as well as a variety of Orthodox churches serving several ethnic groups. As Americans celebrate Thanksgiving this November, it is an appropriate time to look back to the history of community congregations.

1887 – First Baptist Church of St. Paul opened a mission at Grand and Concord; 1905 – moved to what is now Concord and 494. 1928 – South St. Paul Baptist Church established at that location. 1957 – The South St. Paul Baptist Church united with Calvary Baptist Church and dedicated the First Calvary Baptist Church at 501 6th Ave. S. Moved to Inver Grove in 2000. Today the 6th Ave. site is home of St. Mary’s Coptic Orthodox Church.

1892 – St. Paulus German Lutheran Church organized. 1893 – First church dedicated at 201 6th Ave. N. 1953 – Merged with Trinity Lutheran, incorporated as Luther Memorial Church and moved to new church at 315 15th Ave. N. The St. Paulus Church was subsequently home to South St. Paul Assembly of God and is currently the South St. Paul Hispanic Seventh-day Adventist Church.

1893 – First Presbyterian Church of South St. Paul established. 1896 – First church dedicated on the northwest corner of 5th and Marie Avenues. 1958 – Built new church on 20th and Congress where the congregation remains today.

1894 – Bethesda Swedish Lutheran Church was founded. 1895 - First chapel built on 7th Ave. S. in 1895. 1923 - New church built at 100 6th Ave. N., where they remained until moving to Inver Grove Heights in 1964. The church became home to Gethsemane Baptist Church, St. Mary’s Coptic Orthodox Church and is currently the First Hmong Baptist Church of South St. Paul.
1896 – St. Augustine’s Catholic Parish formally incorporated and built a chapel on the southwest corner of Grand Ave. and 3rd St. N. 1923 – fire destroyed the first church. 1924 – Current church built at the present location at 408 3rd St. N.

1915 – The First United Methodist Church of South St Paul was established and began construction of their church at 140 6th Ave. N. in 1920. 1924 – First church building dedicated. Remains home to the congregation today.

1920 – Grace Lutheran Church established and first chapel dedicated at 149 8th Ave. S. 1928 – Rebuilt on the same site and dedicated their current church which remains in worship in 2008.

1924 – Holy Trinity Catholic Church incorporated and property purchased. 1940 - Built their current church at 749 6th Ave. S.

1924 – St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church established. First chapel built at 201 5th Ave. S. That structure burned in 1953 and was rebuilt. The congregation joined with Good Shepherd Church in 1983 and became St Anne’s Episcopal Church in Sunfish Lake. The New Church- Swedenborgian bought the building on 5th Ave. N., which today is home to the Apostolic Christian Church of South St. Paul.

1924 – St. Stefan’s Romanian Orthodox Church built at 350 5th Ave. N. Remains home to the church in 2008.

1927 – Trinity Norwegian Lutheran Church incorporated. 1928 – Bought the original church building of Grace Lutheran and moved it to the Southwest corner of 10th and Southview. 1953 – United with St. Paulus Lutheran to become today’s Luther Memorial Church on 15th Ave. N.

1932 – The Christian Apostolic Church was founded and eventually moved their building from 10th Ave. N. to 7th Ave. N. across from South St. Paul High School. That church is now closed and the congregation is meeting at 201 5th Ave. N. in the former St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church.

1946 – St. John Vianney Catholic Church was founded and met in the pavilion at Kaposia Park. 1947 – Their first chapel was built at 17th and Bryant Aves. N. 1955 – Lower level of the current church completed. Many additions and renovations have been made.

1952 – Concordia Lutheran Church incorporated. Built their church at 255 W. Douglas. They remain at that site in 2008.

1953 – St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church built at 357 2nd Ave. S. Remains in worship today.
1985 – The Miracle Center of St. Paul founded as The Word Church. Purchased the former Jefferson Elementary School building at 125 21st Ave. S. The congregation remains at that location today.

This image of South St. Paul churches was published in the early 1900s as part of a promotional postcard booklet to let people know what a great place the city was to live. The churches pictured are numbered as follows 1: Bethesda Lutheran; 2: St. Augustine’s Catholic; 3: German Baptist 4: Clark Memorial UCC; 5: First Presbyterian and 6: St. Paulus German Lutheran. From the earliest days to the present, South St. Paul has been home to a diverse Christian community, with more than 20 specific congregations establishing church homes in the city.
The End of Prohibition - 75 Years Ago in December 1933
December 2008
By Lois Glewwe

South St. Paul’s history is filled with stories of accomplishments and progress. The massive livestock industry brought wealthy bankers and commission men to town by the end of the 19th century. South St. Paul had one of the first high schools in the state and South St. Paul women were among the first to vote legally in a local election in 1920. South St. Paul’s people represented a wide variety of ethnic groups and brought a rich diversity of culture to the city.

One aspect of the city’s history that is not as illustrious is South St. Paul’s connection to the world of bootlegging, gambling, gangsters and crime. It was seventy-five years ago, on December 5, 1933, that Prohibition was repealed. The law, which had made production and sale of alcoholic beverages illegal, had been ratified in 1919 and took effect on January 16, 1920. For thirteen years, South St. Paul and every other city in America was prevented from allowing the production or sale of alcohol. Millions of bars, taverns and clubs were forced to close and distilleries were shut down immediately.

From 1887 to 1915, South St. Paul City Council minutes and phone directories mention 107 bars and taverns that operated in the city. Nearly every doorway along Concord Street from South Park to the South End led up, down or directly into a bar. While many residents looked forward to the closing of these establishments, others were determined to not allow the Federal Government to prevent them from having a cold beer.

Stories abound in the recollections of many who lived through the years of Prohibition in South St. Paul, many of which are recorded in the Centennial History of South St. Paul, published in 1987. Some describe an elaborate system of underground copper tubing that was put in place under the old Exchange Building on Grand and Concord and connected to the taps of former bars and taverns along both sides of the street. Through a pre-determined message system involving telephone calls, adjusting the level of a window or door shade and other secret signs, the owners of these businesses, now called cafes, restaurants and sandwich shops, kept each other informed of whether the “Feds,” the agents from St. Paul, were anywhere in the area. When they weren’t, the taps freely flowed with beer and hard liquor. When the window and door shades were moved to signal the arrival of the enforcers, the taps would quickly be switched to tea, coffee or water.

Estimates are that more than 90 locations along Concord sold alcohol during Prohibition, most of them under the marquee of grocery store, hardware supply, restaurant, butcher shop, garage or billiard parlor. The moonshine or “hooch,” as it was called could be quite easily produced in the tunnels underneath the street or in a nearby garage or even a boarding house kitchen. Production was dangerous and there were successful raids, but for most of the years of Prohibition, the bootleggers were able to pay off the police or Feds and be protected from arrest.
South St. Paul was known across the Twin Cities as the place to drink and gamble during the 1920s. It was not uncommon to see a gangster’s big black sedan rolling along Concord or racing up the Grand Avenue hill with the Feds in pursuit.

The underground illegal activity of the years of Prohibition has often been romanticized in movies and books in subsequent years. For many in South St. Paul, however, the presence of bootleggers, gamblers, Federal agents and gangsters led to devastating family tragedy as men became caught up in the production or sale of alcohol and ended up in prison or caught in the crossfire of a raid. In 1987, many families were unable to even talk about those years and preferred to forget everything that took place.

The devastating economic crisis brought on by the Great Depression was one of the things which led President Franklin Roosevelt to sign the Cullen-Harrison Act, allowing the sale of 3.2 beer and light wine on March 23, 1933. By December 5 of that year, Congress repealed federal Prohibition, allowing states to choose whether to remain “dry” or not. Within only a few weeks, South St. Paul’s underground liquor industry was once again legal and within a few months, there were 60 licensed taverns back in business along the Concord Street Strip.

**CAPTION:** The Roman Tavern, owned by Roman Chrosniak, was located at 211 S. Concord. This photo was taken in about 1918, right before Prohibition supposedly forced South St. Paul tavern owners to stop selling intoxicating beverages. It is estimated that over 90 locations continued to provide liquor to customers by switching their taps from beer to water when the Federal agents were headed for South St. Paul. Prohibition ended December 5, 1933, and within a few months, South St. Paul had 60 taverns operating...
America’s attention in recent months has focused on automobile manufacturers and their financial stability. Minnesota has seen major dealers close locations and approach bankruptcy. Owning a car has long been a highlight of American success and in South St. Paul, many of the city’s earliest entrepreneurs were car dealers.

The first automobile to appear in South St. Paul was built by Emil Gardie, who debuted his new-fangled vehicle in 1910 and powered it nearly all the way up the Grand Avenue hill before prevailing on neighborhood boys to give him a push to the top. South St. Paul’s streets at the time were filled with horse-drawn wagons and delivery carts as well as personal carriages pulled by handsome pairs of horses. The automobile was a fad that many felt would never become popular.

That same year, however, Charles F. Worm founded the South St. Paul Auto Company. He ultimately became a major car dealer and handled the Chandler, Cleveland Six, Overland and the Stephens Six. In 1924, J.C. Van Roo opened a business at 330 N. Concord selling Fords. He offered the latest Ford touring car for $348 in May of 1922. By the end of the 1920s, Hencir Bros. and the Tomek Bros. opened on Southview, and in 1926 Reuben Glewwe opened his business selling Willys Knights and Auburns at 509-513 Marie Avenue next to his dad’s Glewwe’s Grocery, where he remained in business until 1939. Hencir’s eventually became Grandview Motors at 200 8th Avenue South and later was taken over by James and Laud Tomek who ran the business as Tomek’s for many years.

In the 1930s, William F. Rund sold the DeSoto at South St. Paul Motors at 820 Southview and Henry Egan opened his first car lot as Egan LeMire Motor Company on Concord Street next to the Post Office. The business later became Jay Kline Chevrolet and then Southview Chevrolet.


A Hudson-Essex dealership operated at 101 S. Concord in the 1930s and later the Metzen-Brown Motor Company, owned by Mark Brown and Floyd “Butch” Metzen, sold Hudsons at 770 N. Concord. Adolph LeMire and Roy Danielson were Dodge, Plymouth and later Pontiac dealers at 337 and 364 N. Concord, and the Fox Brothers sold the Nash at 722 N. Concord. Kallin Motors provided a showcase for the Studebaker at 817-825 N. Concord and Ed Peters opened his Oldsmobile dealership at 525 S. Concord in the 1940s. Concord Street became known throughout the Twin Cities as Automobile Row as World War II came to an end and into the 1950s when customers came from all over the region to get a good deal at one of the competitive South St. Paul dealerships.
In 1925, Thomas Howard “Red” Leonard came to South St. Paul and worked as a sale manager for Leon Burch at his Ford dealership. Twenty years later, his son, Harold T. “Red” Leonard opened Fury Motors which remains the only dealership left in the city today.

The presence of a well-established automobile industry in the city in the formative years of the 1920s-1950s also meant that South St. Paul civic organizations benefited from the financial support of the owners of competitive firms and the volunteer hours of their employees who joined Kiwanis, Lions and Rotary Clubs and shared their time and talent to strengthen the city’s efforts at civic improvement and development projects.

The decline of the local automobile industry began with the urban redevelopment movement of the 1960s as over 100 buildings were demolished on Concord Street to make way for more modern retail and business facilities. Many of South St. Paul’s early dealers moved to Inver Grove Heights, which soon replaced South St. Paul as the “Automobile Row” of the region.
CAPTION: The first automobiles appeared on South St. Paul streets in 1910. This vintage 1913 model belonged to tavern-owner Aurel Papiu and his wife Carolina Bretoi Papiu. The family gathered for an outing in front of a cluster of boarding houses on the old Pitt Street off of Grand Avenue. Dumitriu Bretoi is standing on the running board; Carolina and Aurel Papiu are in the front seat and Elena and Nicolae Bretoi are in back with baby Sylvia Bretoi on her father’s lap.
On December 15, 2008, the South St. Paul City Council approved Ordinance No. 1214 which required for the first time that citizens of South St. Paul help pay for public illumination of city streets. The importance of lighting public thoroughfares has, however, long been recognized by municipalities. As early as 1887, the three wards of the city each had eight oil lamps that were lit by hand each evening.

In 1899, the City Council approved the following: “Whereas the City of South St. Paul is recognized as one of the business cities of the Northwest, where numbers of businessmen are coming and going at all times of day and night; and whereas it is the duty of the Mayor and Council to see that the lives and property of all persons shall be secure and protected while within the City limits; Whereas the center of our city is in complete darkness and the lives of the people are in danger when getting on and off trains, even the lives of our officials and police are sometime in danger on account of the darkness. Therefore be it Resolved: That Mayor Lytle be and is hereby empowered to have 16 lamps repaired and placed where in his opinion they are most needed…and be it further resolved: That said lamps shall be filled and attended to by the police of South St. Paul alternately without compensation…”

The number of lamps was increased to 42 by 1890 and John Gorman was hired to keep the kerosene fixtures illuminated. Patrick McAuliff took over the lamp lighting chore the following year when gasoline replaced kerosene in the lamps. He was paid $1.48 per lamp per month.

While the city continued to deal with gas lamps, two local businessmen were experimenting with other types of lighting. John Coates, founder of the Coates Hotel on the northwest corner of Grand and Concord, installed a gasoline engine in his establishment which had the capacity to light 150 fixtures at a time. Michael O’Toole, who rented rooms above his tavern on Concord Street, also put in a ten-horse-power gasoline engine to run 100 lights. Both men soon learned, however, that their makeshift generators were not reliable and success was limited.

The two entrepreneurs approached Emil Gardie, one of South St. Paul’s earliest residents who was renowned for building his own automobile, and Emil Erick, an engine shop foreman at the Waterous Company who had a degree in mechanical engineering. They also brought in Albert Baumgarten, an electrician at Swift & Company. Together the men drew up plans for construction of a power plant in the city and sought incorporation as the South St. Paul Electric Light, Heat and Power Company in January 1905.

The first electric lights in the city were installed in August 1905 at I.A. Grant’s Feed Store on the southern end of Concord, at City Hall on the Grand Avenue hill, at the corner of Concord and Grand and at Rund’s Hotel further north on Concord Street. The
following April two more electric lights were installed on the corners of Bryant and Central at Concord Street.

The city tried to purchase the power company in 1909 but the men regained control. By January 1910, they had 350 private customers and operated 63 street lights. In 1911 private utility companies were taken over as public operations and the Consumers Power Company, later known as Northern States Power Company, assumed control of the local plant and named Augustus S. “Gus” Francis as manager. Although access to electric power was soon available to most areas of the city, it was not until 1925 that power lines were extended along Southview and Marie Avenues as far west as 15th Avenue.

The new 2009 streetlight fee enacted by City Council has prompted discussion and debate but also reminds residents of the early pioneers who saw the need for improvement and enhancement and who worked hard to bring light to the streets of the city.
Caption: One of the first street lights in South St. Paul can be seen hanging next to the telegraph pole on the left. It is suspended from a light pole in front of Shaw Lumber Company. In 1907, the city required that the light at Shaw Lumber be kept burning all night long to assist in providing light to Concord Street. This photo was taken in approximately 1915 from a position approximately one block south of Grand Avenue on Concord. The spires of the old Exchange Building can be seen on the right. Horses, buggies and early autos are parked alongside the street while the electric streetcar indicates the arrival of the modern age to the streets of South St. Paul.
Recent global economic developments have led many journalists and interviewers to reflect on what America has always known as “The Great Depression,” that time from 1929 to the mid-1930s when the American economy completely crumbled into a round of bank failures, unemployment, home foreclosures and stock market crashes.

South St. Paul’s local economy survived the Depression of the 1930s because the meatpacking plants remained in operation, making it possible for banks and commission firms to thrive. As long as workers were getting paychecks, small businesses hung on despite the reduced purchase level and illegal operations such as bootlegging and gambling kept Concord Street in a positive cash flow situation.

That is not to say that families didn’t face suffering and sacrifice during those difficult times, but diversions like movies and entertainment provided moments of happiness. For hundreds of South St. Paul children, music and dance classes with Mary and Adolph Vavro provided a joyous respite from the reality of reduced circumstances.

Adolph Vavro was 16 years old when his parents emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the United States in 1912. After completing his musical degree at the Chicago College of Music, Adolph served in the military in World War I and then came to South St. Paul with his parents and the rest of the family. By the mid-1920s, Adolph’s younger sister, Mary, who was born in America in 1914, convinced him to allow her to begin teaching dance at their home at 1300 North Concord (now the site of the Simon’s Ravine Trailhead).

Within two years, Mary’s dance classes had grown to the extent that she was able to found a dance school on the third floor of the former Fair Store at 149 North Concord. In 1932, Adolph, who had worked with professional musicians around the country, partnered with Mary and founded the Vavro School of Music and Dancing in the Stapp Brothers Electric Building at 613 Southview Boulevard. They later moved the school to 139 North Concord and eventually to the Werner Building on the southeast corner of Grand and Third Avenue North, where they remained in business until 1980.

The yearly Vavro Review was one of the most popular entertainment events ever held in South St. Paul. For decades, the high school auditorium was transformed once a year into a professional stage set for hundreds of tap dancing kids dressed in elaborate costumes. The annual theme prevailed in massive backdrops, music and dance numbers. One of the most popular groups was Adolph Vavro’s Saxophone Band, with over 30 youthful saxophone players, the boys dressed in suits and girls in their Sunday best.

These were the days of the great American musical in theater and movies and school children were enamored with the glamorous costumes, dance numbers and big band
sound of the productions. Shirley Temple was America’s favorite star and every little girl wanted her own shiny tap shoes. Boys longed to emulate the musical skill of the trombone and saxophone stars who always ended up getting the girl in the romantic dramas.

The splendor of the stage sets and the degree of professionalism that the Vavro’s expected of their students provided a welcome diversion from economic woes and brought magnificent showpieces of musical entertainment to the local community.

In addition to the musical enhancement the Vavro’s brought to South St. Paul, Adolph served on the South St. Paul Charter Commission for 12 years, was a director and treasurer of the Chamber of Commerce and a life-long member and president of the South St. Paul Kiwanis. He was also a member of the American Legion and of the Last Man’s Club of World War I.

Mary Vavro Mazar retired from the dance studio in 1978 but donated thousands of dollars to Divine Redeemer Hospital and to South St. Paul High School’s performing arts programs. Both Adolph and Mary Vavro Mazar were inducted into the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence because of their contributions to the cultural life of the community.
This 1942 Vavro Review had a military theme with most of the boys dressed as sailors and the girls wearing international outfits of allied nations. The elaborate backdrop of the cannon provided dimension to the detailed costumes and lively dance numbers choreographed by Mary Vavro.

The Vavro Saxophone Band of the 1930s and 1940s featured more than 30 sax players. The group traveled the state with director Adolph Vavro and often won awards.
South St. Paul Loses a Landmark – 51 Years of Snyder’s Drugs
April 2009
By Lois Glewwe

South St. Paul’s Snyder’s Drug Store opened next door to Applebaum’s Grocery Store in the city’s first modern shopping center on Southview Boulevard in 1958. To the south of Applebaum’s was the Ben Franklin store. Together the new strip of stores brought the exciting new world of retail to the old neighborhood.

I grew up in the 100-block of 15th Avenue South, just three blocks from Snyder’s and I will never forget the thrill we all felt at the opening of the city’s new center. You entered Snyder’s into a little glassed-in foyer much like the current entrance. The first thing you saw was the brightly polished chrome lunch counter with spinning stools and hand-lettered signs advertising “Tuna on White” for 75-cents or “Fresh Hot Coffee – 15 Cents a Cup.” There was a soda fountain, an ice cream freezer stacked on top with metal sundae dishes, a glass-domed display of homemade pies and layer cakes and a cooler filled with salads like coleslaw, cottage cheese, fruit cocktail and every color of whipped-cream-topped Jell-O imaginable.

To the south of the lunch counter were the beautifully displayed shelves of candy, toys, coloring books, dolls, magazines and those charming items that ladies knew as “notions,” a term which encompassed needles, threads, hooks and eyes, elastic extenders, bias tape and other necessary items for the homemakers of the era. At the rear was the serious section of the operation, the prescription counter where people came to pick up medications prescribed by their physicians who had only recently begun to use outside retailers to dispense pills and potions.

The Snyder’s store of the 1950s will no longer be open for business by the time this article is published. In many ways, the retail philosophy exemplified by the local store has never changed but has only been expanded upon by today’s big box drug emporiums like the ones on nearly every corner in suburban America. Snyder’s was one of the first to transform the old-time apothecary/drug store from a place to buy a bottle of aspirin to a place where every family could find entertainment and enticement by walking the aisles filled with tempting items that one may have never seen before.

One of South St. Paul’s earliest drug stores was Straight Brothers, which opened in 1911 on Concord Street. City Drug was another popular spot at 161 North Concord. Julius Gericke’s first job was at Central Pharmacy at 158 North Concord. In 1923, he opened his own drugstore on the southeast corner of Fifth and Marie Avenues. Gericke’s was one of the first of the local drugstores to have a soda fountain and lunch counter. The site soon became a popular gathering spot for teenagers who would swarm the spot after school for milk shakes, sodas and snacks. The family-owned pharmacy remained in business until Julius’ son Jack retired in 1975 and sold the business to Greg Schouweiler, who operated Pro Pharmacy on the original Gericke’s site until moving across the street where he remains in business today.
Another of the early drug stores was owned by Sidney Shom who bought Crandall’s Central Pharmacy in 1934 and took over City Drug in 1937. Shom renamed the store Quality Drug and remained in business on Concord Street until 1954, when he became the owner and operator of Southview Nursing Home, now known as Southview Care Center in West St. Paul.

Ev and Fred Green opened Green’s Drug at 138 North Concord in 1920 and later moved to 207 North Concord where they advertised “37 Lover’s Treats” for customers at their busy counter. Gericke’s opened a second store at 710 Southview Boulevard by 1930, and a few years later, Reid’s, on the northwest corner of 15th Avenue and 4th Street North boasted one of the first full service lunch spots with booths as well as a counter. Both of the Gericke’s locations and Reid’s building, now joined by an empty Synder’s, stand today as landmarks of a time when the drug store was a place for breakfast or lunch, for spontaneous purchases of toys and games, greeting cards, wrapping paper and quaint “notions” as well as for the place to pick up the medications that would provide relief and healing.

CAPTION: South St. Paul’s Snyder’s Drugs recently closed after 51 years. Today’s residents would find it hard to believe that George Waldhauser and his horse are posing in the early 1900s in what would become the parking lot outside of the Snyder’s store on Southview Boulevard at 12th Avenue South. At the time, the body of water was identified on maps as Waldhauser Lake but most residents called it the Mudhole. It was not until the 1940s that developer Mike Kassan bought the lake, filled it in and paved it over to create space for Snyder’s, Applebaum’s and a Ben Franklin store to open in the 1950s.
Lincoln School – Another Local Landmark Gone Forever
May 2009
By Lois Glewwe

Many long-time local residents experienced a dramatic sense of loss the first time they
approached the corner of 12th Avenue North and Thompson after the demolition of the
former Lincoln School in March of 2009. No one alive today can remember a time when
that block was vacant land. It had been home to Lincoln School, the heart of the South
Park neighborhood, since 1908. Even though the buildings had not been used by South
St. Paul for elementary classes since Lincoln was closed in 1986, the property was most
recently operated as Thompson Heights School by Dakota County and still provided area
kids with a playground to enjoy and the neighborhood with a long-time historic
landmark.

Lincoln Elementary School had its beginning as the first public school in Ward 1 of the
new City of South St. Paul. The Clark-Bryant Company of South Park donated a lot in
Block 10 of the First Ward for a new school building. Christian Zinck was awarded the
contract to build five schools on April 26, 1887. He built the first Lincoln School on the
northeast corner of Bryant and 15th Avenue North. In 1896, an addition to Lincoln School
was approved with E.J. Daly awarded the contract for his bid of $1,545.

In 1897, School Superintendent Lindsay Webb chose Lincoln School as the place where
half-day classes for grades eight and higher would be offered, marking the first evidence
of high school education in the community. By December of 1897, another teacher was
needed to handle the older students at Lincoln as the classes were growing too large for
Webb to handle alone. W.J. Brickman and Miss Louise Snyder were hired as the first
official teachers of pupils beyond the sixth grade in January 1898. Thirteen teachers were
working for the city that year and for the first time, slate blackboards replaced cloth
blackboards in all city schools.

All of the teachers in 1899 were women except for Fred Galloway. Teachers who had
been working in the city for three years or more were paid $50 a month. In 1890, new
guidelines for school administration were approved and it was determined that no married
woman would be eligible for appointment as a South St. Paul school teacher. Hours were
set from 9 a.m. to Noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. daily with a recess intermission in the
morning and afternoon.

The city continued to attract new residents each year and by 1907 the original Lincoln
School was overcrowded and needed to be replaced. The Bly family bought the school
building on 15th and Bryant and demolished it to build their new house which still stands
on the property today. The new Lincoln Elementary School was built on a plot of land on
Thompson Avenue between 12th and 15th Avenues North and opened for classes in 1908.

From the early 1900s through the mid-1980s, every neighborhood in South St. Paul had
its own elementary school. The schools, known in their final years as Washington,
Roosevelt, Central, Lincoln, Jefferson and Wilson, were community gathering spots.
Everyone in the neighborhood known as South Park, the area north of Wentworth Avenue to Simon’s Ravine, was familiar with Lincoln School even if they had no children in school themselves. Whether it was a musical program, a voting location, or a place to get a smallpox shot or a TB (tuberculosis) test, the neighborhood schools were important landmarks to everyone in the area. Not seeing the old school buildings on the corner of 15th and Thompson is an adjustment that all long-time city residents will have to make.

In 2009, South St. Paul has only two public elementary schools: Lincoln Center, located in what was the Junior High School from 1951-1980, now named after the original Lincoln School, and Kaposia Education Center which replaced the old Washington School in 1993. Roosevelt and Wilson Schools have been demolished; Central School was demolished and replaced with Central Square Community Center and Jefferson School was purchased by the Word Church and is currently the Miracle Center Church and parochial school.

Lincoln Elementary School was built in 1908 on the north side of Thompson between 12th and 15th Avenues North. It served students in grades 1-6 until closing in 1986, but was also a gathering spot for the residents of the South St. Paul neighborhood known as South Park. Demolition in March 2009 cleared the block for development of residential properties on the site of the old school.
South St. Paul has been through a series of historic changes in recent months. The closing of the stockyards in April 2008 brought an end to the city’s 120-year economic identity. Since then, the community has experienced the closing of Snyder’s Drugs, a staple of the Southview shopping area since 1958, and witnessed the demolition of the 101-year-old former Lincoln School on 12th and Thompson. Residents more recently learned that the *Sun-Current* newspaper, a direct descendant of the original *South St. Paul Daily Reporter* which began publication in 1891, would no longer serve the community after 118 years of providing local news and advertising.

Change isn’t new to South St. Paul. Businesses are bought and sold and marquees come and go. Many neighborhoods have seen historic businesses disappear. Sabreen’s Grocery, which served the neighborhood at 345 Fourth Ave. S. as Lehmann’s and Neiderkorn’s for 85 years, was torn down in 2006 to make room for new homes. The Mizpah Lodge on 4th and Marie has given way to town homes. One of the city’s most successful revitalization programs has seen dozens of older homes replaced with appropriately designed new houses that blend into the old cityscape as though they’ve been there for years.

All of this change led me to wonder what hasn’t changed in South St. Paul in terms of the basic elements of the city’s cultural or civic life. Four organizations, all founded for and by the early women of South St. Paul, came to mind.

It was 1911 when many of the wives and daughters of the city’s early commission men, bankers, insurance brokers and livestock dealers founded the South St. Paul Study Club. Limited to 12 members, the club soon expanded its outreach and grew in numbers. Women met monthly to learn about books, art, world cultures, gardening, bird-watching and other topics. In 1912, P.E.O. International, a women’s philanthropic society that was founded by a group of college coeds in Iowa in 1869, chartered South St. Paul’s Chapter H of P.E.O. The group’s major focus was on raising money to provide scholarships for women to be able to attend college and go on to advanced degrees.

In 1924, another women’s group, founded as the Midweek Study Club, was established. The members tended to live in South Park, the old neighborhood that was on the north end of South St. Paul, from about north of Wentworth/Dwayne to the city limits. Their focus was on providing an opportunity to learn about “modern” culture and literature but they also became involved in philanthropic activities and often donated funds to help local families in difficulty.

Twenty years later, in 1944, Chapter H of P.E.O. founded a new Chapter CC of South St. Paul. CC’s members also tended to be from the city’s northern neighborhood of South Park and it wasn’t long before both P.E.O. Chapter were making a difference in South St.
Paul by providing war relief funds to families whose husbands, brothers, uncles, and sons were off fighting in World War II.

All four organizations remain active in 2009. The South St. Paul Study Club will celebrate its 100th Anniversary in 2011. Chapter H of P.E.O. is preparing for its Centennial in 2012. Midweek Study Club enjoyed their 75th Anniversary in 1999 and Chapter CC of P.E.O. celebrated their 65th Anniversary with a banquet at Southview Country Club on April 15, 2009. The ladies of Chapter CC often lunched at Southview 65 years ago and it was the only location which is still open for dining opportunities today. One of the guests of honor Chapter CC’s banquet was Ilyssa Ryan, South St. Paul High School Senior, who was awarded a $2,500 P.E.O. STAR Scholarship.

It is significant that these organizations, which might be labeled old-fashioned by some, continue to benefit the community. In the early days of the city, when the stockyards and the bars and illegal gambling and moonshine stills were labels applied to South St. Paul across the entire metropolitan area, women’s groups lobbied for educational opportunities for women and immigrants and worked hard to make South St. Paul schools the best in the state. Through their efforts, the entire community experienced access to cultural events, exhibits and opportunities that may not have been possible without their influence.

Many other women’s organizations also provided leadership to the community in terms of improvement. Church groups, PTAs, civic groups, social clubs, neighborhood groups – all have been important contributors to the foundation of the city’s quality of life.

If there is one thing that we may all hope will never change in South St. Paul, it is the faithful, creative, imaginative, enthusiastic and innovative contribution that civic organizations, like these women’s groups, do to enrich the life of every resident.
The women of Chapter CC of P.E.O. International served as the hostesses of the Historical Society’s 100th anniversary celebration of Dakota County in 1949. The club, like many other women’s groups founded in the early years of South St. Paul, continues to exist in 2009, providing philanthropic assistance to families, students and social service agencies. Pictured at the 1949 celebration are: Back Row, left to right: Lucile Gower, Mabel Mikkelson, Ethelyn Sloan, Margaret Vogel, Kathryn Hesnault, Hazel Fullmer, Beulah Woolsey, Gladys Schumacher, Ellen Pearson, Clara Hempy. Front row, left to right: Marie LaHue, Minnie Clark, Doris Kask, Selma Swanson and, seated in front, Adell McCarthy.
South St. Paul has always celebrated summer and community heritage with parades and festivals like Kaposia Days, now in its 33rd year. One of the most spectacular events of the 1940s, however, was the South St. Paul Rodeo sponsored by an organization known as the South St. Paul Stampede, Inc., founded by President Charles Govern and Chairman George Murray in 1939.

The main purpose of the event was to keep people in town spending money locally during the Independence Day holidays. Its civic purpose, however, was to provide a variety of entertainment that would attract visitors from all over the area.

South St. Paul Attorney David L. Grannis, Jr. was a charter member of the South St. Paul Stampede. The first year’s program is unknown but for the second annual event, held from Thursday, July 4, through Sunday, July 7 in 1940, Grannis drew up the bases for the rodeo, arranged for bonds and insurance and made several speeches throughout the community to promote the event for weeks before the Fourth of July. Local cowboys and exhibition riders from the Midwest were invited to the rodeo, which was held in an arena east of the South St. Paul Tannery at 629 South Concord. Local livestock broker Fred Luhrs was the rodeo announcer.

The Rodeo Parade was held at 7 p.m. on Saturday night, July 6, with the Belvidere Playground Drum and Bugle Corps from West St. Paul in the place of honor. The Hook ‘Em Cow Riders, Stampede Riders and rodeo participants were in the parade as well as visitors from Eaton’s Dude Ranch, Custer Riding Academy and the Flying M Ranch in Robbinsdale. The Hook ‘Em Cow Band, led by John Giel played and members of the FCA Club Drum Corps from the Federal Land Bank of St. Paul also participated.

A Merry-Go-Round was constructed next to the Coast-to-Coast Store at 128 North Concord for the event and an outdoor Saturday Night Street Dance was held in the plaza at the rear of the South St. Paul Tobacco Company at 204 Grand Avenue. One of the events, known as the Fox and Coon Hunt, was held at the arena on Sunday afternoon, July 7, under the management of Bill O’Malley and H.G. Bergman.

A traditional fireworks show topped the entertainment roster. John Giel, director of the Hook ‘Em Cow Band, saw the size of the crowd piled onto the makeshift bleachers and had to make a difficult decision. Afraid that the stands would collapse if everyone stood up at the same time when the fireworks formed the image of the American flag, he had a modest trio play the Star Spangled Banner quietly in the background instead of pulling out the stops for the National Anthem.

The South St. Paul Stampede Celebration was held again in 1941 with the South St. Paul Municipal Band leading the parade with the Hook ‘Em Cow Riders. America changed forever just a few months later with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entry of the
United States into World War II in December. Summer parades and festivals were set aside for a few years but it wasn’t long before Hook ‘Em Cow Days, Water Carnivals, Tennis Court Dances and other civic celebrations provided family entertainment during the days of summer.

CAPTION: South St. Paul presented the “biggest rodeo in the Midwest” when the Stampede of 1940 drew thousands of visitors and residents to the Concord Street arena to watch dare-devil horseback riders, coon and fox trials and fireworks.

CAPTION: South St. Paul is remembered as a stockyards town, but the presence of all that livestock also attracted cowboys and rodeo riders. One of the most famous families of performers were the Keene boys. Pictured in this photo, left to right are: Buddy, Smoky, Boots and Johnny. The other brother, not pictured, was named Buck.
I often think of my dad when I walk into one of the big box home improvement centers that are so prevalent in our part of the Twin Cities. I can’t quite imagine what he would make of the massive size of the place or the vast array of products, gadgets, paint colors and tools available. Dad’s building projects were aided, not by any such commercial enterprise, but by a variety of local businesses that provided everything from fresh cut lumber to electrical tape to saw blades to that unique little bolt that was needed to repair some old gadget of his own. Part of the thrill of Saturday morning was driving all over town and stopping at a variety of businesses until just the right set of materials was in place and the project could begin. Among the most valuable rewards of those diverse errands was gathering advice on the best product to use and sharing greetings with long-time friends and colleagues in the local business community.

One of the first places to stop was at the lumberyard. Shaw Lumber Company was the biggest and best known. They opened in South St. Paul at 127 (later 133) North Concord in 1902, an expansion of their St. Paul location that had been around since 1887. The Shaw family ran the operation, moving into the old tannery buildings at 633 South Concord in the 1940s. Shaw’s major competitor in town was Sam Buron of the South St. Paul Lumber Company at 139 S. Concord. Buron purchased the tannery property in 1939 and leased it back to Shaw Lumber, Schumacher Feed & Seed and the South St. Paul Horse Market. Jefferson Lumber was in town by 1924 and Famers Supply had a lumber yard at 1030 North Concord by 1930 under the name Millwork Lumber Company. Parkwood Products, Johnson Cashway and Metro Lumber have also operated lumber yards in town in more recent times.

Once the wood was purchased, it was time to head for the hardware store. Bartl Bros. on the southwest corner of 7th and Marie Avenues was closest to our house and Dad knew all of the Bartls who worked there. The store was originally founded by Adam, John and Nick Bartl in 1922 in the lower level of Chalupa’s Standard Building Supply on North Concord. Their partner in that first operation was Herb Griesbach. When he left the firm in 1925, the Bartls bought the 7th Avenue property and built a new store. When the property burned in 1941, they immediately rebuilt and dominated the Marie Avenue business district for many years.

There were many other options for nails, tools, cement mix, plaster and drill bits in South St. Paul in those early days. One of the first businesses in town was M.F. Lienau’s hardware store which opened on the east side of Concord north of Grand in 1887. George Pratt opened South St. Paul Hardware Company by 1915 and was still in business in the 1950s at 143 North Concord.
Anderson’s Hardware opened in the early 1900s and then moved into their impressive new Anderson Building at 143 North Concord. Frank Yedelsky managed his hardware store at 3567 North Concord and Mike Gavel ran South St. Paul Hardware and Furniture at 417 North Concord. The Gamble’s Store was in operation by 1936 and shortly after World War II, the city welcomed the Coast-To-Coast Store, Midland Supply, Nord-Warner, South Park Hardware and Werner’s Hardware A short time later Southview Hardware opened on the hill in what is now Southview Center.

Specialty stores also offered a wide variety of decorating supplies. The day wouldn’t be complete without stopping by Elmer M. Larson’s South St. Paul Glass and Paint on Southview Boulevard or Swanson’s Paint and Wallpaper to pick out that perfect paint color, buy a new window shade or pick up a couple of wallpaper samples.

Shopping certainly took longer than it does today at the one-stop emporiums of products that we patronize. Still, there was something great in being able to chat with just about everyone you encountered on your errands, knowing that you were supporting local business owners and that you could trust their advice, laugh at their jokes and always be greeted as a friend.

CAPTION: John and Nick Bartl are pictured behind the counter of the Bartl Bros. Hardware store on 7th and Marie Avenues. Generations of South St. Paul residents shopped at Bartl’s, which opened on the corner in 1925. The shelves were neatly stacked, labeled and filled top to bottom with gadgets and tools and nails and nuts and bolts and anything else that a weekend home improvement project might require.
The United States Postal Service announced in August of 2009 that hundreds of federal post offices across America would be closed in a dramatic attempt to reduce an ever-growing operating deficit. City residents can be grateful that as this issue went to press, South St. Paul Post Office was not listed among those endangered sites.

Today’s residents know the South St. Paul Post Office as the Federal-style building at 236 North Concord Exchange. In reality, the city’s history of postal service began many years before that classic structure was erected in 1930. The first post office opened in what would become South St. Paul on February 4, 1853, on the site of the former Kaposia village of the Dakota Indians who had been exiled from the state following the 1851 Treaties. John Aiton, who came to Minnesota as a missionary in 1848, was named the first Postmaster of the Village of Kaposia. At the time, Kaposia, the first county seat of Dakota County, was the heart of the area’s rapidly growing residential and business center.

In those earliest days of mail delivery, recipients of mail often received their letters only after they paid the fee for delivery. If they were fortunate, the sender would pay in advance and the letter would arrive with the word “Paid” stamped on the envelope. It wasn’t until about 1847 that adhesive stamps were printed. At first anyone could set up a press and print and sell stamps, causing great confusion in accountability for revenue and sales. It was 1894 when the federal government took over the printing and sale of stamps.

The Kaposia Post Office remained in business until October 16, 1854, when the county seat was moved to Mendota. It was more than thirty years before another Post Office opened in what is now South St. Paul. It was February 7, 1887, when Arthur D.S. Clark was named Postmaster of the South Park, Minnesota Post Office. Located just a few blocks from the original Kaposia village site, the mail station was located in the Clark and Company Grocery on the northwest corner of Bryant and Concord. South Park wasn’t really a city; it was simply a neighborhood that was located in what was then West St. Paul Township. Despite the lack of official identity, South Park, Minnesota, was recognized by the United States Postal Service as an official Post Office until it was discontinued in April of 1925.

The City of South St. Paul was incorporated in March 1887, taking over the former West St. Paul Township. A year later, on March 9, 1888, the first South St. Paul, Minnesota, Post Office opened in the Exchange Building on the northeast corner of Grand and Concord Exchange. The first full-time South St. Paul Postmaster was James Reid, who was named to the position on December 6, 1893. He recorded the first income figures in 1896 when $2,675.00 in postage was sold at the South St. Paul Post Office. In 1897, the Post Office moved into the basement of the Exchange Building and then moved across the street to 211 North Concord in 1905. The first rural routes were established in 1909.
and by 1913, free home delivery of mail was supplied to all parts of the city. In 1916, receipts totaled $42,390.00, a remarkable increase from the tally twenty years before.

The South Park Post Office remained in operation during this time and when Arthur D.S. Clark passed away in 1916, John Irving was named to the office. Irving held the distinction of having served as Postmaster of two official U.S. Post Offices when he was named South St. Paul Postmaster on March 2, 1929. By that time, the Post Office had been moved into the Schult Building on the south side of Grand Avenue and receipts had grown to $81,000. Several civic leaders led the effort to obtain funding and approval for establishment of an official building for the post office. They were successful and groundbreaking for today’s Post Office was held on August 11, 1930. The local station reached the $1,000,000.00 revenue mark in 1975 and revenues today reach several million dollars each year.

CAPTION: Groundbreaking for today’s South St. Paul Post Office at 236 North Concord Exchange took place on August 11, 1930. This photo shows the massive pilings that were used to shore up the swampy riverfront site. A streetcar is pictured speeding by on Concord and the signs for several area businesses are visible across the street. Today the South St. Paul Post Office and the Exchange Building (now Valentino’s) are the only pre-1930s structures remaining on the old Concord Street strip. In 1987, John Baskerville Sr. was commissioned to paint a mural of South St. Paul’s history on the wall of the lobby of the historic Post Office building. The mural and the gracious old Post Office are treasured by today’s residents as examples of the city’s rich heritage.
In August of 2009, South St. Paul residents learned that one of the city’s banks had been purchased and would reopen under another name. South St. Paul banks are no strangers to takeovers, closures, and dramatic response to economic impacts. South St. Paul was a fully developed, thriving metropolitan banking and economic center by 1900. Unlike other Dakota County cities, South St. Paul vied for investments with the biggest banks in America during the heyday of the packing plant industry in the early years of the century. The South St. Paul market was an attractive target for purchases and mergers. It is estimated that in the 1920s there was more cash on a given day on the corners of Grand and Concord in South St. Paul than there was in any city outside of New York.

The first bank in South St. Paul was Union Stockyards Bank, founded in 1888 in Room 23 of the Exchange Building on the northeast corner of Grand and Concord. In 1915, the bank moved into the building that was known as the Exchange Building Annex on the north side of the Exchange. In 1917 two additional stories were added to the Annex, which was demolished in the 1990s. The bank changed its name to Stockyards National Bank in 1903. In 1929, the bank became affiliated with Northwest Bancorporation and after 1968, was known as Northwestern National Bank. In 1983 the corporation built its new facility on the southwest corner of Grand and Concord and became known as Norwest Bank. It’s most recent transformation was the result of a buyout from Wells Fargo which operates the institution in 2009.

The second bank in town was Drovers State Bank which opened in the former O’Brien Building on the northwest corner of Grand and Concord in 1912. Otto Schumacher, who was the assistant cashier across the street at the Union Stockyards Bank across the street became cashier at the new institution and assumed the presidency just a year later in 1913. Just a few years later the bank built a new facility with a four-sided chiming clock that dominated the corner for generations. After several mergers and moves, Drovers became Bremer Bank at 633 South Concord. They remain a vibrant member of the local banking community in South St. Paul in 2009.

The southwest corner of Grand and Concord was the home of the Livestock State Bank, which opened on October 24, 1917. The bank was taken over by Drovers Bank in 1924. On November 1, 1917, the Exchange Savings and Loan was founded in the Hamm Building at 423 North Concord. In 1918, they changed their name to the Exchange State Bank and moved into the former Livestock State Bank quarters on the southwest corner of Grand and Concord in 1932. They merged with Drovers Bank that same year.

The banking industry in South St. Paul remained fairly stable until after World War II. In 1954, a group of local businessmen organized the United Federal Savings and Loan Association with former Minnesota Governor Harold LeVander as President. Originally
located at 205 North Concord, the bank moved to 224 North Concord and ultimately to their current location at 12th and Southview in 1973.

A new bank opened in the city in 1964 when John Todd founded Southview Bank at 835 Southview Boulevard. The bank has most recently been known as Main Street Bank. In recent years, others have joined the local banking community, including Key Community Bank on 5th and Marie Avenues. Over the generations all of the city’s banks carried on a tradition of significant community involvement and contributions. Sponsorship of Miss South St. Paul programs, local sports teams, school projects, Restorative Justice, South St. Paul Hall of Excellence, Chamber of Commerce projects and Neighbors, Inc. has remained the hallmark of community excellence for a city that has been home to major financial institutions for over 120 years.
Drover’s State Bank built their impressive new facility on the northwest corner of Grand and Concord in South St. Paul in 1919. Constructed of Bedford limestone, the bank building was adorned with a four-sided chiming clock that tolled every quarter hour for more than 50 years. The bank was one of the first to cater to the city’s new immigrants, establishing a foreign exchange department and advertising transportation assistance in going to “the old country” in their early ads. Drover’s State Bank moved to 633 South Concord in 1973 and is currently known as Bremer Bank.
South St. Paul Becomes a Union Town
November 2009
By Lois Glewwe

It was 1897 when the union of Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen was chartered by the American Federation of Labor in Chicago with seven locals. It was also 1897 when Swift & Company opened their South St. Paul meatpacking plant. There were no unions in the South St. Paul stockyards in those early days.

Serious strikes were called by the unionized meatpackers in 1904 and 1921 but the repercussions on both union and non-union workers were violent and severe, with many former employees blacklisted across the country. It wasn’t until 1937, forty years later, that a two-year strike against the Morell Company ended with a union victory. Later that year the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) formed the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC).

For South St. Paul meatpacking plant employees, unionization came with both dangers and benefits throughout these formative years of national union policy and activity. In the mid-1930s, an independent company union was formed at Swift & Company. Charley Bester and Floyd “Butch” Metzen, who were both state scale inspectors for the plant, were organizers of what became known as Independent #11. The union offices were located on the second floor of the old Farmer’s Union building next to Aller’s Café on Grand Avenue. Tom Metzen, Butch’s son, recalls visiting his dad there and picking up little metal promotional buttons advertising the union as keepsakes.

These local unions, like the one founded at Swift’s, were affiliated and supported by the CIO under the auspices of the PWOC even though they remained independent of the national organizations until the 1940s.

The arrival of the national organizers in the local community was accomplished through a somewhat mysterious organization known as the South St. Paul Community Council. This group of prominent civic leaders apparently existed for only a short time during 1941. The story of the group was not discovered during the research done for the 1987 South St. Paul Centennial History. It was only when historian Chris Steller contacted me via Facebook recently that I learned of the role of Chicago union organizer Saul Alinsky and his union promotion in South St. Paul.

Perhaps most interesting is the wide variety of individuals and organizations who were part of the meetings of this civic group. On May 1, 1941, the South St. Paul Daily Reporter listed the leaders of the organization as follows: President: Judge Lewis C. Shepley; CIO Rep: Carl Champ; Catholic Church Rep: Rev. Jeremiah O’Callaghan; PTA Rep: Mrs. J.C. Hanson; Business Rep: H.H. Krinsky and Edward Gerber; Foreign Nationality Rep: Frank Rech; Service Organization Rep: Gunnar Seaberg; Civic Organization Rep: David L. Grannis, Jr. (county attorney); Co-Executive Directors: Fallon Kelly and Dr. W.H. Carroll; and Treasurer: Burns Methewson.
Local old-timers will be amused to learn that high school teacher Al Gower sang the national anthem at the event and Rev. A.R. Henry of the First Methodist Church gave the invocation. Acting Mayor David Hardman gave the welcome (Mayor Al Elder was out-of-town) and Dr. H.R. Tregilgas was listed as the Speaker on Health. Named to the Community Council on Entertainment, preparing for the “big celebration,” was Adolph Roiseland, who would later serve as South St. Paul High School Principal from 1946-1970.

It was a prestigious and significant roster of participants. Unfortunately, no subsequent articles on what the “big celebration” consisted of have been located. Historian Chris Steller also shared that he learned in subsequent research that Charles Taylor Burnley, listed in the newspaper article as Publicity Secretary, was working at the time as Advertising Manager of the *South St. Paul Daily Reporter* and was reportedly forced to give up his involvement with the “South St. Paul Community Council” for fear of losing his job.

The efforts of 1941 ultimately paid off for the CIO and plant workers after the end of World War II, and after an election by employees in 1945. The CIO, which officially dissolved the PWOC to form the United Packinghouse Workers of America in 1943, became the official union representing the local meatpackers. Every department had a shop steward for each division; one for the beef side and one for the pork side. Before 1945 workers had to buy all of their own equipment like knives, steels, stones, clothes and safety equipment like belly boards and heavy leather aprons. After unionization, many changes were made and workers were given 15 minutes a day to sharpen their knives.

The changes and improvements in benefits made a significant difference for local workers but it was only three years later that South St. Paul’s major industry was shut down by a 67-day meatpackers’ strike that was to change the future of local meatpacking forever. The story of the strike will be next month’s article.
Conditions for meatpacking plant employees improved significantly after the successful arrival of union standards under the CIO in 1945. The workers on the bacon line in this photo are, left to right: Doris Spear, Mary Alesso, Cliff Cornell and Alice Harvey.
The 1948 Meatpackers Strike in South St. Paul
December 2009
By Lois Glewwe

The arrival of the United Packing House Workers union to the South St. Paul stockyards in 1945 brought the benefits of the national organization to local packing plant employees with a series of dramatic changes. The meatpacking plants were now required to provide equipment like knives, steels, stones, clothes and safety equipment rather than making the workers provide their own. Production requirements had grown to extremes during World War II and those levels were now reduced to more manageable numbers.

The war had also changed the face of meatpacking. Hundreds of women had been hired to fill the jobs that were held by men who had left to join the Armed Services. Women were always paid less than the men they replaced but when the war ended, the women were immediately told to return home as jobs were given back to the veterans.

In many ways World War II also changed the expectations of laborers in America. They had fought side-by-side in the trenches and flown missions over war-torn Europe and Japan with men from elevated economic and social cultures. Many were not willing to now return to minimum pay jobs in an industry that promoted the upper class to management positions while keeping laborers at low wage levels. The industry was primed for revolution and conflict as the post-war economy brought a huge financial boom to America.

In 1946 and 1947, strikes in the steel, coal and railroad industries brought massive changes to workers in those areas. South St. Paul in 1947 had more than 6,000 union meatpackers employed by Swift’s and Armour’s. They earned approximately $9.00 a day. A national strike by the United Packing House Workers was called on March 6, 1947 and within minutes, South St. Paul workers with hand-lettered signs were walking picket lines outside the entrance to Swift’s at Grand and Concord.

The biggest and most bitter strike to impact South St. Paul, however, was the 1948 United Packinghouse Workers walkout in March of 1948. The national strike lasted 67 days and tensions rose steadily as unpaid plant workers formed picket lines each morning. Ray Allen, who worked in the plants for years, provided the following memory of the 1948 strike for the South St. Paul Centennial history: “The spring snow, rain and cold seemed to go on forever. A soup kitchen was set up in a building on Pitt Street where I was in charge of tickets for soup or chili, whatever was available and food for the need. This food was donated. A committee was in charge of making the rounds every week to local merchants to donate – which they freely gave, like canned goods. Hubert Humphrey, then Mayor of Minneapolis, came over to see. He sat with the man around the fires along the railroad tracks and later came up to the Union Hall and donated $50 to the soup kitchen; that was a lot of money for time.”
As the strike entered the third month, in May 1948, a group of strikers allegedly beat up some of the guards and rumors of vandalism over at the Cudahy plant across the river spread throughout the crowd.

In a dramatic and decisive action, Governor Luther Youngdahl called up the National Guard on Friday, May 14, 1948, to break through the strike lines in South St. Paul. Company “I” of Litchfield, Minnesota, formed a truck convoy the next morning and headed into the packing house area, with their tanks rolling down the Grand Avenue hill. The guard had 400 men, armed with rifles and bayonets and they were an unstoppable force as they broke through the picket lines. Anticipating their arrival, it was reported that some of the strikers showed up that morning wearing their full military uniforms from the war in hopes of embarrassing the guardsmen sent to break the strike. Company “I” kept order on the site for a week when the national union representatives agreed to a settlement in Chicago that earned workers a nine-cent an hour raise as opposed to the twenty cents they had requested.

In addition to the small wage increase, workers were successful in obtaining extended vacation benefits and seniority rights. Health and insurance benefits were increased and compensation was increased for workers injured in the plants. Still, the 1948 strike had impacted South St. Paul in ways far beyond union concerns. Families and colleagues who had lived and worked together without rancor for generations faced the consequences of being forced to take one side or the other during the bitter 10-week strike. South St. Paul was never quite the same after that strike, according to many who lived through those days of drama.

CAPTION: Federal agents inside the meatpacking plants took photos such as this one in order to identify individuals who were on the picket lines during the 1948 United Packing House Workers strike. Many South St. Paul families were torn in two over loyalty to the union and loyalty to the meatpacking plants. Violence broke out in the third month of the strike and the National Guard was called in to break through the picket lines on May 15, 1948.
On any given Friday afternoon in 1962, Concord Street in South St. Paul was filled with throngs of workers headed to one or more of the dozens of taverns for a cold beer after a long week in the meatpacking plants. Pay day also brought women and children to Concord Street to visit the butcher, the baker, the hardware store, the shoe store and possibly the furniture store or the bank. Automobiles crawled along the strip, barely moving as bumper-to-bumper traffic prevented anyone from making much progress during the end-of-week rush hour.

Concord Street had been widened and the streetcar tracks and cables removed in 1953. New streetlights illuminated the downtown area but as the years passed, many felt that the bright lights only showed how much the city needed to do to create a modern, shiny, 1950s shopping district that would attract customers from across the metro area. As West St. Paul’s Robert Street filled with new fast food restaurants and retail outlets, South St. Paul was showing its age. The old boarding houses, storefronts, taverns, restaurants and miscellaneous businesses along Concord were literally piled on top of each other; one shop in the basement; another shop on the street; two or more in the floors above. No uniform design requirements or building codes were enforced. Clapboard structures leaned precariously against their sturdier brick neighbors. Rickety floors, broken stairways and leaky roofs were the result of nearly 80 years of unplanned development that had taken place since the city’s earliest businesses set up shop in the 1880s.

It’s difficult to imagine in today’s more gender-equal world, but in 1962, the way the situation was addressed was that a group of 40 white men were brought together to address the problem. The Committee of 40, as they were known, was officially named the Community Redevelopment Committee, headed by attorney and former state legislator Arthur Gillen. The group’s purpose was to make a comprehensive study of the business district. Besides Gillen, the others on the committee were Steve Alencich, Maurice Barnes, Joseph Bartl, Irving Beaudoin, Louis Briguet, Dr. James Canine, Norris Carnes, Bob Carter Sr., Joseph Chalupa Jr., Noel Dike, Richard Eggert, James Finson, Vance Grannis Sr., Bob Hansen, George Heuer, Stan Krinsky and Gunnar Kronholm. Also, Edward Kuntz, Elwood Lastine, Sid Linneroth, John Blomquist, Bob McCreight, Gust Mikutowski, Howard Milbert, H.H. Milstein, Ed Rasmussen, Jerry Sexton, Bernie Skiba, R. Lloyd Smith, Cliff Spainhower, Elmer Stassen, Thomas Steichen, Paul Thuet, Jr., John Todd, Gordon Trepp, B.D. Varing, Richard Werner and Henry Wertheimer. The group represented nearly every business, industry and service group in town.

After five years of planning, the City Council accepted the Committee of 40’s first plan for the redevelopment of the city on November 25, 1968. Phil Woog was the Mayor and the City Council included Bruce Baumann, James P. Cosgrove, Myron Grant, Frank Mega, Jim Metzen, Charles Michelson and Mike Verderosa. The Concord Street Urban Renewal Project could now begin.
The planners recognized that the city’s economic and employment base, which had been centered in the meatpacking industry since 1895, was at risk as the national packing plant industry changed. Still, as the community’s largest employer and with the plants bustling with activity, everyone believed that the industry would continue to be the foundation of the community for years to come.

The overall objective of the redevelopment plan focused on moving the railroad tracks to the river front so that the traffic pattern could be moved off of the old, narrow Concord Street, and demolishing the old structures that prevented expansion of modern new businesses. New businesses or new facilities for old businesses were intended to improve the diversity and strength of the shopping district and create a revitalized community that could compete effectively with surrounding suburbs.

Then, just one year after the approval of the renewal plan, Swift & Company closed its doors forever on November 29, 1969. Armour’s had already begun reducing the number of shifts and it soon became clear that the changes that had been impacting the meatpacking industry since the 1948 national strike had suddenly come home. The question in the air, and the question faced by the Committee of 40 was “What would happen next? What would South St. Paul do without the meatpacking industry?” Next month’s article will talk about the amazing community efforts and organizations that worked to answer that question.
CAPTION: By 1968, South St. Paul civic leaders had been working for five years to create a modernization plan for the downtown area. One year after the plan was approved by the City Council, Swift & Company closed its operations in the city and rumors that Armour’s was also reducing operations spread rapidly. Losing the largest employers in town meant that plans for creating a modern shopping district that could compete with West St. Paul’s Robert Street for metro-area customers suddenly spiraled into difficulty.
One year after the approval of a massive urban renewal plan for South St. Paul, Swift and Company closed its doors forever on November 29, 1969. According to former Mayor Bruce Baumann, writing for the South St. Paul Centennial History in 1987, “South St. Paul was designated an economically distressed community, which qualified it for federal Economic Development Authority (EDA) Funds after the city established a local EDA. With that group promptly organized, volunteer commissioners were appointed to represent all segments of the community. Under their leadership the community was successful in acquiring and using millions of federal dollars for major infrastructure projects to make land more desirable for development.”

The early and most visible evidence of urban redevelopment was massive destruction. By 1974, over 100 buildings on Grand Avenue and along Concord Street between Wentworth and Armour Avenue had been demolished. The only structures from the old city which remained at the end of this period were the Exchange Building and the Post Office. Concord Street had been renamed Concord Exchange and the new Concord was now a four-lane expressway buzzing traffic right through the former downtown area. The railroad tracks were moved to the riverfront and Grand Avenue east of Concord was renamed John Carroll Boulevard after a St. Paul developer who brought several companies to South St. Paul in the 1970s.

In August 1970, a private development and lending corporation owned by local shareholders was founded by a group of local business owners and residents. Known as South St. Paul Futures, it sold shares of stock in order to provide funds for potential developers through loan programs and worked closely with the City, the EDA and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), which had been established in 1964.

As plans proceeded for replacing the demolished businesses with new facilities, the city was hit with another massive economic blow when Armour & Company, still the largest employer in the city, closed its doors forever in 1979. One of the redevelopment challenges facing the city had always been abandoned properties. Swift & Company’s buildings had nearly all been removed but now the huge Armour plant, covering 40 acres, dominated the riverfront area. Another negative impact on the city in 1979 was the closing of the Exchange Building as the Stockyards Company moved its operations to a new facility that had been built on former Swift & Company property on the east side of Concord Street. The Exchange, always a landmark for downtown South St. Paul, now stood empty and silent on the main corner of the redevelopment district.

The other significant challenge facing redevelopment was that although a few properties had been relocated to new facilities, the national and regional economy was suffering as the 1970s came to a close. Funding simply wasn’t available to assist every former business owner by providing new construction money. As the years passed several blocks
along the new Concord Exchange remained empty and hopes for successful revitalization of the downtown area dimmed with the passage of time.

A number of light to heavy industrial and manufacturing operations were convinced to locate in the area along the riverfront in the 1970s and early 1980s but many closed after only a few years of operation. The stockyards were moving towards enclosed pens and efforts were made to enhance the area, but it remained a challenge to convince businesses to relocate to the district next to the yards and the abandoned Armour’s plant. The struggle to restore vitality to the Concord Street area remained a difficult battle.

Again quoting Mayor Bruce Baumann from his 1987 story in the South St. Paul Centennial history, “While we hope that the livestock and meat processing industries continue to be a vital part of our economic base for decades to come, the community has focused on diversifying its industrial development. We look forward to continuing success in total community development and improvement of our quality of life.”

Several creative and unique efforts, spurred on by private citizens, contributed to the ultimate successful redevelopment of the city in ways that continue to attract national recognition. Next month’s article will talk about some of those grassroots campaigns which combined with city efforts and leadership to bring South St. Paul to renewed economic strength.
This photo of the southeast corner of Grand and Concord in the early 1970s shows the concentration of businesses along the length of Concord prior to redevelopment. Visible are Hank’s Liquors, Hub Bargain Cabinets, Packer Recreation, Hank’s Restaurant, Sweeney’s and the Hook ‘Em Cow. Today the Subway Sandwich Shop and parking lot occupy this corner of South St. Paul’s downtown. Over 100 structures along Concord and Grand Avenue in South St. Paul were demolished between 1968 and 1974.
In recent months, this history column has addressed the closing of both of South St. Paul’s major meatpacking plants between 1969 and 1979, the urban renewal efforts along Grand Avenue and Concord Street in the 1970s and the challenges the city faced as the 1980s arrived. All branches of government, including city, county, state and federal agencies had brought their best efforts to the plans for revitalization of South St. Paul’s economic base. Some projects had succeeded but the massive abandoned Armour’s plant dominated the riverfront and the grand old Exchange Building, vandalized in 1981, stood silent with gaping, broken windows beckoning pigeons into the once gracious hallways and offices of the 1886 structure.

In the midst of this difficult time, the City of South St. Paul began to make plans to commemorate the city’s Centennial in 1987. Mayor Bruce Baumann asked J. Robert “Bob” Stassen to chair the Centennial Commission and Bob recruited many of the best and most dedicated local leaders and volunteers to serve. I was fortunate to be hired as the coordinator for the year-long celebration in April of 1986. At the same time, the South St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society gathered the reams of research and hundreds of photographs that they had been accumulating in order to produce a history of the city. I was doubly fortunate that they chose me to be the editor of that massive book project.

None of those who took part in the Centennial planning for the 21 events that were held in 1987, nor those who assisted with the publication of the city’s history had any idea what an impact their efforts would have on South St. Paul’s future. Because of the community’s focus on its heritage, hundreds of individuals and families gathered throughout the year to share memories of the stockyards, the packing plants, the old downtown and the rich ethnic celebrations that had marked the city during its one hundred year history. As the year of reflection drew to a close, in November of 1987, the Governor’s Design Team, a group of volunteer architects and city planners, came to town to help the community focus on what their vision was for South St. Paul’s future.

A series of well-attended Town Meetings were held and people from all walks of life came and participated in the discussion. One of the main themes which came out of the process was a desire to reconnect South St. Paul to the Mississippi River. Another was to find a way to beautify and enhance the connection of the Southview and Marie Avenue shopping areas to the rest of the city. Redevelopment of the old Exchange Building and reclaiming of the land along the river where the old Armour’s plant stood were also identified among the top priorities.

The ideas generated with the assistance of the Governor’s Design Team were powerful and for many, impossible to imagine. The one tangible and achievable concept which arose out of the process was the creation of a grassroots citizens’ organization that ended up being called the River Environment Action Project or R.E.A.P. Originally organized
with several action groups dedicated to various aspects of the Design Team’s suggestions, R.E.A.P. was the driving force that kept the vision and the dream in front of the City Council, the Planning Commission, the Housing and Redevelopment Authority and the Chamber of Commerce. Citizens began to participate at public meetings in greater numbers and expressed their willingness to volunteer to assist official bodies with any steps that would bring the community closer to a successful future.

Volunteers who had spent a year working on Centennial events transferred their energy into improving the community in a variety of ways. Citizens who had also spent 1987 hearing about and reading about the city’s history remained interested and turned their attention to the new ideas for a different kind of development. Many were curious although not entirely convinced that spending time and money to improve the riverfront was a wise move. Others firmly believed that South St. Paul should focus on replacing the packing plants with heavy industry and stop trying to become anything more. As the community gathered to dance the night away at the Centennial Ball on December 31, 1997, the stage was set for a dramatic decade that would bring more changes to the old city than anyone imagined. Next month’s column will examine the efforts to restore legal public access to the Mississippi River for all of South St. Paul’s citizens.
The city of South St. Paul celebrated its 100th birthday in 1987 with over 20 community events including those advertised on this huge billboard which greeted travelers heading south on Highway 52 into the city. The billboard was sponsored by V.F.W. Post #295. The year-long commemoration of the city’s past resulted in the creation of R.E.A.P., a grassroots citizens’ group which involved residents in the discussions and decisions that would ultimately restore public access to the Mississippi River in South St. Paul.
On any given day in South St. Paul, even in the coldest months of winter, it is not unusual to see joggers, hikers, dog-walkers, bicyclists, skate-boarders and casual strollers enjoying the river walk. The scenery, the water birds, the deer and other wildlife along the trail have become well-known attractions, especially for dog owners whose pets enjoy the popular dog park at the northernmost end of the trail.

Twenty-two years ago, however, as the city’s Centennial celebration ended in 1988 and the new citizens group known as the River Environmental Action Project (R.E.A.P.) became established, there was no legal public access to the Mississippi River in South St. Paul. The railroad, private landowners, banks, and the former operators of the city’s major meatpacking plants, Swift’s and Armour’s controlled access to the waterfront. To the south of the stockyards along the river, the former Metropolitan Waste Commission treatment plant was no longer used, but stood abandoned and silent.

Despite this challenge, one of the major goals of R.E.A.P was to create a pedestrian walkway along the river in South St. Paul. The South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights Chamber of Commerce also turned its attention to the riverfront with their visionary plan called Focus 2000, unveiled in 1988. Although the business-focused plan did not initially include a public trail, by the time it was ultimately approved, river access and recreational space was part of the proposal. In October of 1988, R.E.A.P. hosted the first annual River Ramble at the Packer River Terminal Area on the riverfront. For generations of city residents the event marked the first time they had ever been to the river in South St. Paul.

While citizens, elected officials and city organizations discussed diverse concepts for what kind of development should be encouraged along the river, Peter Parranto, a St. Paul developer, approached the city with a proposal to create a marina at the northern end of the city on land known as Port Crosby. Many on the City Council were not in favor of the financing that Parranto proposed and City Council, Planning Commission and Housing and Redevelopment Authority meetings began to attract citizens who had never before been motivated to show up to ask questions and bring suggestions.

When a city enters a time of challenge and change, political upheaval often accompanies the process. Such was the case in South St. Paul on April 4, 1989, when Katherine Trummer was elected the first woman Mayor of South St. Paul and three incumbents on the City Council were unseated by newcomers to the political scene. The new Mayor and all three new Councilmembers were active in R.E.A.P. and were proponents of the creation of the river trail and additional recreational green space along the Mississippi in the city.

The first ever clean-up of the dike wall along the river was held by R.E.A.P. on April 21, 1989, and a barge-load of car parts, tires, appliances and trash bags were removed by
volunteers. That summer, Senator Jim Metzen and Bob Milbert called a meeting with R.E.A.P., City staff and City Council to propose that officials determine a strategy to make South St. Paul’s proposed trail part of the Dakota County Regional Trail System. R.E.A.P. had participated in the nomination of Representative Tom Pugh to the newly-formed Mississippi National River and Recreation Coordinating Commission that same year. All three of South St. Paul legislators brought the discussion of river development to a broader audience. Dakota County approved the concept and the Metropolitan Council included $500,000 in the Parks and Open Space budget for land acquisition along the river in South St. Paul. On May 15, 1989, R.E.A.P. approached the City Council with a request that South St. Paul apply to the Department of Natural Resources for a public boat launch in the city, a cause with Representative Bob Milbert carried through to completion in 1990.

On November 16, 1989, the City Council voted unanimously to support the river trail and the boat launch proposals. A year later, the former waste plant property was transferred into City ownership and the citizens of South St. Paul once again had legal public access to the Mississippi River. The historic accomplishment, however, was soon threatened by a series of events which nearly derailed trail development. The story of how the city met those challenges will be next month’s history column.
CAPTION: The first clean-up of the Mississippi River shoreline in South St. Paul took place on April 21, 1989. After decades without legal public access to the riverfront, volunteers gathered appliances, hundreds of tires, car parts and garbage to fill a barge. In 1990, Great River Services donated this even larger barge to remove the collected trash. This photo is taken near the site of what became the city’s public boat launch that same year.
South St. Paul Wins All-America City Honor
May 2010
By Lois Glewwe

It was twenty years ago, in 1990, that South St. Paul achieved the first legal public access to the Mississippi River within the city. Political upheaval at City Hall, several town meetings and dozens of carefully negotiated partnerships had paved the way for development of the trail and related recreational and green space on South St. Paul’s riverfront. Serious plans to develop the river trail as part of the Dakota County Regional Trail system began to take shape.

There was little time for trail proponents to celebrate this early success, however. It was March 9, 1990, that the South St. Paul City Council first learned of a proposed major expansion of railroad switching operations on the city’s riverfront. The Chicago-Northwestern Railroad, owners of much of the property that the City was attempting to obtain for the trail, released their plans for the new switching station adjacent to the middle section of the proposed public trail.

R.E.A.P., the grassroots citizens’ organization that had been promoting development of the trail, immediately diverted its emphasis to preventing the switching expansion due to concerns about noise, pollution and danger. Residents testified before Council to explain that current noise levels without the switching yard were often intolerable, causing damage to homes and rattling shelves, windows and doors. City Council votes were often split four to three as those hoping to prevent the expansion prevailed by a slim margin.

Even as the often heated meetings and discussions with the railroad continued, several other projects were beginning throughout the community, many inspired by a state-wide campaign called Celebrate Minnesota 1990, which provided small grants to communities who applied for improvement funds. The Kaposia Connector Team of R.E.A.P. was inspired by the campaign and began to lay out and clear the trails through the ravines of Kaposia Park. The South St. Paul Jaycees painted the inside of the old 1930s pavilion in the park and Court Services did the outside. A new roof was donated and the first Frisbee golf course was installed by the City Parks and Recreation Department. Voters approved a $975,000 park bond issue on September 11 and the first discussions were held about the creation of a joint South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights Park at Seidl’s Lake.

One of the most unexpected developments was the return of the bald eagles to South St. Paul’s riverfront. The first R.E.A.P. Eagle Watch had been held in 1989 when a pair of adult eagles revealed a baby eagle in their nest just across the river from South St. Paul. 1990 brought the prospect of a second baby eagle birth and the event became an annual celebration of river renewal throughout the Twin Cities.

Prompted by this ever-expanding list of civic improvement projects, volunteers who were involved with the local Celebrate Minnesota 1990 Committee submitted an application to the National Civic League in an effort to obtain national recognition for South St. Paul as
an All-America City. On May 17, 1990, the group was informed that their application had made the first cut and was one of 30 cities that were invited to Phoenix, AZ to present their case in person.

A flurry of activity resulted in raising the money to get the group to Phoenix as well as the selection of Darrol Bussler, then Director of Community Education, to write the script and choreograph the public presentation. Three projects were identified to promote South St. Paul: 1) The Year Long Centennial Celebration in 1987; 2) The Armour Redevelopment Initiative; and 3) The creation of R.E.A.P. and its promotion of the river trail. The overall theme of the presentation was “The Spirit of the Eagle” and local artist Betty Thompson designed the image of the eagle that became the central visual graphic of the sound and slide show that accompanied the live presenters in Phoenix on June 7-9, 1990.

Competition was stiff but South St. Paul prevailed and was named one of the ten outstanding All-America Cities in 1990. The community embraced the award with a large celebration at South St. Paul High School, a special Spirit of the Eagle dinner at the V.F.W. with National Civic League President Henry Cisneros as guest speaker and with the creation of city-wide banners, signage and All-America City promotional items.

It was to take many more months before the effort to stop the switching yard expansion was successful and it was not until 1997 that the official groundbreaking ceremony for the South St. Paul portion of the Dakota County Regional Trail took place. Many challenges have been encountered while the community has continued the transition from being a place known only for heavy industry and stockyards to a city on the Mississippi where the river trail, the railroad, the eagles’ nests, the barges and the dog park all come together to create a unique experience for residents and visitors alike.
The City of South St. Paul was named an All-America City by the National Civic League at the awards ceremony in Phoenix, AZ on June 9, 1990. Presenters and some spouses, listed with the position they held in 1990, are front row, left to right: Leslie Metzen, Lois Swanson (R.E.A.P. Coordinator); Katherine Trummer (Mayor); Betty Thompson (Artist and R.E.A.P. Council); David Hohle (Chair of the R.E.A.P. River Trail Action Team); Roy Swanson. Back row, left to right: Darrol Bussler (Director of Community Education); Larry Dowell (Executive Director, South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights Chamber of Commerce); Forrest Glewwe (Chamber President); Lois Glewwe (South St. Paul City Councilmember); Jodelle Ista (South St. Paul City Councilmember); and Dave Metzen (Superintendent of Schools).
Hidden behind the trees that now dominate the hillside at Bircher and Concord Streets South St. Paul’s far north end is the imposing residence that has become known as the Weir house. The property is one of the earliest residential sites in the city. It was owned by William Bircher who settled in the area in the late 1860s. Bircher served as a drummer boy in the Civil War and then came to Minnesota as a settler. One of the earliest schools in northern Dakota County, Bircher School, was located on the property until it was torn down in 1888.

John and Francisca Karnstedt Weir became owners of the property and moved their family into the big house at the top of the hill in 1902. Francisca’s family, the Karnstedts, lived at 1649 Willis Avenue after moving to South St. Paul in 1888. She married John Weir in 1892. The Weirs had eight children: Lillian, LeRoy, Violet, Grace, Ruth, Pearl, Henry and Dorothy. The last three were born in the house on the Bircher hill.

John Weir worked in the meatpacking plants for many years but then decided to go into the grocery business. He built his final store right on the corner of Bircher and Concord on his own property. He provided fresh produce from the St. Paul Farmer’s Market, milk, eggs, butter, bread, staples and a variety of penny candy for the children in the neighborhood. The little building still stands on the corner today.

Andrea Tweit, the daughter of the youngest Weir girl, Dorothy Weir Tweit, shared the family’s story in 1986 for the South St. Paul Centennial history. She grew up listening to stories that her aunts and uncles loved to tell at every family gathering.

All eight of the Weir children loved the big old house and the surrounding neighborhood. The house had two barns and a windmill, as well as a six-sided playhouse that John built. Many attractions beckoned the children of the area including the Mississippi River where often headed with their fishing poles. In winter the steep slopes of the ravine provided opportunity for skiing, tobogganing and sledding.

Another favorite spot was the spring slough which was located between what was then two sets of railroad tracks, southeast of the end of Bircher Avenue. The shallow end of the slough stayed open all year because of the underground spring but the other end became a skating rink in the winter months. The children would sometimes put their skates on in the house and then attempt to walk on their blades to the bumpy ice of the frozen slough.

In summer a team of neighborhood children often gathered on Willis Avenue at the top of Bircher to play kittenball. The only drawback to the location was that any outfielder who missed a catch often had to chase the ball all the way down the steep Bircher hill to Concord Street and beyond.
The Weir girls were in their teens during the fashionable age of white ruffled dresses, huge hair bows and dainty laced-up kid boots. Known for their fun parties, the girls were popular residents of the city in the years leading up to World War I in 1914. One of the stories about the house that Andrea Tweit shared was of the Halloween parties that the girls hosted. There were three large bedrooms and one little bedroom on the upstairs level. The small bedroom had just one window so it was often dark and the family called it the “dark room.” Because of the name it had been given, children tended to find it a bit scary. At Halloween, guests were often led upstairs one-by-one and made to enter the little, dark room where an icy hand would grasp them, causing screams of terror. Inside the room was LeRoy Weir who used an ice-filled rubber glove on a stick covered with a sleeve to create the frightening effect.

John and Francisca Weir both died in 1949 but the house remained home to Lillian, Pearl, Violet and Henry for another forty-some years until they had all passed away. Most recently, the house on the hill was owned by Roger Nielsen who restored the gracious residence to its original glory and added a lovely hilltop garden and multi-level patio around the old home.

The gracious home of the Weir family still stands atop the Bircher Hill above Concord Street on Willis Avenue. Today the structure is obscured from view by the trees which have taken over the property but in the early 1900s the house was visible from the Mississippi River.
South St. Paul’s Dream House  
July 2010  
By Lois Glewwe

Like many American communities following the end of World War II, South St. Paul anticipated the arrival of the 1950s with optimism and hopes for economic strength. People were especially interested in anything that was modern and new. Local real estate developer Mike Kassan was one of the first to recognize this desire for updated housing in the city. He bought acres of farmland on the western borer of town and began to develop upscale modern homes for a new generation of post-war couples. The new neighborhood was named Oak Park and lots were offered for 4250 in 1947.

Buyers were attracted to the area because it was still in South St. Paul but looked like no other part of town. The streets were curved and winding and had unusual names like Isalona, Dessa and Caroline (all names of the daughter of contractors and buildings in the area.) The lots weren’t the usual 40-foot plats that dominated the rest of the city’s residential neighborhoods but had wide expanses of front yards with garages opening off the street instead of being tucked behind on an alley.

In the heart of this new neighborhood, at 2023 Burma Lane, South St. Paul residents watched with excitement as contractor Herb Dillon began work on the city’s very own “Blandings’ Dream House,” on land donated by Mike Kassan.

The original of the “Dream House” concept began when Eric Hodgins, an executive with Fortune magazine decided that his growing family needed a home in the country rather than a crowded apartment in New York City. It was 1939 when he and his wife went looking for an old country home in Connecticut that they could remodel. Instead, they ended up building a new house that started out at a projected cost of $11,000 but ended up with a price tag of over $56,000. The trials and travails of dealing with contractors, builders and decorators led Hodgins to write a book about the experience. His novel, Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House, was published in 1946 and immediately became a bestseller. Within two years, 540,000 copies had been sold, and the movie rights brought in $200,000. In 1948, Cary Grant and Myrna Loy were chosen to play Mr. and Mrs. Blandings in the RKO film of the same title. Melvyn Douglas acted as the attorney and a variety of character actors played the various workers and architects involved.

The film was immensely popular and received rave reviews around the country. More recent filmgoers may remember the loose remake in 1986, “The Money Pit,” starring Tom Hanks and Shelley Long.

Director H.C. Potter promoted the film by sending actual building plans to contractors, real estate developers, builders and architects. There was no charge for the plans which came complete with detailed instructions concerning what color of paint to use in each room and how to select the best complementary towel color for the bathrooms. Among the movie lines about the house details, Myrna Loy directs, the painters, “Ask one of your
workmen to get a pound of the A&P’s best butter and match it exactly…in the master bath, the color should suggest apple blossoms just before they fall.”

The actual “Dream House” where the move was filmed was not in Connecticut but in the hills about Malibu, California, at what was then known as Fox Ranch. Among the films shot at the Ranch were “How Green Was My Valley,” “Viva Zapata” with Anthony Quinn and Marlon Brando, the Daniel Boone TV series with Fess parker, and “Love Me Tender” with Elvis Presley. In 1974, the Ranch was sold to the site of California and Mr. Blandings’ Dream House now serves as the administration building for Malibu Creek State Park.

The house in the top photo is the top photo is South St. Paul’s “Dream House at 2003 Burma Lane.” Local contractor Herb Dillon used the promotional plans from the house in the movie, “Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House,” to build the famous house. Developer Mike Kassan donated the lot. The photo below is the original “Dream House” from the 1948 movie which is located in Malibu, California.
Send in the Clowns
August 2010
By Lois Glewwe

Summer is the time for parades and festivals and even though South St. Paul’s 2010 Kaposia Days parade was rained out, the city has a long tradition of celebrating with carnivals and parades. One of the interesting things about parades from the past is that South St. Paul had its own professional clown in Elmer Larson as well as several amateurs who were members of the South St. Paul Clown Club, founded in 1977. One of the club’s founding members, Myrtle Allen, is especially renowned for her many contributions to South St. Paul.

Elmer Larson’s professional name as a clown was Sunshine. He appeared at local events whenever possible and also took part in Minnesota Twins games, the Shrine Circus and the Saint Paul Winter Carnival. For more than 20 years he changed costumes and served as a Santa Claus in St. Paul during the Christmas season. Born in 1902, Elmer married Lorena Tiedman of South St. Paul and worked as a painter when he wasn’t clowning and performing. His act included his little dog who would sometimes jump out of a cake or faithfully head for the little red fire hydrant that Sunshine carried as a parade gag. Sunshine knew his audience well and both hockey jokes and cowboy antics were appreciated by local crowds.

Many residents still recall the Larson name. Elmer’s son, Ed Larson, and his wife Helen founded Larson’s Paint and Wallpaper in 1954 at 903 Southview Boulevard. They moved the store to 705 Southview in 1955 and bought the building in 1969. In 1977, it was renamed Larson’s Decorating Center. Ed and Helen, later assisted by their son Eric Larson, served generations of area customers with personal attention and special care until retiring. Today the store site is the Black Sheep Coffee Café.

Sunshine became a professional clown in the early 1950s but was happy to lend his assistance when the South St. Paul Clown Club was formed in 1977. Myrtle Allen wrote the following for South St. Paul Centennial History: “Elmer was our mentor and directed us in becoming successful… Sunshine had a great love for children. His experiences and knowledge of approaching and caring and showing love taught us the basic components to becoming successful clowns. We choose always to induce joy and laughter and to convey the wisdom that can be found in humor.”

Myrtle was born in South St. Paul in 1911 to Fred and Bertha Esslinger Schulze. She grew up on 8th Avenue South, graduated from South St. Paul High School and married Raynold Allen, who worked for Swift’s for 37 years as the manager of product supply inventory. They had one daughter, Adrianne, who currently resides in Idaho. Founding the South St. Paul Clown Club was only one of Myrtle Allen’s contributions to South St. Paul. She was on the South St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society, active in Stage Door South, a member of the Senior Citizens Club, served on the On the Road Again Committee, and was the Treasurer of HELP, the group that worked to save the Serbian Hall in South St. Paul. She was on the board of Christmas in South St. Paul,
served on the Kaposia Days board and was active in Grace Lutheran Church for many years.

In her professional life, Myrtle was a creative fashion designer specializing in wedding dresses. She worked as a designer for Barbara’s Bridals in St. Paul and eventually became a real estate agent with Kassan Realty.

Myrtle’s friend and real estate colleague Kathy Waldron, recently wrote: “Myrtle loved South St. Paul. She dedicated a major amount of her time promoting the City and getting involved in projects to enhance existing businesses and to encourage new businesses to attract like-minded people to live and work here. She was a frequent participant at City Council Meetings. Myrtle was a visionary, really, on the cutting edge of what should be going on…She was a kind, creative person but also persistent and resilient. We were fortunate and privileged to have her in our city.”

Both Elmer Larson and Myrtle Allen were far more than performers. They used their clown appearances to bring joy to thousands of South St. Paul residents over time. Their commitment, loyalty and support of South St. Paul inspired many. Elmer Larson died in 1980 and Myrtle Allen passed away more recently on April 4, 2008. South St. Paul and its festivals and parades just aren’t the same without them.
LEFT: Elmer Larson was South St. Paul’s very own professional clown for many years. As “Sunshine,” he brought humor and compassion to his decades of community service. CENTER: Myrtle Schulze Allen was known to many in South St. Paul for her community service in a variety of organizations. RIGHT: Myrtle Allen (left) is pictured with another founding member of the South St. Paul Clown Club, Alphild Michaels, at the Kaposia Days Parade in 1978.
The Grand Old South St. Paul City Hall
September 2010
By Lois Glewwe

At the top of the Grand Avenue hill where Grand meets Third Avenue North, today’s South St. Paul residents will find Lawshe Park, a small hillside garden spot with a few benches where walkers can take a welcome rest. Few remember that the peaceful park was once the site of South St. Paul’s grand old city hall, a massive structure with elaborate stonework and copper domed tower.

Built in 1890, the City Hall was thought by some to be a foolish waste of money. South St. Paul had been incorporated in March of 1887. At the time the city’s boundaries included all of the current city plus the entire area that is now the City of West St. Paul. The first 1887 City Council had planned to build a new city hall on donated land on Oakdale. The offer came with a one-year, $6,000.00 cost stipulation and the Council could never agree on the exact location or design. Two years later, in 1889, half of the South St. Paul Council got up and walked out to form their own City of West St. Paul. The newly formed West St. Paul Council moved quickly to accept an offer of land on Eaton Street (now South Robert Street) at Orme Avenue. They hired architect John Hopper Coxhead to design their city hall and moved into the impressive building in December 1889.

In the meantime, South St. Paul struggled with the financial crisis that resulted from the splitting off of the new West St. Paul. The city had lost five of the nine existing schools that had been built between 1887 and 1889. They no longer had a meeting space because Gladstone School, where the city offices were located was now in West St. Paul and the land donated for a city hall was now outside South St. Paul’s new boundaries. Nevertheless, just five days before his work was completed on the West St. Paul City Hall, South St. Paul officials hired architect Coxhead to design a city hall that would be built into the hillside at Grand Avenue and Third Avenue North.

West St. Paul’s City Hall cost a total of $5,000 but the bid that South St. Paul received from the contracting firm of Barnett & Record came in at $8,950. A few weeks later an additional $1,900 was added to cover the cost of vault doors purchased from Dakota Safe and Lock Company of Canton, Ohio. When the two city halls were completed, they were nearly identical in design.

Coxhead’s South St. Paul city hall was ready for occupancy on July 28, 1890. As the Mayor and City Council moved into their new facilities along with the police department and other city staff, they faced many challenges, especially financial ones. It was only a few months later, in January 1891, that C.H. Lienau, a state senator from Ramsey County, wrote to Senator Ignatius Donnelly of Dakota County expressing his dismay at the behavior of the South St. Paul City Council. His words, published in the South St. Paul Reporter on February 9, 1891, included the following accusation: “They (the property owners living in South St. Paul) will tell you some strange stories about the
building of a so-called ‘City Hall’ at an enormous cost, a building for which there was absolutely no demand…” He went on to itemize a long list of expenditures which he said were in question. His suggestion to Donnelly was that Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul immediately step in and annex South St. Paul in order to protect its citizens from such irresponsibility.

Fortunately for South St. Paul, the annexation move failed in large part because there was a terrible snow storm on the night the vote was to be taken at the City Council and those in favor of annexation were unable to get to the meeting. Freed from the threat of takeover, the Council continued to work through the financial crisis and managed to move forward. By 1891, the city hall had been fitted with steam heating and its rooms and auditorium were rented nearly every night for literary readings, socials, church meetings and civic groups. Its construction cost had prompted criticism and controversy but for the next sixty-three years it would be the focal point for the growing community.

CAPTION: West St. Paul City

Hall, above left, was erected on the corner of South Robert Street and Orme Avenue in 1889. South St. Paul’s municipal center, above right, was built in 1890 on the top of the hill at Grand Avenue and Third Avenue North. Both structures were designed by architect John Hopper Coxhead, who founded his own firm in St. Paul in 1887. South St. Paul demolished its city hall in 1953. The old West St. Paul City Hall was torn down in October 1971.
Digging Up the Past
October 2010
By Lois Glewwe

It’s been over six years now that I’ve had the privilege of contributing a monthly column about the history of South St. Paul for publication in the South St. Paul Voice newspaper. Every time I sit down to consider a topic or research some details about a story, I’m reminded of how fortunate our community is to be home to the Dakota County Historical Society Research Library and Museum. Located at 130 Third Avenue North, across from City Hall and next to South St. Paul Library, the Museum is a treasure house of artifacts and information.

Founded in 1939 by South St. Paul High School teacher Fred Lawshe, the Dakota County Historical Society began as a small group of interested citizens and teachers who shared a love of local history. Lawshe, who had come to town in 1918 from Bruce, South Dakota, had always been interested in collecting artifacts and was especially intrigued by archaeological digs and the relics they produced. Although he taught industrial arts or “shop” at the High School, his extracurricular activities revolved around discovering all he could about the Kaposia Indians and their South St. Paul village site along Concord Street.

Today Lawshe’s methods of digging and cataloging Native American artifacts would be unacceptable in terms of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. That law provides specific methods of collection and requires the return of most artifacts to the tribal organizations most closely aligned to the original creators of the artifact in question. In the 1930s, however, when Lawshe began his digs at the Kaposia village site in South St. Paul, he was ahead of his time in recognizing and documenting the age, use and history of found objects.

His collections, as well as objects, photographs and publications from all over Dakota County were not on exhibit until the Society obtained its first public space in 1954 when South St. Paul High School provided a room in the West Wing of the school for use as a historical museum. The location of the exhibits at the high school led to increased interest on the part of many students who became involved with a student group called The Scribes, organized by teacher Kathryn McAuliff. The students researched and wrote stories about South St. Paul and county history with the assistance of Miss McAuliff and Mr. Lawshe.

Three years later, the museum’s collections had grown significantly and a larger exhibit space was needed. The City of South St. Paul was persuaded to open an exhibition space in the basement of the Municipal Building on Third Avenue North, across from the current museum location. The new space opened to the public on April 16, 1957 and Fred Lawshe retired from teaching the following year so that he could assume full-time responsibility as the director and curator of the Society.
For the next 20 years, the Museum continued to expand its space at City Hall and hundreds of school children and visitors toured the creative exhibits each year. Lawshe never stopped working to obtain a permanent and effective space for the Society’s collections, prevailing upon the Dakota County Commissioners to recognize the need for a true county facility to house the ever expanding holdings. At the time of his death on his 87th birthday, November 22, 1971, Lawshe’s long-time colleague, Al Smeby, took over as Curator and Frances Miller was appointed as his assistant.

As the United States prepared to commemorate the nation’s 200th birthday in 1976, extensive efforts were made by the Society to attract new members across the county and to encourage the County Commissioners to make a new museum part of their own Bicentennial project list. Their work led to the signing of a contract for construction of the current museum in South St. Paul in May 1977.

Today’s museum was dedicated on April 13, 1978, and has developed into one of the most innovative county museums in the country. The mural on the south side of the great hall was created by artists John Acosta and Carlos Menchaca in 1982 and was subsequently enhanced by the floor mural which continues to delight visiting classes from schools around the county. In more recent years, the Society has grown in terms of outreach, financial stability and visibility through its management of the LeDuc Historic Estate in Hastings, Minnesota.

Thanks to the dedication of local shop teacher and self-educated historian and archaeologist Fred Lawshe, South St. Paul is home to an outstanding collection of family information, census records, newspaper archives, photographs and artifacts that continue to inspire a new generation of history-lovers.
Fred Lawshe, on the right in the black hat, was often consulted when construction crews or gravel mining operations uncovered a relic or skeletal remains that were thought to be connected to either the original aboriginal inhabitants of South St. Paul or the Mdewakanton Dakota who lived at Kaposia village in the city from the 1830s until 1854. Lawshe’s personal collection of artifacts was exhibited through his work as founder of the Dakota County Historical Society in 1939.
South St. Paul started the 2010-2011 school year with a new Superintendent of Schools. Dr. David Webb came to the position from Fridley, MN. In Dr. Webb’s case, the transition from Patty Heminover, South St. Paul’s first woman superintendent, to his own leadership role has gone smoothly. That wasn’t always the case when a Superintendent was selected to lead the city’s schools. In the first 18 years of the city’s history, from 1887-1904, 11 different men held the position. It wasn’t until Louis Isaacs was appointed to the top job in 1904 that any stability was established. Only 11 people have held the position in the 106 years since Isaacs was hired.

Part of the reason for the turnover in the city’s earliest years was that the administration of public schools was a new venture for most communities in the 1880s. In the case of South St. Paul, Dakota County had always provided for schools throughout the region. It wasn’t until 1887, when South St. Paul was incorporated, that it became necessary for the new entity to establish school procedures and policies.

In those first years, one of the elected members of the Council was appointed as the school representative. George Wentworth, of Wentworth Avenue fame, was the first such appointee. It was Wentworth who convinced the Council that a Superintendent of Schools was needed to oversee the education needs of the new city. Frank Miner was hired and paid $75 for the month of April 1887 as the city’s first Superintendent. Miner was also a teacher in the system as was his brother Jesse. Unfortunately, in December of 1887, Frank Miner resigned and his brother Jesse was discharged that same month.

C.L. Greenough was named the new Superintendent on January 8, 1888, and led the city through one of the most challenging periods in its history. It was 1889 when half of the members of the South St. Paul City Council resigned their positions and left to create their own new city of West St. Paul. After the dust settled a few weeks later, South St. Paul had lost five of the nine schools that had been built as well as the financial support and resources that the farmers of what became West St. Paul had provided to the struggling new city.

The crisis led the City Council to appoint a committee on the schools on March 25, 1899. Frank Waterous, founder of today’s Waterous Company in South St. Paul, commission man Charles Fitch and Pierce Connelly soon realized that the City needed assistance to resolve the issue and recommended that a Board of Education be appointed. Thus it was that the first School Board was appointed on April 15, 1889. The first members were John Kochendorfer, P. Foley and J.J. McNally. At the end of that school year the new Board reported that 342 students had attended school; 291 residents and 54 non-residents. Salaries for teachers were set at $40 a month and $3,500 was set aside for the construction of two new school buildings.
In August 1890 new guidelines for school administration were voted on and control of the schools was turned over to a new Board of Education consisting of Superintendent Greenough, James J. Mitchell and Joseph Gester. It was also determined that no married woman could be eligible to teach in South St. Paul. School Board members were slated to receive $150 a year and instructed to visit the schools twice a month.

It isn’t clear what caused the School Board and City Council to completely eliminate the position of Superintendent from 1891-1895 but on July 15, 1895, John Pemberton was named to the restored position of Superintendent. The instability of the position was typical for the next eight years. As the school district matured and administrative procedures improved, some consistency was able to be established as the following roster of leaders of the schools shows:

**South St. Paul School Superintendents**

- Frank Miner, April-December 1887
- C.L. Greenough, January 1888-October 1890
- C.B. Gilbert, December 1890-February 1891
- 1891-1895 – Vacant
- John Pemberton, July 1895-July 1896
- H.S. Curry, July 1896-January 1897
- Lindsay Webb, July 1897-April 1898
- Lee Galloway, May 1898-July 1899
- Bert Russell, August 1899-May 1900
- Martin Helm, June 1900-June 1901
- W.R. Ball, July 1901-August 1903
- C.T. Conger, September 1903-June 1904
- Louis Isaacs, 1904-1911
- D. Edward Hickey, 1911-1926
- Irvin T. Simley, 1926-1957
- Harvey Jensen, 1957-1970
- Marvin Rosen, 1970-1972
- Ray Powell, 1972-1982
- David Metzen, 1982-2000
- Kent Baldry, 2000-2003
- Dana Babbitt, 2003-2007
- Patty Heminover, 2007-2010
- David Webb, 2010-
South St. Paul has had 22 Superintendents of Schools since 1887. Pictured above is Superintendent D. E. Hickey with members of the graduating class of 1913. Hickey served from 1911-1926. Graduates that year included 10 young ladies and one gentleman, Milton Joyce, who didn’t show up for the class photo.
Monumental Moments in South St. Paul History  
December 2010  
By Lois Glewwe

In September 2010, a new monument honoring all veterans was dedicated at Veterans Field in South St. Paul. Gallagher-Hansen V.F.W. Post #295 of South St. Paul hosted a Veterans Day program at the site to commemorate the installation and its important remembrance. It is the third monument honoring veterans in the city. The other two are located in Oak Hill Cemetery and on the site of the former city hall in Lawshe Park at the top of the Grand Avenue hill.

South St. Paul has a long history of honoring the past through public monuments and historical signage but often these monuments become invisible as citizens drive past them frequently and never pause to read the inscriptions or examine their significance. The earliest monument in the city is on Highland Avenue between 11th and 12th Avenues North. The site was donated to the South St. Paul School District by former mayor and real estate developer Charles W. Clark for the purpose of providing a permanent burial site for the remains of the Dakota Indians whose skeletons had been unearthed during many years of excavations. On October 29, 1938, the bones that had been preserved by Bernie Andrus and other excavators were reinterred at a funeral service on the site. A bronze plaque was mounted on a large boulder to mark the site. It read “Final Resting Place of the Indians Who Inhabited the Village of Kaposia Located on This Site.”

On August 1, 1958, Bill Schowalter was operating a loader at the sandpit on Bryant Avenue and a skull rolled out of a bank that was being excavated. The County Coroner, Joseph Klecatsky, was called to the site and he carefully removed the rest of the skeleton. Artifacts unearthed with the remains included a pipe, brass bracelet, steel table knife, fire steel and a leather tobacco bag. The skeleton was identified as an Indian and was reburied on the Highland Avenue site on October 12, 1958. Descendants of Chief Little Crow of the Kaposia Village were in attendance for the ceremony and the brass plaque was replaced by words carved into the boulder reading, “The Last Known Remains of the Kaposia Indians Who Resided in This Area 1839-1852 – Reinterred 1958.”

The second oldest monument in the city is located at the intersection of Concord Street and Butler Avenue. It is also in commemoration of the Kaposia Indians and was built and installed by the Minnesota Historical Society. Martha McConnell Burnley of South St. Paul, wife of Charles Burnley who was advertising Manager of the South St. Paul Daily Reporter was the chair of the local committee overseeing the monument. Dr. Arthur Larson of the Minnesota Historical Society and Bernie Beadle of the Dakota County Historical Society spoke at the dedication on July 23, 1941. The plaque on the center wall of the stone structure reads: “Kaposia Village. Here on the Mendota Trail, from 1839 to 1852 stood the Sioux village of the Little Crow family. An attempted Chippewa attack in 1842 precipitated the battle of Kaposia across the river. After the treaty of Mendota in 1851 the band moved up the Minnesota River to the Lower Sioux Agency region near Redwood.”
The third historical monument in South St. Paul was dedicated on October 28, 1989. It stands on the northwest corner of 2nd Street and 3rd Avenue North in Lawshe Park and commemorates the original South St. Paul City Hall which once dominated this site at the top of the Grand Avenue hill. The monument was commissioned by the South St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society. The inscription reads: South St. Paul City Hall, 1890-1956. This monument commemorates the first City Hall which occupied this site for more than 60 years. The stone globe adorned the top of the original structure. Bricks used are from the former Armour & Company’s meat packing plant.”

In the base of the monument is another plaque which reads: “South St. Paul Centennial Time Capsule Compiled in Honor of the City’s History, 1887-1987. To Be Opened on the 200th Birthday of South St. Paul, Minnesota, March 2, 2087.” There are South St. Paul children alive today who will perhaps be around when the time capsule is opened 77 years from now.

Left: This boulder marks the permanent burial site for the remains of the Kaposia Indians unearthed in various excavations over the years.

Left: The monument on Butler and Concord commemorates the Kaposia Indian Village.
Left: The stone globe and plaque of this monument stand in Lawshe Park in memory of the first City Hall.
Remembering the Cow Palace
January 2011
By Lois Glewwe

Whether it’s sledding on the Jefferson Hill, cross-country skiing on the river trail or playing hockey on an outdoor rink, South St. Paul residents play outdoors even in the coldest weeks of winter. Ice skating and hockey have always been one of the most popular events. The first public rink opened in February 1919 and by 1935, five warming houses had been built at area municipal rinks.

It wasn’t until 1945-46 that the Minnesota High School Hockey League staged its first tournament. Ralph Page established the first boys’ hockey team at South St. Paul High School that same year. Page coached the team through the 1951-52 season and took three teams to the State Tournament during that time, taking consolation honors in 1946-57. Local games were played on outdoor rinks after school.

In the 1950s, an organization was formed in South St. Paul called Kids, Inc. The purpose of the group was to raise money for youth hockey since neither the School District nor the City Parks and Recreation Department had any provision in their programs to expand hockey opportunities. Collection banks for a penny drive were placed in area businesses and the group began to raise funds.

Paul Bartl of South St. Paul recalls that his dad, Joe Bartl, was a big supporter of youth sports, especially hockey. Sometimes referred to in the press as the founder of Wakota Arena, Joe Bartl took a couple of other interested hockey supporters to Des Moines to take a look at their hockey arena. Convinced that South St. Paul needed to move forward with building plans, Joe and other business owners in the city set up a program to sell shares in a new arena. They organized Wakota Arena Incorporated on March 17, 1961, and began selling shares for $1.00. Anton Roszak provided the land on 6th Street South below Villaume Street in exchange for $25,000 worth of shares according to his nephew, Tony Roszak. The new arena cost $550,000 and opened in October 1962.

Originally known as The Cow Palace, the new venue was officially named Wakota Arena in 1963. Joe Bartl worked with Minnesota hockey legend Walter Bush to establish a new semi-pro team known as the South St. Paul Steers. The team remained in existence from 1962-1966, with Wakota as their home ice. In 1967, the Minnesota-Ontario league or the Canadian American Hockey League (Can-Am for short) was formed. This league eventually evolved into the Midwest Junior Hockey League (MJHL) in late 1972 after the Can-Am league ceased operations.

The MJHL started league play with 6 new teams in 1973, one of which was the newly formed St. Paul Vulcans which evolved from the Junior Stars Can-Am team. One of the Vulcan’s home venues was Wakota Arena. They moved to Bloomington in 2000 and eventually to Kearney, Nebraska. After the Vulcan’s departure, Wakota became home to the South Suburban Steers under local owner Len Mancowski and General Manager Jim
Martin. They operated the team until it was sold and moved to Bloomington to become the Twin Cities Northern Lights.

In addition to these semi-pro leagues, Wakota served as the high school hockey venue for South St. Paul, St. Thomas, Simley and Sibley High Schools. In the early 1990s, a new sport was added to the ice sheet at Wakota when Ringette became a popular girls sport at all grade levels. It wasn’t long, however, before the Ringette players evolved into the Minnesota State High School Girls Hockey League and left Ringette behind for ice hockey. Through the years, Wakota Arena has also been home to figure skating classes and public skating sessions.

Today the city Parks and Recreation Department provides six outdoor skating rinks for the public at Bromley, Harmon, Jefferson, Lorraine, Seidl's and Spruce. Four have warming houses and four have hockey rinks where aspiring hockey stars of both genders dream of making it to the big time.
CAPTION: The South St. Paul Municipal Band showed up for the dedication of this new skating rink in the 1930s. The rink was located on the west side of 9th Avenue North at 4th Street North across the street from the current Lincoln Center. This photo is taken looking northwest. Only a few homes can be seen on the hills behind the rink. The property was opened up to residential development in 1953.
The last time the South St. Paul Hook-Em-Cows made an appearance in the city was on a Monday night in January 1987. Long-time local residents and community volunteers Jerry and Joni Arvidson, dressed in full Hook-Em-Cow regalia, stormed into a South St. Paul City Council meeting to announce an upcoming winter event in honor of the City’s Centennial Celebration.

The Arvidson’s, whose maroon and white wool uniforms were vintage 1930s apparel handed down in their families, were in perfect character for South St. Paul’s most famous and infamous civic boosters. Staged as part of the city’s year-long commemoration of its history, the Council invasion was all in good fun.

It was 1916 when Louis B. Hill of the Great Northern Railroad approached South St. Paul commission man Charles Govern with an idea that he thought would revitalize the Saint Paul Winter Carnival. Govern and area businessmen Ed Forsythe and Craig Curry organized the first committee that created the South St. Paul Hook-Em-Cow Booster Club. Govern is credited with coming up with the name that echoed the symbolic “hook” or cane of the commission men and the cows that of course dominated the city’s industrial base in the livestock industry.

That first year they marched in the Winter Carnival Parade, designed their uniforms and recruited new members. By 1917, they held a huge barbeque and booya in South St. Paul after the Winter Carnival’s Grande Day Parade and served over 10,000 visitors. By 1919, they were ready to really make a difference. That summer, in response to the Moose Lake Fire in October of 1918 the club expanded its winter apparel and activity and traveled with 60 horses and riders dressed in western gear to perform in a fundraiser to cover the devastating costs of the fire.

In April of 1920, a special train trip for the club led them to Billings, Montana. Nine chartered cars were filled with costumed participants who distributed over 20,000 Hook-Em-Cow bells and buttons. The organization incorporated in 1928 and added the first women’s marching unit in 1937. The years 1937 and 1938 were the revival years for the group which grew to 1,000 strong with a horse patrol, a band, a drum corps, a men’s marching unit, a women’s marching unit and a queen. Professional ice skater Sonja Henie was made a member of the Hook-Em-Cows when she visited South St. Paul in 1938. In World War II, Hook-Em-Cow member and local resident Captain John Ollom and his crew chief James McGinn were stationed in England. They told Harold Johnson, a young GI the story of the Hook-Em-Cows and Johnson painted the name of the Hook-Em-Cows on his bomber plane. The plane and the Hook-Em-Cows became quite famous throughout the U.S. military.
In recent decades Twin Cities residents have heard stories about the early days of the Saint Paul Winter Carnival Vulcans and their revelry but the wildest Vulcan stories barely come close to the Hook-Em-Cows of the 1930s and early 1940s. When local attorney Harold Stassen was running for governor in 1938 the Hook-Em-Cows turned out in full force at the Winter Carnival Parade to support their local famous son for the state’s highest office. Stories abound about how they rode their horses right up the stairs and into the lobby of the Saint Paul Hotel back when the hotel entrance was on St. Peter Street. The group’s antics evoked the ire of one South St. Paul pastor who wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper in which he accused “men and women of casting every last grain of dignity and morality to the wind…plunging down on their way to eternal Hell…Who cares? Certainly not the public spirited booze hounds and liquor hoisters, not the brewing companions, not the joints along Concord Street, which constitute a veritable Red Light District…What profits have been gained from last night’s hilarious tendrums…a hangover? A headache? A flat pocketbook? Sure, but don’t forget that the joints stayed open the rest of the morning counting your nickels and dimes and dollars, yes and relief checks…Will South St. Paul be visited by the hand of God for its continued outrageous orgies?”

The Reverend’s dire warning went unheeded by most and the group thrived until World War II put the Hook-Em-Cows on hold for a few years. Sporadic revivals took place several times in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1987, the city’s Centennial celebration included a post-Grand Day Parade barbeque at the South St. Paul VFW Post #295 in memory of the Hook-Em-Cow promoters. Many in town showed up in vintage costumes like those the Arvidsons wore at that earlier City Council Meeting. Now worn by the children of the club’s founders, it was evidence that the heritage of the Hook-Em-Cows is alive and well in the attics and storage closets of many local families.
St. Paul lawyer and Dakota County Attorney. The Hook-Em-Cows, founded in 1916 as a group to promote the Saint Paul Winter Carnival expanded to summertime activities and appearances by 1919 and held annual parades in South St. Paul well into the 1950s. To the left of Harold Stassen is one of Minnesota’s future governors, Harold LeVander, who worked for Stassen’s law firm. Above LeVander is the sign for the Hook-Em-Cow Hotel a popular watering hole at 155 North Concord from 1920 until the 1960s. Next to the Hook-Em-Cow is Salet’s Department Store, just one of the former Concord Street strip’s popular shopping places in the 1940s and 1950s.
I always smile when I read the names of South St. Paul High School students who receive scholarships from the South St. Paul Educational Foundation every spring. I’m amused because so many of the students have last names that are the same as many names that were found in my own graduating class of over 40 years ago. It’s also surprising to me how many of those last names continue to reflect South St. Paul’s origins in Serbia, Croatia, Romania and Poland because of the large number of immigrants who came to the city from the Balkan countries of Europe between the late 1890s and early 1920s.

Attracted by the offer of employment in the livestock industry, many young men made the journey to America alone. They lived in big, rambling boarding houses that sprang up along Concord Street and saved the money they earned in the slaughterhouses in order to fulfill their dream of sending for their siblings, wives and children once they had enough money in the bank.

The new immigrants tended to live, work and play with others from their own country. They could relax with each other, speak their own language and share reminiscences of what is commonly called “The Old Country.” At the same time, one of the priorities common among them was the desire to learn to speak English and to become an American citizen. Citizenship and English classes were held at night at the high school and hundreds of South St. Paul people eagerly attended.

When families arrived from Europe with children, the parents were certain to want their children to start school as soon as possible. They wanted them to learn to read and write in English so that they would feel like Americans and fit into the culture of their new country.

Still, the music, costumes, language, food and culture of their home country was loved and remembered and honored. Three of the main immigrant groups had their own church and three had their own social halls that were open to members. The Polish Hall was built in 1911 at 622 First Avenue South. It served as a meeting spot, local bar, reception hall and gathering place until it was replaced with two one-bedroom apartments in 1962. The basement of the building has remained in use by the Zagloba Society of the Polish National Alliance of America. In 1941, the Society was able to build their own parish - Holy Trinity Catholic Church at 745 Sixth Avenue South.

Immigrants from Serbia began meeting together officially in 1909 when they created the St. Sava Serbian Benevolent Society. By 1923 they had grown in numbers and resources and built the Serbian Home at 404 Third Avenue South. It was 1953 when the Serbian Society dedicated their church. St. Sava, at 357 Second Avenue South. Today the Serbian Home is on the National Register of Historic Places although it no longer has a liquor license and parking restrictions prohibit its use for public gatherings. It is lovingly cared
for by Ted Trkla, who is the curator of the massive collect of art and artifacts that are housed in the historic building.

The Croatians formed their Hrvatski Dom Association in 1918 and built the Croatian Hall at 445 Second Avenue South the following year. Today the “Cro Hall” is the site of community meetings, political events, banquets, wedding receptions, high school reunions, Sarma suppers and family gatherings.

The first Romanians came to South St. Paul by 1904. They formed two organizations, the Alexandru Cel Bun (Alexander The Good) in 1918 and the Clubul National Roman (Romanian National Club) in 1922. As the community grew, they became determined to establish a parish. The Romanian National Club initiated the efforts, organizing in 1923. They purchased land and build the Byzantine style St. Stefan’s Romanian Orthodox Church at 350 Fifth Avenue North in 1924. The church hosts Romanian dinners and continues to celebrate and treasure their historic building and their faith traditions.

The largest immigrant group to arrive in South St. Paul was from Germany in the 1850s and 1860s and of course, many other groups from Europe, including the Irish, made up significant numbers in the early city. It was the people of the Balkans, however, who left an indelible mark on the city through the many unusual names still found in any South St. Paul phone directory or on a list of high school grads.
CAPTION: This group of children posed on the front steps of the Serbian Home at 404 Third Avenue South in South St. Paul. The St. Sava Serbian Benevolent Society was formed in 1909 and built their social hall in 1923. The adults in the top row are, left to right: Jovo Makevich, Rev. Jovan Dovodoff, Very Rev. Z. Ristorovich, Mrs. Katherine Bogatich and Mrs. Jovan Dovidoff. Today the Serbian Home is on the National Register of Historic Places, reflecting the significance of South St. Paul’s rich ethnic heritage.
South St. Paul’s history is often positioned in time by referring to “before Concord Street came down,” or “before they demolished Grand Avenue.” Residents who’ve moved in since 1980 often find it difficult to comprehend just how many buildings, homes and businesses were removed to make way for new development. Even long-time citizens who remember the old Concord and Grand structures are surprised at how difficult it is to remember those days and recall where specific businesses or homes were located.

Photography, of course, makes it possible to capture a moment in the past and record for all time how it really was. The photo accompanying this story is one such image. It was taken, presumably from an airplane, above North Concord Street between address numbers 363 and 600. It was published by the former Sun-Current News to record the damage done by the 1965 flood. The view is looking northwest from above Concord Street. The railroad tracks are in the forefront, surrounded by the built-up dike that was holding the Mississippi back from at least part of the tracks. At the far right of the photo, the tracks are under water.

To orient a sense of where this is, the dike wall and the railroad tracks that aren’t under water stop at what is now Wentworth Avenue. Wentworth proceeds to the west at the center of the photo, the only major intersection that is included in the picture. If you were to stand on that corner today, you’d have the South St. Paul Animal Hospital, 501 North Concord on the north and the now-closed gas station on the southwest corner of Wentworth and Concord on the south. No buildings exist on the east side of Concord at that location today.

On the hills to the west in the photo, the road that winds across the top is Stewart. In 1965, Dwane came through to Concord at the opening in the far right hand corner of the image. Wentworth didn’t go through but stopped at the ravine which is now fully developed as a residential neighborhood on Ravine Street.

Although it isn’t possible to identify every structure on the street, the following businesses were listed along North Concord in the 1964 Polk Directory. Starting on the east side of Concord at the far left corner of the photo is 364 North Concord, the Dolan-Danielson Chrysler/Plymouth dealership. South St. Paul Bee-Line auto repair service was at 374. Mrs. Irene Yedelsky provided furnished rooms at 384 and another apartment building was at 400 North Concord, with 5 units. The South St. Paul Small Animal Hospital was at 414. Crossing Wentworth, the Clark Super 100 gas station was at 510 North Concord and Brown Quick-As-A-Wink Cleaners & Launderers was at 520. Nicky Kolak’s Liquor Store stood at 522, along with Alex Batush’s Fruit Market. Crossing Dwane, the Spur Gas Station was at 600 North Concord. The remaining property on the east side of Concord in the picture is the yard office of the Chicago Great Western Railroad.
On the west side of Concord, again beginning at the lower left hand corner of the photo, the first building is the Rivera Tavern at 365 and Standard Building Materials at 369. Frankie’s Pizza Place was at 375 North Concord with six apartments upstairs. Buck’s Tavern was at 379. The Polk Directory defines the cluster of buildings that extend west above Concord by attempting to identify the address on the street itself and then listing who lived in the rear of that address. Zella’s Corral, a dealer in used furniture, was at 417.

Crossing Wentworth on the west side of the street, the building at 501 is identified as Joseph Annerl, with several private residences following in the listings. The Hillside Tavern was at 525 and Southview Automatic Transmission was listed at 529 North Concord. The photo ends as Dwane intersects North Concord.

Interspersed with businesses on both sides of North Concord were dozens of private residences, many of which had been there since the earliest days of the city in the 1890s. It is also possible to see in the photo several houses that were built on Wentworth itself, all of which were purchased and torn down during the period of urban renewal in the 1970s.
CAPTION: This photo of North Concord Street in South St. Paul was taken in 1965 to record the extent of that year’s spring flooding. It also captures for all time the dozens of homes and businesses that once dominated this part of the city before being removed as part of the massive urban renewal effort of the 1970s.
South St. Paul’s public transit system has been an important part of the community story since the late 1880s. As today’s cities debate the merits of light rail, it’s interesting to remember that in the decades before nearly everyone owned an automobile, use of trains, streetcars and other forms of urban transportation was very much part of life.

One of the earliest forms of rail transportation that served South St. Paul was commonly known as the “Stickney Motor.” Operated by the Chicago Great Western Railway, the little steam engine had three small cars and ran from St. Paul to Inver Grove from the 1890s to about 1905. Passengers would purchase a “Commutation Ticket,” good for ten rides with several farms in Inver Grove Township designated as official stops on the route.

The little steam engine tracks ran alongside the passenger and freight trains that roared into the South St. Paul depot, then located just below Concord Street south of Grand. By 1899, the City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting the speed of trains passing through the city as more than 16 trains a day pulled into the South St. Paul Station. In 1915 the South St. Paul Railroad Depot was moved to the east side of North Concord in the 200 block.

It was May 15, 1905, when the City approved the first franchise to bring streetcars to Concord Street. The Minneapolis and St. Paul Suburban Railway Company was hired to construct, equip, maintain and operate street railway lines on South St. Paul streets. There was a grand celebration when the tracks were open for operation on July 2, 1905, the 18th anniversary of South St. Paul’s founding.

The streetcars soon replaced the old Stickney Motor system, extending service from St. Paul to Hastings via the Southern Streetcar Company by 1913. The southern system ran on its own track on the far side of the railroad to Hastings until closing operations in 1928. The standard tracks of the South St. Paul lines ran as far south as the Moose Lodge in Inver Grove where the cars were turned around at a little green building by Barron’s Store on the curve into Inver Grove. In the early years the fare was 12-cents from St. Paul to Inver Grove; 25-cents from Inver Grove to Hastings and 40-cents from St. Paul to Hastings.

Streetcars and rail lines were limited to Concord Street and no lines were ever built in the residential neighborhoods to the west. Charles Clark attempted to address that situation with his ill-fated monorail, built in 1888, but his venture was unsuccessful. It wasn’t until January 18, 1936, that bus transportation began in South St. Paul. Service was limited to travel from St. Paul to destinations along Concord Street.
Then, in 1944, local entrepreneur Anton Rechtzigel founded the South & West Transit Company, or the Jitney Bus Company as its passengers came to call it. The brightly painted blue and white “jitneys” brought public transportation to all of South St. Paul’s neighborhoods and also had several West St. Paul routes. Tokens could be purchased for use by regular riders with cash fares running around 10 to 15-cents.

As the post-World War II veterans returned home from the war, they ushered in one of the greatest economic booms in American history. The 1950s brought prosperity and possibility to all. Houses sprang up for enterprising young families throughout the city and the community wanted everything to be new and modern.

It wasn’t long before a move was afoot to replace the streetcars and their old track systems with modern new busses. The last streetcar trip was commemorated on March 19, 1952, with a final ride on a streetcar celebrated by prominent area businessmen who then returned on a shiny new bus, making its charter run into South St. Paul. The removal of the tracks soon led to the widening of Concord Street and the erection of new street lights that led some to refer to the new Concord shopping district as South St. Paul’s “Great White Way.” It was only a matter of time before South St. Paul residents, like so many urban dwellers in the Twin Cities, began to abandon their long-held support of public transit in favor of owning their own automobile.

Caption: Chamber of Commerce members, business owners, city officials and other gathered on Concord Street in South St. Paul on March 19, 1952 to commemorate the last streetcar to provide transportation to the city. The cars, which had been in use since 1905, were replaced by busses. The tracks were torn up and overhead lines removed. In this photo, a group of riders has taken a trip out of the city on the streetcar and now board the new bus to make their grand entrance back into center of town.
Whatever Happened to Harriet?
June 2011
By Lois Glewwe

One of South St. Paul’s claims to historic fame is the fact that the first public school teacher in Minnesota was brought to the state at the invitation of Dr. Thomas S. Williamson of the mission at the Kaposia Indian village in what became South St. Paul in later years.

Like many historic heroes and heroines, the real story of Miss Bishop’s life and career is more complex than a simple tale of sacrifice and good works. Harriet was born in Vermont on January 1, 1817. She attended the Fort Edward Institute in New York and became a teacher in the city of Essex, NY. She was 30 years old and hungry for adventure when she joined a group of 25 other young women to undertake a preparatory course led by Catherine Beecher in Albany, NY. The purpose of this extended education was to train the women to become teachers in the western regions of America where settlements were being established and teachers were needed.

While she was at the Beecher school, a letter arrived from Dr. Thomas Williamson. Williamson and his sister Jane had a successful school at Kaposia for the Mdewakanton Dakota children of the village but the good doctor was concerned about the children of the growing city of St. Paul who had no schools to attend. He estimated that there were 36 potential students of school age in the city and he sought Ms. Beecher’s help in identifying a woman who would come to teach these children. Harriet was eager to undertake the challenge and she volunteered to go to Minnesota.

On the morning of July 16, 1847, the steamer “Lynx” arrived at Kaposia. In her book, *Floral Home*, published in 1857, Harriet described the scene: “All nature had conspired, too, for a glorious day when we first looked on Little Crow’s village, or Kaposia, where our boat landed. The ringing of the bell occasioned a grand rush and with telegraphic speed every man, woman and child flew to the landing. To an unsophisticated eye like mine, the scene on shore was novel and grotesque…blankets and hair streaming in the wind, limbs uncovered, children nearly naked, the smaller ones entirely so, while a papoose was ludicrously peeping over the shoulder of nearly every squaw. In the midst of the waiting throng appeared the missionary and his sister.”

Harriet spent two more days with the Williamsons at Kaposia and then Dr. Williamson arranged for two Mdewakanton women to escort her by canoe to the capital city. She called at the home of J.R. Irvine, where she was to stay and within a few days she opened her first school in a former blacksmith’s shop. Classes opened in her humble school room on July 19, 1847.

Of the first seven students who showed up for school, only two were white. Harriet could speak only English so she relied on a mixed blood Dakota girl who could read and speak Dakota, English and French to help her communicate.
It was not quite what the well-educated New England Harriet had expected but she persevered and by 1849 the school was moved to a small frame building on the bluff near the foot of what is now Jackson Street. The following year Harriet left the public school system and established a small seminary and private boarding school in St. Paul as a true public school system was established in what was to become the state’s capital.

Harriet was a respected and well-known figure in the early days of St. Paul and she was not above hoping that she might find the opportunity for marriage. She had been through a difficult break-up of an engagement and in 1858 she married John McConkey. They were later divorced and Harriet resumed her maiden name. The resulting scandal impacted her influence even though McConkey was reputed to be a scoundrel according to contemporary sources.

In 1862, Harriet wrote a rather infamous book entitled *Dakota War Whoop*. The first edition had 304 pages and by the time she self-published the second in 1864 it had grown to 429 pages. It was a melodramatic account of the U.S. Dakota War that former Minnesota governor Henry Sibley refused to endorse despite a plea from Harriet. Written by one who was never near the locations of the war of 1862 and whose entire recollection was based on exaggerated newspaper accounts, the supposed memoir is full of errors and has impacted Harriet’s reputation as an authentic recorder of history.

Harriet Bishop died on August 8, 1883, at the age of 66. It is reported that she retained her signature long curls until 1880 and despite the challenges to her reputation and career, she remained in Minnesota, the place she described as her home: “I have known Minnesota from its infancy, and have loved it as a parent does a child. I have never so felt my soul glow with enthusiasm, with the fact that I am an American woman, as in scanning the vast field which the West presents for the exercise of our best faculties, for effort and expansion.” Her memory is honored in today’s St. Paul by the fact that Harriet Island is named after the state’s first public school teacher.

CAPTION: Harriet Bishop arrived in the Dakota village of the Kaposia people in what would become South St. Paul on the morning of July 16, 1847. She was the first public school teacher in Minnesota and came to the territory at the invitation of Dr. Thomas Williamson who was concerned that the children of St. Paul had no teacher.
In a little over a year, Minnesota will commemorate what is perhaps the most significant event to ever occur in the state, the 1862 war between some of the Dakota people and the U.S. government and settlers. The chief who is traditionally identified as the leader of the Dakota who went to war was Taoyateduta, commonly known as Little Crow. The location most identified with him was the village of the Kaposia band of the Mdewakanton Dakota in what is now South St. Paul. In preparation for the stories of the U.S. Dakota War that will be prevalent during 2012, it is appropriate to learn something about this complex Dakota leader.

Little Crow was the fifth in a hereditary line of chiefs of this band. His date of birth, according to his gravestone in Flandreau, South Dakota, was 1818. Other biographers suggest a birth date closer to 1810 or 1812. His father, Wakinyantanka or Big Thunder, was head of the Kaposia band whose village was then located on the east side of the Mississippi River north of the South St. Paul site. When he was a young boy, Little Crow’s mother, Miniokadawin or Woman Planting in Water, left the Kaposia band and took Little Crow to her people at what is now Lac Qui Parle, Minnesota.

It was at Lac Qui Parle that Little Crow first met Dr. Thomas Williamson. They founded the mission at Lac Qui Parle in 1835 and remained there for 11 years. Little Crow learned to read and write in Dakota at the mission school and reportedly was a quick study in arithmetic, a skill he knew would be helpful in dealing with the fur traders. It is also reported that he was a great card player and avid gambler.

By the time he was 20 years old, Little Crow had left his mother’s village and relocated to join a band of Wahpekute Dakota people on the Des Moines and Cannon Rivers. There he married two daughters of Tasagye, an important tribal leader. Three children were born to the sisters but within two years, Little Crow abandoned them to return to the Upper Minnesota River bands near Lac Qui Parle. It was 1838 when Little Crow brought his new wife, Mazaiyagewin (Iron Cluster Woman) to visit his father and the family at Kaposia which was by now located on the South St. Paul site. In subsequent years, Little Crow married three of Iron Cluster Woman’s sisters. At least 19 children were born to the four sisters during these marriages but by 1862, it appears that only six of the children were still living.

Little Crow visited Kaposia often and built alliances with his cousins and other family members. It was October of 1845 when Little Crow’s father, Big Thunder, was walking behind his wagon up what is now the Bryant Avenue hill in South St. Paul when his rifle that was lying in the wagon bed went off accidentally, wounding him severely. On his death bed he named his son Little Crow as his successor.
For some unknown reason, Little Crow did not show up to claim his new role until early in 1846. Upon his arrival, some of Little Crow’s brothers confronted him and told him they would kill him if he attempted to approach. One of them had already taken over as chief and they had no intention of letting Little Crow assume his role. Little Crow was shot through his wrists which he had lifted to his chest to protect himself. Despite his severe wounds, Little Crow’s allies staved off the attack and got him to safety. Doctors at Fort Snelling wanted to amputate his hands but Little Crow refused permission and the Indians wrapped up his wounds and took him home. His deformed wrists would ultimately be one of the ways in which his body was identified at the time of his own death.

Many stories exist in the historical record about the aftermath of this attempted coup but ultimately the two brothers who initiated the attack were killed and Little Crow became head of the Kaposia band. The next 16 years leading to the War of 1862 were tumultuous ones for the new chief who would ultimately go down in history as the instigator of the greatest tragedy Minnesota would ever experience.

CAPTION: Photographer J.H. Gravenslund took this photograph of Taoyateduta, Chief Little Crow, at Joel E. Whitney’s St. Paul studio in 1861. Governor Alexander Ramsey had urged Little Crow to have the portrait made and lent him his own dress suit for the occasion. Little Crow reportedly insisted on adding his own blanket to ensure that his Dakota identity was also reflected in the image.
Learning about Little Crow – Part II
August 2011
By Lois Glewwe

Next year Minnesota will commemorate the 1862 war between some of the Dakota people and the U.S. government and settlers. The chief who is traditionally identified as the leader of the Dakota who went to war was Taoyateduta, commonly known as Little Crow of the Kaposia band of Mdewakanton Dakota from what is now South St. Paul. Last month’s article covered Taoyateduta’s childhood until he took over as chief of the Kaposia band in April 1846. According to the birth date on his tombstone, he was 28 years old at the time.

During the first few months of becoming chief of the band, Little Crow’s actions indicate that he was intentional about educating his people and moving them to economic security. A renowned orator, he spoke to government agents and military leaders with skill and authority. The chief was no stranger to whites or to white civilization. His grandfather had been part of a Dakota delegation to Washington, DC in 1824 and his father had held that same responsibility in 1837. The tales they told a young Taoyateduta about railroads, steamships, multi-storied buildings, fancy hotels and department stores had influenced him all of his life. As a leader of his people, he knew what was coming and tried to implement policies and practices that would benefit the Dakota as they moved into this new future.

One of the first things he did as chief was contact his former teacher from Lac Qui Parle, the medical missionary Dr. Thomas Williamson. He invited Williamson to bring his family to Kaposia and establish a new mission and school there. Little Crow had recently had a falling out with the Methodist missionaries at Kaposia and they had moved their mission to the white settlement of Red Rock (now Newport) on the east bank of the river. The Williamsons, who were Presbyterians, agreed to the move and arrived at Kaposia on November 30, 1846. At first things went smoothly. The chief was very supportive of the school and even had two of his own children, Wowinape and Emma, spend months at a time living with the Williamsons while he went on the winter hunt or other excursions to find food for the band.

Tensions constantly grew, however, as regular attacks were carried out between the Ojibwe and the Dakota along the Mississippi, sometimes with over a dozen people on both sides killed. Provisions of the 1837 treaty between the Dakota and the U.S. Government were not being enforced and payments due to the tribe were often claimed by white traders who had issued goods on credit until the government annuities arrived. In 1849, rumors began to circulate that the dollars for education promised in the treaty were being given directly to the missionary teachers and Little Crow subsequently pulled his children out of the school although the allegations were not true.

Two years later in 1851, starving and in need of assistance, Little Crow and other Dakota leaders were convinced to sign a new treaty in which they sold all of their land on the
west side of the Mississippi River to the United States in exchange for a 20-mile wide strip of land on both sides of the Minnesota River in western Minnesota. Taoyateduta delayed his band’s departure for nearly three years while trying to work out a more acceptable agreement. On March 30, 1854, Little Crow left for Washington with Henry Sibley and others in the delegation. It was his first railroad trip and the first time he’d been east of Wisconsin. He remained in D.C. for several weeks and presented his case without success.

The last of the Kaposia began making their way to their new reservation by summer of 1854. Four years later, in 1858, yet another treaty was negotiated in which the Dakota people sold their land on the northern side of the Minnesota River, leaving them only a 10-mile wide strip on the south. Little Crow made a second trip to Washington that year, remaining in the nation’s capital for four months. He was promised several adjustments to the treaty provisions and felt he had accomplished some success.

He returned to the reservation but when no additional land or money was received from Washington, many Dakota turned on their leader and accused him of lying to them. Red Owl replaced Little Crow as their spokesperson in 1859 and the chief, now 41 years old, moved into what the government called a civilized brick house and, according to some reports, began to consider becoming a farmer.

CAPTION: The artist Frank Blackwell Mayer made this sketch of Taoyateduta at the July 1851 treaty signing at Traverse des Sioux. He described Little Crow in his diary: “The Chief is a man...of a very determined and ambitious nature, but withal exceedingly gentle and dignified in his deportment. His face is intelligent when conversing and his bearing that of one accustomed to command. (“Bygones and Rigmaroles, “137-138, an unpublished autobiography begun in 1876, *Minnesota History*, Summer 1978, p. 67)
Mississippi River to the federal government and the removal of the Dakota people to two new reservations on the Minnesota River in western Minnesota.

The Dakota had been living on the Upper and Lower Sioux Agency reservations for nearly 10 years when a series of events led to the beginning of what is now known as the U.S. Dakota War of 1862. By August of that year, tensions were rising. Life had not been easy for anyone in Minnesota during that time. Crop failures, depletion of game, drought, financial failure and corruption in the Indian Agency plagued the reservation residents.

On Sunday morning, August 17, 1862, four young Dakota men left the reservation and were walking through the woods looking for any kind of game or food. They stopped at Robinson Jones’ farm seven miles southwest of present day Litchfield, Minnesota. Dakota oral tradition and historical accounts vary somewhat as to what happened next but an apparent argument over some broken eggs prompted the four Dakota to attack Jones and his family. Jones, two other men and Jones’ 15-year-old adopted daughter Clara were killed. Mrs. Jones, another woman and their three young children survived and managed to escape.

The Dakota fled the scene and returned to their village on the reservation where they began to boast of the attack and encouraged others to join them in additional attacks on whites.

That same morning, Little Crow, who lived in a brick house and relied on farming to feed his family, attended worship services at the Episcopal mission at the Lower Sioux Reservation.

By Sunday night, word of the killings at Acton had spread rapidly and a large band of Dakota descended on Little Crow’s house, demanding that he lead them in a large scale attack on the agency. Although he initially tried to reason with the angry men, in the end, the proud chief became resigned to the fact that they would not listen to him but were determined to wage a full-scale war against the whites. The traders were among the first to be attacked and killed at the Lower Agency on Monday morning, August 18. Within a few days, hundreds of white men, women and children had been attacked and killed on their farms around the agency. Battles took place in New Ulm, at Birch Coulee, at Fort Ridgely and ultimately at Wood Lake, where the Dakota were finally defeated on September 23, 1862. The whites and mixed blood Dakota prisoners that had been captured by Little Crow’s forces were released to Henry Sibley three days later and the war was over.

While hundreds of his followers were convinced to turn themselves in at the Lower Agency, Little Crow fled north to Canada with his family and his closest followers. Over the course of the next six weeks, over 300 Dakota were brought before a military court and sentenced to death or prison in trials that often lasted less than five minutes. Ultimately 38 Dakota men were hanged in Mankato on December 26, 1862, in the largest mass execution in U.S. history. The rest of the prisoners and their dependents were
ultimately removed from Minnesota to prison in Davenport, IA and to a barren reservation in Crow Creek, South Dakota.

As for Little Crow, the reluctant leader of the war, he and a small band, including his son Wowinape, eventually wandered back into Minnesota. On July 3, 1863, Little Crow was killed by an area farmer. The chief’s body was mutilated, dragged through the streets of Hutchinson and eventually tossed in a pit by the river where the remains were dug up and claimed by a local physician. The chief’s scalp and bones from his forearms were displayed at the Minnesota State Capital in 1869 and the skull was given to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1896. It was not until 1972 that Alan Woolworth of the Society worked with Little Crow’s descendants to inter the remains in a grave at the Indian cemetery in Flandreau, Minnesota.

CAPTION: Chief Little Crow of South St. Paul’s Kaposia band of the Dakota, was killed in July 1863. His body was never recovered but his skull, bones of his forearms and his scalp were given to the Minnesota Historical Society. It was not until 99 years later that Little Crow’s descendants were able to inter his remains in this grave at the Indian Cemetery in Flandreau, Minnesota. Memorial tributes to the famous chief are left at the grave by those who will never forget the tragic events of the war of 1862.
The meatpacking industry in South St. Paul began with the founding of the St. Paul Union Stockyards Company in 1886 and expanded with the arrival of Swift & Company in 1895 and Armour & Company in 1919. By 1921, the market was fully established as a major livestock market and meatpacking center.

One of the most important functions of the industry was communicating livestock market reports to cattle, hog and sheep farmers as well as providing financial updates to commission firms, banks and investors. Beginning in 1921, market reports were telephoned to a radio station at University Farm in St. Paul for broadcast. In 1922, the Federal-State Market News office at South St. Paul furnished those stock reports by phone to the Minnesota Loan and Trust Company of Minneapolis for broadcast over a station in the Curtis Hotel. In September of that year Station WLAG at the Oak Grove Hotel also aired the South St. Paul market report. When radio station WCCO was founded in 1924, daily reports were phoned to the station until 1926 when South St. Paul livestock market reporter Al Smeby made the first live broadcast from the local market. By 1929, the sixth floor of the Exchange Building was the site of the live radio broadcasts. Three years later a new studio opened in the Exchange with loud speakers that broadcast the shows throughout the offices and hallways of the building.

Al Smeby worked for the U.S. Agriculture Department and was involved with the Livestock Market Reporting Service in Washington, D.C., Chicago and South St. Paul. He came to the South St. Paul market in 1926 and was responsible for the daily market report until 1942 when he was called to Washington, D.C. to serve the Agriculture Department where he remained until 1960. The next major voice of the South St. Paul market reports was that of Lyle Lamphere. He came to town in 1936 and after holding a variety of field positions with Central Livestock, Lamphere took over the daily radio reports in September 1946. From one radio station, Lamphere organized the Central Livestock Association Radio Network, which grew into nineteen regional radio stations.

By the mid-1980s 26 daily market reports of trade activities, press releases and other market communications were being directed by the Livestock Market Institute. Formed as a non-profit corporation funded by contributions from member firms representing the St. Paul Union Stockyards, livestock selling agencies, order buyers and related financial and transportation interests, LMI continues to serve the livestock industry today. WCCO Radio stopped broadcasting farm reports in 2004 and today’s cattle and livestock growers rely more commonly on the Internet for market updates.

Al Smeby’s memories of his radio days were published in the Dakota County Historical Society’s Over the Years of April 1970 and in the History of South St. Paul 1887-1987. He wrote: “I had hoped that someday we would be able to broadcast directly from South St. Paul. That dream came true in 1929 and on November 12 my broadcast originated in a
small room on the 6th floor of the Livestock Exchange Building. It was in the midst of the Junior Livestock Show and that year the Honorable Arthur M. Hyde, United States Secretary of Agriculture, as mentioned in my evening broadcast, awarded the blue ribbon to the exhibitor who had the grand champion baby beef. This was of course the year of the never-to-be-forgotten stock market crash with its many repercussions. But at Christmas time that year a little surprise occurred during my Christmas Eve broadcast that folks talked about for many years. After a brief market report I said, ‘After all what is more symbolic of the true Christmas spirit than children’s voices singing familiar Christmas songs.’ Then four little seven-year-old boys from Lincoln School sang ‘Silent Night,’ with an older boy playing the violin. It was repeated at Christmas the following year.”

CAPTION: For over 60 years, the Livestock Market Report on WCCO was broadcast from South St. Paul. The studio was in the Exchange Building but in this undated photo the announcer has brought the WCCO bus right into the pens to capture the sounds of the yard for regional listeners.
Home Sweet Home  
November 2011  
By Lois Glewwe  

I picked up my newsletter from the City of South St. Paul a few weeks ago and was perusing it for information on city events and redevelopment updates. To my surprise, I learned in reading the Housing and Redevelopment Authority’s story on Rediscover South St. Paul that one of the properties that had been purchased and demolished to make way for a newer home was 210 First Avenue South. “Wait!” I said to myself. “That’s our house.” It had always been there and I immediately regretted the fact that even though I’d written the Glewwe Family History in 1999, I’d never thought to take a picture of the old homestead. It wasn’t long before I confirmed what I already suspected was true: 210 First Avenue was now a vacant lot.

I tell this story not because I had any real connection to the house; I’d never been inside it; never owned it; never even thought about it very much. I just knew it was there. It made me realize that in a city the size of South St. Paul, a city with nearly 125 years of incorporated history, every house that was built over 100 years ago comes with a history. Rediscover South St. Paul has been a remarkably successful program with over 100 new homes built since 1997 and 9 more currently awaiting new construction. It always gives me a feeling of pride to be driving down one of the residential streets in the city and spot a lovely new home that has taken the place of one that was ready to be replaced. The new houses seem to be perfectly suited to the old city streets; they fit right in and look as though they’ve been a part of the neighborhood for years.

The story also made me reflect on the particular history of the house at 210 First Avenue South. My grandfather bought the house in 1910. He had founded Glewwe’s Grocery Store in the city in 1904 and in 1907 both the store and the family moved into a storefront that is still standing at 141 Fifth Avenue South. By that time, my grandparents had seven children and two more joined the family above the tiny grocery store by the end of 1909.

My dad was in first grade at Central School when his father bought the house on First Avenue. Dad remembered that house and the neighborhood with great affection. Across the street from their new home was the big wooden stairway that led down to the boarding houses and businesses on Concord Street. A mile to the south was the little Baptist mission church where the family worshiped and Central School was just five blocks away up the Marie Avenue hill. Two more children were born while the family lived on First Avenue. My great-grandmother, Wilhelmina Kloss Glewwe, also lived with the clan until her death at the house in October of 1912.

Before my dad died in 1986, I drove around the old neighborhood with him, making notes of the families and stories he recalled. I loved the diverse ethnic names and interesting characters he still remembered and through his stories it was easy for me to imagine the unpaved streets and horse-drawn wagons that were common when he was a boy. He loved talking about Emil Gardie, who reportedly owned the first automobile my
dad ever saw, an event which led him to found his own auto sales and repair business in South St. Paul in 1925.

When Dad was in sixth grade, his father sold the house on First Avenue and the family moved into the second floor of the grocery store which was now located in a larger space on the corner of 5th and Marie Avenues. The youngest child in the family was born there in 1915 and all 12 children and my grandparents lived there until Martha Glewwe married William Stassen, Jr. in the summer of 1926. My grandfather passed away that December at the relatively young age of 58 years and it wasn’t long before the remaining children were grown and beginning their own lives.

The homestead on First Avenue was just one of the places in town that were a significant part of my family’s history and I was thrilled when HRA Executive Director Branna Lindell told me that they had taken a picture of the house before it was torn down. I’ve included it here as a reminder to descendants of the city’s long-time residents. Every old house in the city has a story to tell about the people who founded our community. Go and take that picture of your own family’s homestead, drive through the old neighborhood, remember the people who once lived there and be glad if one day a brand new house rises on the old memories as another generation of South St. Paul families puts down their own roots in our community.

CAPTION: In recent years this South St. Paul home truly was humble but in earlier years it was where my own dad spent most of his childhood with his parents and 10 of his 11 sisters and brothers. The old house has been demolished to make way for a brand new home for a new generation of South St. Paul families under the very successful Rediscover South St. Paul program of the South St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority. One hundred new homes have been built in the city since the program began in 1997.
Farewell to Three Leaders
December 2015
By Lois Glewwe

Three local South St. Paul leaders passed away in recent weeks. Each was an honored inductee in the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence and each had an impact on our community. The Hall of Excellence honors 90 individuals who established an ongoing relationship with South St. Paul and whose lives exemplify excellence in all life’s pursuits. The Hall of Excellence exhibit at Central Square is currently in storage for renovation but the memory of those honored in that forum is not forgotten.

Bernie St. Peter (8/16/1926-10/28/11) was inducted into the Hall of Excellence in 1991. Bernie came to South St. Paul from Plaza, ND with his parents when he was 4 years old. He attended South St. Paul schools until enrolling in Cretin High School. Bernie enrolled at St. Thomas College in St. Paul after serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He graduated in 1951 and found a professional career with the Toni Company, now known as Gillette Company. Bernie’s local impact really began when he was elected to the South St. Paul School Board in 1954 and served a total of 16 years on the board before retiring. It was then that Bernie served as chair of a research and development task force which ultimately led to the formation of the South St. Paul Educational Foundation. As Board Chair, he often spent 30 hours a week in the Foundation offices working to implement the Foundation’s mission. Since its inception, the Foundation has awarded more than $3 Million in scholarships to 2,155 South St. Paul High School seniors.

Jerry Reynolds (8/31/30-10/8/11) was honored as a Hall of Excellence inductee in 1995. Jerry came to South St. Paul as the adopted son of Ethel and Alvah Reynolds. Jerry graduated from South St. Paul High School in 1948 and from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Elementary Education in 1958. He worked for four years to earn money for his college education and spent two years in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. After two years teaching at Oakdale School in West St. Paul, Jerry became a teacher of 5th and 6th grades at Washington School in South St. Paul in 1960, a position he held for 30 years. In addition to his work in the classroom, Jerry loved the theater and performed in many community productions. After retiring, Jerry volunteered his time to conduct history tours of the city for new teachers and potential students, served as co-chair of the South St. Paul Educational Foundation Walk-A-Thon for several years and was involved with International Ringette as announcer for the tournament held in South St. Paul in 1994. Beginning in the mid-1980s Jerry began to write personal postcards and letters to 60-70 people around the country, focusing his greetings on the elderly, the ill or those who had experienced loss. In 2011, Jerry was honored by the South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights Rotary Club as the first recipient of the local Rotary’s Humanitarian Award.

Tom Kaliszewski (6/24/28-10/26/11) was also inducted into the Hall of Excellence in 1995. Tom was born in South St. Paul, where his father worked at Swift & Company as a millwright. From the time he was a young boy, Tom helped with hauling livestock and
doing other odd jobs around town. After graduating from South St. Paul High School in 1946, Tom worked full time in the stockyards until serving in the U.S. Army in Korea from 1951-52. He then attended the University of Minnesota while continuing employment with Central Livestock where Tom had been employed as a mail boy during his high school years. Tom moved into the role of cow salesman and in 1956 was promoted to Head of the Calf Department, becoming Head Cow Salesman in 1960. During his career, he sold over three million cows, more than anyone else in any recorded yard markets in the world, before retiring in 1994. Tom’s impact on the professionalism of the market, his work as an agricultural ambassador and his promotion of the livestock industry was remarkable.

These three men knew each other; they came from very different backgrounds; and were involved in different careers. The roster of local, regional and statewide organizations with which they were involved and the list of accomplishments they achieved are too extensive to be included in this brief story. Each one, however, was a strong proponent of the importance of education, the role of community involvement and the impact of business success on the community of South St. Paul. They will be missed.

Left to Right: Bernie St. Peter, Jerry Reynolds, Tom Kaliszewski. Three of South St. Paul’s most honored citizens passed away in October 2011.
Whew! 125 years. As a local historian, and as the former coordinator of South St. Paul’s Centennial celebration, I feel as though the past two and a half decades have flown by. It’s hard to believe that 1987 was that long ago and that so many things have happened in the 25 years since the city commemorated its Centennial.

2012 will also mark the eighth year that our community has benefited from the publication of the *South St. Paul Voice* and begins the eighth year of monthly history columns that I’ve been privileged to contribute. During this year I hope to look back and remember the events of 1987 and the impact they had on both civic and economic development and I want to document the major changes that have taken place in South St. Paul in the past 25 years.

The story really begins with Bruce Baumann, the father of our current mayor, Beth Baumann. Bruce was the mayor of South St. Paul from 1985 to 1989. He was first elected to the City Council in 1967 and served eight terms on that body before taking the leading position as mayor. Mayor Baumann appointed a Centennial Commission in 1985. He recruited J. Robert Stassen, a long-time city volunteer, former state senator and business owner, to chair the group. The Commission was charged with coordinating the celebration of 100 years of the city’s history. The others on the Council in 1985 who supported the appointment of the Commission were current Dakota County Commissioner Kathleen Gaylord, Wayne Johnson, current HRA Commissioner Virginia Lanegran, Don Maher, former State Representative Bob Milbert, Ed Oster and Dwight Peterson.

It became clear to the Commission early in 1986 that it was going to be necessary to hire a staff person to be the coordinator of what had become an ambitious schedule of possible events and activities. I was fortunate enough to be the person who was ultimately hired by the Commission to fill that position. I believe my contract was for $10,000.00 for the year. I’m a South St. Paul native and graduate of South St. Paul High School. I’d been gone from South St. Paul for about 14 years while I earned my Master’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, lived in India for a year, worked at the Philadelphia Art Museum for many years and ultimately served as a newspaper editor of the *Montgomery County Observer* in Center City, Pennsylvania. I returned to Minnesota in October 1985 to spend some time with my parents before deciding where I’d land for the next phase of my career. Being asked to fill the position of Centennial Coordinator for my hometown just seemed like it was meant to be.

I was given an office in the basement of City Hall and I immediately began meeting with the Commissioners and city staff to plan a year-long schedule of events, to raise additional funds to pay for the activities we hoped to stage and to establish relationships with what then were two weekly local papers (The *South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights*...
As we embarked on a year-long schedule of activities and commemorations, it soon became clear that celebrating the Centennial was going to provide the people of South St. Paul with an opportunity to express their concerns, their grief and their sadness over the loss of the city’s identity. The two major packing plants, Swift’s and Armour’s had both closed; thousands of people had lost jobs that had been the mainstay of their families for generations; urban redevelopment had resulted in over 100 buildings being torn down and not replaced on Concord Street and Grand Avenue and for many it was hard to find anything in which to feel pride or a bright outlook for the future. I will never forget the experience of meeting with men and women in my basement office as they literally shed tears when we they described to me what South St. Paul used to be and about what they now feared it would never be again.

What had begun as a simple Centennial Birthday Party soon became a much deeper and more significant enterprise that would end up changing the future of our city and impacting generations of residents to come.
The South St. Paul Centennial History
February 2012
By Lois Glewwe

As the City of South St. Paul celebrates 125 years of history in 2012, we have an opportunity to both review the City’s Centennial Celebration in 1987 and look at what has occurred in the city in the past two and a half decades. Last month I wrote about the South St. Paul Centennial Commission and its role in the year-long celebration of the city’s birthday. This month I want to talk about the publication of the 528-page History of South St. Paul that was published by the South St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society.

The Chapter began work on the book in 1984 in anticipation of publishing a history of the city for the 1987 Centennial. Each member of the group was assigned a general area of research and began gathering newspaper articles, compiling chronologies and assembling a collection of documents that would form the basis for a published book. Families were asked to submit their own photos and stories and retired amateur photographer Mervle Norman began making copy prints of the pictures as they were submitted.

The Chapter hired me in April of 1986 to serve as the editor and designer of the book. Josten’s, best known for their work on high school yearbooks, was chosen as the publishing outlet. Josten’s provided me with a computer – one of the first in South St. Paul City Hall. It was an Apple 2E and they gave me software that could be used to actually compile the history of the city although it was only a word processor; desktop publishing did not yet exist.

For today’s authors and designers, digital photographs, scanners and email make publishing and printing a quick and efficient process. In 1987, that wasn’t the case. I had to take all of the assembled files and photos that the Chapter had accumulated and bring some kind of organization and background to the featured stories. I recall reading and notating every single City Council Meeting from March of 1887 to the present time in order to document elections, major ordinances and business owners mentioned. I also spent hours in the census records from 1850-1895 in order to document the specific residents of the city over the decades. One of the most important sources of information were the city’s phone books with the first one printed in 1915. They helped me document long-forgotten businesses and families who were no longer in the city but who had played important roles in the early years of the community.

The people of South St. Paul were the greatest source of information, providing original photographs, family stories, business histories and personal diaries that enriched and added depth and interest to the published history. Over 1500 photographs were submitted, re-photographed, printed and filed with negatives and captions over the course of a year.

Once a chapter of the book was ready to be written, I typed everything into the computer, always tracking the word count because I had to keep a possible layout and design in my
head while I wrote. I then sent a 5-1/4” floppy disk to Josten’s and in about two weeks I would receive back a long single column of printed type that could be 20-40 feet in length. Then I had to manually use 11x17” layout sheets to design every page of the book, cutting and pasting the type to fit into columns and adding photos (cropped on the original print with an orange wax pen) and adding captions, page numbers, page headings and any chapter titles. The finished layouts were then mailed to Josten’s with specific deadlines for every 100 pages. Proofs were returned within a few weeks and Chapter members would come in and read every word and catch any edits deemed important enough to pay for the changes.

The first printing of 1000 copies of the South St. Paul Centennial, 1887-1987 arrived in March of 1987. Five more printings were ordered by August of that year when over 14,000 people descended on the city to celebrate the All-Class, All-City, All-Family Reunion. The book has now been out of print for many years but I get phone calls almost every month from someone searching for a copy. I always tell them to check on-line at Amazon and Alibris and to visit garage and estate sales. The most expensive edition I’ve ever seen was in a rare bookstore in Northfield, MN for $150 and I still hear of people who pick up a copy at a local garage sale for a couple of bucks.

For a project that was begun by a faithful and dedicated group of historians in an era before digital imaging, scanning or the Internet, the South St. Paul Centennial history book remains a treasured collection of photos, stories and memories that has inspired another generation of residents to embrace the rich history of our unique community.
CAPTION: The South St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society began their work on the publication of the city’s history in 1984. Pictured are Front Row, left to right: Mervle Norman, Gladys Schumacher, James Blair, Mary Kaliszewski, Myrtle Allen, Anna-Marie Bistodeau and Ellen Carter. Back row, left to right are: Eleanore Matczynski, Tom Kaliszewski, Kathy Waldron, David Bester, James Cashman, Ray Allen, Ed Oster, Robert Bohrer, Ed Horst and Joe Schumacher. Not pictured are: Alta Brown, Frances Miller and Don Spavin.
Happy Birthday South St. Paul!
March 2012
By Lois Glewwe

As South St. Paul kicks off the celebration of the city’s 125th birthday this month, it’s appropriate to reflect back on what was happening 25 years ago when South St. Paul turned 100 and to mention a few significant events that have happened in the years since 1987.

The Centennial celebration actually kicked off in December 1986 when a detailed history calendar sponsored by South St. Paul V.F.W. Post #295, was hand-delivered to every house in town. The first major event was December 28, 1986, when all of the churches in the city, then numbering 14, participated in an open house from 2-5 p.m. The congregations and parishes, decorated for Christmas, invited the public in to view history displays and enjoy Christmas cookies. For many in town it was the first time they’d ever been in many of the churches.

In January 1987, South St. Paul had a float and marching unit in the Saint Paul Winter Carnival Grande Day Parade. Themed after the city’s early booster club, the Hook ‘Em Cows, the float featured several residents who had inherited one of the maroon and white wool uniforms of the organization which flourished from 1916 through the 1940s. Following the parade, the community was invited to the V.F.W. for a Hook ‘Em Cow Revival Barbeque.

Apparently some things never change. The February event for the Centennial, the South St. Paul Winterfest that was to be held on February 14, 1987, had to be canceled because of lack of snow and temperatures in the 40’s. That same month, however, marked the debut of the first souvenirs of the Centennial. T-Shirts, buttons and Centennial mugs went on sale in the Centennial office in the basement of City Hall.

The birthday party itself took place on March 2, 1987. As a kick-off for the event, at exactly 5 p.m., the old Swift & Company whistle, which once sounded four times a day, rang out across the city for the first time in nearly 20 years. A three-tiered birthday cake with 100 candles, was lit promptly at 5:15 p.m. City residents were invited to dress in historic costume and come for the big event with free cake for the first 1,000 attendees. One of the highlights of the celebration was the presentation of ethnic flags representing 15 ethnic groups that were significant to South St. Paul’s history. Sponsored by the Civic Arts Commission, the flags were displayed in City Hall and used in many subsequent commemorations. The City Council, dressed in historic costume, re-enacted the signing of the city’s original charter in 1987 as they convened their meeting at 7:30 p.m. and Dick Gardiner, founder of the Original Harmonicats, a renowned local band, played music from the 1880s on his foot-long harmonica.

Other events in March 1987 included the first showing of four one-hour video documentaries entitled “Mysteries of History.” The programs premiered at the Dakota
County Historical Society Museum on four Thursday nights before being shown on Continental Cablevision, then the local cable company for South St. Paul. Each one-hour program focused on a specific aspect of South St. Paul history. The first printing of 2,500 South St. Paul Centennial History books arrived at City Hall on March 9, 1987, and sold out in less than two weeks. The book ultimately went into five printings.

Looking Back at 25 Years of South St. Paul History
What’s Happened Since 1987

A few things that have happened in the city since the Centennial celebration of 1987:

• February 4, 1988 – The River Environmental Action Project (R.E.A.P.) was founded at Community Partnerships with eight original Action Teams: Pedestrian Walkway, Marie Avenue Connector, Kapio Park Connector, Memorials, Armour’s, Marina, Natural Environment and Exchange Building.

• October 1, 1988 – The first annual R.E.A.P. River Ramble brought people to the banks of the Mississippi River in South St. Paul – the first time many in town had ever see the river up close.

• April 21, 1989 – The first River Trail Clean-Up was held along the dike wall on the river.

• June 1, 1989 – Demolition of the abandoned old Armour’s plant began, opening over 40 acres of riverfront property to future development as today’s Bridgepoint industrial park.

• September 1, 1989 – First conceptual drawings of the proposed River Trail were unveiled at a Town Meeting at Central Square.
CAPTION: South St. Paul celebrated its 100th birthday on March 2, 1987 with a 100-candle cake. Pictured front row, left to right are: Melissa (Krone) Grannis, then Miss South St. Paul Princess; Lori (O’Malley) Felton, then Princess of the South Wind; Kathleen Gaylord, then South St. Paul City Councilmember and Christine (Rosenberger) Arne, then Miss Minnesota-USA. The two gentlemen are South St. Paul Mayor Bruce Baumann and City Councilmember Ed Oster. Councilmembers came to the party in historic costume and re-enacted the signing of the city’s original charter.

CAPTION: Joe Todd, on the left, and an unidentified colleague, hooked up the old whistle from the Swift & Co. plant to a steam compressor in honor of the city’s birthday party. The whistle used to announce shift changes four times a day and could be heard all over the city. At exactly 5 p.m. on March 2, 1987, they sounded the old whistle for one last time.
The Story of Miss South St. Paul
April 2012
By Lois Glewwe

As South St. Paul residents come together at the many events planned to celebrate the city’s 125th anniversary this year, they will often see Allison Dippel, Miss South St. Paul for 2011, and the two Miss South St. Paul Princesses, Melissa Ciupik and Holly Ekwochi, welcoming people and spreading royal cheer to the crowds. The women serve as ambassadors for the community at parades, festivals and coronations all over the state.

They are part of a long line of royal representatives who have carried the prestigious title of Miss South St. Paul. The concept began back in the mid-1950s when civic leaders came up with the idea of holding a swimsuit competition at the annual Water Carnival. The popular poolside beauty contest soon expanded to an event that was produced by the South St. Paul Jaycees. Using the format of swimsuit, talent and evening gown competitions that the Miss America program had established, the pageant was held at the High School Auditorium. Eventually the competition became part of the official state organization that sent the winning woman to the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

South St. Paul’s first turn at national fame came in 1970 when Juliana Gabor won the South St. Paul crown and represented Minnesota at the Miss America pageant. Then, in 1975, a 20-year-old young woman from Edina entered the local pageant. Her poise, polish and talent allowed her to sweep the title away and Dorothy Benham not only went on to become Miss Minnesota of 1976, she was crowned Miss America 1977 on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. Despite South St. Paul’s role in her road to success, however, she was always announced as being from Edina, Minnesota, and the experience left a sour taste in the mouth of South St. Paul’s pageant organizers who officially bowed out of the Miss America organization.

The local selection of an honored queen continued each year until 1981 when Julianne Oster, who was Miss Teen Minnesota in 1977, was honored as Miss South St. Paul. The Jaycees had decided to discontinue sponsoring the program as her year came to an end but Julianne continued to generously volunteer to represent the city around the state.

That same year local resident and Chamber of Commerce employee, Carol Swenson, came to the Kaposia Days board with an idea. She suggested that the annual festival take over the Miss South St. Paul selection process and call the new queen Miss Kaposia Days as a way to promote the festival (and to distinguish the title from Miss South St. Paul to avoid confusion.). The board and organizers agreed and the first Miss Kaposia Days Pageant was held in 1982. In 1984, in order to better identify the festival with the city, the title became Miss South St. Paul. Carol recalls that the Miss Kaposia Days title often prompted confusion when they were out of town with questions such as “Where is Kaposia?” and a favorite, “Is Kaposia a pastry?”
The new Miss South St. Paul pageant was not affiliated with any statewide or national organization but in 1983, the Board voted to send the South St. Paul Queen to the Saint Paul Winter Carnival as a Queen of the Snows candidate. This continued until the early 1990s when Miss South St. Paul was given the option of a scholarship or paid participation in Winter Carnival.

The community was thrilled when Chris Rosenberg, who had been crowned a South St. Paul Princess in 1984, pursued the Miss Minnesota U.S.A. title in 1986. Any woman could enter this pageant which led winners to the Miss U.S.A. program, as distinguished from the Miss America organization. Chris was named Miss Minnesota that year and later became part of the local production team following her reign.

This summer, another group of hopeful young women will submit their applications to be named Miss South St. Paul and will eagerly anticipate the Coronation ceremony during South St. Paul Kaposia Days. They will be South St. Paul’s royal representatives until June of 2013.
CAPTION: When South St. Paul celebrated its 100th birthday in 1987, these women (love the big hair!) all vied for the prestigious title of Miss South St. Paul. Front row, left to right: Christina Alex, Tamara Ryan, Rose Martineau, Tanya Harms, Amy Wood and Maria Ramirez. Second row, left to right: Rhonda Sohr, Elizabeth Reimers, Christine Davidson, Jackie Nelson, Michelle Willey and Kelly Jahner. Back row, left to right: Sheila Oberaigner, Anne Picha, Betzi Ponto, Nancy Rys, Kari Goers and Sonja Dorau. Betzi Ponto was crowned Miss South St. Paul and Jackie Nelson and Beth Reimers were South St. Paul Princesses. Sadly, the community lost 34-year-old Betzi to breast cancer in 2004. In another sad development for the community, Juliana Gabor, who had become Miss Minnesota in 1970, died of cancer in 2009.

Significant Events Since the Centennial Celebration

March 3, 1990 – City Council first heard of a major expansion of switching operations proposed for the South St. Paul riverfront by the Chicago Northwestern Railroad. (This battle continued until the City was ultimately successful in stopping the proposed expansion adjacent to the new River Trail in 1993).

June 7, 1990 – South St. Paul competed in Phoenix, AZ to be named an All-America City by the National Civic League and was named one of the ten honored communities. Artist Betty Thompson’s hand-painted banner, “The Spirit of the Eagle,” was awarded to the City and displayed in the Council Chambers.

August 5, 1990 – The completion of the clearing of all trails throughout the ravines of Kaposia Park. The South St. Paul Jaycees painted the pavilion and a new stove and
refrigerator were donated for the kitchen. The horseshoe pits were donated and installed and South St. Paul Parks and Recreation opened the first Frisbee Golf Course in the park.
Company’s Coming
May 2012
By Lois Glewwe

On May 30, 1987, volunteers descended on the Stockyards Exchange Building on the corner of Grand and Concord in South St. Paul. Armed with brooms, rakes and clippers the crew faced the task for clearing the grounds of overgrown brush, trash and debris that had accumulated over the years. Joining the group were city workers with backhoes, trucks and equipment to aid in the clean-up. The effort marked the kick-off of the South St. Paul Centennial Commission’s campaign called “Company’s Coming,” a summer-long program designed to encourage residential and business property owners to spruce up their buildings and yards as the community prepared the host the “All-Class, All-City, All-Family Reunion in August 1987.

As the only property in South St. Paul on the National Register of Historic Places, the Stockyards Exchange represented the glory days of the city’s past when the livestock market was thriving and when the Exchange itself was filled from attic to basement with commission firms, insurance companies, banks, brokers and related businesses. As South St. Paul celebrated its own 100th anniversary, however, the Exchange had fallen on hard times.

In 1977 the St. Paul Union Stockyards moved out of the grand old landmark, built in 1886-87, and re-opened on the other side of Concord in new facilities. The South St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) purchased the Exchange Building in 1978 with the intention of marketing it as the centerpiece of the redevelopment along Grand and Concord that had begun in the 1970s with the demolition of over 100 commercial and residential properties. A private developer bought the building from the HRA in 1979. As part of the agreement, a parking lot was constructed by the HRA across the street from the Exchange.

Then in January of 1980, vandals broke into the building and turned on the sprinkler system. Water flowed through the building for several days before it was noticed. This destroyed the heating and ventilation system and caused severe damage to the main floor ceilings as well as other floors. Following the vandalism, electricity and plumbing to the building was disconnected. Various private developers continued to show interest in the building over the years but none were able to make the finances work. Damage continued to the building as windows were broken and pigeons roosted inside. Vandals and vagrants began sleeping in the building and graffiti was sprayed on walls throughout.

The 1987 clean-up crew had no access to the inside of the privately-owned Exchange but did get permission to improve the exterior appearance. Following the 1987 effort, damage continued and although the HRA attempted to work with the owner to get the facility cleaned up, attempts were futile until the owner passed away in 1991. The HRA was able to get the building back in 1992 and gradually began to restore it in order to secure it for
future development. Windows were replaced and a major clean-up of the interior was conducted, removing the years of dead pigeons and debris.

In June of 1992, the Dakota County Historical Society offered public tours of the building for the first time since it closed. Approximately 500 people toured the building in small groups with several guides. Some of the people who had offices in the Exchange over the years were in their old work places to explain to people how the Exchange had functioned. That same year the HRA commissioned a Feasibility Study which led to a recommendation that the most plausible re-use of the structure would be for public space such as a potential new South St. Paul City Hall. The estimated costs of renovation would make redevelopment prohibitive for a private business.

Finally in 1996, Duane and Martha Hubbs, owners and operators of the Lumberjack Hotel in Stillwater, purchased the Exchange Building for one dollar with the stipulation that they would spend $3 Million to renovate it for hotel and restaurant space. Over the course of the next several months, the Hubbs renovated the entire building, restoring the ceramic fireplaces, turning the old offices into bedrooms decorated in lush Victorian detail and adding restaurant, bar and banquet space.

Now, fifteen years after The Castle Hotel opened, the old Exchange is known as Valentino’s and is a catering and banquet facility used mostly for weddings. That 1987 group of volunteers who led the clean-up effort were just the beginning of a vast community partnership of cooperation that worked tirelessly to make sure South St. Paul’s historic landmark was saved.
Volunteers from the Centennial Commission spent May 30, 1987, working with city crews to clean up the exterior of the Exchange Building as part of the “Company’s Coming” campaign that summer. Pictured left to right are: Roy Swanson, Doug Burington, Lauri Burington, Bill Hinderks, Carol Johnson, Lou Ann Goossens, Lois Glewwe and Lois Swanson.

City crews assisted the volunteers in removing years of overgrown brush and accumulated debris from the Exchange on the corner of Grand and Concord.
100-Year Storm Hits 100-Year-Old City in 1987
June 2012
By Lois Glewwe

On June 28, 1987, South St. Paul was preparing for the kick-off of one of the biggest and best Kaposia Days Parades ever planned. It was the city’s Centennial celebration year and the Kaposia Days Directors and volunteers were thrilled to have over 100 units from all over the region as part of “one of the biggest events the city has ever had,” according to Kaposia Days Parade Chairman Kevin Kraus, whose letter to the editor was published in the South St. Paul Sun-Current newspaper of July 8, 1987.

One of the distinguished visitors who was in town for the parade was Lafayette, Indiana attorney John Gambs, a renowned collector of historic fire trucks. Gambs had brought South St. Paul’s very own 1937 Ahrens-Fox fire truck back to town to be part of the Kaposia Days parade and celebration. The painstakingly restored engine glistened under summer skies as people crowded around to see the historic vehicle.

According to Kevin Kraus’ aforementioned letter to the editor, “At 5:35 p.m. on parade day, Sunday, June 28, the street along 15th Avenue from Southview Boulevard all the way to Vets Field was bustling with clowns, marching bands, floats, Shriners and volunteers, trying to get it all organized. Then the rain hit.”

Within a few minutes, the winds picked up and the storm sirens went off. The Civil Air Patrol was helping with the parade and communicating via their walkie-talkies in those days before cell phones. They soon realized that this was a major storm with potentially damaging winds and tornados. As the rainfall increased and the winds raged, suddenly residents along 15th Avenue began opening their front doors and shouting to parade participants to come inside their homes. Some people ended up with 40 to 50 individuals crowded into kitchens, living rooms and basements where homeowners were soon running clothes dryers and offering hot coffee to the completely drenched visitors.

The rain forced the cancellation of the parade and also of the elaborate stage show which had been set up for the High School football field before that evening’s fireworks, the largest display ever planned for the city. Hundreds of sodden and bedraggled residents who had lined up to watch the parade gradually made their way back to their homes and the parade units, many damaged from high winds, headed out of town without ever performing or parading.

The fireworks show was fortunately able to be rescheduled and lit up the skies two months later at the conclusion of the All-Class, All-City, All-Family Reunion in August of 1987.

I called John Gambs to find out what he remembered about this storm 25 years ago and he immediately said that it was the worst he’d ever seen. He recalled that electrical wires were being ripped away from poles and he was worried that the Ahrens-Fox would be
damaged before he could get it back to the South St. Paul Fire Station. The old engine is still in his possession along with 10 other historic vehicles and about 40 historic police and fire autos – all kept in temperature and humidity controlled garages on Gambs’ Indiana estate. He’s had many offers over the years to sell South St. Paul’s historic engine but he told me he’d never part with it.

South St. Paul City Engineer John Sachi also remembers the storm, which dumped 11.56 inches of rain on the city in a matter of a few hours. He worked for Inver Grove Heights at the time but recalled viewing the extensive damage caused by the event, subsequently referred to as a “100-Year Storm” by Minnesota meteorologists. Simon’s Ravine through Kaposia Park suffered the worst damage with hundreds of trees ripped out of the ground. The west side of the ravine collapsed under the 19th Avenue but the bridge held. The culvert under 19th Avenue was clogged with trees and debris and even a month later, the ravine was filled with water up to street level. According to Sachi, we were fortunate that the entire bridge didn’t collapse. Additional damages at 24th and Bromley and Central Avenue at 15th closed those roads to traffic while repairs were made.

In the end, there is only one word to describe the Kaposia Days Centennial Parade of 1987 – Unforgettable!

In 1996-1998, water pipes were installed to deal with any such future storms and the paved trail was begun and completed in 2000. The current tunnel under 19th Avenue was put in 2008.
The Vietnam Wall Replica Came to Town in 1987
July 2012
By Lois Glewwe

On Saturday, August 8, 1987, South St. Paul residents and visitors descended on the South St. Paul High School football field to attend the opening ceremonies for the exhibit of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial replica as part of the city’s Centennial year commemoration. V.F.W. Post #295 Commander Mike Keenan was emcee for the event, representing the local Post which brought the meaningful memorial to the community. The replica of the famous memorial in Washington, DC, debuted at Tyler, Texas, in October 1984 and had never been on display in Minnesota prior to the Post #295 bringing it to South St Paul.

Father Raymond Zweber of St. Augustine’s Catholic Church offered the prayer of dedication and Mayor Bruce Baumann; Robert Hansen, Past National Commander-in-Chief of the V.F.W.; and Daniel Sandstrom of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Post #62; spoke at the dedication. The South St. Paul Male Chorus and the South St. Paul High School Band provided the music. The Twin Cities Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America Color Guard, the 4th Marine Division with bugler Ella Gustavson and Staff Sergeant Jim Corder of the U.S. Army Recruiting Station in West St. Paul also participated. Helicopters of the 47th Aviation Brigade flew over the South St. Paul High School football field where the exhibit was presented 10 a.m. to dusk for seven days.

The 250-foot long traveling replica which is still in use today, is half the size of the actual Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., and consists of 70 separate silk-screened panels. Currently there are three replica memorials that are available for exhibit in communities across the nation at a cost of $2,500 plus traveling expenses for operations and security staff who accompany the exhibit. Two are constantly traveling and one is held in reserve in case of problems. The replica is now officially called the Moving Wall.

Artist Maya Ying Lin designed the actual Vietnam Wall Memorial in Washington, D.C. which was dedicated on November 13, 1982. There were originally 58,132 names on the wall, which is constructed of black granite from Bangalore, India. An additional 238 names have been added since 1982. There are eight women’s names on the wall - seven Army women and one Navy Nurse. An additional 59 civilian women were casualties of the Vietnam War. They were with organizations such as the Red Cross, the CIA and with various missionary and journalism entities.

One of the memorable moments of the 1987 ceremony in South St. Paul was the placing of a memorial wreath at the wall by Mr. and Mrs. Clarence and Nena Christophersen of South St. Paul, parents of Keith Allen Christophersen who was then still classified as MIA (Missing in Action). Keith’s name now appears on the official list of Minnesota Vietnam War casualties.
South St. Paul is the home town listed for the following men whose names are inscribed on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. and on the Moving Wall that travels today:

Bruce Christensen, born 10/15/47; killed 2/9/71 – Marine Corps
Keith Christophersen, born 10/22/46; killed 1/21/73 – Navy
Philip Gene DesLauriers, born 8/16/44; killed 8/9/69 – Marine Corps
Dennis Groth, born 1/21/49; killed 10/19/68 – Army
Richard Johnson, born 12/29/46; killed 20/25/67 – Marine Corps
Theodore Leyde, born 9/8/49; killed 5/6/68 – Army
Robert Mariz, born 7/9/30; killed 1/30/68 – Marine Corps
James Mega, born 11/21/47; killed 6/24/68 – Army
Stephen Thuet, born 6/1/42; killed 2/20/68 – Marine Corps

A memorial at South St. Paul High School honors those on the list who are South St. Paul graduates; other names are documented on the State of Minnesota Vietnam War casualty records.

CAPTION: Twenty-five years ago in August 1987, over 7,000 people visited the Vietnam Wall Replica in South St. Paul and hundreds of memorials, photographs, notecards and personal tributes were left at the exhibit just as they are each day in Washington, D.C.
Looking Back at 25 Years of South St. Paul History
What’s Happened Since 1987

• February 26, 1993 – First City Entrance Monument Meeting held; this group successfully obtained and installed the welcome signs that greet visitors to South St. Paul.
• June 1, 1995 – Sally Patrick, the city’s former South St. Paul Recycling Coordinator, involved citizens in a city-wide project of sewer stenciling, informing residents of where it was safe to dispose of water from lawns, car washes, etc.
• February 17, 1996 – South St. Paul City Council passed the resolution in opposition to Alter Corporation’s plan to erect an automobile metal shredder on the northern border with St. Paul.
• April 20, 1996 – Ground breaking ceremonies were held for the South St. Paul portion of the Dakota County Regional Trail.
• July 1, 1997 – Duane and Martha Hubbs’ plan for the Exchange Building renovation was approved by City Council and the Castle Hotel (subsequently Valentino’s) was created.
All 50 states and six foreign countries were represented among the 20,000 people who took part in the All-City Reunion weekend in South St. Paul on August 21-23, 1987, as part of the city’s centennial celebration. There were 38 class reunions held all over the city on Friday night, with locations ranging from private homes to Fury Motors to a big tent erected at Dick Clubb’s in Inver Grove Heights.

Saturday morning began with breakfast for 980 folks at the High School Commons where message boards helped old friends find each other while retired and current teachers had fun greeting former students. Over 800 people climbed aboard school buses throughout the day to take the History Town Tour. Buses were staffed by volunteers who played a pre-recorded history narration for each stop. Participants also received a commemorative issue of the former *South St. Paul Reporter* with a photo and story about each location on the tour. At noon, 1200 people gathered by the Central Square sculpture for a catered barbeque lunch.

After lunch, Charles “Lefty” Smith, former SSP High School and Notre Dame hockey coach; Anita Pampusch, former president of St. Catherine’s University and a South St. Paul High School graduate; and then South St. Paul School Superintendent Dave Metzen addressed a gathering of over 2000 at the high school football field for the Pep Rally. The Centennial Sales store, set up in a vacant storefront at 6th and Marie was open all day and visitors could stop by the South St. Paul Post Office to buy a special Hook ‘Em Cow Station cancellation on a commemorative envelope.

That night, the All-Class Dinner was held at Wakota Arena, which had been transformed with drapes, flowers and decorations into a huge banquet hall with entertainment from the South St. Paul Male Chorus, The South St. Paul Choralettes and Sonny Zarich on the organ. Radio personality and South St. Paul grad, Chuck Follmer, was emcee and Gertrude Kramer Glewwe and Peter Maurer were honored as the oldest graduates in attendance. South St. Paul’s very first foreign exchange student, Gunther Baumgarten, was there with long-time high school history teacher Kathryn McAuliff. Dinner was served to over 1100 people while a slide show played with hundreds of images of classes and class reunions over the past century.

Following the dinner, thousands of local residents joined the party at the Centennial Street Dance in the parking lot at the former Northwest Bank on Grand and Concord Exchange. Deuce and George Bordanea alternated taking the stage while people danced the night away.

Sunday morning dawned bright and beautiful as over 300 families lined up to take part in the All-Family Parade. Eighteen 100-Year families, those who could trace their residence to 1887 or before, were honored but any family could join and creativity marked the day
as floats and trucks and cars and convertibles proclaimed the pride and joy of South St. Paul residents. Among the more famous participants in the parade were actor Mike Farrell of M.A.S.H. fame and his wife, actress Shelli Fabares. Mike was born in South St. Paul and they were marching with the Cosgrove clan.

Following the parade, everyone poured onto the football field at South St. Paul High School where photographer Dave Petek captured an aerial image of over 2000 people, many showing their family names on banners and posters. That night the Centennial Commission presented the stage show and fireworks that had been cancelled when the Kaposia Days June event was unable to be held because of a damaging 100-year storm.

As South St. Paul continues to celebrate its 125th birthday this year, it’s been both exciting and poignant to realize that the strength of civic participation and volunteer efforts has remained strong, while recognizing that so many of the people who were such a vital part of 1987 are no longer with us except in the spirit of community pride.

**Significant Events Since the Centennial Celebration in 1987**

July 3, 2004 – The Grand Excursion with dozens of paddle wheelers and steamers came up the Mississippi River through South St. Paul. Hundreds of residents, many of whom had never been to the riverfront, lined up to watch the spectacle.

October 2004 - Simon’s Ravine Trailhead and Bridge were dedicated, marking the third legal public access to the Mississippi River for South St. Paul residents

June 2007 – Dedication of the Sculpture and Memory Path at Simon’s Ravine Trailhead. The sculpture, created by Native American artists Bill LeDeux and David Estrada, was paid for with over $23,000 raised by the River Environmental Action Project.
CAPTION: Over 2000 people gathered at South St. Paul High School on Saturday, August 22, 1987 for the All-Class, All-City, All-Family Pep Rally. Band members, choirs and cheerleaders from past classes had been recruited to be part of the celebration. In this photo former cheerleaders from decades of high school classes wait for their chance to perform. The rally was just one of dozens of events that were part of reunion weekend.
The SSP Post Office Mural
September 2012
By Lois Glewwe

It was 25 years ago this summer that the father/son team of John W. and John C. Baskerville were selected to design and paint a mural portraying South St. Paul’s first 100 years of history on a wall of the South St. Paul Post Office lobby. The Baskervilles won a contest that was sponsored by the South St. Paul Post Office, the South St. Paul Civic Arts Commission and the South St. Paul Centennial Commission. They were awarded a $1,500 prize which never came close to covering their expenses plus the more than 500 hours they spent on nights and weekends painting the mural.

John W. Baskerville passed away in 2005 but his widow Marion still gets comments and compliments on the mural from friends in town. Her son, John C. Baskerville, who is now retired and living in Wyoming, MN, treasures the memory of working with his dad on such an important piece of civic art.

The mural is designed in four sections, each depicting 25 years of local history. The Post Office was the perfect site for the public project because it and the former Stockyards Exchange Building (now Valentino’s) are the only two structures from the “old Concord” of the 1930s still standing today.

The Baskervilles used the South St. Paul Centennial History book and the Dakota County Historical Society photo archives to decide on the images for the mural. In 1987, the elder Baskerville estimated that they spent about 50 hours on the research and design phase of the project. They did rough sketches in pencil on four-inch-square paper and on a one-inch to one-foot scale transferred the drawing to the final board panel. Each of the four panels, measuring 10-feet by 5-feet, took about three weeks to complete. The artists worked on moveable scaffolding which was erected in the Post Office lobby for the duration of the project.

In some ways, the mural project itself commemorated a history of public art that was prominent during the time of the WPA when many older post offices and other public buildings were painted with murals during the Depression of the 1930s. Former Postmaster Dick Holst, said in 1987 that the South St. Paul Post Office just missed out on the opportunity for a WPA project but were now catching up with the 1987 mural completion.

Although both of the Baskervilles were artists, they had never collaborated on a project before. The elder Baskerville designed the stained glass windows for Luther Memorial Church in South St. Paul and the younger graduated with a degree in fine arts in college and enjoyed painting, although his career was as an account representative with the postal service for South St. Paul and Inver Grove Heights.
Dignitaries from the postal service in this region as well as local citizens, elected officials and visitors attended the dedication of the mural on October 4, 1987. The employees of the South St. Paul Post Office hosted a reception following the dedication ceremony.

South St. Paul has a long history of postal service with the first post office opened in the village of Kaposia on February 4, 1853. The post office for the area moved to the new county seat in Mendota the next year but in 1886, the South Park Post Office opened in Arthur D. S. Clark’s grocery store on the corner of Bryant and Concord. Even after South St. Paul was officially incorporated as a city, the South Park station continued to operate until 1925, making it the only city to have two federal postal stations within its boundaries in those years.

In March 1888, the new City of South St. Paul opened its first post office in the lobby of the Exchange Building on Grand and Concord. In 1930 the current post office was built and by 1950 receipts for the year totaled $188,135. In 1987, that number had increased to over $3 million.

In reflection, it was a grand idea to leave South St. Paul with a permanent reminder of its history – a reminder that still draws the attention of visitors to the South St. Paul Post Office every day.

Photo was taken by The South St. Paul Voice and no copy is available.

CAPTION: The mural on the wall of the lobby of the South St. Paul Post Office was painted by father/son artists John W. and John C. Baskerville in 1987 as part of the city’s Centennial celebration. Today the mural continues to reflect 100 years of local history and commemorates a strong tradition of public art projects in the community.
In 1987, as South St. Paul celebrated its 100th birthday, the South St. Paul Centennial Commission founded the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence as a way to inspire the young people of the community to aim high and go after big, unbelievable dreams. The creation of the Hall of Excellence and the exhibit of the inductees at Central Square Community Center was prompted by the realization that South St. Paul, a relatively small and not particularly wealthy community, had produced dozens of people all over the world who had accomplished astonishing feats in the areas of science, politics, technology, civic leadership, community development, literary and visual arts and education.

The process of identifying and recognizing those individuals began with a search for financial support to find a location to showcase the photographs and biographies of the honorees. Bremer Bank, founded in South St. Paul as Drover’s Bank in 1912, stepped forward to pay for the renovation of an old meeting room of the Central Square Community Center. With a display designed by Bill Lucking, who was then with James and Company and who later served as Executive Director of Progress Plus, a dramatic and meaningful exhibit area was established. New conference tables, chairs, podium and signage were developed and the new space was named the Centennial Room. The forum of recognition was named the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence in honor of Drover’s Bank founder Otto Bremer.

Open nominations for those to be recognized began to be accepted from the public early in 1987. The requirements were that the nominee, living or deceased, had to have established an ongoing and significant relationship with the community of South St. Paul at some point in their lives and then gone on to achieve excellence in all of life’s pursuits. It was not necessary to have graduated from South St. Paul High School or to have been born in the city.

After weeks of anonymous balloting, the first 50 charter members were selected. Those who were living were notified immediately and invited to attend the induction ceremony. Relatives of the deceased honorees, who were to be honored posthumously, were also invited to the event. Photos were gathered, copied and framed; the display panels were upholstered; invitations were sent and the biographies of each of the 50 charter members were developed and prepared to be displayed in the new Centennial Room. In November 1987, the first ceremony occurred and the photographs were unveiled to an admiring audience.

As the Centennial came to an end that year, the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence was established as an ongoing recognition forum under the financial sponsorship of Bremer Bank. For the next ten years, individuals from the community served three-year terms as members of the completely anonymous selection committee.
The public continued to submit nominations and all nominations received were reconsidered each year so that only one nomination for an individual was necessary. Each year a meaningful ceremony was held to add honored individuals to the exhibit.

Finally, after 10 years and 90 total inductees, the Otto Bremer South St. Paul Hall of Excellence held its last induction ceremony in 1997. In 2002, the entire exhibit was moved into the new Centennial Room at Central Square Community Center where it continued to prompt comments and questions from those who attended meetings in the room or who found themselves examining the photos of all of those outstanding individuals.

By 2010, however, the 23-year-old exhibit began to show signs of wear and tear. Some of the photos had been replaced because of damage from lighting and the upholstered panels themselves began to fall apart. With hopes that somehow the Hall would be renovated, the exhibit was packed away last year for safekeeping.

Now, as part of the city’s celebration of its 125th anniversary, efforts are underway to raise the funds necessary to not only reinstall the Hall of Excellence in the Centennial Room at Central Square, but also produce digitized images of the inductee portraits. The first steps have already been taken as the printed biographies, which were written with software that no longer exists, have all been re-typed in Microsoft Word so that they can be edited, updated and accessed on a future Hall of Excellence website. Individuals, businesses and organizations will be approached for financial support, as well as living inductees and families of inductees who have passed away. For additional information, or to make a donation to the reinstallation fund, contact Deb Griffith, Community Affairs Liaison at 651-554-3230.

CAPTION: The official logo for the 1987 Hall of Excellence was designed by David Krech, formerly of Silent Wings Gallery in Inver Grove Heights. His most well-known work, Silent Wings, is a tribute to the Challenger Seven Astronauts.
R.E.A.P. Changed South St. Paul for All
November 2012
By Lois Glewwe

In November 1987, a group of volunteer architects known as The Governor’s Design Team, came to South St. Paul as part of the city’s Centennial celebration. The team spent four days in the city meeting with civic leaders, elected officials and ultimately with hundreds of citizens who attended town meetings. The result of the visit was the identification of several concepts that citizens wanted to pursue. The visitors also suggested that a nonprofit organization be created to manage the planning and implementation of the future visions.

Darrol Bussler introduced the structure, mission and purpose of this new organization which was called the River Environmental Action Project (R.E.A.P.) at a Community Partnerships meeting on February 4, 1988. Eight Action Teams were formed: The Pedestrian Walkway; Marie Avenue Connector; Kaposia Park Connector; Memorials; Marina; Natural Environment; and Exchange Building.

A representative from each Action Team served to make up the R.E.A.P. Council under the leadership of the first Coordinator, Darrol Bussler. Teams began to meet monthly and every few weeks a general meeting was held for the public with a guest speaker.

Almost immediately, R.E.A.P. began to address issues and challenges as the city attempted to move forward with plans for the visionary changes identified by citizens at the 1987 town meetings. Some of those issues over the years have included:

- **The Exchange Building** – R.E.A.P. worked with the HRA to encourage clean-up and preservation of the building, conducting the first public tours of the space in 1990. Today the Exchange is fully renovated and under private ownership.
- **The River Trail** – R.E.A.P. hosted the first River Ramble on October 1, 1988, inviting the public to the Mississippi River in South St. Paul for the first time in generations and paving the way for discussions that ultimately led to creation of the Dakota County Regional Trail System in South St. Paul and to the creation of three riverfront access points.
- **The Boat Launch** – R.E.A.P. members appeared before City Council on May 15, 1989 to encourage the City to contact the DNR and request a public boat launch in South St. Paul. The boat launch was dedicated in 1993.
- **River Clean-up** – R.E.A.P. hosted the first river clean-up of the dike wall on April 21, 1989. The event continues to the present day.
- **Renovation of Kaposia Park** – R.E.A.P. was contacted by SKB the demolition firm working on the removal of the old Armour’s plant and worked out a way for the debris to be used to repair the damage that had been done to Kaposia Park in the 1987 Kaposia Days storm.
• Prevention of the Chicago Northwestern Railroad’s Switching Yard Plan in South St. Paul. – R.E.A.P. spearheaded the effort to encourage City Council to oppose the implementation of the switching yard with the noise and pollution it would bring to the city’s riverfront.

• Celebrate 1990 and the All-America City Award – R.E.A.P. members led the efforts to obtain a state Celebrate 1990 grant to renovate the Kaposia Park pavilion and clear walking trails through the park. R.E.A.P. Council members were part of the team that represented South St. Paul in the All-America City Competition in Phoenix, AZ, which led to South St. Paul being awarded that honor.

• Seidl’s Lake Restoration – R.E.A.P. initiated the discussions and town meetings with Inver Grove Heights that led to the restoration of the Seidl’s Lake area as a joint recreational space.

• All-City Garage Sale – R.E.A.P. held the first All-City Garage Sale on October 4-6, 1990. The event was turned over to the City of South St. Paul in 2003.

• Entrance Monuments – A new R.E.A.P. Beautification Action Team was formed in 1993 and raised the funds for the design and installation of new entrance monuments at the main entry points in South St. Paul.

• Prevention of the Construction of the Alter Metal proposed automobile shredder from being built on the riverfront just north of the city limits in 1997.

• Simon’s Ravine Sculpture and Memory Path – R.E.A.P. raised over $23,000 to commission the design and installation of the Native American sculpture marking the entrance to the trailhead at Simon’s Ravine in June of 2007. Donors purchased memory blocks to mark the trail and their names are engraved there in honor of their donations.

There is not room in this brief history to mention all of the people who took leadership roles in R.E.A.P. during the course of the past 25 years. The community owes a debt of gratitude to each one as R.E.A.P. disbands in 2012, having accomplished its original goals set at those November town meetings in 1987.
CAPTION: R.E.A.P. members celebrate the groundbreaking of the South St. Paul portion of the Dakota County Regional Trail System on April 10, 1996. Left to right are: Jeri Leonard, David Hohle, Margaret Hall, Lois Glewwe, Kay Schmidt, Mel Bergstrom, Lois Swanson, Betty Thompson, Lucy Sanford and Jodelle Ista.
The SSP Centennial Comes to a Close
December 2012
By Lois Glewwe

On New Year’s Eve 1987, over 400 people, many in historic costume, gathered in the
Grand Hall at the Dakota County Museum for the Centennial Ball. The event was the
grand finale of 12 months of celebration as South St. Paul commemorated its 100th
anniversary.

Centennial Commission Chairman, J. Robert “Bob” Stassen, was emcee for the event
which included an ongoing slide show projected on a white wall with over 750 images
from the year’s activities. Red Leonard and Bob also served as bartenders for the wine
bar which offered complimentary wine and soft drinks to the attendees. Cheese trays,
appetizers and desserts were also available. The only requirement for admission was a
suggested $2.00 donation although reservations were required.

Throughout the evening, the hundreds of volunteers who had helped plan, coordinate,
promote and implement over 20 Centennial events during the year were recognized. All
guests were asked to sign a guest book which was to be placed in the Centennial Time
Capsule that is to be opened in 2087.

Mark Kaliszewski’s band provided dance music and Tom Waldron entertained
enthusiastic singers with ragtime music on the piano. The hours for the Centennial Ball
were 5 to 8:00 p.m. and right before 8:00 p.m. 1,000 green and white balloons were
dropped from a huge net in the ceiling as the band played Auld Lang Syne. Many of the
guests had tears in their eyes as memories and reflections of 1987 were recalled.

In 2012, South St. Paul continues to commemorate its 125th birthday with events that will
continue through the actual anniversary of the city in March 2013. Many of those who
danced the night away at the Centennial Ball of 1987 are no longer with us but the city
continues to benefit from the loyalty, participation and enthusiasm of hundreds of
volunteers.
Below Left: Then Mayor Bruce Baumann and wife Marianne are the couple on the left. They led the crowd on the dance floor for the opening dance of the evening. Below Right: 1000 balloons dropped from the ceiling as the event came to an end.

Two couples were awarded “Best Historic Costume.” Above Left are Mark and Lou Ann Goossens and at Above Right are Don and Carol Johnson.
For the past year, these history columns have focused on South St. Paul’s Centennial celebration in 1987, recalling the events, volunteers and accomplishments that the community noted in the 25 years since that anniversary. As 2013 begins we will turn our focus back to specific individuals and their stories, with an emphasis on the earliest pioneers who created this place we call home. One of those stories is of a young woman who came to Kaposia village on the western banks of the Mississippi River in 1848.

Harriet Newell Pettijohn was born in Ohio on August 5, 1826. She was the seventh child and second daughter of Abraham and Jane Sloan Pettijohn and was named after Harriet Newell, one of the first women missionaries to go overseas from the United States in 1811 when she and her husband were sent to India.

Harriet’s oldest sister, the firstborn child of the family, was Lydia Pettijohn. She married Alexander Huggins on May 3, 1832, and the couple and their first child came west to Fort Snelling and ultimately to Lac Qui Parle in western Minnesota in 1835. They were Presbyterian missionaries to the Dakota people and served the Lac Qui Parle mission until the spring of 1844, when they took over the mission at Traverse des Sioux, which is today part of St. Peter, Minnesota.

It’s hard to imagine how 21-year-old Harriet convinced her parents to allow her to travel to the wilderness of Minnesota to visit Lydia in 1848. She came as a single woman and her adventures began soon after her arrival. Her niece, Mary Ann Huggins Kerlinger, recorded in her journal how Harriet almost drowned while attempting to make a trip to Lac Qui Parle to visit the mission there. Mary wrote:

“She was very much afraid of the water especially in a frail canoe. In going to Lac Qui Parle they found the Chippewa [River] very high having overflowed its banks and rushing through the trees. No way to get over except a small canoe. I really don’t know how the team got over. Aunt Harriet lay flat in the bottom of the boat. Mr. Riggs and Uncle Jonas took long ropes and tried to pull her across. Possibly Uncle swam with the rope. Although he was lame he was a very good swimmer. The boat capsized in midstream throwing Aunt into the raging water. Uncle rescued her and brought her to land where they soon made a fire for it was pretty cold weather.”

Trying to imagine this young woman attempting to dry out her long skirts and wet underclothes in cold weather over a makeshift fire with no one to advise her but two older men is difficult to comprehend.

Harriet’s intention was to return home to Illinois in the early fall of 1848, after spending time with her sister and visiting the missions. She was taken to Kaposia Village in what is now South St. Paul in October 1848 to catch a steamship back east. To everyone’s
surprise, winter arrived early and the Mississippi River froze before she could get out. Jane Williamson, a missionary at Kaposia village, described Harriet’s time at Kaposia to her friend Agnes Pond in a letter dated March 16, 1849:

“Harriet’s cheeks do not look so blooming as when she first came down but she says she is quite well. I was so fully impressed with the idea that Providence had delivered her on your account that I felt sorry she could not get to you but her feet were frosted the day she came down with Mr. Huggins and she coughed hard for weeks after till we prevailed on her to take medicine….she has been of great assistance to us.” In the same letter we learn that “Mr. Cook and she have been singing till just now…”

Sylvester Cook had come to Kaposia in 1848 as the government teacher at Kaposia and he and Harriet apparently made beautiful music together, perhaps making her less upset at being stranded at Kaposia for the winter. As it turned out, Harriet and Sylvester Cook were married back at her parents’ home in Illinois on May 3, 1850. They returned to Kaposia a few weeks later and both worked as teachers for a year before establishing their own farm at Richmond and Concord Streets in what became South St. Paul. They had five children when Sylvester died at the young age of 35 in 1858.

Harriet remarried in 1863 to Furber Libby and they had another three children together. She died on February 19, 1882, at the age of 55 years. She and Sylvester Cook and Furber Libby are all buried in Union Cemetery in Inver Grove Heights.

Her obituary includes the following tribute:

“Around her lifeless body gathered these Indians, the community at large, Christians of all sects, and with her kindred and family wept together, knowing and feeling that one of the excellent women of earth had passed away.”
CAPTION: Harriet Newell Pettijohn was visiting her missionary sister in Minnesota in 1848 when the Mississippi River froze and she was stranded for the winter in Kaposia Village in what is now South St. Paul. It was there she met her future husband, Sylvester Cook, and she was to turn her one-year adventure into a life-long involvement in the pioneer community that became our city.
Chief Big Thunder Learns to Plow
February 2013
By Lois Glewwe

It was the year 1834 when Samuell and Gideon Pond, two brothers from Connecticut, arrived at Fort Snelling. They had made the trip west for the sole purpose of helping the Dakota people. They had no official sponsor and did not refer to themselves as missionaries although they were both Congregationalists. When they presented themselves to the acting agent at the Fort, he permitted them to occupy a vacant room in one of the agency houses, charging them rent for it and giving them no encouragement. They were soon summoned to appear before Major Bliss, commandant of the fort and the brothers decided that Samuel would represent them at this meeting. The commandant informed Samuel that they had no authority to be at the fort or anywhere in the area which was only open to military troops and licensed traders. After reading a letter of recommendation, Major Bliss was convinced of the brothers’ character and asked Samuel what their plans were.

Informed that their only goal was to do what seemed most for the benefit of the Indians, the major mentioned the fact that the Kaposia band had oxen and a plow but no one to plow for them. Samuel immediately volunteered to go down and help them.

The chief of the Kaposia Village was Wakinyantanka, translated into English as Big Thunder. He was actually the hereditary chief of the band and was thus also known by the name Little Crow. Born in about 1785, he was the father of the most famous Little Crow, Taoyateduta, who was to become the leader of the warring faction of the Dakota in the U.S. Dakota War of 1862.

When Big Thunder learned that a white farmer was going to come to the village and plow their fields, he immediately took the plow from the fort to Kaposia in a canoe and Samuel drove the oxen down. While there is no description of where this took place, it is most likely that the area to be plowed was on top of the bluffs above the riverfront village. Today the location would be near Thompson Avenue between 12th and 15th Avenues.

Samuel recalled in his journal on May 25, 1834, that he spent a week in the village, lived in Big Thunder’s house and ate with him. The chief had two wives and a house full of children. Communication was difficult since Samuel only knew a few words of Dakota at that time and Big Thunder didn’t speak English. Still, Samuel considered the experiment a success. He recalled that the chief and his lead soldier, Big Iron, alternated holding the plow while Samuel drove the oxen to break the ground. He remarked that they seemed very pleased with the result.

In reality, Big Thunder and the Kaposia people had no need for a plowed field. They were already successful growers of corn, potatoes, beans and other vegetables. The women were the ones who tended the crops, planting them very practically with one corn stalk in a small mound, surrounded by the other plants at the base. This style of planting
kept the weeds away, allowed the plants to share nutrients, made watering each individual mound possible and did not require the breaking of the ground or the removal of trees. For eager white men, however, teaching the Dakota to plow like white settlers was a priority.

Fortunately for Samuel Pond, he and Gideon were soon much more involved in creating the first written Dakota alphabet and learning the language than they were in plowing for Big Thunder, who abandoned the idea of plowed fields as soon as Samuel returned to the fort.

The chief lived another eleven years until October of 1845 when he was fatally wounded while following a wagon up the Bryant Avenue hill. His rifle, which was in the bed of the wagon, went off and he was shot in the chest. The doctor at Fort Snelling was immediately brought to the village but he was unable to do anything. The chief died the next day. Taoyateduta, the first in line for the position of chief, was at Lac Qui Parle when his father died but he showed up at Kaposia in April 1846 and claimed his right to lead the Kaposia band. Two of his half-brothers challenged him and shot him, shattering the bones in his forearms. He survived the attack, his brothers mysteriously ended up dead, and the rest, as they say, is history.

CAPTION: This engraving shows the very practical method of mound farming that proved to be more successful to the Dakota people than trying to break the hard prairie lands above the Mississippi River with a plow and team of oxen. Photo Courtesy Google Images.
Henry Sibley’s Dakota Daughter
March 2013
By Lois Glewwe

One of the most interesting and controversial people who ever lived in the area around the Kaposia Indian village in what is now South St. Paul was Helen Hastings Sibley. Helen’s father was Henry Sibley, Minnesota’s first state governor. Her mother was Tashinahohindoway or Red Blanket Woman, the daughter of a Mdewakanton Dakota leader known as Bad Hail.

Sibley came to Fort Snelling and took charge of the trading post at Mendota in October 1834. He was 23 years old and unmarried. Like many of his fur trader colleagues, he entered into a relationship with a Dakota woman. Helen was Sibley’s daughter, born to Red Blanket Woman at Sibley’s house in Mendota on August 28, 1841. She was baptized by Father Augustin Ravoux at the Church of St. Peter a few weeks later. Sibley’s relationship with Red Blanket Woman apparently ended when Helen was born but the future governor kept track of Helen and cared for her during her entire life.

On May 2, 1843, Henry Sibley married Sarah Steele, a white woman who was the sister of Franklin Steele, Sibley’s friend and one of the most powerful real estate investors in early Minnesota. From the beginning, Sarah Sibley was aware of Helen’s existence but refused to acknowledge her in any way. In 1847, when Helen was six years old, Sibley brought her to board with William and Martha Brown at Red Rock (now Newport) on the east side of the Mississippi River south of the Kaposia village site. Some historical accounts indicate that Helen’s Dakota mother had died by this time while others imply that she married a Dakota man and was deeply depressed when Henry Sibley took Helen away.

Helen arrived at the Brown’s speaking French and Dakota and possibly some English. Her education was begun in English and she became part of the Methodist community at Red Rock, where Martha and William Brown had met and married in 1841. The Browns were paid $8.00 a week for Helen’s room and board.

Dr. Thomas Williamson, who had established a Presbyterian mission for the Dakota people at Kaposia in 1846, charged the Browns $1.00 for medicine for Helen in October 1847 and on May 19, 1848, he submitted a bill for $5.00 for setting her fractured forearm. William Brown subsequently submitted a bill to Henry Sibley for $8.50 for two pair of shoes, twelve yards of gingham and six yards of alpaca for Helen. In 1851, when Helen was ten years old, William and Martha sold their farm at Red Rock and moved across the river to the new white settlement that was growing up around the Kaposia village. Under the terms of the Treaty of 1851, the Dakota were preparing to be removed from the village and relocated at two reservations in western Minnesota. It isn’t known exactly where the Browns lived; one account indicates they were in West St. Paul which at that time included all of Kaposia and the area that became South St. Paul.
By 1854, The Browns moved to St. Paul and after their house burned down, they lived at 145 East Fifth Street between Robert and Jackson Streets. Helen studied music, attended singing and dancing school and became a young leader at the Jackson Street Methodist Church. Sibley paid William Brown for a melodeon for Helen on her 14th birthday and paid $95.00 for her board and clothing. Helen was known as a very pretty and popular young woman and Sibley grew very fond of her and visited her often at the Brown’s St. Paul home. Sibley also paid for her to go to a finishing school in the east.

Helen’s promising young life unfortunately ended in tragedy. She married a physician, Sylvester Sawyer on November 3, 1859. They were living in Raymond, Wisconsin, ten months later when Helen gave birth to a daughter, Helen Mary Sawyer, on September 4, 1860. Both Helen and the baby succumbed to scarlet fever. Helen died on September 6, 1860, and the baby passed on September 14. Sylvester Sawyer was devastated at the loss of his family and the Browns and Henry Sibley wrote often of their grief at the loss of the beautiful young Helen who had begun her life with her Dakota family and ended her days as the wife of the town physician in a white community in Wisconsin.
CAPTION: Helen Hastings Sibley was the daughter of Minnesota’s first state governor, Henry Sibley, and a Dakota woman known as Red Blanket Woman. Although Sibley rarely acknowledged Helen in writing, he did provide for her financial needs and education, gave her away at her wedding and had a close personal relationship with her. Bruce Kohn recently wrote the story of Helen Hastings Sibley. His book, published by the Friends of the Sibley Historic Site in Mendota, is available through the Sibley Historic Site website at http://www.sibley-friends.org. The painting of Helen and Henry Sibley on the cover was created by artist Deb Zeller.
James Thompson – First African American at Kaposia
April 2013
By Lois Glewwe

Local residents don’t always think of the state as home to several African slaves in the earliest years of the area that became Minnesota Territory in 1849. The historical record, however, provides information on many slaves who were brought to Fort Snelling and other area government outposts by officers soon after the fort opened in 1819. One of those slaves, James Thompson, was among the earliest residents at Kaposia Village in today’s South St. Paul.

Thompson was born a slave in America in 1799. His first owner was a nephew of President James Monroe named George Monroe. The family located in Kentucky and at some point, James was given to John Culbertson as payment for a debt. Culbertson, a government sutler, or supply agent, brought James to Fort Snelling in 1827, and then sold him to Captain George Day. According to some stories, it was at this time that James Thompson married a Dakota woman from the nearby village of Chief Cloud Man. Shortly after, Captain Day was relocated to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. It was at Prairie du Chien that James Thompson met Rev. Alfred Brunson, a Methodist missionary who came west with his wife Eunice in 1836. Brunson wanted to set up a mission at Little Crow’s Kaposia village. He did not know the Dakota language, however, and needed a translator. James Thompson, who had learned to speak Dakota from his wife, approached Brunson and asked him to purchase him so that he could return to the area around Fort Snelling and be reunited with his wife. He offered to serve the new mission as an interpreter.

Brunson, an avid abolitionist, immediately sent letters to his sympathetic friends in the east and raised $1,200 to purchase James from Col. Day. As soon as the funds arrived, Brunson finalized the sale and freed James at Fort Snelling. James’ wife had adopted the Christian name Mary Thompson and she moved with him to Kaposia in May of 1837.

James immediately went to work building a log house that served as home to the Brunsons as well as the location for the school and mission. James assisted Brunson in his efforts to teach the Dakota people to speak English while David King oversaw the farming operations.

In the fall of 1839, Rev. Brunson was forced to return east because of illness. He was replaced by Rev. Benjamin Kavanaugh and James and Mary Thompson are listed as attending classes at Kaposia in his 1840 school. Kavanaugh and Dakota Chief Big Thunder did not get along and Kavanaugh soon moved across the Mississippi River to Red Rock, known today as Newport. He apparently released James Thompson from his obligations and James and Mary moved to Pig’s Eye Landing, which later became known as the City of St. Paul. James worked as a carpenter on many early buildings in the rapidly growing community. In 1849, he helped build the Market Street Episcopal Church in St. Paul and donated 2000 feet of timber, 1500 shingles and a piece of property
that he owned. He is also said to be the builder and operator of the first ferry boat between downtown St. Paul and what became West St. Paul on the other side of the river.

James and Mary Thompson had at least two children, a son George and a daughter, Sarah. After the Dakota people were removed from the Mississippi River under the Treaty of 1851, James and Mary and their family moved to a farm near the Lower Sioux Agency on the Minnesota River near Redwood Falls, MN. They were there when the U.S. Dakota War broke out in August of 1862. Mary and her children remained with the Dakota while James headed for Fort Ridgley, afraid for his personal safety. The family survived the war and may have returned to St. Paul. James Thompson died in 1884 and is noted as the only African American member of the Old Settlers Association of St. Paul.
CAPTION: James Thompson, a freed African American slave, built this log cabin on its original site at the Kaposia Village in South St. Paul in 1837. The cabin served as the home and Methodist mission of Rev. Alfred Brunson until 1840, when several sources indicate it was moved across the river to the Village of Red Rock by Brunson’s successor, Rev. Benjamin Kavanaugh. After several subsequent moves to various historic sites, the structure is currently located on the grounds of the Newport United Methodist Church across the river from old Kaposia.
Mary and John Aiton
May 2013
By Lois Glewwe

Mary Smith Briggs was just sixteen years old in 1852 when she arrived at the Mdewakanton Dakota village of Kaposia in what is now South St. Paul. Mary was from West Union, Ohio, where she had studied with Jane Williamson as a young girl. Jane, now a teacher of the Dakota at Little Crow’s Kaposia Village, welcomed her former pupil to the riverfront mission on the Mississippi. Mary recalled in later years how excited and frightened she was when the steamer stopped at Kaposia and 40 to 50 Indians came out to welcome her to their village. The Williamsons made her part of their family and she roomed with Jane on the second floor of their log house near what is now the trailhead at Simon’s Ravine on Concord Street just south of Butler Avenue.

Rev. John Felix Aiton and his wife, Nancy Hunter Aiton, were missionaries at Kaposia when Mary arrived. John had come to America from Scotland in April 1835. He settled in Cleveland, Ohio, and was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in June of 1848. He and Nancy were married a few weeks later and sent to Red Wing’s village in Minnesota by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In May of 1852, they were transferred to Kaposia to work along with Thomas and Margaret Williamson and Thomas Williamson’s sister Jane.

The Ayton’s had three children but sadly, their firstborn daughter Elizabeth, died before her first birthday in 1850 and their youngest unnamed son died at Kaposia in 1853. Another son, Thomas Aiton, was born in 1851 and lived to the age of 32 years when he contracted typhoid fever and died. John purchased a claim in the area that would become South St. Paul and was appointed the first postmaster of Kaposia, then the county seat of Dakota County, on February 4, 1853. He also hosted the first meeting of the brand new Dakota County Board of Commissioners on July 4, 1853. Unfortunately, Nancy Aiton suffered from what was then called consumption and she periodically returned to her parents’ home in Illinois to be treated for the illness that we now know as tuberculosis. She succumbed to her condition and passed away in Illinois in the spring of 1854 at the age of 26 years.

John Aiton returned to Kaposia after Nancy’s death. He had left his position with the mission board but worked as a government teacher. In the meantime, the Williamsons and Mary Briggs had gone with the Dakota people to their new reservation in Yellow Medicine, Minnesota, in October of 1852. Jane Williamson, who was a dear friend of Nancy Aiton, wrote to Nancy on February 4, 1853, “Miss Briggs is happier than she has been since we left Kaposia.” None of them could know of course, that Nancy’s life would end before a year had passed or that Nancy’s husband John would marry “Miss Briggs” on April 22, 1855, at the chapel at Yellow Medicine.

Mary was nearly 20 years younger than John but they had much in common, including their love and support for the Dakota people. In June of 1856, John and Mary purchased
property near St. Peter in Nicollet County, Minnesota, and named their new homestead Ten Trees Farm. Their first child, George, was born in 1856, followed by Jean in 1858. Jean died less than a year later and Rachel was born in 1860. They had six more children in the years between 1863 and 1876. John enlisted in the military on August 19, 1862, not knowing that Minnesota had been thrust into six weeks of the U.S. Dakota War the day before and that years of loss and devastation would result from that war. Mary took their two children, George and Rachel, ages six and two, and fled to St. Peter to safety during the conflict. John served in the Union Army in the Civil War until May 31, 1865. A few years later, in 1869, he sold his land in Kaposia to Gottfried Schmidt and he and Mary and the children continued to farm in Nicollet County. John Aiton died on August 24, 1892, at the age of 74 years. Mary lived another thirty years and was honored in 1914 as the “last of the missionaries” in ceremonies at St. Peter, Minnesota. She passed away at the age of 85 years on February 2, 1922.

CAPTION: Mary Briggs was 16 years old when she arrived at Kaposia Village in 1852. John Aiton was a missionary to the Dakota at Kaposia with his then wife Nancy. Nancy died in 1854 and John married Mary Briggs in 1855. The Dakota people called John, “Man with the White Hat” and named Mary “Mary Goodpath” because she reportedly had big feet.
Remembering Henry Williamson, the First Non-native American Born at Kaposia
June 2013
By Lois Glewwe

On March 3, 1851, Margaret and Thomas Williamson welcomed the birth of their youngest child, Henry Martyn Williamson, at the mission house at Kaposia village in what is today South St. Paul. The Williamsons had been serving as missionaries to the Mdewakanton Dakota on the west side of the Mississippi River since October 1846. Thomas Williamson’s sister Jane wrote to her cousin in Ohio on July 10, 1851: “Little Henry Martyn was bald-headed and looking almost as care worn as his father at first but like other nephews of maiden aunts, he has become a fine boy.”

Margaret was 47 years old when Henry was born. Thomas was 50. They had six children at that time. Elizabeth, 17, and John, 15, were both at school in their home state of Ohio when Henry arrived. Andrew, 13, Nancy 10, Smith, 8 and Martha, 6, were all at Kaposia. Margaret and Thomas had previously buried three of their children, William, Mary and James, all of whom had died in Ohio before Thomas accepted the call to serve as a medical missionary to the Dakota in Minnesota in 1835.

Andrew, Nancy, Smith and Martha went to school at Kaposia with the sons and daughter of Chief Taoyateduta/Little Crow and the other Dakota families. Jane Williamson, whom the Dakota call Dowandutawin, or Red Song Woman, translated dozens of English hymns into Dakota so the students could learn to read and write in their own language. The music made the lessons more entertaining. Several of the Dakota students lived with the Williamson family, including Little Crow’s daughter, Emma, and his son, Wowinape. It was not unusual for the missionaries to serve as caregivers to the children while the Dakota went on their winter hunts in the north and western part of the region.

There had been other white families at Kaposia before the Williamsons arrived, including several Methodist missionaries and government farmers and their families who worked with the Dakota from 1837 to 1838, but none of them had any children born at Kaposia. There was no legally available land for white settlement on the west side of the Mississippi River in 1851, so the Williamsons only neighbors were either employed by the government or by the mission.

Margaret Williamson, did, however, have other women to assist her at the time of Henry’s birth. Her sister-in-law Jane was there, as was Nancy Hunter Aiton, the wife of missionary Rev. John Aiton. Harriet Pettijohn Cook lived a short distance away with her new husband, Sylvester Cook, and of course, the Dakota women would have come to Margaret’s assistance upon the arrival of her new baby.

In July 1851, when Henry was only a few months old, new treaties signed by the Dakota led to their removal from the Mississippi river and relocation to the Upper and Lower Sioux Agencies in western Minnesota. The Williamsons went with the exiled Dakota, settling at Yellow Medicine in the fall of 1852, when Henry was 18 months old.
Henry was 11 years old when the U.S. Dakota War broke out on August 18, 1862. Margaret and Thomas reluctantly sent him with Elizabeth and Nancy as Elizabeth’s husband led a group of missionaries who fled to safety at Fort Ridgley. Reunited with his parents a few days later in St. Peter, Minnesota, Henry survived the war and eventually graduated from the University of Minnesota in the first graduating class of 1873. He studied law in Minneapolis opened his own practice in Flandreau, South Dakota, where he lived and worked with many of the Dakota families he had known throughout his childhood.

In 1876, Williamson married Helen Mar Ely, who was the first woman to graduate from the University of Minnesota in 1875. Helen was the daughter of Rev. Edward and Jane Wellimgton Barker Ely of Winona, Minnesota. Henry and Helen had two sons: Sumner, born in 1877, and William, born in 1879. Henry and Helen ultimately moved to Portland, Oregon, where he passed away on November 29, 1917, at the age of 66.

CAPTION: Henry Williamson was the first white child born at the Kaposia Village in what is now South St. Paul when he arrived on March 3, 1851. Henry is on the left with his mother, Margaret Williamson.
South St. Paul’s “Pill Hill”
July 2013
By Lois Glewwe

One of the things which distinguishes South St. Paul from communities like Inver Grove Heights, Eagan and Apple Valley is that the city never went through the gradual process of transition from farmland to suburban development. Soon after Dakota County was created in 1849, surveyors began the process of identifying plats that were meant to attract new residents and businesses to the area after the Mdewakanton Dakota people were removed to reservations in 1852. Instead of parceling off 140 acre farms, however, South St. Paul began with the establishment of the massive St. Paul Union Stockyards and the rapid construction along Concord Street that accompanied the arrival of the livestock industry.

The result of this rush to build led to the establishment of early residential homes along the main streets of the center of the city. These elegant new homes were quickly purchased by the commission men, cattlemen, bankers and industrialists who brought their families here from the east coast to invest in the burgeoning community.

A particular stretch of land high on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River became one of South St. Paul’s most elite and elegant neighborhoods. Identifiable today as the 300 and 400 blocks of Fifth Avenue North, the property was first purchased by Chester Pitt in 1857, who most likely bought the 40-acre plat as an investment. A more well-known entrepreneur, Alpheus French, added the area to his extensive land holdings in 1859. French also owned all of the property encompassing the stockyards and what is now Grand and Concord. French was followed by a variety of investors, none of whom were successful in developing the street into residential lots. It was not until 1928, when Dr. Harold Tregilgas and the South St. Paul Improvement Company purchased the plat, that any kind of construction plans were implemented.

The first homes on what was to become Fifth Avenue North were built in the early 1930s and the last were completed before the end of World War II. Each house is distinctive in design, although several reflect America’s fascination with Spanish architecture that was prevalent at the time. Whether by intent or accident, several South St. Paul physicians were among the early owners of the Fifth Avenue homes. Their shared profession led to the nicknaming of the street as “Pill Hill,” a designation which identifies similar neighborhoods of elegant homes belonging to doctors in Chicago, Illinois, and Rochester, Minnesota.

South St. Paul’s Pill Hill was home to Dr. Tregilgas and to Drs. Earl and Thomas Lowe, brothers who officed together on Concord Street. Local dentist Dr. Thomas Conlon moved onto the avenue in later years as did Dr. Robert Lindell. Dr. Robert Forsythe, a veterinarian, was one of the owners of the plat in 1928 and lived at 389 for many years. One of the first houses completed was that at 379 Fifth Avenue North which was the first home that Harold Stassen and his new bride, Esther Glewwe Stassen, built in 1932. They
lived there when Harold was elected the Governor of Minnesota in November 1938, making the house the only “Governor’s Residence” in the state at that time. The home was purchased by William Bowen, owner of Lee Livestock, when the Stassens moved to their new house on Stewart Lane in South St. Paul in 1941.

Other residents over the years included the families of Union Stockyards sales executive Thomas Lesch; Campbell Commission Company salesman Myron Grant; Armour’s cattle buyer Ewald Peterson; Insurance Agency Owner Leo Rolle; Northwest Airlines executive Adolph Rindfleisch; Standard Building Supplies owner Joe Chalupa; and Southview Country Club founder Ezra Lloyd. Many of the homes were passed down from parent to child to grandchild over the years and most have had only two or three owners in the seven or eight decades since they were built.

The most remarkable characteristic of the Pill Hill neighborhood is the view many of the homes have of the Mississippi River. Because of the height of the bluff and the angle of the hillside, most of the buildings on Grand and Concord are hidden and only the river, the barges, the tugboats and the pleasure craft are seen from bay windows and front yard patios. The two most significant neighbors the Fifth Avenue residents share are St. Augustine’s Catholic Church and St. Stefan’s Romanian Orthodox Church. The latter, built in 1924, was placed on the National Register of Historic sites in 2004 and is a local landmark as well as one of the attractions of Pill Hill.

Readers can find details about a Pill Hill tour being presented on July 21, 2013, by South St. Paul Restorative Justice in this month’s issue of the South St. Paul Voice.
The homes on the 300 and 400 block of Fifth Avenue North in South St. Paul were built in the 1930s and 1940s. Many were purchased by local physicians, earning the street the nickname of “Pill Hill.” The neighborhood is one of the most elegant and charming in the city. The historic architecture, the personal stories of the original owners and the classic landscaping are examples of the ways in which South St. Paul is different than any other suburban community in this area.
On March 7, 1882, William Bircher, who was completing his elected term of office as Clerk for West St. Paul Township, wrote the following note on the last page of the Clerk’s official record book: “Enlisted [sic] in the US Army Aug 14th 1861 Discharged August 26th 1865 Age 15 years.”

That little handwritten comment provides the dates of the military service of one of South St. Paul’s earliest residents. William Bircher was born in July 1846, in Indiana. His father, Ulrich Bircher, had emigrated there from Switzerland where he was born in 1818. At some point when William was a boy, the family moved to Minnesota where Ulrich Bircher took up farming.

William was fifteen years old when he ran away from home and headed for the Union Army enlistment office at the railroad depot in St. Paul. When he was told he was too young to serve, he walked back home and convinced his father to enlist with him. Both were signed into the Second Minnesota Volunteer Regiment on August 14, 1861. Ulrich was to be wagon driver and William would be a drummer boy.

In William’s diary, originally published in 1889, he wrote: “The happiest day of my life was when I put on my blue uniform for the first time and received my drum….we did post duty at Fort Snelling and drilled a great deal. October 14 we embarked on steamboats and proceeded down the river to St. Paul where…we marched through the city….the streets crowded with people waving their handkerchiefs. The band played, the flags waved and the boys cheered back…. the sidewalks everywhere were crowded with boys who wore red, white and blue neckties and with girls who carried flags and flowers… There was scarcely a man, woman or child in the great crowd around us but had to pass up for a last good-bye and last ‘God bless you, boys!’ and so amid cheering and handshaking and flag-waving the steamboat came floating down the stream and we were off, with the band playing the ‘Star Spangled Banner.’ ”

William and Ulrich served together in the 2nd Minnesota and both survived the war. William’s service is mentioned in another diary, that of Jeremiah C. Donahower, which is in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. Donohower described the preparations for the battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky, on January 19, 1862. “Some of the men were seated around their campfires in a drizzling rain awaiting breakfast. Others were washing at a small brook or were engaged in a strenuous effort to get their feet into soggy boots. William Bircher, the drummer boy, sounded the long roll, which one member of the Second recalled as a ‘monotonous beating on the drum that puts action into men and brings them into line quicker than will any other call, not excepting even the bugle call to breakfast.’ ”
When the war ended, Ulrich and William came back to Minnesota where William married his wife Anna, in 1870 and established his claim on what is today the northwest corner of Concord and Bircher Avenue, which is named after the young drummer boy. The property was at that time part of West St. Paul Township and William was elected Constable of West St. Paul on March 12, 1872, and then took the spot of Clerk on March 11, 1873. In 1887, when the new City of South St. Paul took over all of West St. Paul Township, William continued his civic service and was elected City Recorder in May 1887. Two years later, when the current City of West St. Paul was created out of the western portion of South St. Paul, several school houses were then taken over by West St. Paul and South St. Paul had to scramble to replace them. One of the first to open was the Bircher School on the northern portion of William’s land. He was paid $12 a month for renting an out building to the city for use as a school in 1889. The last mention of William in city records is when he was appointed Clerk of Elections on October 13, 1890, and in 1902, John and Francisca Weir purchased the large Bircher house atop the bluff.

William and Anna Bircher had four children when the 1900 census was taken. The family was living in Ramsey County when the 1910 census taker recorded their names and then William and Anna are no longer found in Minnesota, nor have I learned where they died.

As Minnesota commemorates the state’s significant role in the Civil War in 2013, it is appropriate to take a drive on Bircher Avenue and reflect on the young drummer boy who experienced that infamous war in person.

CAPTION: Bircher Avenue in South St. Paul is named for William Bircher, a drummer boy in the Union Army during the Civil War. William’s diary was originally published in 1889 and was re-issued by Shelley Swanson Sateren and Suzanne L. Bunkers in September 1999. William joined the Army when he was 15 years old, survived the war and farmed and lived in South St. Paul until 1902, when the family moved to St. Paul.
South St. Paul students return to school this month, taking their places in classrooms that are outfitted with state of the art technology where experienced teachers provide a wide array of resources that will help them learn.

Local girls and boys also took their places in classrooms over 160 years ago at the Mdewakanton Dakota village of Kaposia on the banks of the Mississippi River. These students, however, experienced a very different kind of education than today’s young people. The first school at Kaposia was built in 1837 by Methodist missionaries from Pennsylvania. They taught both adults and children despite their limited knowledge of the Dakota language until Chief Little Crow closed their school in 1843.

A new Presbyterian missionary family, the Williamson’s, arrived at Kaposia at the invitation of a new Chief, Taoyateduta, in October 1846. They had been teaching the Dakota people at the Lac Qui Parle mission in western Minnesota since 1835, and Dr. Thomas Williamson, his wife Margaret, and his sister Jane, were all fluent in the Dakota language. They opened a new school at Kaposia and worked successfully with the chief.

While it’s tempting to picture the new school as a classic one-room building with children seated at desks and a young teacher writing on a blackboard, the Kaposia school was nothing like that. E.S. Seymour visited Kaposia in the Summer of 1849 and wrote in his book, *Sketches of Minnesota*, (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1850, p. 141): “During the day, female children are called in, from time to time, to receive instruction from Miss Williamson….It is impossible to collect the children together or to appropriate any portion of the day for the purpose of teaching them: they must be taught when they are ready.”

Attendance rosters for the school indicate sporadic attendance, especially on the part of the adults, including Taoyateduta himself, who attended the school for one or two days to try to improve their ability to read their own language or learn sums to help them in their dealings with the traders.

In addition to the mission school, the federal government also operated a school at Kaposia. In 1849, it was under the leadership of Sylvester Cook. He apparently struggled with attendance and order as well. R.G. Murphy, the Indian Agent at Fort Snelling, described a visit to Kaposia: “I went to Crow’s village but it was at a time when very few children were in attendance at Mr. Cook’s school. Such as were present showed that they were learning to read, and one was writing. I find many girls in attendance at the American Board of Foreign Missions school, instructed by Jane Williamson…On entering the school…the children became very much embarrassed from bashfulness, but the gentle kindness and skill of Miss Williamson soon restored order….we found the
school arranged again, and the Indian children singing…I was quite delighted with the singing and much astonished to see such proficiency displayed by Indian girls so young….they read and sung sweetly, keeping excellent time and appeared to have correct ears for music. They were all asked to read in their Indian books, and produced specimens of their work that would do credit to any girls of their age.” (History of Dakota County, by Edward D. Neill, North Star Publishing, 1881, p. 129-130)

One of the challenges the missionaries faced was the practice of Dakota families to leave Kaposia during the coldest months of the year and head into the northern and western woods for the winter hunt. These months spent outdoors in the coldest part of the year were hard on children and over time, many Dakota families were convinced to leave their youngest boys and girls with the missionaries. These weeks were for many the only time they had perfect attendance at school. The attendance roster, of course, also included the names of the Williamson children and the many children of the half white/half Dakota children of the area’s fur traders. Both the mission board and the federal government required their teachers to submit detailed attendance and progress reports and the archives at the Minnesota History Center include each individual’s progress in reading, writing and arithmetic.

The Williamsons left Kaposia with the Dakota people when the band was relocated to a new reservation in western Minnesota in 1852. The government school continued to operate for some time at the village site under the direction of former missionary John Aiton. The first public school in South St. Paul, then operated by Dakota County, opened in 1857 on Theobald Motz’s farm on what is now Concord and Sixth Streets South.
The daily attendance roster for the school at Kaposia Village in 1851 includes the names of the missionary children and children of the area traders with consistent checkmarks indicating they were in school. For the Dakota children and adults listed on the lower half of the list, attendance was much more sporadic as the winter hunt and other family or tribal commitments prevented their participation. (Aiton, John Felix & Family Manuscript collection, Minnesota Historical Society P1447)
Ravines Defined SSP’s Neighborhood Schools
October 2013
By Lois Glewwe

When the City of South St. Paul was established in March of 1887, officials were confronted with the need to build, staff and operate the first city schools. Prior to incorporation, schools were maintained under the direction of Dakota County which created Kaposia School District #2 of Dakota County, on July 4, 1853. The only school within the current boundaries of South St. Paul opened in 1857 at Theobald Motz’s farm where the I494 highway ramps meet Concord Street at the foot of what became known as the Church Street ravine.

Philip Crowley, who was superintendent of schools for West St. Paul Township from 1870 to 1878, was one of South St. Paul’s first aldermen elected to the first South St. Paul City Council and he directed his colleagues’ attention to the issue of education at their very first meeting in March 1887. By February of 1889, South St. Paul had nine new schools in operation. Then on February 22, half of the City Council walked out in protest over various issues and founded their own City of West St. Paul, taking nine-and-one-half sections of prime farmland and five of the nine schools with them. South St. Paul was left with two little one-room schools, one on Jacob Bollinger’s farm where the old 1857 school was located at the Church Street ravine and the other on William Bircher’s land on the north side of Simon’s Ravine. The only two new schools retained by South St. Paul were the Stickney School on the site of today’s South St. Paul High School and Lincoln School on 15th and Bryant.

By the end of that year, the Board of Education reported that 342 students had attended school in South St. Paul. The locations identified for new schools were on Simon Avenue at Outlook in the far north end, called Simon School, and at Concord and Church Street called Riverside School. Lincoln School and Stickney School remained in operation while the Bircher School was closed.

As decisions about the locations for schools were made, it became clear that locations were based on the realization that students had to be able to walk to school without having to traverse the huge, deep ravines that slashed through the city from its western border to the Mississippi River. At the south end, the ravine that is today the I494 corridor was so deep that it was many years before the south end of the city was connected to the center of town by any other route than Concord Street. At Wentworth Avenue, another deep ravine made travel from the center of town to the north impossible. Beyond Wentworth, the steep slopes of the Central Avenue ravine prevented residents from reaching the city to the north without going down to Concord Street. At the north end of town at Butler, the city’s largest ravine, named after property owner, John Simon, effectively cut off access to lands to the north.

With the practical goal of building schools in locations where students could reach them easily, the Board of Education and the City Council created not only local schools but in
turn, created distinct neighborhoods of the city. Students who attended Simon School in the north end (later known as Wilson) rarely if ever, met students from Riverside School in the south end (later known as Washington). Pupils at Lincoln School in the neighborhood known as South Park, likewise had little reason to form friendships with students in the northernmost school or with boys and girls across the Wentworth ravine who attended Central School, built on land adjacent to Stickney School in the center of town. Although not defined by a ravine, Central School claimed a certain prestige by being in the very center of the city while Roosevelt, built in 1923 on Fifth Avenue and Fifth Street South, was identified by being in the heart of the ethnic neighborhood that included the Serbian, Polish and Croatian Halls. The few school age children who lived south of the Church Street ravine didn’t have their own school until 1929, when a new Washington School was built on the site of today’s Kaposia Education Center. It wasn’t until 1954 that a new neighborhood school, Jefferson, was built to serve the newly created neighborhood of Oak Park on the western border of the city.

In coming months in the South St. Paul Voice we will look at each of these schools and how their locations impacted unique and significant characteristics which continue to define South St. Paul’s neighborhoods today.

CAPTION: South St. Paul Junior High School was built in 1951 on the site of today’s Lincoln Center. For the first hundred years of the city’s existence, elementary students attended small neighborhood schools which define the unique characteristics of South St. Paul’s neighborhoods to the present day. The first time students from the north end of town met students from the south end was when they entered 7th Grade at the new junior high.
Last month’s *South St. Paul Voice* history column pointed out that the city’s elementary schools were all built in locations where children could walk to their own school without having to cross the huge ravines that divided the city. Those schools defined a particular part of the community that soon became identified as unique and specific neighborhoods.

In the earliest days of the area that became South St. Paul, however, there were very few settlers. The steep bluffs and deep ravines made farming impractical and those who did stake claims were located mostly in the southern and western fringes of the city. The only site that could be identified as any sort of residential development was the former Dakota Indian village of Kaposia. The Dakota people had been removed to reservations by 1852 and the village remained as the site of former missionary teacher John Aiton’s home where the first Dakota County Board of Commissioners met in 1853.

The only public schoolhouse for the area was built in 1857 where the Highway 494 highway ramps meet Concord Street. Today that spot seems particularly unusual for a school site. It has been business or industrial property for decades. Many residents have no idea that this area east of South Concord Street was a booming neighborhood for nearly 100 years with platted lots, streets, and plain but comfortable family homes dotting the landscape leading to the river. The area was attractive for several reasons. It was flat and accessible by the only major thoroughfare through the area, the St. Paul and Hastings Road, as Concord was then called. Travelers could avoid the steep climb up to the top of the bluffs and travel north or south without a problem, at least when the spring floods didn’t make Concord Street impassable. It was also close to the rapidly growing meatpacking industry which was where most new immigrants found their first jobs.

Several small businesses also located in the riverfront neighborhood on the east side of South Concord from just south of Richmond north to Messer Avenue and Maltby and Malden Streets. The site of the schoolhouse on the Motz farm continued to be used as a school and in the late 1880s, the Riverside School on the site became home to the First German Baptist Church which eventually built its own little chapel on the southeast corner of Concord at Church Street, now 494, in 1905.

Joe and Katie Pechanec purchased the old Riverside School building in the spring of 1890 for $75.00 and moved the building to the northeast corner of Concord and Church Street so the city could build a new Riverside School which opened in December 1891. By 1907, Riverside School housed more than 160 students and the following year a four-room addition was built to accommodate the growth of the number of residents in the neighborhood. That same year the school was renamed Washington in honor of the nation’s first president.
The children who attended the new Washington School lived on the “flats,” as the Messer Avenue neighborhood was known. Their families shopped at the constantly expanding business district along Concord Street and had no reason to venture up the steep bluffs where the first shops were starting to be built “on the hill.”

The 1908 Washington School was demolished in 1929 and a new Washington School was built on First Avenue at Dale Street in a completely new neighborhood. In the 1930 Polk city directory, the Maltby, Malden and Messer neighborhood was still home to 26 families, even though South Concord was rapidly being transformed into industrial use. The residents had learned to live with the annual flooding of the Mississippi, but by 1961, all of the residents of Messer Avenue except one had been bought out and removed from the flood plain and only five residences remained on Maltby and Malden. Ten years later, four homes remained and by 1982, Paul French, the last person to own a private home, at 925 Messer Avenue, was gone.

Today, Messer Avenue, which is for some reason identified as Messer Street south of Richmond and Messer Avenue north of Richmond, is only a short two blocks leading to the cul-de-sac driveways of the industrial companies in the area. Malden and Maltby extend less than a block and lead nowhere. The greenhouses of what used to be Schumacher’s Garden Center on Messer Avenue (renamed Schumacher Street) are still visible in the tall grass that covers the site. There is no remaining evidence anywhere that hundreds of school children, dozens of families or several small businesses once headed home to Messer, Maltby or Malden, to their neighborhood homes next to their neighborhood school.

who attended the school that year. The building was demolished in 1929 when a new Washington was built on First Avenue and Dale Street. The neighborhood where these children lived, on the east side of South Concord at Richmond, disappeared between 1959 and 1980, when residences were bought up and redeveloped for industrial use as part of flood plain requirements.

CAPTION: The unique fire escape chute on the 1908 Washington School at what is today the southeast intersection of Highway 494 at South Concord was a huge source of fun for the 160 students
The North End
December 2013
By Lois Glewwe

The city of South St. Paul wasn’t created until March 1887 but its earliest neighborhoods were established in the 19850s and 1860s when white settlers began moving to the land where the Mdewakanton Kaposia band of Dakota lived before their removal to reservations in 1852.

One area that attracted settlement became known as the north end. Today it extends from the Mississippi River west to what is now Highway 52 and from the Simon’s Ravine railhead north to the border of St. Paul. The land was rough and rocky, with steep hills leading up the bluffs. Atop the bluffs the terrain leveled off into smaller rolling hills. Homesteaders who settled there were cut off from the central part of what was to become the new city by the massive Simon’s Ravine but they did have access to the burgeoning new city of St. Paul and to the remnants of the Kaposia Village, where the first school in the area was operated by former missionary John Aiton.

By the mid-1850s, a few small farms were scattered across the hills above the former site of the Kaposia village. The terrain made it difficult to grow large crops of wheat, but it was suitable for growing berries, fruits and vegetables. The area also attracted one of Minnesota’s most prominent land developers when Franklin Steele, brother-in-law of Minnesota Governor Henry Sibley, negotiated the purchase of the Kaposia village site from Jane Williamson in 1852. Steele, often called the founder of Minneapolis, paid $3,000 for the land but let it go in a pre-emption claim filed by Addis E. Messenger, who arrived in the area with his wife in 1853. Messenger and his partner Sherwood Hough platted a new town-site known as Kaposia, achieving the patent for the site in November 1856. He divided the site into 42 blocks, each measuring 50-feet by 100-fee, with five streets running north and south and ten streets east to west. The imposition of order on the site existed only on paper since the land itself refused to bend to submission, and the raging Mississippi River made settlement impossible. Mrs. Messenger ended up deeding the land back to the public in 1888 and ultimately it became part of what is now Kaposia Park.

Once the city of South St. Paul was founded, it became necessary to provide access to a school for the children of the north end who could not be expected to travel across the huge ravine to a school in the center of the city. The first north end school, Bircher, opened in 1889 in a rented room on William Bircher’s property, near what is now Bircher and Willis Avenues. At the end of that year, the school was overflowing and the city purchased several lots where Outlook Avenue reaches Stickney today. They budge $3,500 for the new north end school, which opened for classes in January 1890.

Just a few years later, the school was renamed Roosevelt, in honor of President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1917 a new school was built next door to the 1890 structured, named after President Woodrow Wilson. The old school was demolished when the new Wilson school was ready for a new generation of north end.
In many ways the students from Wilson and their families lived in one of the most isolated neighborhoods in the city. In the spring, the Mississippi River flooded the land at the foot of the bluffs while Simon’s Ravine roared with rushing water flowing through its creek bed. In winter, heavy snow made it impossible for wagons to travel to the center of the city. By the 1960s, 100 years after the north end was established, the number of students at Wilson had decreased significantly, making it the smallest of the city’s elementary schools. Many long-time South St. Paul residents remember that the first time they met any of the Wilson kids was when they entered 7th grade at South St. Paul Junior High. For the north-enders, this could be a strange experience as they suddenly found themselves dropped into classes that had 30 or more students. They were accustomed to classes of just a handful of children, all of whom lived nearby. In those days, where one went to grade school really did determine who they’d become in high school. It wasn’t unusual for the Wilson kids to stick close together, loyal to their unique, rocky north end neighborhood.

CAPTION: South St. Paul kids from the north end attended Simon School on Outlook Avenue when it opened in 1890. In 1903 the school was renamed after President Theodore Roosevelt, and in 1927, the name changed again when a new school building replaced the 1890 structure and was named after President Woodrow Wilson in 1917. Wilson served the north end families until it closed in 1971. The building was used for the school district offices until it was demolished in 1983. Today an elegant residential development known as Wilson Heights covers the rolling hills that once were the playgrounds of the north end kids.
South St. Paul Neighborhoods: On the Hill
January 2014
By Lois Glewwe

For the past few months, this column has focused on how South St. Paul developed into unique neighborhoods often defined by the deep ravines that slashed through the city from the top of the bluffs to the Mississippi River. Another geographical characteristic which led to the development of specific residential areas was the bluff itself, rising hundreds of feet above the St. Paul and Hastings Road (now Concord Boulevard) which followed the course of the river below.

Most of the city’s earliest white residents came to the area, not as farmers, but as entrepreneurs attracted by the development of the railroad and stockyards industries in the area. By the 1880s, food stores, taverns, lumber yards, butcher shops, boarding houses and hotels dominated Concord Street. It wasn’t long before the new business district became a rough-and-tumble, often dangerous location as the bars and taverns proliferated.

By the late 1890s, it became clear that the newly arrived bankers, commission men, realtors and insurance brokers did not want to raise their families in the midst of Concord Street business district. They began instead to establish elegant brick and frames homes on the bluffs above Concord, away from the smells and activity of the livestock industry. My grandfather, Henry Glewwe, has been recognized for being the first business owner to receive a permit from the South St. Paul City Council to open a retail food market “on the hill,” as this new neighborhood came to be known.

It wasn’t long before other businesses began to move to the hill and both Marie Avenue and Southview Boulevard became the heart of the new shopping district. Stickney School, built in 1887 on the site of today’s high school, was the first neighborhood school in this area. In March 1905, a $25,000 school bond issue was passed and work began on the new Central School where Central Square Community Center is today. The new school, then known as Central High School, opened on January 23, 1907. It was only four years later that the high school enrollment had grown so significantly that a new high school was built and Central became an elementary school.

Along with businesses and schools, area churches began to claim the hill as their preferred location as well. Between 1892 and 1896, the First Presbyterian Church, the German Lutheran Church of St. Paulus, Bethesda Lutheran Church, and the city’s first Roman Catholic parish, St. Augustine’s, had all opened within a few blocks of each other on the hill. Within a few years, St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, First United Methodist Church, Grace Lutheran, St. Stefan’s Romanian Orthodox Church, and Trinity Lutheran had all built new churches in the same neighborhood.

Unlike many other students living in neighborhoods defined by their local elementary school, the kids at Central Elementary were often emulated and envied by the kids who
were more isolated up at Wilson in the far north end, or at Washington, down on the river on Concord Street. Central School kids had malt shops, burger joints, bakeries and candy stores all within a block of their school as well as enjoying the little neighborhood grocery stores that popped up on nearly every block. They and their families might venture down to Concord Street to do their banking or other business but for many people, every need they had was satisfied without ever venturing east to the stockyards business district.

The neighborhood atop the river bluffs extended from First Avenue to 12th Avenue and from Wentworth Avenue to around Third Street South. The only significant property to the west in the early years was Oak Hill Cemetery which was outside of town on the highest hill on 15th Avenue North. As the city developed, the original city hall, which was about halfway up the hill at Grand and Third Avenues, was demolished to make way for today’s new municipal center a little further up the hill. The South St. Paul Library was built on Third Avenue in 1927 and a more recent cultural addition, the Dakota County Historical Society Museum opened across from City Hall in 1978.

Today’s residents still shop the Marie Avenue and Southview business district and many of the original old churches continue to be home to ethnic congregations. Perhaps the most lingering evidence of this early area, though, rests in the block and after block of big old houses from the 1900s which continue to grace the streets and avenues of this elegant old neighborhood “on the hill.”
The Hill Grocery Company was one of the first businesses permitted by the City Council to operate above Concord Street on the bluffs overlooking the river. Located in what is now the west parking lot behind the current City Hall, the shop opened as Glewwe’s Grocery on March 1, 1905. It paved the way for the development of an entirely new and elegant residential and commercial neighborhood always described as “on the hill” to distinguish it from the rambling and ramshackle boarding houses, bars and taverns along the Concord Street strip.
South St. Paul Neighborhoods: South Park
February 2014
By Lois Glewwe

South St. Paul neighborhoods have historically been determined by unique geographical characteristics and boundaries, especially the ravines which cut through the community from the Mississippi River to the bluffs above. Previous articles have examined the river flats neighborhood at Maltby and Messer Streets, the North End and the homes and businesses that were established “on the hill” in the center of the city.

One of the most interesting of the city’s neighborhoods is known as South Park. It roughly includes that area from the Wentworth Avenue ravine on the south to Simon’s ravine at Butler on the north and from Concord Street west to 19th Avenue North. It is the only neighborhood in the city which at one time had its own legally recognized federal post office even though its boundaries were well within the service area of the South St. Paul mail station.

Like so many of the city’s neighborhoods, South Park was known for its local public school. In this case, Lincoln Elementary, which opened in its first building on the northeast corner of 15th and Bryant Avenues North in November 1887. In 1908, a new Lincoln School was built on the north side of Thompson Avenue North between 15th and 12th Avenues.

The earliest church in South Park, Clark Memorial, on 15th and Bryant, was named for the neighborhood’s founder, Charles W. Clark. Clark had come to the area that would become South St. Paul in 1886 and he immediately began buying up whatever properties he could find along the river. He and his partner, John Bryant, built the impressive Bryant Block on the northwest corner of Bryant and Concord and soon attracted dozens of prominent foundry companies and related businesses to the new area. Charles Clark’s cousin, Arthur Clark, opened the Clark and Company Grocery on the same corner and built his family a magnificent Victorian style home overlooking the river at 1033 Highland Avenue.

Charles Clark is attributed with naming his new community South Park although it isn’t exactly clear where the name came from. He was a widow when he arrived in the area but took a second wife, Lucy Larcom Spaulding, in 1893. Lucy was from South Park, Illinois, which might explain the selection of the name but South Park existed long before 1893. The South Park Post Office opened on February 7, 1887, and was officially discontinued on April 15, 1925.

In any case, South Park soon came to be known as one of the more elegant and exclusive neighborhoods in the growing city of South St. Paul. Rather than echoing the large frame houses of the center of the city, the bankers, cattlemen, insurance brokers and other businessmen who came to the area from the east coast, built charming New England style brick and stone cottages on the rambling hills of South Park. Charles Clark’s own house
was on Concord Street just north of the Bryant Block for a number of years, but the most well-known South Park residents lived atop the bluffs.

The oldest structure in South Park is the 1876 John Kochendorfer home above 19th Avenue North on the south side of Simon’s Ravine. The only other church in South Park, besides Clark Memorial, is St. John Vianney Catholic Church which opened on 19th Avenue North in 1947. Undoubtedly the most famous structure in South Park was Charles Clark’s electric monorail which he built on the south side of Bryant in 1888. The little monorail made several test runs that the public could experience before it was derailed by economic and political issues, but it is always known as the South Park monorail, and not the South St. Paul monorail. The only remnant of the elegant Bryant Block is one of the oldest continuously occupied non-residential structures in the city, the building at 1009 Concord, erected in 1886. Long gone from South Park are the Grand Hotel which once dominated the southwest corner of Central and Concord and the smokestacks and industrial plants of the foundry industries along the river.

Like so many loyal neighborhood residents, however, the people of South Park were proud of their little corner of the community and any school student who first met a “South Park kid” at Junior High soon learned that they were from a very special place – a neighborhood that continues to be known as South Park to the present day.

CAPTION: The Clark and Company Grocery store clearly identified its location on this delivery wagon as South Park, not South St. Paul, when this 1890s photo was taken. The store was on the northwest corner of Bryant and Concord and was operated by Arthur Clark, a cousin of South Park’s founder, Charles W. Clark, who came to the area in 1886.
The Roosevelt Neighborhood – South St. Paul’s Ethnic Melting Pot
March 2014
By Lois Glewwe

It’s been fun to focus on South St. Paul’s neighborhoods in several recent history columns. From the river flats of Messer Street to the Far North End, to the City Center and South Park, each area has unique characteristics. From the end of World War I in 1919 until the post-World War II years of 1946 into the 1950s, the major residential development in South St. Paul was concentrated on the area south of about Third Street South to the huge ravine that slashed through the city at what is now the I-494 Highway corridor.

This part of town was originally owned by investors who thought that the land would be ideal for farming. As the city’s economic base developed, however, it became clear that housing for the workers in the rapidly expanding stockyards industry was a priority. When Armour & Company opened in the South St. Paul stockyards in 1919, hundreds of new workers arrived from Central and Eastern Europe, enticed by the offer of work in the new meatpacking plant. Along with the workers came the managers who moved to South St. Paul from Chicago. While the laborers initially moved in to Concord Street boarding houses, both they and their wealthier counterparts were soon eager to establish their own homes in their own neighborhood.

Both groups of newcomers needed appropriate housing. Their desire to become American citizens was powerful but they also found solace and support in being with people who were from their home country. Immigrants from Croatia, Romania, Serbia and Poland longed for the social and cultural structure that would make them feel comfortable in their new country. The land south of the center of the city, once believed to be best for farming, was quickly bought up by private developers, eager to meet the needs of the new arrivals.

In 1909, Polish immigrants founded the local chapter of the Polish National Alliance of North America. They built their local Polish Hall at 622 First Avenue South in the summer of 1911. The Serbians also organized in 1909 and began construction of the Serbian Hall at 404 Third Avenue South in 1923. The first local chapter of the Croatian Fraternal Union was founded in 1918 and named the Hrvatski Dom Association. They began construction of the Croatian Hall at 445 Second Avenue South in 1919.

All of this construction of ethnic cultural centers attracted hundreds of new arrivals who were interested in living near the people and communities affiliated with their home countries in Europe. As developers bought up former farmland and began building homes, the school district soon needed to build a new school to accommodate the children of the new neighborhood. Roosevelt School was completed on Fifth Avenue South between Fifth and Sixth Streets South in January 1923.
The site of the school was viewed as being far out of town in the first decade of the 1900s when it was a horse racing track. By 1930, however, it was the hub and center of South St. Paul’s newest neighborhood. Recognizing that the growing population of this new Roosevelt neighborhood came from traditionally Roman Catholic backgrounds, Father Peter Roy of St. Adalbert’s parish in St. Paul, came to South St. Paul to establish a new parish that would serve the hundreds of immigrant families moving in the neighborhood. Holy Trinity Catholic Church was incorporated on November 13, 1924, and finally broke ground for their new parish at 749 Sixth Avenue South on November 13, 1940.

By then, the old Washington School on Concord Street had closed and the children who lived on the riverfront between Third Street South and the Church Street (now I-494) ravine, had to attend the new Roosevelt. The climb up the steep hill from Concord to Fifth Street South is memorable to students who made that trip long before today’s carpooling parents became accustomed to drop boys and girls off at the school’s front door every morning.

Today, the site of Roosevelt Elementary School has been transformed into soccer fields and the school is no more. For generations of kids who grew up in this diverse ethnic neighborhood, however, their school and their neighborhood was a unique melting pot of American immigration where cultures came together in the school rooms of Roosevelt, the pews of Holy Trinity and the neighborhood streets and alleys that are still home to these pre-World War II houses of the Roosevelt neighborhood.

CAPTION: Holy Trinity Catholic Church at 749 Sixth Avenue South was incorporated in 1923 and began construction in 1940. The church was founded by Polish immigrants to South St. Paul who were just one of the many diverse ethnic groups who bought homes and established the Serbian Hall, the Polish Hall and the Croatian Hall in the neighborhood south of Third Street to the huge Church Street/I-494 ravine.
The South End Story
April 2014
By Lois Glewwe

Over the past few months, this column has focused on the history of South St. Paul by looking at how and why its distinctive neighborhoods developed. From the river flats of Messer Street to the bluffs of the far north end, residential areas and neighborhood schools were often built whenever one of the city’s many major ravines cut an impassable barrier from the river to the bluffs. The deepest, widest and most dramatic of those ravines is today’s I-494 and Highway 110 corridor. In its early days it was known as the Church Street ravine and it extended all the way from Mendota to the Mississippi River.

From the 1880s until the first decade of the 20th century, large truck farms dominated the flatlands that extended south from Church Street to Inver Grove. It wasn’t until after the First World War, in the 1920s, however, that some of those farmers began selling off property for sporadic residential development. The city of South St. Paul, realizing that the area would ultimately attract new builders and buyers, opened a brand new Washington School on First and Dale Streets in September 1929.

With a school now nearby, landowners and contractors like Matt Krech and Sam Buron began to intensify the expansion of housing by erecting tiny bungalows, often of nearly identical design, on hundreds of flat 40-foot lots. With houses priced at around $4,000 - $5,000, young couples were to buy their own first home and began moving into the area in the 1930s. A huge increase in construction followed World War II when returning servicemen bought up the modest homes as soon as they were ready for occupancy.

During the twenty years between the two wars, the early residents of the neighborhood had realized that the Church Street ravine cut them off from many city services that other areas were receiving. There was no public sewer or water; many homes still had outhouses and no running water and there was no public transportation. Streetcars ran far below the neighborhood on Concord Street but bus service ended on the north side of Church Street at Fifth Avenue. Anyone going further south had to somehow cross the Church Street ravine to get home until the Rechtzigels began providing South End service on their little blue and white jitney buses in the 1940s. The South End Community Club, originally formed as a loose-knit social club, eventually moved into political activities and finally elected a councilman from their neighborhood when Clarence Anderson took office in 1939.

One of the most significant developments in the South End was the opening of an airstrip on the southern border of South St. Paul in 1939. The following year, the modest landing site was expanded into a real airport, dedicated on September 29, 1940. U.S. Navy purchased the airport by January 1941, and invested more than $1 Million to expand the facilities, including building eight large hangers, two large barracks, a control tower, power house, apron and runway. Flight training operations were held at the airport...
throughout World War II, bringing the sound of roaring planes overhead 24 hours a day to the South End neighborhood.

Despite the proximity of the expanded airport, the South End remained isolated in many ways from the center of the city. Many people recall the anxiety and excitement they experienced when they had to leave their neighborhood and travel all the way to Junior High School when they were old enough for seventh grade. Others remember that they were often teased with comments such, “You guys live so far south, you’ve got race riots,” an observation that strikes today as certainly inappropriate if not racist. The extremely small size of many of the homes coupled with a propensity for South End families to have elaborate religious shrines or unusual home-made sculptures in their yards, often prompted critical comments from their more conservative neighbors to the north.

The jokes and criticism in many ways, however, only deepened the loyalty South End residents felt for their unusual neighborhood. Many families have seen three and four generations of their children remain in the south end where the little bungalows continue to be popular with first-time homebuyers.

Today Willenbring’s dairy farm, Nechville’s Grocery, Hjort’s Foods and many other neighborhood landmarks are gone but the neighborhood is still home to Fleming Field Airport and to Kaposia Education Center, which has replaced the old Washington School. South End kids still enjoy living in a close-knit neighborhood where they often know other kids in nearly every house on their block, where they can walk to school, and where they still see and hear planes take off and land just at Fleming Field every day.
CAPTION: South St. Paul’s South End neighborhood extends south from what is now I-494 to the border with Inver Grove Heights. It includes Fleming Field Airport, which was a full-time training site for the U.S. Navy during World War II before it was turned back to the city in 1946. The South End was inaccessible from the north because of the massive Church Street ravine that divided the city. South End kids attended Washington School on the site of today’s Kaposia Education Center and had their first introduction to students from neighborhoods to the north when they began seventh grade.
Tangle Town – South St. Paul Kicks Off the 1950s
May 2014
By Lois Glewwe

South St. Paul’s distinctive neighborhoods have been discussed in this column over the past few months. Each of the areas - the river flats of Messer and Maltby Streets, the far north end, South Park, the center of the city, the ethnic melting pot around Roosevelt, and the far south end, came to be known by the local elementary school which served each area. The city’s unique geography also created natural divisions as deep ravines cut through the town from the river west to the flat farmlands bordering West St. Paul.

Most of the city’s neighborhoods had all been developed before World War II and when the war ended in 1945, enterprising investors soon opened up the farmlands to the south and hundreds of homes were built in a matter of months. Another major change was occurring in America as the decade of the 1950s began. Cities and towns all over the map were eager to embrace the shiny, new, modern world promised by this first post-war decade. Hundreds of thousands of old town halls and aging schools and government buildings were demolished to make way for big square brick boxes that were the ideal architecture of the modern era.

For South St. Paul residents, the major changes came to Concord Street where the streetcar tracks were torn up and bold new steel street lights installed to flood the commercial district that advertisers called the “Great White Way.” The grand old turreted city hall at the top of Grand Avenue was torn down to make way for a new flat-roofed brick box. Many long-time city residents also began to long for housing options that would allow them to remain in the city but to construct homes that were a far cry from the big old Victorians that dominated the center of the city or the little houses that characterized the neighborhoods to the south.

One of South St. Paul’s most ambitious and successful entrepreneurs, Mike Kassan, was among the first to take steps to bring the city an entirely new neighborhood. He called it Oak Park and he laid out winding streets that meandered over the former farmland, earning the new area the name “Tangle Town.” The development extended south to Marie Avenue, west to West St. Paul, north to Wentworth and east to roughly where today’s Reid Lane extends. The first lots were ready to buy for $250 by 1947 and many families stumped through muddy fields following Mike around as he described the vision he had for this elegant and modern showplace. Lot #1 in the new Oak Park is today the southwest corner of 21st and Wentworth and a variety of unusual lot shapes and sizes were platted outwards from that point.

The end of the war had also led to the famous “Baby Boom” of the 1950s and South St. Paul realized that it needed another elementary school to accommodate growing families. Jefferson Elementary School opened on 21st Avenue at Southview Boulevard in 1954 and was doubled in size a year later. The school also reflected the modern architecture and style of the 1950s and included a broad expanse of land for a sliding hill, playground,
tennis court, ball fields and wintertime skating rink. Jefferson became the real heart of the new Oak Park neighborhood as families from all over the city relocated to this elite new area as far away from the smells and sights of the stockyards as one could get.

Just as South St. Paul kids from Wilson School in the far north end were isolated from ever knowing kids their age from Washington School in the far south end, Jefferson kids were also set apart in many ways. It was only human nature that a student who lived in the newest and fanciest neighborhood in town and went to the newest, most modern school in town was likely to enter junior high with perhaps a slightly inflated self-image. Everyone who grew up in the era of the neighborhood school in South St. Paul is very likely to remember telling stories about the “stuck-up” kids from Jefferson who seemed to simply waltz into seventh grade wearing that year’s most popular fashions and seeming to outshine anyone else around.

Today Oak Park continues to be a charming part of the city, although the homes are no longer the epitome of modern residential development. Just as they do in neighborhoods all over town, however, Oak Park residents often pass their homes down to children and grandchildren who continue to preserve the unique nature of South St Paul’s Tangle Town.

CAPTION: South St. Paul’s Oak Park neighborhood was developed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, leading to the need for a new neighborhood school. Jefferson Elementary was built on 21st Avenue in 1954 and doubled in size a year later. The school served the city only thirty years before being sold to The Miracle Center of St. Paul which opened The Word Church on the site in 1985.
Over the past few months, this column has discussed the city’s unique neighborhoods which sprang up on either side of the many ravines and which became identified with neighborhood elementary schools. We’ve covered the early residential properties on the river flats to the 1950s homes of Oak Park and ventured into the North End, the South End, South Park, the melting pot that was the Roosevelt neighborhood and the center of the city where Central School dominated the scene.

Those neighborhoods developed over a span of almost seventy years, from 1887 to the mid-1950s. Most of the land that was left to develop after the initial post World War II boom was either a gravel pit, at the bottom of a ravine, on the side of or atop a huge river bluff, or was part of a farmer’s fields when it was thought that farms would remain a vital part of the city’s economy. It soon became clear that those pioneer farm families were more than happy to sell off their cornfields and welcome the bright, shiny, new world of the 1950s by subdividing their property and often building themselves a brand new home on their old homestead while welcoming brand new neighbors right next door.

One of the first new neighborhoods was created at the same time that Mike Kassan was developing Oak Park on the city’s western border. Park Lane was a remarkable addition to the city’s landscape. The street, really just a block long, curves gracefully atop the bluff overlooking the Wentworth ravine that forms the South St. Paul High School football fields. With no alleys in back, but with garages and driveways facing the street, it echoed the modern design of Oak Park. It has the unique distinction of having houses numbered in the 300s on the south end and in the 800s on the north end as the unique circular design was somewhat artificially constrained to follow the numbering systems of Fourth Street North and Ninth Avenue North.

The first of the gracious, mid-century modern homes was built at 817 Park Lane in 1948. By 1954, there were 23 homes along the lane and Ninth Avenue had also been transformed into housing sites for five new residents. The city’s new Junior High School was built across 9th Avenue from Ninth Avenue North, opening for classes in 1951. Park Lane was a prestigious address, developed by the South St. Paul Improvement Company, which also obtained and developed the land that became “Pill Hill,” the Fifth Avenue North neighborhood which began this series of articles on neighborhoods last summer.

One of the Park Lane’s current residents showed me the agreement of purchase for his home that was built in 1949. I’d heard rumors of this requirement before but never actually seen it in writing. The agreement specifies: “No person of any race other than the Caucasian race shall use or occupy any dwelling on any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race or nationality employed by an owner or tenant.” The provision is dated October 23, 1940, and it was reportedly included in purchase agreements for properties across the city in these years.
before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It is hard to imagine that such a requirement could ever have been in place in a city like South St. Paul, which was home to thousands of European immigrants with such diverse origins, but those immigrants were white. African Americans and Mexican Americans were welcome to work in the slaughterhouses of the meatpacking firms, but were not allowed to purchase property or live within the city limits.

While Park Lane was being developed, another new neighborhood was established across 4th Street North from the city’s new Junior High School and Veteran’s Field. Tidy bungalows, many with interesting decorative features in fencing, window framing and entry ways, soon lined the street across from the new school. After these Fourth Street properties became available to buyers, builders began buying up the land to the north and new residential properties soon rose on the streets between Ninth Avenue North and Fifteenth Avenue North, from Fourth Street to the southern border of the old South Park neighborhood at Dwane Street. This little neighborhood actually developed its own business district with the South Park Pharmacy or Reid’s, as it was known, opened on the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Fifteenth Avenue North. Complete with its own lunch counter, Reid’s was the ultimate in modern drugstore design in the 1950s. It was owned by Dr. Andrew Reid, just one of the city’s many entrepreneur real estate developers who looked at fields of waving wheat and saw a vision of modern suburbia.
CAPTION: This photo, taken by aerial photographer Tony Rericha of South St. Paul in about 1950, offers a glimpse into the city’s newest post WWII neighborhoods. At the left center of the image, is Park Lane, which had only a few houses at that point. The prestigious neighborhood overlooks the northern expansion of today’s High School football fields, in the center of the photo. To the right of the High School complex is the old Central Elementary School and at the top of the image are the plants owned by Swift’s and Armour’s as well as the Saint Paul Union Stockyards holding pens and property along the river. The expanse of empty land across from Ninth Avenue North and Park Lane became the site of the first South St. Paul Junior High School which opened in 1951. Today the building is Lincoln Center elementary school. Photo Courtesy, Private Collection
South St. Paul Neighborhoods – The Horseshoes
July 2014
By Lois Glewwe

One of South St. Paul’s most interesting post-World War II neighborhoods is located on the western border of the city between Marie Avenue and Southview Boulevard. It is there that two horseshoes, accessible from 23rd Avenue South, make their appearance. Four streets, Heimel, Kraft, Anthony and Francis, make up the two horseshoe-shaped roads that define this neighborhood.

The first homes on the Heimel and Kraft horseshoe were built in 1960-61 and the last home on the Anthony and Francis horseshoe was completed in 1977-78. Although each of the houses is slightly different in design, they represent one of the earliest uses of adjoining backyards. Instead of having an alley behind the house, the homes on Heimel Street have backyards that border the backyards of the houses on Kraft, making for elegantly flowing hills and valleys between the two roads. The same is true for Anthony and Francis and the houses at the “top,” or the western most point of the two horseshoes have huge backyards that extend all the way to Highway 52.

It’s hard to imagine today that the steep rise of the horseshoes was once part of the farm of Frank and Catherine Sturm Heimel. Frank came to the United States first and worked in the stockyards at South St. Paul for three years to save money to bring Catherine and their first four children, George, 12; Francis, 10; Frank Jr. 8; and Joseph, 3, to the city in 1887. Their youngest child, Mary, was the only one born in America in 1890.

While the Heimel family was farming in South St. Paul, Henry John Kraft and his wife Apollonia Hauer Kraft, were raising their family in Pine City, Minnesota. They had nine children when Henry died in 1926. Their oldest son, Anthony Nicholas Kraft, known as Tony, had to take over the family farm at the age of 12 years and helped raise his eight siblings. When Tony was 23 years old, his brother Wilfred took over the farm and Tony came to St. Paul where he worked to put himself through college and took engineering classes at night at the University of Minnesota.

On January 4, 1941, Tony Kraft married none other than Marie Heimel, a granddaughter of the original Heimel family whose apple orchard stood where the horseshoes are today. During World War II, Tony served in the United States Navy in the Pacific Theater and later received a Bronze Service Medal. After the war, in 1950, he founded the Anthony N. Kraft Construction Company and Marie was the bookkeeper.

According to Tony’s obituary in the Minneapolis Star Tribune in 1999, nearly a third of the property on West St. Paul’s Robert Street boom period in the 1950s and 1960s passed through his hands at some point. Just as Robert Street began to be transformed from a sleepy dirt road to the commercial strip we know today, Tony and his wife Marie began
to negotiate with Marie’s family, seeking the opportunity to develop the Heimel farmland into South St. Paul’s newest neighborhood.

The last of Frank and Catherine Heimel’s children, their oldest daughter Francis, died in 1959. Francis had never married and was the only family member still living on the original farm site when she moved into a new bungalow at 131 23rd Avenue South.

As the horseshoe project moved forward, Tony and Marie Heimel Kraft decided to honor both of their families by naming the first two streets of the new development Heimel and Kraft. When the second horseshoe was developed, starting in 1964, they named the streets Anthony in honor of Tony Kraft, and Francis, in memory of the last surviving member of the Heimel family, Aunt Francis.

CAPTION: Tony and Marie Heimel Kraft celebrated their 36th wedding anniversary in 1977 when this photo was taken. They founded the Anthony N. Kraft Construction Company in 1950 and developed many of the region’s residential and business properties, including South St. Paul’s two horseshoes. Many local residents may not realize that the four streets of the horseshoes are named in honor of their families. Kraft Street commemorates Tony’s family and Heimel Street honors Marie’s parents, grandparents and extended family. Anthony is named for Tony himself and Francis Street is named in memory of Francis Heimel, the last of the original Heimel family to live on the original farmland in South St. Paul. Photo Courtesy: Rick and Barb Kraft
A Neighborhood on Top of the World – Kassan Crest
August 2014
By Lois Glewwe

One of South St. Paul’s most enterprising and successful real estate developers was Mike Kassan of Kassan Realty. Although he was involved in dozens of major projects in the community, only two small streets bear his name – Kassan Drive and Kassan Court. The two streets form a unique neighborhood high atop the bluffs above the river off of Butler Avenue across from Kaposia Park. Platted in April 1963 as Kassan Crest, this development was one of Mike Kassan’s most ambitious projects.

When the land was originally purchased, it was densely planted woodland, much like the Kaposia park property to the south. In order to turn it into a viable residential neighborhood, Mike had to move tons of dirt in order to level the top of the bluff. Always aware of opportunities, Mike timed the major earthworks to coincide with the building of South St. Paul’s 1965 dike wall. The city benefited from having the dirt nearby and available and Mike benefited from having a purchaser for all that earth he needed to move. He built the first house on Kassan Drive in 1965. It’s still there as 1321 Kassan Drive today.

Today’s residents enjoy a quiet, isolated neighborhood that dead ends at the Kassan Court cul-de-sac. The homes on the east side of Kassan Drive overlook the Mississippi River beyond their steep back yards that ramble down the wooded hillsides leading to Concord Street.

Mike Kassan came to South St. Paul with his parents, Peter and Mary Kassan, when he was about six or seven years old in 1919. He had two sisters, Ann and Nellie, and two brothers, Emil and John. Mike and his brother Emil opened the first Kassan real estate business out of a tavern they operated at 518 N. Concord in 1938. Mike married Eva Schimpf and they welcomed their first child, Marilyn, in 1939. In 1942, Mike enlisted in the Merchant Marine. Emil Kassan also enlisted but was killed in action on March 11, 1945, in Luxembourg.

Mike returned to South St. Paul and now he and his younger brother John seized on the post-war need for housing for all those military men returning from the war. One of their first projects was to buy up newly-platted farmland south of 4th Street South. As the city graded Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Avenues through to the south, Mike sold lot after lot to builders who would buy up an entire block, dig all the basements and set the foundations in a week. Within a month, the streets were lined with nearly identical one and two-bedroom bungalows that still stand proudly up and down these main thoroughfares of the city.

Mike is also credited with what may have been his earliest earth-moving project as he took that dirt from those new streets and used it to fill in a huge waterhole between 12 and 14th Avenues along the south side of Southview Boulevard. The wetland, known for
generations as Waldhauser Lake, was soon transformed into a new post-war shopping center when Applebaum’s Supermarket (now Knowlan’s) opened in 1951.

The neighborhood story about Oak Park published in the *South St. Paul Voice* in May 2014 told of Mike Kassan’s major role in the development of the Tangle Town development and the July 2010 issue described Mike’s promotion of South St. Paul’s very own Blanding’s Dream House on Burma Lane.

In addition to local projects, Mike owned and developed residential and commercial properties across the Twin Cities and in later years was a major partner in developing Inver Grove Heights along the Highway 52 corridor. Mike and Eva were partners in business and in life and their children, Marilyn Kassan Groenheim, Michael Kassan, Jr., George Kassan and Kathy Kassan, grew up at 212 Dessa Lane. Eva passed away in 1980, but Mike kept working, never really retiring until shortly before his death in 2006 at the age of 94 years. Mike’s son George worked with his dad in the local development market until founding his own business Kassan V Properties in 1985, with a focus on local commercial development. George and his sister Kathy recently met with me and shared the stories, history and photos of their dad’s career.
CAPTION: Mike Kassan, on the left above, created Kassan Crest north of Butler Avenue in South St. Paul in 1963. In the photo on the right, Mike’s wife Eva is showing off the first street signs for Butler Avenue and Kassan Drive. In the background is 1321 Kassan Drive, the first home built in the new hilltop neighborhood in 1965. Although Mike Kassan developed hundreds of residential and commercial properties around the Twin Cities, only these two little streets, Kassan Court and Kassan Drive, bear his name and one street, Eva Lane, was named in honor of Eva Kassan. Photo Courtesy, Kathy Kassan Family Collection
I realized when I hit “send” on my South St. Paul Voice history article last month that I have been writing this monthly history column for 10 years. That’s 120 months of 750 words with at least one photo per issue. Most recently, I’ve been focusing on South St. Paul neighborhoods and I’ve had more positive feedback on those articles than any in the past. I’ll continue that focus next month but I wanted to pause and reflect on why South St. Paul’s history is still so interesting to so many people. Many readers have noted that I’m writing a new history of our city and it’s led me to think a great deal about this place and its past.

The main reason that local history seems to have such appeal is, I believe, because even though we have thousands of new residents who’ve moved into the city in the past 20 years, we still have a broad base of citizens with roots that go back seven and eight generations. Whenever I look over the list of scholarship recipients at the South St. Paul Educational Foundation annual banquet, I see name after name of families who have been part of this town for generations.

Another reason is that South St. Paul’s past is just a really great story. We aren’t quite like Inver Grove Heights or West St. Paul or Eagan or Apple Valley. We had huge bustling downtowns with bumper to bumper traffic and a thriving livestock industry while those cities were still made up of wheat fields and cow pastures. We had our own high school before anyone else; we didn’t need to go to St. Paul or Minneapolis to buy a car or a new suit or a pair of shoes. We just needed to go to Concord Street and it was all there.

And then the story came to an end with the closing of the city’s major industry as both the Swift’s and Armour’s meatpacking plants closed between 1969 and 1979. Thousands of people lost their jobs, the huge slaughterhouses fell silent and the city was in a very difficult economic situation. Many organizations and individuals had solutions. Over 120 old buildings on Concord and Grand and beyond were demolished to make way for new development. The railroad tracks were moved to the riverfront so that a modern downtown could be created. All kinds of manufacturers, some of whom weren’t welcome in other communities because of their history of polluting the land, air and water, were brought into the former stockyards properties.

While each idea had some merit and led to some pockets of positive development, it really wasn’t until a variety of organizations, citizens, businesses, elected officials and local legislators came together with a vision of green space, river access, clean manufacturing and a whole new kind of employment base that the city was able to move forward with consistent success.
That recovery, which led to the city being named an All-America City by the National Civic League in 1990, changed the reputation of South St. Paul, not only across the metro area, but throughout the country. City planners, architects and developers visited to take notes, watch the progress and document the positive results which have led to today’s Bridgepoint Business Park and a completely new riverfront in the city.

Most recently, Dakota County and the National Park Service, have been working on several distinctive historic “nodes” along the river trail in South St. Paul where visitors will be able to virtually ride the old monorail, hear the cattle in the auction barns, see the images of cows, sheep and hogs and experience what it was like to ride a ferry across the mighty Mississippi River to go to work in the packing plants.

South St. Paul history continues to intrigue and fascinate, especially visually. The photo with this article is an example of the previously unpublished photos that I hope to find to include in the new history of South St. Paul. Thank you, readers, for the many positive notes, comments, emails and ideas that you’ve shared with me over the past ten years, and thank you to Tim Spitzack and the South St. Paul Voice for continuing to provide a forum to tell South St. Paul’s story.
CAPTION: This photo, taken by E.W. Carter in about 1900, was found in an antique shop in St. Paul a few years ago and is provided courtesy of Chuck’s Toyland. The only existing building identifiable is the turreted Exchange Building. Concord Street had no development south of what today is approximately the 200 block of South Concord Exchange. The Armour’s meatpacking plant would not open for another 20 years. The smokestacks and buildings are part of Swift & Company, which was established in the city in 1895. The railroad tracks at the base of the bluff were a secondary line from the main tracks located to the east of the Exchange building. The bluffs themselves are bare of forestation. Alpheus Stickney had removed thousands of square feet of earth from the hillsides to raise the level of the land on which he established the St. Paul Union Stockyards Company in 1886.
Finding Your House’s History  
October 2014  
By Lois Glewwe

Over the past few months this column has covered the stories of several South St. Paul neighborhoods and some of the unique developments like Oak Park, Kassan Court and the Heimel and Anthony horseshoes. For many residents, however, their house is simply one of many typical homes built on a 40-foot along one of the city’s streets. Several people have asked me how to find out about their house – who built it, when it was built and what else on the street was there at that time.

Most people start their search with a family story about the house. For some, that means asking parents or grandparents or neighbors who remember the original owners of the home. There’s an ongoing joke in town about buying an older house. For example, if you buy a house that belonged to a well-known family in the neighborhood, it will always be identified by that family’s name, not yours, as in: “They live in the Johnson place.” It won’t be “your” place until you move on.

For others who have only been in their house a few years, more research is required. One of the first places to check is Dakota County Property Records on line, http://gis2.co.dakota.mn.us/maps/property.htm. There are several ways to search for a property but I’ve had the best results by clicking on the map to open up the detailed street map of South St. Paul. Keep enlarging it until you can click right on your street and your lot. From there, double right click on your lot to open up the Property page. You’ll be able to find out when the house was built, who owns it now and what the property details are.

You can then click on the lots around your house to see when they were built. It’s fun to learn that that older home on the corner, now fully renovated, was built in 1898, over 70 years before there were any other houses on the street. Even if your house was built recently, it’s possible to learn quite a bit about your block and adjacent streets from looking up other homes.

The next step to learning about your house is to visit the South St. Paul Public Library. In the lower level, you will find Polk Reverse Directories for nearly every year from 1947 on. The directory will have a large section that is like a phone book with alphabetical listings for residents, often with West St. Paul and South St. Paul combined. No phone numbers are provided, just addresses, spouse’s name and residents’ occupations. To find out who lived in your house in a prior year, you go to the separate section of street and avenue names. This is also alphabetical. Look up your street, find the house number and you will see who lived there that year. Once you have a name, you can flip back to the name listing and see what that person did for a living, how many people were living in the home and who the neighbors were at that time.
I grew up at 147 15th Avenue South. My parents were married in June of 1928 and the Dakota County property listing says the house was built in 1926. I know my parents were the first to live there. There were only seven houses on both sides of the street by 1930. The house at 126 is the oldest, built in 1898, when it was part of the Gackstetter family farm, which also included the property at what is now 116, and U.S. Meat Inspector Horatio Crosby built his house at 112 in 1931. I found it surprising that, even as people bought up lots on the street and began to create a new residential neighborhood, William Chapin was allowed to build the big structure on the southeast corner of 15th and Marie Avenues as Chapin Cabinet and Woodworking Shop. It was still in business through the 1950s and eventually was renovated into the apartment building it is today.

Even if your house is brand new, Dakota County Property Records and the Polk Directories will allow you to take a trip to the past and learn about what your own neighborhood was like generations ago.

CAPTION:
Left: Every house has a story. My parents moved in to this house at 147 15th Avenue South in 1928. The house next door, 149 15th Avenue South, was built in 1932 by Sigurd Lindeberg. The house visible on the far left in the background is 141 14th Avenue South, built in 1929 as home to contractor Otto Kramer and his family. No other homes were built on this block of 15th Avenue South until after World War II, but William Chapin erected a huge woodworking plant on the southeast corner of 15th and Marie Avenues in 1935. Today, the former factory is apartments and most of the original homes on the street have been expanded or renovated. Right: 147 15th Avenue South today.
New Neighborhoods on Old Farmlands
November 2014
By Lois Glewwe

By 1960, the population of South St. Paul was 22,032. Over 10,000 people were employed in the livestock market and meatpacking industry. Eight public schools and three parochial schools served the city’s families and three banks were ready to provide funding to growing families and developers wanting to build new modern houses.

The problem with that plan was that nearly all of the former farmland available for new construction consisted of rolling hills, steep bluffs, deep ravines and heavily wooded hillsides. Platting and transforming that rambling terrain into welcoming residential neighborhoods was a challenge. Some descendants of early families, like Karl and Antoinette Kochendorfer, filed a new plat on their old farmland, creating residential lots on Bromley and the west side of 19th Avenue North, including Logan Lane. The first homes were built in that newly created neighborhood encompassing the 19th Avenue North ravine in the 1960s by developer Jim Murr.

Vernon Eide and Mitch Choban purchased parts of the original Nauer farm on Seidl’s Lake by the mid-1950s. Eide developed 18th Avenue South and Choban began construction of new homes on 18th-20th Avenues and 4th to 5th Streets South by the early1960s.

One of the first and perhaps most interesting post-1960 projects was spearheaded by John Vujovich. John partnered with several landowners, including the Grannis family and Louis and Marie Nauer to purchase several acres, including the remnants of the old Nauer farm and a portion of the Vance and Margrete Grannis property.

Echoing the curving streets with no alleys that characterized the Oak Park development on the city’s western border, the new development consisted of a two-sided circle and a cul-de-sac that extended off the western edge. The south side of the circle was named Deerwood Drive after the Deer Park Addition on the original plats of the area. The north side of the circle was named Maywood Drive, in honor of John Vujovich’s wife Mary Clara Vujovich, who was always known as “May.” The cul-de-sac became Deerwood Court. John began constructing new homes in the area with his partner, Lawrence Mikes of Mikes & Vujovich Contractors.

Despite the economic downturn that the city experienced following the closing of the Swift’s and Armour’s packing plants by 1979, two more challenging development projects were implemented on the hillsides around Seidl’s Lake in the 1980s. Gary Dornseif platted the Dornseif Addition to the west of Deerwood Drive and created Alice Court, named after Gary’s wife Alice. The first homes there were under construction by 1987. Steve and Nancy Apfelbacher and the Johnson Family Trust platted Apfelridge in June of 1989, creating Apfelridge Court and 14th Court South to the east of the lake. Construction was underway there by 1990.
The Grannis family turned more of their original land into a new residential plat when they created Oakridge Avenue on the steep sides of what had been a deep ravine between 16th and 18th Avenues South along Southview Boulevard in August of 1984. The first home was built there by the end of 1989. Another dramatic ravine on Wentworth Avenue between Kaposia Boulevard and Dwayne Street was transformed into the residential plat known as Wentworth Hollow by the City of South St. Paul in 2000. The City also created Wilson Heights out of the former Wilson Elementary School property north of Butler and west of Outlook in 2003. One of the newest neighborhoods was created on the flowing hillsides of what used to be the home of Minnesota Governor Harold LeVander and his wife Iantha. River Run Properties purchased the LeVander property and platted LeVander Estates in August of 2006 along Thompson Avenue between 21st Avenue North and Highway 52.

The population of South St. Paul in 2012, over 50 years after the first homes on Deerwood Drive were ready for purchase, was 20,404. There are now two elementary schools and two parochial schools in town, plus the middle school/high school complex and two banks and two credit unions are still ready to provide funding if any potential developer can still find a place to build a house.
CAPTION: John Vujovich, pictured with his wife May and son Bob, is just one of many enterprising developers who created new courts, circles and cul-de-sacs out of former farmlands through the city. John platted the Deerwood/Maywood neighborhood in 1961 and built several of the homes there with his partner Lawrence Mikes. Many early residents recall that one of the most important members of the construction team was John’s dog Snooper, whom John recalled fondly in a recent phone interview. Like so many early builders, John named one of the new streets after a family member. Maywood Drive is named for John’s wife May.
I’ve spent the past year in this column discussing South St. Paul neighborhoods and the characteristics that set them apart from other areas. It would not be appropriate to leave this topic without talking about the neighborhood of Concord and Grand. Although it was a business community, it was also home to many boarding house and apartment dwellers who lived above the bars, hotels, drugstores, groceries and hardware shops that were such a vibrant part of the city’s past.

Over the past ten years, I’ve shared articles in the South St. Paul Voice on the urban renewal efforts in the city in the 1970s and in 2006, I ran a complete list of businesses on Grand and Concord in 1949 by street number. The process of how economic development decisions were made under the leadership of South St. Paul Futures and the Committee of 40 have also been featured in previous years.

One aspect of the Grand and Concord neighborhood that hasn’t been discussed is the atmosphere and character of the old strip. A new Facebook page called Conversations in History of South St. Paul (https://www.facebook.com/groups/ConversationsofHistoryinSouthStPaul) provides an inside visit to the memories and recollections of South St. Paul residents. The site also encourages individuals to post their own photographs, one of which is featured along with this article. Many of these previously unpublished photographs will be included in my new History of South St. Paul that will be published by The History Press in 2015.

The stories people share on the site reflect that life in downtown South St. Paul before the demolition of the 1970s was a daily drama peopled with interesting characters, unique opportunities and lots of adventures. There was a rhythm to the street as well, a rhythm that was driven by the shift changes at the packing plants. The famous Swift & Company whistle sounded the Noon lunch break and daily closing of operations. With each blast, hundreds of workers poured out of the yards and onto Grand and Concord for midday lunch or an after work beverage. The bars and restaurants extended all the way from south of Armour Avenue to north of Wentworth along Concord and along Grand Avenue from the yards to the old City Hall at Grand and Third Avenue North.

Packing plant workers mingled with bankers, commission men, secretaries and shop owners as they claimed a stool at one of the dozens of lunch counters or filled a booth in one of the many eateries. Among the popular lunch spots were the drugstore soda fountains that so many pharmacies offered.

One of my own personal memories is going with my friends to Paula’s Cocina, an authentic Mexican restaurant on North Concord. It was dark; the old leather booths were
torn and stained and there was no real menu. You were offered what Paula was cooking and that authentic Mexican cuisine was an ethnic adventure for South St. Paul teenagers.

In addition to the restaurants, coffee shops and taverns, the street offered several groceries, butcher shops, banks, hardware stores and retail shops, including the massive Grand Mill Furniture at 149-153 North Concord. There was a Montgomery Wards at 152 North Concord and several liquor stores, including the Paragon at 1003 North Concord.

Above many of the businesses were tiny apartments. Small doorways right on the street led up steep, dark stairs to warrens of rooms for rent. Behind the storefronts on Concord, dozens of buildings were erected on the steep hillsides, reached by outdoor staircases, creating a maze of dirt roads, tiny winding alleys and structures built on top of structures.

Saturdays on the strip attracted shoppers from all over the region. Bumper to bumper traffic created a noisy din, punctuated by the sound of the railroad as trains rumbled through the city. People were everywhere on the street, neighbors greeting neighbors, bustling by with their purchases and dodging automobiles and trolley cars as shoppers darted across Concord to make another stop.

The Grand and Concord downtown came to an end with demolition and urban renewal in the 1970s but it will never be forgotten by generations of South St. Paul residents.
CAPTION: This photo was taken by Fred “Crosby” Grant shortly before demolition of Concord Street. It is North Concord looking north toward the Exchange Building on Grand. The businesses on the east side of the street, right to left were: Silver Inn Tavern (134); Double A Western General Store (136); Rogowski Clothing (138); South St. Paul Surplus (140), Northern States Power (142); Square Deal Market (144); Thorp Thrift and Loan (146); South St. Paul Salvage (148); Hook-Em-Cow Bar (150); Tom Sweeney’s Bar (152); Nick’s Bar and Granny’s Kitchen (154); Packers Billiards and Sobaski’s Liquor Store (156); Drs. Tom and Earl Lowe (160) and Hank’s Tavern (164).
South St. Paul’s many deep ravines were formed by the same glacial activity that carved the Mississippi River bed out of the ancient rock thousands of years ago. As the glaciers melted, layers of clay, sand and rock were embedded into the land. Over time, many of the deposits settled into huge expanses of gravel that formed the walls of the characteristic ravines.

When Alpheus Stickney came to the area in 1886, he began to excavate the bluffs to the west of what became Concord Street in order to fill in the swamp land along the river. He created a four-foot deep base of gravel and fill to raise the level of the land in order to build the first pens and structures of the stockyards. Additional excavation enabled him to lay the first railroad tracks where Concord Boulevard is today. Early contractors also took advantage of the natural gravel pits to excavate materials for the earliest roads.

Contractor Bernie Andrus came to town in 1918 and founded United Materials Company in South Park, where he also served as the postmaster until 1925. He was one of the first to excavate the gravel pit which ran west from Concord between Bryant and Central Avenues. It was during Andrus’ excavations that many skeletal remains of aboriginal people were uncovered as the centuries old burial mounds were demolished. Showing remarkable sensitivity for the era, Andrus made sure those remains were taken to Klecatsky’s Funeral Home where they were prepared for re-interment. Charles Clark, founder of the South Park area, donated property on top of the Highland Avenue hill as a perpetual burial site and memorial to the city’s earliest people. A stone marker commemorates the site to the present day.

By 1930 Andrus moved his excavation operations to 1040 South Concord at Richmond where he remained in business until retiring to Florida after World War II. Nicolas Bretoi was one of the first to excavate the pit at Pitt Street which ran south of Grand Avenue. Bretoi made bricks at the site until the sand was no longer available in the 1940s. Joe Chalupa, founder of the South St. Paul Cement Block Manufacturing Company, later known as Standard Building Materials, excavated a gravel pit at 369 N. Concord for several years before moving his operations to 1201 South Concord. He operated the large gravel pit at 110 and South Concord from 1948 until 1959. Chalupa sold the company to Cemstone Concrete in 1982.

Nick Woog and Andy Pedersen partnered to create Pedersen and Woog contractors in the early 1900s and by 1930 Nick was in business with his son Ludwig, later expanding to include all of his sons as Nick Woog & Sons Cement Contractors. Their gravel pit and brick plant was on 6th Street South across from Wakota Arena.

Each of the sites went through various owners over the years. Inver Grove Heights excavation contractor Jim Kamish worked the Bryant Avenue site in recent years and
Merv Borgelt’s Bituminous Surfacing Company worked the pit which extended alongside the Poplar Avenue Hill west of Concord, currently being worked by Frattalone Companies. As the pits were emptied of their natural materials, much of the land was sold and opened for development. One of the biggest sites, at 494 and Concord, became home to The Golden Steer Restaurant in 1959 and eventually to Lakeland Ford and Fury Motors.

New excavation operations today are minimal but the city is home to one of the largest gravel processing plants in the Twin Cities. Marley Danner’s operation on the riverfront at 843 Hardman accepts concrete, asphalt and other recycled building material and processes it into fill for road construction projects.

**CAPTION:** This massive gravel pit operated at 494 and Concord until about 1959 when part of the land was purchased for The Golden Steer Restaurant, later becoming the site of Lakeland Ford. Today the property is Walser Auto Auction at 740 South Concord. The homes pictured are on Second and Third Avenues South in the 800 and 900 blocks. Most were built in the late 1950s overlooking the operation. The Armour plant and the stockyards are visible in the background and the new I494 cloverleaf roadway has only two cars heading for the highway bridge.
South St. Paul has always been a city of multiple personalities. The earliest settlers who planned to be successful farmers in the 1850s and 1860s were challenged by the rocky terrain and the deep ravines and the city was never really an agricultural success. The first riverfront developers, Charles Clark and Alpheus Stickney, both arrived in the area in 1886 and brought manufacturing and meatpacking plants to the flatlands along with Stickney’s railroad. Farmers soon mingled with cattle drovers, insurance brokers, bankers, commission men and small business owners as Concord and Grand began to grow into the bustling business area it became by World War I. While the laborers on the slaughterhouse floor of the packing plants found their social support system in ethnic and union halls and societies, the wives of the professional men from out east soon began to imprint a sophisticated social structure on the community culture.

The South St. Paul Study Club, founded in 1911, limited its membership to 12 women—all wives of professional men who were active in the early city. The following year, South St. Paul Chapter H of P.E.O., another women’s organization, was established, serving many of the same women but expanding in numbers to broaden their influence in the city. In 1926, the Midweek Study Club was chartered, serving the women of South Park, that neighborhood north of Wentworth which actually had its own federal post office until 1925. Midweek boasts membership of two of Minnesota’s first ladies, Esther Stassen and Iantha LeVander, among its members. In 1944, Chapter CC of P.E.O. also joined the roster of clubs for the privileged women of South St. Paul.

One of the women who was active in both the Midweek Study Club and in Chapter CC of P.E.O. was Loretta Blum Andrus. Loretta’s husband, Bernard Andrus, brought the family to South St. Paul in 1918 and served as the postmaster of the South Park Post Office. He built the family their gracious home at 1115 Highland Avenue and founded the United Materials Company, one of the earliest gravel pit operations in the city. Bernie, as he was known, also built the city’s first public swimming pool, a wading pool sat the old Central School and was well-known for honoring the remains of aboriginal peoples whose skeletons were unearthed during his excavation work and having them reinterred in the designated memorial site that Charles Clark donated for that purpose on Highland Avenue, a site still identified by the rock and memorial plaque there today.

Loretta Andrus was the first president of the Lincoln School Mothers Cub in 1922, the early manifestation of what became the Parent Teachers Association or the PTA in later years. Although the country was plunged into economic depression in the early years of the 1930s, Loretta was determined to impose a certain social and cultural elegance to this “Cowtown,” which was what South St. Paul was becoming known as throughout the region.
Bernie built her an elegant brick building at 140 Eighth Avenue North where she opened the Greystone Grill. It was a lovely space specifically designed to attract the South St. Paul High School teachers whose classrooms were located directly across the street. The teachers responded appropriately, often enjoying a lovely lunch of tea sandwiches, soup, fruit salad and cookies for lunch or stopping for a cup of tea or coffee after school let out in the afternoon. Loretta Andrus served as the personal hostess at the Greystone and contributed many of her personal recipes such as Apricot Nut Bread and Asparagus Soufflé to the menu’s offering.

Loretta welcomed guests to the Greystone Grill until after the Second World War. She and Bernie retired to North Carolina and sold the Greystone to Robert English, a local funeral director, in 1946. Robert English partnered with Warren Meeker and they then sold the location to Myron and Russell Kandt in 1957, after expanding the building in 1954. The Kandt brothers worked together until 1979 when Russell left. In 1985 Myron’s son, Jeff Kandt, joined the business and Paul Tetrick became his partner in 2003, following Myron’s death in 2000.

Today the building still evokes the memory and charm of the 1930s tea house where Loretta served the ladies of the city tea sandwiches, soufflés and desserts. Whether it is the room with the starlit ceiling, the fish pond or the charm of the brick façade, many local residents find comfort and history in the old Greystone Grill even as they attend the visitations and final services for friends and family.

CAPTION: Today it’s a local funeral home, but in the 1930s and 1940s, the charming brick building at 140 8th Avenue North, was the Greystone Grill, an elegant tea house owned and operated by Bernard and Loretta Andrus. The tea house welcomed high school teachers who often enjoyed lunch or an after school cup of tea or coffee in the
elegant rooms of the building which evolved into the English Meeker funeral home in 1951.
How Things Change
March 2015
By Lois Glewwe

One of the topics that people have been posting about on the Facebook Page “Conversations of History in South St. Paul” is the many memories they have of growing up in South St. Paul in years gone by. The overarching story is about how much freedom children had to ride their bikes all over the city, and sometimes beyond, without any supervision or interference from parents. Many remembered leaving home on summer mornings right after breakfast, returning for a quick lunch and then heading out again for an adventure until dinner time. Some of the most fun times were after supper when neighborhood kids would play tag, sing “Star Light, Star Bright,” and sneak through neighbors’ yards and gardens playing “Hide and Seek” until the street lights came on and mothers’ voices would be heard calling their children home for the night. No one worried about child abduction or scary strangers.

Not that tragedies did not occur, most commonly because of accidents involving cars. On January 27, 1945, a little girl on my block on 15th Avenue South, Lois Elaine Dobmeyer, was struck by a car and fatally injured when her sled shot down the Marie Avenue hill from the top of 16th Avenue and skidded into the street. She was 11 years old. I know I was warned by my mother to never try to cross Southview by myself since there was too much traffic and I was told another little girl had been hit by a car there and died.

One of the conversations on the site was prompted by the photo of the slide at Central School which is reproduced with this article. Many people commented that their sister or brother fell off that slide and “cracked their head open.”

Among the stories that kept surfacing on Facebook was that of Anne Marie Johnson, a 4th grader at Central Elementary School, who died after falling over a railing on the staircase leading to the restrooms in the school’s lower level. People remembered the story very differently after all these years but I was fortunate to find Julie Ista Hoffner, one of Anne’s best friends, who will never forget how she felt when she learned of the accident. Julie and Anne went to school together at Washington in the south end of town until Anne’s mom and two sisters moved to First Avenue South and Anne and her sisters began to attend Central School. Julie and Anne sometimes saw each other at the Lorraine Park pool in the summer and Julie recalls that their friendship simply picked up where they’d left off whenever they saw each other.

It was December 10, 1972, when Anne was heading to the traditional bathroom break at Central School. Girls went in one line to one side of the school and boys on the other side. The substitute teacher that day stayed with the boys who were being a bit difficult and the girls headed downstairs on their own. One of Anne’s friends told the police that Anne suddenly felt faint and slumped against the railing on the third floor and then fell through the open railing three floors down. The police report leaned towards saying Anne was sliding down the banister head first on her stomach when she fell but her mother
rejected that explanation, saying that Anne was always afraid of heights and had never misbehaved in school, saying that she would never have slid down the railing on purpose.

Anne’s 10th birthday would have been on Christmas Day 1972. Julie Ista Hoffner learned of the tragedy in her classroom at Washington when her teacher called the students into a circle and told them something very sad had happened at another school. When Julie heard it was Anne who had died, she was heartbroken and still recalls the shock, sorrow and grief of that loss.

Services for Anne Marie Johnson were held at the Yetzer Funeral Home in Waconia, Minnesota on December 16. She is buried in St. Bernard Cemetery in Cologne, Minnesota, next to her grandfather and godfather Herbert Tellers.

Julie asked me why I would want to bring up Anne Marie after all these years. I guess because her story touched me with sadness over the loss of a child but also because so many safety protections have been put into place since 1972 in schools and public places to protect not only children but all of us from accidental injury. Today’s kids enjoy playgrounds and still take bathroom breaks but not in places or on equipment that endangers their lives.

CAPTION: This slide was a popular piece of playground equipment at the old Central Elementary School at 111 6th Avenue North. Many people recall falling off the slide and being injured. Today, the tallest point of any slide must be no more than six feet from the ground for school-age children and the ground below has to provide 10 inches of sand or wood chips. This photo was taken about 1945 and is reproduced from the Glewe Family collection.
South St. Paul – Recognized Nationally
April 2015
By Lois Glewwe

South St. Paul has three buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. The Saint Paul Union Stockyards Exchange Building at 200 North Concord Exchange was placed on the roster on March 7, 1979. The Serbian Home at 404 Third Avenue South received the designation on March 26, 1992, and St. Stefan’s Romanian Orthodox Church at 350 Fifth Avenue North was listed on May 19, 2004.

Each building reflects a unique and outstanding example of period architecture, historical importance and significance to the community. There is another building in the community that has never been nominated and may be beyond preservation.

It was 1886 when Cass Gilbert, the famous architect of the Minnesota State Capital, was commissioned by Charles W. Clark and his partner John Bryant to design a centerpiece for their new community that they called South Park. Clark and Bryant came to the area before South St. Paul existed. The northwest corner of Bryant and Concord in 1886 was part of West St. Paul Township. South St. Paul was not incorporated as a city until March of 1887. Gilbert, renowned for his work in Minnesota, was a personal friend of Charles Clark and he had agreed to also design the Clark Memorial Congregational Church which was named in honor of his colleague.

When Charles Clark began to invest in this area which Alpheus Stickney had identified as the home for his new stockyards, Clark was determined to create a business enterprise at the northern end of the old township. He recruited his cousin, Arthur D. S. Clark, to come to Minnesota and open a grocery enterprise in the neighborhood and hired his friend Gilbert to design an impressive retail and social complex.

The corner structure, identified as 1001 North Concord, was the more impressive with its elegantly decorated cornices, gables and arches. The middle building was equally impressive with an identical big window and second story bay window. The third building was the first civic and social hall that the neighborhood, and eventually, the new City of South St. Paul, would enjoy. Identified as the 1009 Hall, the three-story building to the north of the grocery store was the site of ballroom dances on the upper floor, sponsored by such ethnic societies as the Hibernians, who gathered to celebrate their Irish heritage. Several South St. Paul churches met in the ballroom when they were first being organized and before they had the resources to build their own church buildings.

One of the most significant events that occurred in the 1009 Hall took place on May 9, 1888, when over 200 dignitaries from across the United States and Canada came to South Park for a test ride on Charles Clark’s electric monorail that traveled up the Bryant Avenue hill. After their exciting test ride, they were all entertained royally at a luncheon at the Bryant Block, as the two storefronts and the 1009 Hall were known, while
company and city representatives offered speeches extolling the investment opportunities in the new City of South St. Paul.

Just as Alpheus Stickney’s impressive Exchange Building dominated the major intersection of Grand and Concord which would become the heart of the city’s livestock industry, the Bryant Block at Bryant and Concord reflected the sophistication, wealth, creativity and vision of Clark and Bryant who brought hundreds of jobs to the city’s north end. It was Clark who brought Waterous to the city in 1886; they are the city’s largest employee in Bridgepoint today. The partners also brought dozens of foundry companies, manufacturers and other firms to the area which led to the erection of the magnificent Grand Hotel on the southwest corner of Central and Concord in 1889 and created South Park as a vibrant business and social center of the new city.

The original grocery store had become a hamburger joint in the 1930s and then Herb Wuest opened a liquor store and bar on the site. Jerry and Joni Arvidson purchased the store and were the owners when the fire and explosion occurred. They were in the middle building with Darrow Sheet Metal and Walker Meats was on the corner. Herb Wuest added a saw sharpening shop behind the liquor store and he was still renting that space when the fire occurred. Today a parking lot has replaced the elegant building and the former ballroom and community center at 1009 Bryant, is a sad shadow of its former self, turned into small apartments, with plastic covered windows and broken down stairs leading to the damaged brick façade and generally rundown appearance. Charles Clark and his good friend Cass Gilbert would no doubt be disappointed that we have not saved the building that was the site of so many celebrations, services and good times for the early citizens of South Park.
CAPTION:
Cass Gilbert, the renowned architect of the Minnesota State Capital and hundreds of other civic buildings around the world, designed the Bryant Block on the corner of Bryant and Concord for his good friend Charles W. Clark in 1886. Today the corner structure is gone, destroyed in a 1980 explosion and the 1009 Hall on the right is in a vulnerable state.
Post War Problems
May 2015
By Lois Glewwe

There is a general impression that the end of World War II in 1945 ushered in an era of overnight economic recovery, highlighted by jobs for all and the great facelift of America where communities large and small began to build shiny new cities and modern residential developments to accommodate the needs of the returning servicemen, heroes one and all.

In reality, the immediate post-war years were among the most economically stressful that America had ever experienced. First of all there was a massive and troubled migration in the work force. Between 1940 and 1945, the number of women employed outside of the home had increased from 14 million to 19 million. Employment analysts had predicted that those women, who had eagerly stepped into heavy industrial, manufacturing and military jobs, would quietly go home and give men their jobs back. That was not the case. Most women intended to keep their jobs, feeling they had earned the same rights as their returning husbands to save money to buy a home, a new car and a whole new way of life because of increased household income.

The returning soldiers, many of whom suffered from undiagnosed and unmentioned stress disorders, faced a job crisis of their own. Others had remained healthy and had been educated in the service; their professional, technical and management skills had been enhanced and they were no longer willing to go back to, in South St. Paul’s case, the jobs in the slaughterhouse without increased pay and increased respect from the administrators with whom they’d fought side by side for the same wages in the slaughter fields of war.

One of the most immediate crises was the shortage of housing. The federal government estimated that three million houses needed to be built between 1946 and 1947 to accommodate the need for housing for low and middle income families. The same desire for equal pay for equal work that had been prompted by different socio-economic classes working side by side in the war, also meant that these new war heroes didn’t relish the thought of moving back in with their own mom and dad (or their wife’s parents) in their old family homes. They wanted a brand new house in which to raise a new generation of kids with all of the modern amenities that they had come to expect.

For cities like South St. Paul, all of these issues came to the forefront by 1946. During the past year, this column has discussed dozens of ways in which South St. Paul tried to address this need for postwar local housing. The amount of new construction that took place in town from 1946 to 1960 was phenomenal, with little bungalows springing up overnight from north to south along Fifth-Ninth Avenues South to the Church Street ravine. Developers would dig one big ditch down one side of the street and build all the basements and then complete each house one after the other.
Oak Park, the new “Tangle Town” addition to the west, also began to cut winding roads into the muddy wetlands of the old farmland as developers sold off the lots one-by-one and builders began laying foundations and basements. Families often lived in that initial basement for their first two or three years on the site while they saved the money to complete their home.

Many, however, still waited for their own house. The federal government began to offer programs that would provide a family with a pre-fabricated home. Some of these houses were meant to be temporary but others were appropriate for permanent residences. In South St. Paul, an open field that extended north from Third Street at 15th Avenue North to Fourth Street at 13th Avenue North, today known as Vet’s Field, was identified as a site for a Quonset Hut City. Most people today think of a Quonset hut as a metal structure shaped like a half moon. South St. Paul homes were much more traditional structures with straight sides, windows and peaked roofs. The homes extended along the west side of 13th Avenue North from Third to Fourth Street North. The unusual little community was short-lived, lasting only from 1946 until about 1955 when the houses were demolished. South St. Paul continued to build expansive residential neighborhoods from one end of the city to the other, accommodating both the WWII veterans of the 1940s and their grandchildren who are still looking for that perfect “starter home” in 2015.

CAPTION: Carolyn Seiffert Larson, the oldest daughter of William and Iris Seiffert, posed in about 1948 in front of the family’s Quonset hut at 315 13th Avenue North. A row of these homes, built to help with the post WWII housing shortage, extended on the west side of 13th Avenue North on what is now Vet's Field, from about 1946 to 1955. Photo Courtesy, Stephanie Seiffert Bachman.
South St. Paul Creates “The Great White Way”
June 2015
By Lois Glewwe

Over the past few months this column has addressed the many ways in which South St. Paul changed after World War II in terms of expanding residential neighborhoods to the west and building new single family homes on every available lot as developers and investors sought to provide housing to returning veterans.

In addition to that more private residential boom, city officials also began to visualize a downtown that was bright, shiny, modern and new. By the early 1950s, as post-war families began to establish themselves in the city, businesses, schools and city services were required to provide new roads, water, sewer, fire, police and other city services.

Many visionaries looked to Concord Street as one of the places that needed to change. The old thoroughfare, which had served the area as the St. Paul and Hastings Road since the 1850s, was lit in some places by old-fashioned street lights and divided by raised streetcar tracks in both directions. Parts of Concord were still paved with the original brick paving from the early 1900s. People driving automobiles had to wait for the streetcars at every intersection and the tracks made it difficult to travel smoothly through town.

For current residents who are not familiar with the major changes that took place, it is important to realize that what we think of as Concord today – the four-lane thoroughfare that speeds traffic through the city from north to south, did not exist. Concord Street then was what we know today as Concord Exchange, the two-lane street which provides our current access to the Post Office and other establishments on the old street. The big four-lane road was where the railroad tracks ran and there was nothing there but a dirt path alongside the tracks.

In the photo that accompanies this story, the Exchange Building is on the corner across from Drover’s Exchange State Bank. The famous clock on that corner had been in place for generations and was a local city landmark by the time this photo was taken in 1952. Next to the Exchange is the Stockyards National Bank building, built in 1915 and demolished in the 1990s. Globe Publishing Company, which has been in business in the city since 1919, is the next building and the Federal Post Office, built in 1930, completes that side of the street in this image.

The construction activity in the photo captures the removal of the streetcar tracks in order to repave the road and move the public from riding streetcars to using busses. Newspaper articles and city hall press releases promoted the change as bringing Concord Street from the past into “The Great White Way.” The last streetcar run on Concord Street was on March 19, 1952. Members of the Chamber of Commerce symbolically rode the last streetcar out of town and came back into the city on a shiny new bus. In addition to the
removal of the tracks, Concord Street was now to be illuminated with modern street lights that brought shining bright white light to the old city center.

No matter how much civic leaders wanted to turn the old Concord strip into a modern suburban shopping mecca, there was no denying that just across the railroad tracks were the two largest meatpacking plants in the country. The smell of manure, the tang in the air from the tannery, the omnipresent atmosphere which confronted visitors and residents from the dozens of bars, taverns, pool halls and gambling joints up and down the street made it difficult to imagine that the improvements would make a real difference. The movement to create the “Great White Way” perhaps inspired civic leaders to begin to visualize just how different things would be if the entire old Concord strip were demolished and replaced by the shiny, new, modern buildings and businesses of post war America. It took almost twenty years for that possibility to become reality but it was perhaps those 1952 bright, white lights that inspired some to feel that the old South St. Paul needed a major facelift.

CAPTION: In 1952, South St. Paul tore up the streetcar tracks from the old Concord Street (now Concord Exchange). The objective was to welcome busses to town and to eliminate the old streetcars. In addition to the track removal, new street lighting was promoted as bringing the city center to modern America by creating “The Great White Way.”
The Last Drugstore Closes
July 2015
By Lois Glewwe

The closing of Pro Pharmacy on the southwest corner of Fifth and Marie Avenues in South St. Paul marked the end of an era for the city. Not only was Pro the last drugstore still in operation in the city, but its location marks a major event in South St. Paul’s history. Prior to 1905, the City Council had prohibited any business from operating “on the hill,” meaning anywhere above Concord Street. When my grandfather, Henry Glewwe, a teetotaler Baptist, came to town to open a grocery business, he did not want to operate among the bars, pool halls and gambling operations on the infamous Concord strip. He was convinced that the people who lived on the hill would appreciate being able to shop for groceries and other goods without having to confront the sights and smells of the stockyards or the rough crowd of livestock industry workers. Glewwe went to the City Council with his request and was ultimately granted permission. He opened his first grocery store in what is now the Fourth Avenue North parking lot for City Hall, then built a new store at 141 Fifth Avenue North and operated the business from there until 1912, when Henry Glewwe’s Staples and Fancy Groceries opened on the Pro Pharmacy site in 1912.

As soon as businesses were permitted to operate on the hill, others took advantage of the new retail possibilities and all kinds of stores opened along Marie Avenue and Southview Boulevard. There were or had been several drugstores on Concord Street by this time. Straight Bros. opened in the Coates Hotel on the southwest corner of Grand and Concord by 1911 and in 1912, Bernie Baker and his partner Homer Crandall opened City Drug at that location, 161 N. Concord. After Bernie’s death, his wife married Tom Hogan and the store became known as Hogan’s City Drug while Homer Crandall operated Central Pharmacy at 158 N. Concord with pharmacist Julius Gericke. Sidney Shom bought Central Pharmacy in 1934 and in 1937, he also took over the City Drug, renaming it Quality Drug. The store remained in business under that name until 1954. Ev and Fred Green opened Green’s Drug at 207 N. Concord by 1920 and were still in business in 1947. In 1923, Julius Gericke opened his own drugstore, Gericke’s Drugs, across from Glewwe’s Grocery on the southeast corner of Fifth and Marie Avenues. He opened a second store at 710 Southview Blvd. by 1930 and sold that location to Ray Aarness who ran the View Pharmacy there from 1937-1962. South Park Pharmacy, or Reid’s as it was known, on the corner of 15th Avenue North at Fourth Street, opened after World War II, and in more recent years, Snyder’s Drugstore was located in the Southview shopping center on 12th Avenue and Southview and Town Drug opened in Fifth Avenue Plaza.

Most of the drugstores had lunch counters or soda fountain service as well as providing health care products and prescriptions, and although the soda foundations disappeared by the 1980s, Gericke’s and Glewwe’s anchored the retail corner of Fifth and Marie Avenues until November 1975 when Greg Schouweiler and Mike Kelly opened Pro Pharmacy in the Gericke’s store location. Glewwe’s closed in 1986, and in 1990 Dale Schenian purchased the Glewwe building and attracted new businesses, including Pro
Pharmacy which moved into the building from the original Gericke’s location across the street. The South St. Paul School District moved its offices into the southwest side of the building where they remain today. In 2006, local artist Robert Zins painted the mural of South St. Paul’s history on the north side of the building, creating an outstanding landmark of public art.

One by one, all of the drugstores in town closed, except for Pro Pharmacy. Snyder’s, which closed in 2009, was the most recent. It has become a fitness center, View Pharmacy on Southview is a photography studio, Town Drug is part of the South St. Paul Community Education facility in the former Fifth Avenue Plaza shopping center. The Concord Street drugstores were demolished in the 1970s urban renewal project. A city that at one time supported several drugstores is now left with none and a corner that has been a retail center since 1912 is no longer open for business.
South St. Paul supported several drugstores over the years. Pro Pharmacy took over the original Gericke’s Drug Store on the southeast corner of Fifth and Marie Avenues in November of 1975. This photo, taken by Fred “Crosby” Grant during a Kaposia Days Parade, includes the telephone booth on the corner, something many people have never seen. Unfortunately the Dish and the Spoon, as well as the Three Men in a Tub, are unidentified.
Our Grand Old City Hall
July 2015
By Lois Glewwe

The impressive Exchange Building on Grand Avenue and Concord Exchange in South St. Paul was not the only elaborate and gracious structure that once dominated the heart of the city. From 1890 to 1953, the junction of Grand Avenue and Third Avenue North, the top of the Grand Avenue hill, was the site of South St. Paul’s first city hall. Today the site is Lawshe Memorial Park, named in honor of Fred E. Lawshe, founder of the Dakota County Historical Society, whose research library and museum is located kitty-corner from the site of the former government center.

The South St. Paul City Council resolved to build a city hall as quickly as possible on May 6, 1889. By November of that year a site in Block 11, called “The Park,” was approved. The building was designed by Minnesota architect John Hopper Coxhead, a nationally renowned builder who also designed several of the city’s first schools. He submitted a bid to construct the building for $8,950, which was thought to be insufficient, but the contract was approved by the City Council. A few weeks later an additional contract was signed for vault doors in the sum of $1,900 to be paid to the Dakota Safe and Lock Company of Canton, Ohio. Eight thousand dollars of the city hall fund was placed in the bank at 4% interests in preparation of paying for the new building.

From the beginning, the construction of the new government center was criticized for being a waste of money. The new City of South St. Paul, which had been incorporated in March of 1887, had just survived an 1889 walk-out by over half of the Council who left and received approval to create the City of West St. Paul, Minnesota, out of the western half of South St. Paul. Months of fighting over money and property had depleted South St. Paul funds and the Council had had to issue $75,000 in bonds to stay afloat in 1889. The fire department and city hall were funded under a 25-year, six percent bonding bill with $5,000 for the fire department and $10,000 for a new city hall.

The opponents had some perhaps justified fire power. Although the stockyards were growing and attracting businesses, success was by no means assured. There were only 2,242 residents in the entire city, just a few businesses along Concord Street, and only one actual packing plant in the yards. The City of West St. Paul, which had been created by the walkout, was still refusing to turn over any funding to South St. Paul and the coffers were empty.

Construction proceeded, however, and on July 28, 1890, the completed city hall was officially accepted and all city officers were ordered to move there. For those who are not old enough to remember the old city hall, it is difficult to describe the impressive grandeur of the structure. Rising as it did out of the Grand Avenue hill, it resembled a mountainous tower of power. It seemed to dominate all directions and the magnificence of it details rivaled the Exchange building in perfection. A true masterpiece of design, it
was terraced into the hill rising behind it and it lent strength and forcefulness to the dramatic separation of the roads which approached it, divided and led upward.

In those early days, the city hall was home to the courts, the police department, the city jail and all other public offices. One of the most treasured stories from South St. Paul history is that of Charles Verdier, who was nicknamed Snowball. Verdier, an African-American, had arrived in town with a traveling musical review in 1923. He missed his train out and was found in a snowbank by South St. Paul police. They brought him to city hall and he became a permanent resident of the building, working as a janitor and handyman, although he was never paid. He became ill and passed away at Riverview Hospital in St Paul on May 17, 1953. He was given a funeral and burial plot was purchased by the South St. Paul policemen who served as his pallbearers at his burial at Oak Hill Cemetery.

Charles Verdier’s death also marked the death of the old city hall. Like so many other cities in the post-war 1950s, South St. Paul wanted everything to be shiny, new and modern and the impressive structure was replaced in 1953 by the mid-century modern box that is today’s city hall right across the street.
South St. Paul’s first city hall opened in July of 1890 at the top of the Grand Avenue hill. Built on one of the city’s largest Indian mounds, it housed the city offices, police department and the jail until 1953, when several residential properties on the west side of Third Avenue North between Marie Avenue and Second Street North were demolished to make way for the construction of the current city hall. The garages in the picture were retained for several years but eventually the site was turned into a park, with a memorial to WWII veterans. Today the site is known as Lawshe Memorial Park.
South St. Paul’s Grand Hotel  
September 2015  
By Lois Glewwe

The unique South St. Paul neighborhood that civic leader Charles Clark called South Park was one of the most elegant parts of the new city by 1889 when the Grand Hotel was built on the southwest corner of Central Avenue at Concord. Clark and his partner John Bryant had attracted dozens of manufacturing firms and commercial businesses to the neighborhood and John Bryant’s brother, Norman L. Bryant, was the hotel owner. He hired his daughter and her husband, James Nichols, to run the operation.

The 59-room hotel and boarding house with its wide and inviting porches was four stories high, with gables along both sides of the top floor. It had no electricity and no running water but offered guests a dining room and a bar as well as a “sample” room, which was advertised on the side of the building. A sample room was used by salesmen and manufacturers as a place to showcase their wares to area businesses and take their orders.

When James Nichols opened the hotel he had a built-in staff in the Muckle family from Ireland who were popular South Park residents. Five of the seven Muckle girls, Margaret, Elizabeth, Martha, Mathilda and Agnes, as well as their only brother John, all worked in the hotel. The girls’ most challenging task was hauling enough water up from the Mississippi River to provide for drinking, bathing, laundry and cooking purposes. They served as maids, cooks and waitresses while also providing clean, pressed shirts for visiting businessmen. Trimming the wicks on the gas lamps, scouring the windows and sweeping the porches kept the Muckle sisters busy.

Hugh Connelly, a longtime family friend of the Muckles who came from the same County Down in Ireland, was granted the first liquor license for the Grand Hotel. In subsequent years, the operators of the bar and holders of the license included Theodore Klett, W.H. Jenkins and J. J. Grisim.

The hotel bustled with business in these early years of the city as newcomers arrived in town to apply for work in the many foundry companies and engine works that were attracted to the area because of the rail operations and the livestock industry. It was also a scene of many elaborate South Park social events. In January of 1891, the South St. Paul Daily Reporter commented on the good times enjoyed by these South Park gentlemen of the early days. In the “gossip” column one finds the following: “The folly of men masquerading in women’s clothes was seen recently at South Park where Jack Shield’s ‘make up’ made Mrs. Shea provoked at her husband, A.J., who was playing escort to the masquerader.”

Like so many wooden structures in the early city, the Grand Hotel caught on fire on May 10, 1904, and burned to the ground. The Dakota County Historical Society has a letter than was written by an unidentified observer describing the conflagration:
“The fire started about 5:00 o’clock in the morning and was still burning fearfully when we came past on our way to work to about 7:30 a.m. I did not see it until I was at the South Park depot. You ought to have seen the big flames and crowd of people, many of who were supposed to have gone to work at Swifts at 7:00 o’clock. The South Park Foundry was nearest to the hotel and some of the fellows had to carry water up in pails and soak the roof which is tarred and could be easily ignited. The fire department ran out of water. South Park has no water works but had a big cistern for the purpose. South St. Paul has a water works which has been there the past two years. But the distance is too far from the fire department’s hose to reach to South Park.”

Fortunately no one was hurt in the fire and all of the guests made it out safely. Early residents recalled that a huge cavernous hole marked the site where the hotel had stood, a constant reminder of the dramatic early morning blaze one-hundred-eleven years ago.
CAPTION: South St. Paul’s Grand Hotel dominated the southwest corner of Concord and Central from 1889 until it burned to the ground in 1904. Concord Street and Central were both dirt roads when this photo was taken and although there appears to be an electric pole near the hotel, the 59-room structure had no electricity and no running water. It did, however, have a liquor license and a restaurant and provided a social center for the rapidly growing new neighborhood known as South Park. Photo Courtesy Dakota County Historical Society
South St. Paul’s Fair Store  
October 2015  
By Lois Glewwe

The end of the World War I in 1919 brought a huge building boom to the growing City of South St. Paul. Armour & Company opened the largest and modern meatpacking facility in the world in the South St. Paul stockyards attracting thousands of new workers to the community and new businesses began to build modern new stores on Concord Street.

One of the pre-WWI arrivals, which expanded significantly after the war, was The Fair Store, founded in 1912 by brothers Charles and Harry Silverman at 158 North Concord. The store was either named after the nation’s first discount department store, The Fair Store in Chicago, Illinois, which opened in 1874, or was perhaps an early franchise of the Chicago company. The South St. Paul store expanded into 149-153 North Concord in 1921, and opened the four-store emporium with great fanfare. In 1925, the original Fair Store in Chicago was purchased by S.S. Kresge, who later became the founder of Kmart. South St. Paul’s Fair Store may have been impacted by the sale because the two Silverman brothers split up around that same time. Charles opened a clothing store across the street back at 158 North Concord and Harry changed the name of The Fair Store to People’s Department Store. People’s may also have been a franchise; a few still exist in the United States today.

People’s only lasted a few years, however, and was purchased by Hy Krinski in 1936. It was Krinsky’s third location for his Grand Mill Furniture Company. He’d opened his original store on the north side of Grand Avenue next to the old Fire Station in 1919. He then moved across Grand in 1923 and took over the main floor of what was known as the Schult Building at 201-203 West Grand Avenue. The move into the former People’s Department store space put Krinsky’s furniture store right next door to Henry Milstein’s Mill Furniture Company at 147 North Concord. The two competitors joined forces in the late 1940s and combined the two businesses as Grand Mill Furniture. Their partnership was dissolved by 1954, however, and Milstein opened under the former name of Mill Furniture at 131 North Concord while Krinsky retained the 149-153 North Concord location and renamed the business Grand Furniture. He shared the building in the 1950s with Kelly LeVander & Gillen law offices, the St. Paul Civic and Commerce Association, the Vavro School of Music and the Kiwanis Club of South St. Paul. In the meantime, Charles Silverman established the Hub Bargain Store in his location at 158-160 North Concord.

In addition to the department stores, South St. Paul was home to dozens of men’s and women’s clothing stores. David Blumenfeld opened a tailor shop at 108 West Grand in 1902 and expanded that business into men’s clothing at 217 North Concord in 1919. David’s son Al Blumenfeld ran the store until 1969, when they sold out to Drover’s Bank under the urban redevelopment program. Other clothing stores on the early Concord Street included Archer’s Clothing. Binder’s Mercantile, Suzar’s and the Rogowski Brothers American Gents Furnishings Company.
Many early South St. Paul residents have fond memories of shopping for clothing at all of the department stores in town. Whether it was new clothes for kids starting school, warm winter coats, shoes for the family or finely tailored suits for the gentlemen of the market, all of the stores offered a wide variety of products and competed for customers with ads in the daily local paper promoting prices, specials and fabulous deals.

CAPTION: South St. Paul’s Fair Store, which was founded in the city in 1912, opened a new four-story building at 149-153 North Concord in 1921. Guests of honor at the April 21st were Blackfeet Indians who were from Glacier National Park. Their names were listed as Little Chief, Big Spring, Curly Bear, Lazy Boy and Bill Shoots. To the right of the Fair Store is the Hook ‘Em Cow Hotel and O.K. Café, opened by Frank Driscoll in 1919. According to the *South St. Paul Daily Reporter*, the new Fair Store boasted elevators, tearooms, sunny display windows and stock worth over $1,000,000 on opening day. The last occupant of the original Fair Store was Grand Furniture which was operated by Stan Krinsky until being demolished during the urban renewal project of the 1970s. Today the site is just south of the now closed Wells Fargo Bank building on Grand and Concord. Photo Courtesy, Dakota County Historical Society
Most current South St. Paul residents know the big white Victorian house on the northwest corner of Southview Boulevard and Third Avenue South as the site of the former “Lu Ann Cecile’s Exceptionale Victorian Day Spa.” LuAnn Hendrix offered area women a hot tub, spa treatments, tanning bed, hair salon and beauty treatments throughout the elegantly decorated rooms of the classic home until the business closed several years ago. As this issue of the South St. Paul Voice is going to press, the property is being demolished to make way for a potential new residence under the Housing and Redevelopment Authority’s Rediscover South St. Paul program.

The house at 152 Third Avenue South was built by one of South St. Paul’s most flamboyant and well-known characters in 1915. Dr. “Johnnie” Campbell had come to town in 1902 and married one of the city’s socialites, Mary Jane Forsythe, in 1903. They had two daughters, Adelaide, born in 1904 and Mildred E, born in 1906. The Doc, as he was often known, built the family the elegant home on Third Avenue South in 1915.

Beyond his medical practice, Dr. Campbell was Minnesota’s first cheerleader, recruiting huge groups of local fans to go to Minnesota Gophers football games and creating the infamous “Hook ‘Em Cow” cheers as the first official “vocalizer” for the team from 1894-1900. Over the years, Doc only missed five away games and never skipped a home town battle. His cheerleaders, decked out with maroon and gold pennants made so much noise that it is said they alone could stun a receiver into getting so distracted that a touchdown was prevented. Besides his honors from the university, Campbell was also a well-known supporter of South St. Paul business efforts and was honored by the Commercial Club for his contributions.

It was a cold snowy night on November 25, 1936, when Doc Campbell saw his last patient, David Blumenfeld, around 7:30 p.m. Blumenfeld, owner of Blumenfeld’s Clothing Store on Concord Street, told a reporter the next day that a call had come in from a man in need of medical help down near Hastings but that the doctor had told the man not to expect him that night since the weather was so bad. Unfortunately, Doc Campbell changed his mind and after closing the office, he headed for Hastings. He completed the call but then, on the way home, his car was blown off the highway, flipped several times and he was killed instantly. In one of those quite amazing South St. Paul coincidences, Dakota County Attorney Harold Stassen and his assistant were in the car behind the doctor and rushed to his aid, while flagging down traffic in an effort to get help.

The doctor’s funeral was held at the Masonic Temple on the northwest corner of Marie and Fourth Avenue North. The 61-year-old physician’s pallbearers included his close friends Thomas Crosby and Sidney Johnson, stockmen; Edgar McAlpine, chief of police; Frank McCormick, athletic director at the University of Minnesota; Clinton E. Tuttle,
Dakota County registrar of deeds and Don McMillan, general passenger agent of the St. Paul Railroad. At the time of his death, Doc Campbell’s daughter Adelaide was already married to Fred Grant and was living at their home at 353 Grand Avenue in South St. Paul. They had two children, Fred “Crosby” Grant and Gail Grant Klug. Neither of the children ever knew their famous grandfather Campbell. The doctor’s daughter Mildred Campbell remained in the family home with her widowed mother and then began to raise her own family there after marrying veterinarian Thomas Muxlow of South St. Paul. They moved to a lovely new home across from Southview Acres when their daughter Maretta was ten years old and the Karl Bester family purchased the Campbell house on Third Avenue South, living there for several years before it became LuAnn’s salon. Curious neighbors have been keeping an eye on the property for the past few years. Like so many older homes, lack of upkeep and eventually LuAnn’s inability to continue working, led to the roof being damaged and water leaking into the house, causing irreparable damage to the electrical and heating systems, the ceiling and the flooring. Vandals reportedly broke in and stole all of the copper wiring in recent years and the memorable Campbell mansion will now fade into memory.
CAPTION: Dr. John and Mary Jane Forsythe Campbell moved into their new home at 152 Third Avenue South in 1915. This photo, taken by Reinhold O. Werner in 1971, was taken before the gracious old house was turned into LuAnn Cecile’s Day Spa and Salon in the 1980s. Years of neglect and vandalism took their toll on the property and as this issue of the South St. Paul Voice goes to press, the South St. Paul is demolishing the house to make way for a potential new residence. Photo Courtesy, Dakota County Historical Society
Recruiting in Romania
December 2015
By Lois Glewwe

In 1912, Charles Clark opened a new bank named Drover’s in what was then the O’Brien Building on the northwest corner of Grand and Concord. Otto J. Schumacher, a successful Chicago banker, left his position at St. Paul’s Capital National Bank 1909, and became the president of South St. Paul’s Drover’s Bank in 1913.

Mitchell Choban, who emigrated to South St. Paul from Romania in 1913, went to work in the packing plants, served the United States in on the Mexican Border Patrol during World War I, and then was hired by Drover’s Bank as the Manager of the Foreign Exchange and Travel Bureau in 1920. He spoke seven languages and was an invaluable resource to the hundreds of immigrants who were pouring into South St. Paul to work in the packing plants.

In 1923, Otto Schumacher and Mitchell Choban embarked on one of the most remarkable journeys of their lives. Schumacher was 38 years old and Choban was just 24 when Drover’s Bank sent them to Europe for a little over three months. Their job assignment was to establish business connections for Drover’s Bank that would facilitate the recruitment and immigration of people to South St. Paul. Mitchell Choban had been in the U.S. for ten years when the trip brought him back home to see friends and family in Romania. Otto Schumacher, born and bred in Illinois, recorded the sites, foods, experiences, weather, travel difficulties, astonishing landscapes and people he encountered as they traveled across the U.S. and Europe in these years between the two world wars. His grandson, Otto Schumacher, sent me a copy of Otto’s journal earlier this year with permission to share it with the South St. Paul community.

What is perhaps most fascinating about this trip is the friendship and professional relationship that made it possible for these two men from such different backgrounds to become colleagues and friends. Both men played vital roles in the civic and community organizations of South St. Paul in the city’s formative years. Schumacher was the first president of the South St. Paul Library Board and led the county-wide distribution of Liberty Bonds during World War I. He became the first president of the South St. Paul Kiwanis in 1920 and then donated the children’s wading pool on the site of today’s Central Square which provided the first public swimming pool to the city. A Master of the Mizpah Lodge, Otto Schumacher was also president and member of the Board of Southview Country Club and was an active member of the South St. Paul Commercial Club, the forerunner of today’s River Heights Chamber.

Mitchell Choban was an officer in dozens of civic organizations including the South St. Paul Charter Commission, the Chamber of Commerce and the Boy Scouts of America Council. He was a member of the South St. Paul Kiwanis, serving as President and officer for many years. During World War II, Choban was the Chief Air Raid Warden for Dakota County and later became a successful realtor in the city. Perhaps most interesting
is that he was the Minnesota representative at the first atomic detonation in Las Vegas in 1953 and again in 1955.

These two men, one a Mason, who was a member of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in South St. Paul, and the other, a founder of St. Stefan’s Romanian Orthodox Church, were examples of the kind of ethnic and professional relationships which were such an important part of the city’s history. They were among the earliest promoters of South St. Paul, taking the city’s and Drover’s Bank’s opportunities to banks and organizations overseas.

Sadly, Otto Schumacher died in a tragic automobile accident on June 18, 1930, on Concord Street and Annapolis. He was just 45 years old and his funeral at St. Andrew’s was one of the largest ever seen in the community. His wife, Corinne, and children Joe and Ruth, remained in the family home and both Joe and Ruth Schumacher Barrett became beloved and well-known members of South St. Paul’s community. Mitchell Choban lived to the age of 77 years and passed away on October 29, 1975. His grandchildren and great-grandchildren remain a vital part of the parish at St. Stefan’s Romanian Orthodox Church.
CAPTION: Two very unlikely colleagues and friends, Mitchell Choban, a Romanian immigrant, and Otto Schumacher, a Chicago-born successful banker, became Drover’s Bank’s emissaries to Romania in 1923. Pictured here at Drover’s Bank in 1925 are, left to right: Carl Temple, Otto’s son, Joe Schumacher, Al Nelson, Mitchell Choban, Harold Sloan, Mr. Olson, George Woessner, Carl Trout, Mabel Yackel, Art McCoy, Lillian Ringberg, Olga Forester, Abi Pagenkopf, Will Green and Herbert Swanson. Seated are Warren Miller, left, and Otto Schumacher, right.
South St. Paul is one of the few communities in the area that has an astonishing collection of photographs, maps and archival materials that document the city’s past. The Lawshe Museum of the Dakota County Historical Society on 3rd Avenue North houses hundreds of documents and images that chronicle development and changing scenes over the last 150-plus years.

Many of the earliest images are surprising in their subject matter, quality and creativity. Unfortunately, it is not known who these early photographers were who worked from the late 1880s through the early 1920s. One possibility for the source of some of the post-1902 images is Dave Lindblom, who came to South St. Paul from Sweden around that time. He was a cement contractor whose name is still visible in hundreds of sidewalks throughout the city along with his partner L. Newberg.

Whoever the unknown producer of these images was, it seems that much of his collection of negatives and prints came into the possession of another South St. Paul photographer, Reinhold O. Werner, who graduated from the Daguerre Memorial Institute of Photography in Winona Lake, Indiana, in 1935. He worked for Zimmerman Studios in St. Paul for a number of years, while spending summers working for contractor Christ Hansen as a painter and paperhanger. Werner was assigned limited service during World War II because of his growing family, but he spent the war years making wood patterns at the South St. Paul Foundry to contribute to the war effort. In 1952, he opened his first professional photo studio at 515 Marie Avenue, moving to a new studio in 1969 at 750 11th Avenue North.

Werner spent years cataloging and culling the hundreds of negatives that he had been given. The collection included many scenes from Dakota County, but the majority of photographs were of South St. Paul people, schools, city buildings, businesses and street scenes. The Dakota County Historical Society also has many of these same images in its collection and eventually worked closely with Rein Werner to combine their best images into a solid archive. Beginning a few years ago, his daughter Renee Ponto began creating digital images of her father’s collection, which will ultimately be donated to the Minnesota Historical Society so that a broad range of historians can have online access to the photos.

The scene featured in this article is a photograph that was taken in 1915, according to the identification on one of the prints. The photographer is in the middle of 6th Avenue North just south of the intersection with 3rd Street North. On the west, or right side of the street, the spire of St. Paulus German Lutheran Church is visible a block down on 2nd Street North. On the east, or left side of the street, it is clear that the First United Methodist Church has not yet been built so the photo must have been taken before 1924.
It is possible to speculate that the photograph was taken because of the new curbs and sidewalks that are visible alongside the newly planted trees which are just seedlings at this point. There also appears to be a new sewer opening in the lower left corner which may indicate that the street had been added to the public sewer system. There is only one electrical power line visible extending across 6th Avenue at 2nd Street. The inclusion of the sidewalks suggests that this indeed might be one of the photos that cement maker Dave Lindblom took of his own handiwork. At the far end of 6th Street North in the center of the image we should be seeing Marie Avenue but there appears to be a house where 6th Avenue North comes to an apparent dead end.

St. Paulus German Lutheran Church was originally built in 1893 and then burned down and was rebuilt in 1899. It became home to other congregations after 1953 when St. Paulus merged with Trinity and formed Luther Memorial Church. The building was purchased and demolished by the South St. Paul School District in 2012 to make more room for more parking.

All of the homes on the west side of 6th Avenue North were purchased and either moved to new locations or demolished to create the South St. Paul High School parking lot in 1970-71, but thanks to our unknown early photographer and Rein Werner’s later restoration work on the image we can take a visual stroll down one of South St. Paul’s oldest residential streets on a sunny day in 1915.
CAPTION: The top photo was taken looking south on 6th Avenue North in 1915. The bottom picture is the same scene today. All of the homes on the west side of the street were moved or demolished to make way for the High School parking lot in 1970-71.
The Armour Gates

Two stately structures rise out of the open grassland on the south side of Armour Avenue in South St. Paul. Identical in size and design, they no longer serve any purpose except to mark the site of what was the main entrance to the massive Armour & Company meatpacking plant from 1919 to 1979. Armour Avenue, which is now a few feet to the north, once ran right through the two gates and all livestock shipments, visitors, cattle growers and others driving into the 40-plus acre campus had to pass through their shadow and communicate their business to the gatekeepers – one managing incoming traffic and the other handling the outgoing vehicles.

When Armour’s closed in 1979, the world’s largest slaughterhouse campus fell silent and traffic was no longer monitored through the towering gates. For ten years, the pillars stood as guardians over the land even as Mike Kassan purchased the former plant property and attempted to redevelop the site as Armour Place. Kassan hoped that the five-story plant might be renovated into a hotel/entertainment complex that might include businesses and housing. Eventually it became clear that the property, polluted for decades by the daily operation of the slaughter industry and related operations, simply wasn’t marketable for reuse and in 1989, the South St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) purchased the site from Kassan and began to make plans for demolition.

One of the challenges was to negotiate with the Greyhound Corporation that was then owner of Armour’s, to agree to assist with pollution abatement and demolition. The HRA was ultimately successful in achieving an agreement with Greyhound and demolition proceeded.

Within a short time, citizens began to encourage the HRA to save at least some elements of the old plant. The Armour office building was entered through an interesting white portico structure on the south side of the building and it was felt that the portico could be incorporated into either business site or an area park. That same group and others fought to preserve the gates themselves as a reminder and monument to what had been the city’s major industry since 1886.

When then Mayor Katherine Trummer swung the first ceremonial hammer against the walls of the office building in 1989, the portico had successfully been removed and moved into storage and the gates were allowed to remain as the guardians of the old entrance.

Businesses began to move into the area around the gates as the HRA, the City, Progress Plus and the Chamber of Commerce began the first discussions that led to the establishment of today’s Bridgepoint Business Park. One of the businesses in the area,
S&S Tree Service, agreed to maintain the grounds around the gates and development proceeded.

Over the years, several citizens inquired about the portico and wondered where it might be used but no one ever came forward with a proposal to make it into some kind of viable structure. In 2010, the HRA sold the portico to Building Restoration Corporation in Roseville. They saved the stonework for incorporation into the façade of a future building addition at their Broadway Street location in Northeast Minneapolis.

As for the gates themselves, S&S Tree Service has been sold and the new owners have no agreement to take care of the site. The HRA continues to own the land where the gates are located and has no plans for them other than it being a place where people can view them. A historical marker was installed next to the gates by the South St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society in 1997. At one point the HRA investigated what it might cost to move them in case a new business wanted to locate on that site but were informed that it was too costly and not physically possible to move them without harming the structures.

So they remain, reigning as they have for nearly one hundred years over the site of what was once the heart and soul of South St. Paul’s economic livelihood and identity.

CAPTION: The gates to the Armour’s meatpacking plant marked the entrance to the site of the city’s largest packing plant beginning in 1919 and remained in service until Armour’s closed in 1979. It is remarkable to note the detailed and elaborate brick work, design and detailed cornice work, along with the bridgework and decoration that adorns these utilitarian entry gates. Armour Avenue once ran directly through the center of the two pillars.
A Personal Farewell to Jefferson  
February 2016  
By Lois Glewwe

Many longtime South St. Paul residents remember when neighborhoods were defined by the elementary school that its children attended. From Wilson at the far north end of town to Washington (now the site of Kaposia) at the far south end, the public school was the gathering place for PTA’s, Girl Scout and Campfire Girl meetings, Boy Scout Troops, voting booths and musical programs. The last neighborhood school to be built was Jefferson Elementary at 21st Avenue and Southview. The state of the art modern school opened for classes in September of 1954 and was doubled in size by September of 1955 to accommodate the hundreds of children whose families were rapidly buying property and building new homes in the new Oak Park development and neighboring areas.

The kindergarten room was big and bright with multi-colored tile on the floor and truly open concept learning spaces. Outside was a wonderful playground with swing sets and a full size ball field. There was a movie room in the basement where we got to watch occasional films, including that horribly embarrassing sex education program in sixth grade for which the girls and boys were separated for viewing sessions. It was also the high point of the Cold War and we were required to take part in drills where we had to practice diving under our desks in case we were attacked by a nuclear bomb.

It’s hard to imagine today but when Jefferson was built, Marie Avenue west of 15th was a dirt road and Southview Boulevard was paved but had no sidewalks. Twenty-first Avenue was just being constructed and most land to the west was orchards, ponds, woods and former farmlands. There were no water or sewer drains and I remember literally wading to school all the way from 15th up to 21st in deep water when it rained or during a spring snow melt. There were very few homes on Southview and almost none on Marie Avenue from Oak Hill Cemetery all the way to 21st Avenue.

Development happened quickly in the 1950s and early 1960s and by the time I was in sixth grade, homes had been built all over Oak Park, and the streets to the east as well as up and down Southview and on 15th to 18th Avenues both north and south. Jefferson never had a lunch program. Everyone got out of class at around 11:30 a.m. and walked home for lunch (Moms were always home in those days) and then back to class by 12:30 p.m., just enough time to watch the Casey Jones show on TV.

Perhaps the most special thing about Jefferson, though, was the tennis court, where the Parks and Recreation Department held summer dances for teens, the wonderful sliding hill off of Marie Avenue and the warming house and skating rink where many of us spent hours after school, at night, and on weekends perfecting our figure eights and learning to skate backwards and practicing our twirls until a gang showed up and we’d play skate tag until we were frozen cold and exhausted. We’d head into the warming shack with its wood burning stove where we’d toss our wet mittens on the grate and the smell of sweaty socks, sweaty kids and wet wool wafted over the wooden benches. We’d then trudge
home in the dark, our skates over our shoulders and without a worry or care in the world about being abducted or harmed in any way.

Jefferson School closed in 1983 after only 29 years as a public school and the building was sold to The Word Church in 1987. In 2015, their operations closed at the site and the school district purchased the school property. Agreements between city and school over the years preserved the recreation spaces on the site for community use and those operations will continue but the school itself will be demolished. Asbestos contamination, water damage and other issues make re-use impossible. The School District is currently searching for funding to begin clearing the site.

I will be sad to see it go. In first grade, I got my first real kiss from a boy under the portico on 21st Avenue and I, like thousands of Jefferson kids, I have many fond memories of our time in the school, the last of the neighborhood elementary schools that so many longtime residents still miss today. Wilson, Roosevelt, Washington, Central and Lincoln are already gone; now we prepare to say farewell to Jefferson.

**CAPTION:** Jefferson School on 21st and Southview opened for classes in September 1954. At the time the building was only constructed as far as the portico which faces 21st Avenue. It was doubled in size in time for classes in September 1955 to accommodate the hundreds of children whose parents were purchasing land and building new homes in Oak Park and adjacent neighborhoods. Jefferson was a public elementary school until 1983 and in 2015, it is being prepared for demolition. Photo Courtesy, Rein Werner Collection
From 1918 to 1965, South St. Paul was the site of the Junior Livestock Show, also known as the state 4-H Livestock Show. The event was created by W.A. McKerrow, livestock specialist for the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Supported by the Minnesota Livestock Breeders Association and local meatpacking firms, the first show was held at the South St. Paul stockyards in December 1918 with rules set up by the boys and girls club staff at University Farm.

The first show produced only 31 beef calves, but the idea caught on and became an annual 4-H event. The program gave agents a way to build trust with parents by teaching their children how to manage their livestock. Another reason the clubs were promoted was that researchers at experiment stations of the land-grant universities and U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) saw that adults in the farming community did not readily accept new agricultural discoveries, but educators found that youth would experiment with these new ideas and then share their experiences and successes with the adults. Rural youth programs soon became a way to introduce new agriculture technology to the adults.

By 1918, 4-H had grown across the Midwestern United States. A. B. Graham started one of the first youth programs in Clark County, Ohio, in 1902, which is considered one of the first 4-H programs in the United States. T.A. “Dad” Erickson of Douglas County, Minnesota, also started local agricultural after-school clubs and fairs in 1902. Jessie Field Shambaugh developed the clover pin with an H on each leaf in 1910, and, by 1912, they were called 4-H clubs. The national 4-H organization was formed in 1914, when the United States Congress created the Cooperative Extension Service of the USDA. Although different activities were emphasized for boys and girls, 4-H was one of the first youth organizations to give equal attention to both genders.

At first the show only included cattle. Lambs and hogs were added in 1919 and poultry made its first appearance in 1924. The annual show was canceled only once – in 1946 when the polio epidemic made it too dangerous for the children to all gather in one place. The show moved to the State Fairgrounds in 1965 and has remained part of the agricultural awards program at the fair ever since.

It’s interesting that the first show opened only a few weeks after the end of World War I on November 11, 1918. Armour’s had not yet opened in the South St. Stockyards; Swift & Company was the only major local packer at the time with Armour’s beginning operations in December of 1919. It’s also interesting that South St. Paul was the location for the show since there was very little livestock being raised in the city; 4-H kids were usually from Inver Grove, West St. Paul or other farming communities around the state.
South St. Paul was, however, responsible for housing the younger farmers while they were in town. Many people recall the boys sleeping at one or another of the school gymnasiums in town; I haven’t found anyone who recalls where the girls were housed.

Early newspaper accounts of the Junior Livestock Show are extremely matter of fact about these young farmers who were photographed with their winning animals. It was clear that the children raised the animals from birth, groomed them, fed them, named them and then sold them to one of the slaughterhouses. For city kids who were only used to having only domestic pets, it was no doubt a shock to learn what happened to these award winning animals.

Today, the current young farmers who exhibit their animals at county fairs and ultimately at the State Fair, do exactly the same thing that their earlier counterparts did. I recall a few of the prize winning 4-Hers speaking at a South St. Paul/Inver Grove Heights Rotary Club meeting several years ago. Both boys and girls were there to talk about their experiences and were questioned about how they handled giving their beloved animals over to a meatpacker. They all explained that they knew the difference between a pet and an animal that was being raised for food and they’d known from their first visit to their family’s cattle or livestock barn that all of those working animals would end their lives at a packing plant. Some things never change.

CAPTION: This photo from the Dakota County Historical Society collections is not dated but it is labeled “4-H boys sleeping quarters at South St. Paul High School. When I posted the photo earlier this year on Facebook, however, many people commented that they thought this was Roosevelt gymnasium while others agreed that it was what was called “the old gym” at the high school in space that later became the cafeteria. I’d love to hear what others think? Is this the high school or Roosevelt? I think, from the boys’ clothing, that it looks like the 1940s. You can email me at lglewwe@hotmail.com with your answer.
The 1950s was an era of growth and modernization for South St. Paul. Hundreds of new homes were built all over the city from Park Lane to Oak Park to the South End to the Jefferson School neighborhood to streets extending north and south off of Southview Boulevard. The streetcar tracks were removed from Concord Street and new neon lighting installed to create what was called “The Great White Way.” The packing plants were running full shifts and the city’s schools were overflowing with the baby boomers who ushered in the post-World War II population explosion that still impacts America today.

In 1959, a group of enterprising businessmen came together to build the city’s first modern motel and supper club, The Golden Steer, at 1010 South Concord, now the site of Fury Motors. Vance Grannis, Sr. represented the Chamber of Commerce at the groundbreaking; Ed Lehmann was the owner and operator of the business. An advertisement box in the 1964 Polk Directory lists the establishment as “The Golden Steer Motor Hotel, Coffee Shop, Dining Room, Cocktail Lounge, Heated Pool, Deluxe Suites, Bridal Accommodations, Meeting Rooms and Convenient Facilities.”

From opening day, the new restaurant/motel became a popular location for high school proms, wedding receptions, anniversaries, birthday dinners, Chamber of Commerce meetings, high school reunions and impressive “first dates.” The pool, dramatically lit at night to create the ultimate ambience, was reportedly a popular spot for teens to sneak into for a midnight swim. The restaurant, which was named Dakota House by the early eighties, was known for its steaks, of course, and the menu included the classic options that mid-century modern supper clubs throughout the metro area offered to patrons. The bar featured a piano player and song man who entertained the group nightly. Many high school students found part-time jobs as waitpersons, cleaners and front desk representatives or worked in the office and dozens of adults worked full time in a variety of positions over the years. When the Golden Steer opened, Robert Street was still under development and West St. Paul never did have a motel/restaurant that could compete with South St. Paul’s newest night spot.

Unfortunately, like so many businesses in South St. Paul, the Golden Steer was impacted by the closing of Swift & Company in 1969 and Armour’s departure from the community in 1979. Urban renewal had resulted in the demolition of 136 buildings on Grand, Concord and Pitt Street and most of those businesses had not relocated or reopened, meaning that their owners no longer headed to the Golden Steer for business lunches or an after work drink. The city’s workforce and economy had been devastated and without the packing plants, there was less demand for motel rooms locally. The coffee shop and restaurant continued to operate but over time, many of the motel rooms were offered as weekly or monthly rentals.
It wasn’t long before the bar and restaurant closed and only the motel operated on a limited basis. Times had changed and South St. Paul was a very different place than it had been in 1959. In 1998, Harold “Red” Leonard and his sons, Tom and Jim, purchased the property from Ed Lehmann and demolished the once elegant supper club, pool and motel. They salvaged the remarkable etched glass panels that had decorated the bar and incorporated them into the new Fury Motors which opened on the site in 1999. Many longtime city residents often recall, however, when they grab a cup of coffee and a magazine and find a chair in the comfortable fireplace lounge that is Fury’s service waiting area, that they are once again enjoying a visit to the site of the memorable Golden Steer, South St. Paul’s premier supper club.

LEFT: AERIAL
CAPTION: The three buildings in the center are the restaurant and pool next to the two motel buildings of the Golden Steer. Today the site is Fury Motors. Fred “Crosby” Grant took this photo in the 1970s.
LEFT: POOL PHOTO: The pool at the Golden Steer was a popular place for neighborhood teens to sneak into for a midnight swim.

LEFT: RESTAURANT PHOTO: This postcard photo of the Dakota House, the restaurant at the Golden Steer, was taken in 1965. Hundreds of civic meetings, special events and business lunches were celebrated in the elegant dining room.
WCOW – South St. Paul’s Radio Station
June 2016
By Lois Glewwe

Many early South St. Paul residents remember when WCCO Radio broadcast livestock market news live from the Exchange Building. The local broadcast began in 1926 when market reporter Al Smeby, Sr. became the first voice of the South St. Paul market. In 1929, a new studio opened in the Exchange with loud speakers piped out to the hallways so that people could see and hear the local livestock news. Smeby remained in South St. Paul until 1942 when he was called to Washington, D.C. to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). He returned to the city in 1960. By that time, the Livestock Market Institute had taken over the 26 daily market reports.

Al Smeby’s recollections of the early days of local radio were published in an article in the Dakota County Historical Society’s newsletter, “Over the Years,” in April 1970. He remembered his first live broadcast from the new studio on November 12, 1929. “This was the year of the never-to-be-forgotten stock market crash with its many repercussions. But at Christmas time that year a little surprise occurred during my Christmas Eve broadcast that folks talked about for many years. After a brief market report I said, ‘After all what is more symbolic of the true Christmas spirit than children’s voices singing familiar Christmas songs?’ Then four little seven-year-old boys from Lincoln School sang ‘Silent Night,’ with an older boy playing the violin.”

WCCO wasn’t South St. Paul’s only radio station, however. In 1951, three brothers, Al, Nick and Vic Tedesco, founded WCOW Radio, licensed in South St. Paul. It played country western and old-time music and signed on with the sound of a ringing cowbell. Jane Timbers Schmidt of South St. Paul recently recalled on Facebook that WCOW “broadcast out of a building where Third Avenue North turns down Grand Avenue. My neighborhood friends and I would stop in and watch them read market reports, and even got mentioned ourselves sometimes.”

Darlyne Pogose, another Facebook contributor wrote, “Do you remember Joe Zingale the DJ who dared to play rock and roll! His special show ending was ‘Mountains of Melted Madness just OOOOOZING all over you!’ ” Zingale started at WCOW in South St. Paul in 1955 and, according to Sam Sherwood, “called himself ‘Mr. Rhythm.’ He just got this wild idea about playing rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues music. Here was a country station, WCOW, and on Saturday afternoon and evening, along came Mr. Rhythm and played the real soul of rhythm and blues. You can't imagine how his popularity took off. When he was on the air, there were hundreds and hundreds of people around the radio station just hanging out and listening to the music. Joe then took it a step further and booked the St. Paul Auditorium for a rhythm and blues show with great locals such as Augie Garcia. It was an overnight smash.” Zingale succumbed to Parkinson's Disease on March 10, 2014, at the age of 80.
Contributor Bill Brown recalled, “The station played a dirty trick. Call to name a song and you won a diamond ring. One of my sisters called named it correctly and she went to collect. What she got was a ‘Dime and Ring’...ca 1953.” Otto Schumacher shared his thoughts as well, “Of course I remember WCOW. I've always thought it was pretty special that a town would consider it a point of pride to have a radio station with ‘cow’ in its name. That's my town!”

According to the historical record, Al Tedesco wanted to call the station WPIG or WHOG but Vic Tedesco protested and Nick Tedesco came up with WCOW which was thought to be a bit less offensive. The OW part of the name was also appropriate since the records played on the station were reportedly labeled either ‘O’ for Old Time or ‘W’ for Western. Guy Lombardo records were said to be used as the filler between featured songs and the religious programs that were part of the station’s entertainment roster.

WCOW had a brief broadcast life, however. It was renamed WISK in May 1956 and the format changed from Country and Western to a combination of Lombardo and Lawrence Welk renditions with an occasional pop song added to the mix. In October of 1958, the station moved from 1590 on the dial to 630 kc and adopted a women’s only format. The new format included horoscopes, advice to the lovelorn and minute-long lectures on sex, marriage and family problems. It only lasted a few months until June of 1959 when it became KDWB, a top-forty pop station which became a huge hit in the 1960s and 1970s when its biggest competitor in the local market was WDGY. Of course, by then, its South St. Paul livestock market origins were a long forgotten memory.
CAPTION: South St. Paul’s own country/western radio station began broadcasting from the city in 1951. It introduced rhythm and blues in 1955 but underwent a name change to WISK in 1956 and then to KDWB in 1959. It is interesting to note that the WCOW advertising sheet pictured here claims South St. Paul as the “World’s Second Largest Livestock Center,” rather than the First Largest which was the most common claim to fame in those years.
The Boys (and Girls) of Summer  
July 2016  
By Lois Glewwe

It seems as though no matter where a person might be driving, biking or walking around South St. Paul on a summer evening, there are hundreds of kids playing organized sports. Soccer fields are always in demand and crowded with parents vying for the best view of their team. Softball diamonds are scheduled months in advance to serve a variety of leagues for all ages. The new fields at Kaposia Landing are evidence of how more and more family recreational time is focused on organized sports even as the residents of Kassan Court get used to having bright lights illuminating their back yards when games are in play.

Summertime in South St. Paul a century ago wasn’t all that different when it came to sports. From the early years of the 1900s up through the 1980s, hundreds of teams were sponsored by organizations like the South St. Paul Police Department, local churches, the VFW, the American Legion, the Moose Lodge, the Polish National Alliance, the Croatian Hall, the city Parks and Recreation Department and local businesses from car dealers to grocery stores to Concord Street taverns.

There are two important differences to note, however. Soccer didn’t really take off in Minnesota until the 1980s and the Minnesota Thunder became the state’s first professional team in 1990. Schools and Parks Board all over the state immediately began fielding requests for soccer teams for young players and before long students were signing up for after school and summer leagues. Today soccer is the predominant sport in all school districts.

The other difference today from the early 1900s is that girls didn’t play in organized sports in any official capacity until the 1970s and 1980s. Girls participated in softball in elementary school during spring time recess, and once they got to junior and senior high, they played field hockey in gym class once it was warm enough to be outside. There were a few women’s leagues for softball games in town over the years but most of the teams sponsored by the city, churches and local businesses were restricted to boys.

Sports weren’t confined to warm summer days, of course, Amateur hockey leagues were active as early as the 1930s and there were dozens of basketball teams sponsored by local organizations and businesses. Girls played basketball in junior and senior high school as part of their gym requirements, but no local leagues existed for them.

Girls also did not play hockey although many were expected to learn to figure skate but not on school time. The Title IX legislation which championed women’s rights to play all sports in schools and universities that received federal funding took effect in 1978. Although local schools were not impacted by that year’s legislation, South St. Paul reacted to the national movement, and in the 1980s, a local effort began to organize teams that would enroll girls to play Ringette. Created in Canada, the game is played on an ice
surface and uses a blue rubber pneumatic ring instead of a hockey puck. All players, with the exception of goaltenders, use a straight stick. One of the sport's most recognizable and defining features is the fact that it does not involve the use of intentional body contact as a strategic component. It wasn’t long before Ringette players were vying with the male hockey players for space at South St. Paul’s Doug Woog Arena, then known as Wakota Arena.

South St. Paul girls played Ringette for only a few years before ongoing legislative action made it mandatory for schools to allow girls to participate in most team sports. From 2002-2006, the South St. Paul Girls Hockey team won the state championship four times in the Class AA competition, something the boys hockey teams had not achieved since the 1980s.

In any case, it’s still not hard to encounter the boys and girls of summer playing ball on a green and grassy field, surrounded by lawn chairs filled with adoring parents and grandparents. Dogs watch contentedly while their owners stop to chat with a neighbor and children swarm the ice cream truck that slowly drives by playing its tempting tune. It’s all just a sign of summer in our fair city as it has been for over a century.
CAPTION: The South St. Paul Junior Police League in this mid-1950s photo included many players who remain part of today's community.

Front, left to right: Richard Lick, Bob (Butch) Anderson, Philip Lesch. Middle, left to right: Michael Klug, Henry (Hank) Metcalf, Loren Peterson, Francis Reckinger. Back, left to right: Charles Farho, Gary Brown, Herman Todd, Bruce Hansen, Donald Kilcher. Richard Lick was just inducted into the South St. Paul Sports Hall of Fame for hockey. Phil Lesch, Michael Klug, Charles Farho, Gary Brown and Herman Todd were in the Class of 1953 at South St. Paul High School. The coach of the team was "Chick" McClain. Organized leagues for boys were sponsored by dozens of local businesses and organizations. Girls didn't get into the games until the 1980s. Photo by Fred "Crosby" Grant.
It’s been nearly forty years since South St. Paul underwent the huge transformation that changed Concord and Pitt Streets and Grand Avenue forever. One of the last buildings to be demolished was the Werner Building. Over the years, the corner spot housed dozens of small businesses along with several union locals. The structure had two addresses, 221-229 W. Grand and 206-208 Third Avenue North, depending on which door faced which street. Today the site is the Grand Hill Condominiums.

The original building was owned by Richard J. Werner who operated Werner’s Appliances, Radios, Records, and Gifts (later Werner’s Furniture Dealers) there in the 1940s. While the smaller offices were occupied by several firms, a club for youth called Klub Kaposia opened in the space at 208 Third Avenue North in about 1953. Many South St. Paulites remember the live bands and comedians that kept Klub Kaposia hopping. The youth club was established when a teenager’s party in South St. Paul led to arrests for illegal drinking. It was felt that if teens had a place to gather they’d be less likely to get in trouble. No drinking was allowed in the club, but smoking was. Barry Cosgrove and Jay Helm, newly returned from the Korean War, were hired to run the concession stand in the club during its heyday.

In another musical mode, the Traficante Accordion School (later known as the Rex-Charles Accordion Studio and eventually Rex Accordion and Guitar), owned by Edward Rechtzigel, Jr. opened at 206 Third Avenue North by 1954. Patti Plaisted of the Debonair Dance Studio welcomed students at 208 Third Avenue North, also in the 1950s. Her space became the Mary Vavro School of Dance by 1959. Mary opened her first dance studio with her brother Adolph in 1932. That school was in the Grand Mill Building on Concord for many years before moving to the Werner Building. One of the city’s first pizza parlors opened in the Werner Building in the 1960s with its entrance on the corner of the intersection of Grand and Third.

By 1959 United Packing House Workers of America, AFL-CIO, District 2 and Locals 74, 160 and 167 had moved into the Grand Avenue side of the building. In addition to their offices, the Union Hall was the site of hundreds of wedding receptions as South St. Paul celebrated with family and friends from the 1950s to the 1970s. Members of the Union could rent the hall for $25.00.

When Swift’s closed in 1969, their local union closed, and the Armour’s local bought the building, reportedly for $1.00. By that time the name of the building had been changed to Club 167, named after the original local and recognizing the social nature of the hall’s functions.

Some of the other businesses located in the Werner Building/Club 167 over the years included: Thorp Loan and Thrift Company; Suburban Gas; Larry Hunt & Associates,
Insurance; Wisconsin Life Insurance Company; and Kassan Realty. By 1964, Dakota County Mental Health Services was in the building along with A.P. Weigel Real Estate; Gino D’Amalfi, Accountant; Beedle Law Firm; and the South St. Paul Construction Company. In the 1968 directory new businesses on site included Sigal, Savelkoul, Cotten, Sween and Salazar, Attorneys; and Lucking’s Accounting and Tax Service with owner Martin Luckings; Ten years later, Neighbors Clothes Closet was located in the Grand Avenue building and The Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Livestock Handlers Local 160 were listed along with Moore’s Rent-A-Car; Moore Company Real Estate; and the Southwest Cab Company.

The corner was a vibrant and vital part of the city for almost fifty years and was typical of the hundreds of businesses that once called South St. Paul home.
CAPTION: This photo, taken by Fred “Crosby” Grant in 1977, captures a long-gone corner of South St. Paul history. The Werner Building was at the juncture of Third Avenue North and Grand and housed dozens of local businesses over the years. In the background, heading south on Third, is Ramsey Auto Body, the Zephyr Gas Station (formerly the M&H), the library and the Nan McKay High Rise. Everything on Grand Avenue had been torn down except the Werner Building which was demolished shortly after this photo was taken from the roof of the John Carroll High Rise.
A Busy Business Corner in SSP
September 2016
By Lois Glewwe

The southwest corner of 7th and Marie Avenues in South St. Paul has been a prime business location since 1925 when brothers Adam, John and Nick Bartl purchased the original Bethesda Lutheran Chapel on the site and built Bartl Bros. Hardware and Sheet Metal. The original store burned down in 1941 but was rebuilt and opened in May of that year. In 1947, the brothers dissolved their partnership and Nick Bartl, his son Joe and sons-in-law Bob Gross and Bill Healy took over. Nick died in 1948 and in 1960, the roofing and sheet metal part of the business was sold and the building was enlarged and expanded to include sporting goods. In 1966, Joe took over the business along with his sons Bob and Paul.

Hundreds of South St. Paul residents recall shopping at Bartl’s where the aisles were packed with open bins of screws, bolts, nut and other metal parts, seasonal displays of shovels, lawnmowers and every possible kind of glue and tape along with electrical equipment, batteries and unusual parts for small motors and other appliances. In the icy months of winter, stopping by Bartl’s to have one’s ice skates sharpened was a regular occurrence. All year long, many a local kid wandered the tightly spaced aisles to study the latest in basketballs, footballs, golf equipment, softball gloves, bats, tennis rackets, badminton nets and roller skates. My own dad went to Bartl’s a lot and I remember that I always thought Dad must be pretty important because everyone in the store always knew his name. I didn’t realize that the Bartls made a point of knowing everyone’s name and that was one of the many things that kept shoppers coming back.

Bartl’s closed in 1975, and in 1976 Ronald Mergens opened Ronald’s Men’s Wear on the prime corner location. Ron had originally owned a men’s store at 909 Southview called Mr. Ron’s. Then he and his partner Eugene “Gene” Rossi worked with Gene's brother, Bob Rossi, who designed the building across the street from Ron's original location. After the partners closed the men’s wear business, Ron moved to the 7th and Marie location and Gene took over the new building, planning to make it into a restaurant. At that point the sale of alcoholic beverages, either in liquor stores or restaurants was not permitted anywhere above or to the west of Third Avenue North. Gene went door-to-door to convince neighbors that the place would not be a saloon, but a fine dining establishment. The elegant supper club opened successfully in 1976 with white linen tablecloths, uniformed servers full bar service.

In 1980 Rita and Jim Jaworski bought the Bartl’s building and opened Rita’s on Marie, a beauty salon which remains in business to the present day. Their location was the west side of the building and Ron’s Men’s Wear remained open until 1982, when Mary D Ann’s Ceramics took over the corner property. About that same time, Geri (Snip) Lick Kluender, Susan Grannis O'Brien, Sandy Bowen Otto and Kathie O'Brien Fleming opened the Paperback Peddler in the west end of the building. People could bring in used paperbacks and receive credit towards their next purchase. Angelo’s Pizza moved into the
corner spot in 1986 and ran the restaurant there for several years until the current manifestation, The Sunlight Cafe, opened in November of 2009, marking 91 years of bustling business enterprises on the site.

CAPTION: The southwest corner of 7th and Marie Avenues in South St. Paul has been the site of a local business since Bartl’s Hardware opened on the site in 1925. On the left is Bartl’s, 1925-1975; middle photo is Ronald’s Men’s Wear, 1976-1982; Mary D Ann’s Ceramics, 1982 to 1986. Photo Credits: Bartl’s by Reinhold O. Werner and Ronald’s Men’s Wear and Mary D Ann’s by Fred “Crosby” Grant.
A few months ago, I sent Jim Metzen a card and letter thanking him for all the things he had done for South St. Paul and reflecting on our personal, sometimes contentious, interactions over the years. Jim called me and was very moved at my words. He said something that made me appreciate one of the most interesting characteristics of South St. Paul. I had commented on what a long history his family had in town and he replied that South St. Paul wouldn’t be what it is without my family – the Glewwe’s. Jim was right – his grandfather and my grandfather knew each other quite well and although they were often on opposite sides of an issue, they were both significant players in South St. Paul’s early history. Many long-time families have shaped our community over the years. That’s not unique to South St. Paul. But the story of the Metzen brothers is quite remarkable.

Jim passed away on July 11, 2016, and only a month later, his older brother, Tom Metzen, died on August 10, 2016. The whole community and their brother, Dave Metzen, are still grieving the loss of these two community leaders.

The first Metzen to come to town was Henry Metzen, Sr. He was an executive in the stockyards industry and married Pearl Gebhart, the daughter of Wallace Gebhart, the Swift’s construction supervisor who oversaw the building of the local Swift & Company plant. Her father and stepmother had brought her to South St. Paul from Chicago in 1897. Henry and Pearl’s son, Floyd “Butch” Metzen, grew up working in the yards and went to work for Swift’s where he led the battle to establish unionization in the meatpacking industry. During World War II, he worked for Northwest Airlines and after the war, he established the Metzen Realty Company in South St. Paul.

Butch married Mary Elizabeth Ross in 1936 and they had three sons: Thomas, born in 1938; David, born in 1941; and James, born in 1943. Butch set a civic example for his boys by serving on the South St. Paul City Council, 1941-1943 and 1955-1958; and as a Dakota County Commissioner, 1943-1954. He was only 52 years old when he died from a heart attack in 1958. Son Tom, who had completed two years at the University of Minnesota, took over the real estate business. Dave and Jim were still in high school.

Tom Metzen ran the local realty firm all of his working life. He and his wife Karen had three children: Tom, Jr; Tim and Kathy. Over the years I learned to contact Tom when I couldn’t quite figure out some little tidbit of stockyards history, especially if it concerned the meatpacking unions. Metzen Realty remains one of the area’s most prominent realty firms today.

Dave Metzen completed high school in town and then graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1964 with a B.S. in Education, obtaining a Master’s and then his Doctorate in Educational Administration in 1972. He was a teacher, principal and assistant
superintendent of South St. Paul Schools until serving as Superintendent from 1982 until 2000. Dave later served as the Interim Executive Director at the Dodge Nature Center and as a Regent at the University of Minnesota from 1997 to 2009, serving as Chair of the Board from 2003-2005. The list of Dave Metzen’s awards and honors in education is extensive and his contributions to South St. Paul spanned everything from excellence in our schools to being a founding member of Community Partnerships, to the development of Central Square, to creating the concept for the South St. Paul Educational Foundation in addition to dozens of other activities. Dave and his wife Leslie, have two sons, Steve and Joe.

Jim Metzen followed in his father’s footsteps and served on the South St. Paul City Council from 1967 to 1973, when he was elected to the Minnesota State Legislature. He served six straight terms before being elected to the State Senate in 1986 where he served until his death in 2016. Jim chaired many important committees at the Senate and had a reputation for being able to work both sides of the aisle on a variety of issues. He always championed South St. Paul and was one of the leaders who saw to the successful development of the South St. Paul Regional Trail, Kaposia Landing and years and years of successful economic development initiatives in the community. Jim and his wife, Sandie, have two sons, Jeffrey and John.

It’s a story of three brothers who loved their hometown and never left it despite opportunities that could have taken them to success anywhere. My sympathy to the Metzen family passing of Jim and Tom with my hope that their contributions to our fair city are never forgotten.
CAPTION: Left to right: Brothers Tom, Dave and Jim Metzen, three members of one of South St. Paul’s founding families.
Seidl’s Lake Memories
November 2016
By Lois Glewwe

This month I’m sharing parts of a great story by Kenneth Lawrence. Kenneth has lived in South St. Paul his entire life and wrote his memories of growing up playing in and around Seidl’s Lake. Today’s residents know the lake as part of the jointly owned and operated Seidl’s Lake Park on the southern border of South St. Paul and Inver Grove Heights. Kenneth’s entire memoir is available on Facebook on the Conversations of History of South St. Paul site.

“A broad plain made up the residential district that expanded west as the South St. Paul grew. On the southwestern side of town was the beginning of higher ground which led to the Seidl’s Lake valley. [Seidl’s was named for Vincent Seidl, who emigrated to Minnesota from Germany in 1880. He sold his farm on Seidl’s Lake before 1900 and moved to West St. Paul where descendants still reside today.] Across the street was the Louie Nauer dairy farm. Beyond was the valley.

The Nauer family and their farm is so important to this story because of their acceptance, or tolerance, of all the activities that took place on their land. The patriarch was Louie, along with his wife, Jeanette, four sons and three daughters. Because of the hospitality they showed, everyone was welcome. There was always a big pot of coffee on the stove; youngsters could always prowl around the farm.

At the deepest part of the valley was the location of Seidl’s Lake. It was about 200 yards west of the Nauer farmhouse, all on their land. It was a fairly small lake, oblong in shape, about 150 yards long and about 35 yards wide at the most, and a steep slope the south. It was quite shallow and muddy, except for a ten foot deep hole on the south center. That was our swimming hole. The grassy incline, north facing, was excellent for sun bathing. When needing a rest, we laid our clothes on the grassy slope, sunbathing for a tan. Off the south bank, submerged, were two rocks. One, called “Little Rock,” was about ten yards out in about five feet of water than a non-swimmer could stand on, and the other, called “Big Rock,” was about ten yards further out in ten feet of water that you could stand on to rest. When you could master the swim back and forth between the two rocks, the lake was yours. We mastered dog paddling and floating. Seidl’s was a ‘skinny dipping’ lake - no girls allowed – no bathing suits.

The lake was spring-fed which maintained its level. When swimming, you could tell where the springs were by the temperature of the water. There were no fish to speak of; a few minnows, but plenty of crabs or crayfish. We loved to catch them. With a string tied to a stick on one end and pieces of bacon tied to the other end, it was laid out on the shallow, muddy end of the lake. When the claws grabbed the bacon, we pulled ‘em in. when we caught enough, in the evening we would sit around a campfire of glowing coals and had a tasty snack of crab tails.
In the late fall and early winter, the first freeze-up of the lake was highly anticipated. It was my desire to be the first to skate on the lake each year. Before snow would cover the lake, the sheet of ice was beautiful. When word of the freeze-up got around, scores of skaters descended into the valley. We had to take advantage of the anticipated short time before snowfall cancelled the ice skating season on the lake. Then, ‘Take off the skates; bring on the skis.’ The valley was a constant draw, no matter what the season.

At the very end of the valley was a steep hill facing north. A ski jump was built there [by Louis Nauer in the winter of 1921]. It was comparable to the Battle Creek jump in St. Paul. Meets were held on the weekends. It brought back memories, as I witnessed around 1930 at age ten, a skier doing a summersault off the end of the run. Another thrill ride was a toboggan slide. It was built by the city. It was a wooden trough just east of the ski jump. The run was a task for the daring. It was a fast, twenty-second run ending on the lake. A thrilling ride, and then 15 minute climb back up the hill. Our equipment wasn’t high-tech. Our shoes were held on to the skis by a single strap, held in by a rubber band cut from an auto inner tube stretched over the heel of the shoe. The lubricant applied to our skis was wax from the seal of jelly glasses. We prayed that the bindings held fast!”
CAPTION: Today Seidl’s Lake is surrounded by tall trees and the lake covers a much larger area but from about 1920 until the 1960s, the lake was the centerpiece of a year-round playground with swimming in the summer and skiing, sledding and skating in the winter. Photo Courtesy, Mike Crnobrna
Reinhold Werner was only 66 years old when he passed away in June of 1980 but he filled his life with amazing and creative projects and photographs that continue to fascinate today’s residents. Many of his photos, including those he took himself and hundreds of new copy pictures he made from old prints taken years before he was even born, have been used in the South St. Paul Voice and in the Centennial history of South St. Paul as well as in my most recent book, South St. Paul: A Brief History.

Werner grew up in South St. Paul and graduated from South St. Paul High School in 1931 and from the Daguerre institute of Photography in Winona Lakes, Illinois, in 1935. He married Mary I. Truitt in 1936. Mary’s family lived on 10th Avenue North, across the street from Reinhold’s parents’ home. The couple moved to 11th Avenue North and had five children. Needing a larger house, Rein built a new home for the family at 1035 Highland Avenue, just a block from where he and Mary had grown up. Werner worked with the Kenneth Wright photo studies in St. Paul until 1937. When America entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, he tried to enlist in the U.S. Air Corps but was discovered to have a serious heart condition and was unable to serve in the military. In 1942, physicians at the Mayo Clinic told Werner that he would probably not live long enough to see his youngest children, the twins Rein and Renee, graduate from high school but he was there for that celebration in 1963 and lived another 17 years.

According to a Sun Newspaper article from 1980, Werner was the first to work with infrared photography in the Northwest and the first to deal extensively with color as well as the first to mold plastic resins after he invented the molds and heat press for the operation. He served on the South St. Paul School Board for eight years, from 1943-1951, and founded Werner Photo at 515 Marie Avenue in 1951. Werner also created the camera and light riggings needed for the balloon-borne gondola that was used by the Otto Winzen Research Center at Fleming Field Airport. He created his own photo studio in a shop that he built at the rear of the family home on Highland.

In addition to his photography work, Rein built an apartment building east of the old Lincoln School site as well as constructing his own family home and that of Delbert Harrell, the former pastor of Clark Memorial Church, now Clark-Grace Church. He also created clocks, cribbage boards, table lamps and other wood working projects from native trees, oak, walnut and cedar. The photo studio also became a wood working shop where he hand crafted the popular creations.

Always interested in local history, Rein Werner wrote a booklet on the Indian mounds that once dominated all of South St. Paul’s bluffs above the Mississippi River. Entitled “Aborigines of Kaposia,” the volume is still a noted reference on the subject in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.
Through the years, Rein and his wife Mary identified all of his negatives and photographs and after Rein’s death, Mary took over that task, cataloging the hundreds of photographs he had taken of sites throughout the area until her own death in 1991. In recent years, daughter Renee Werner Ponto has spearheaded the photo project, working with both the Dakota County Historical Society and the Minnesota Historical Society to ensure the preservation of the historic collection.

One thing continues to be a mystery, however. Dozens of Werner photographs were actually copy prints of images taken in the 1800s. No one seems to know who the early photographer was who captured so many important buildings and events. Fortunately, Rein Werner’s interest in history and photography led him to preserve and recreate those pictures so that they have been captured for posterity.

CAPTION: Mary and Reinhold Werner married at Clark Memorial Church in 1936 and Mary worked with Rein during his many creative ventures over the years. She was also the cataloguer of the hundreds of historical photographs which Rein Werner took during his remarkable career.
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