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ON THE COVER: St. Paul's Jackson Street Market about 1906. Located on Jackson between Tenth and Eleventh streets, the market, which opened in 1902, represented a major transformation in style and function reflecting new trends in transportation and economics.

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The St. Paul Farmer's Market — A 130-year-old Tradition

By Rosemary J. Palmer

Another chapter in the checkered history of St. Paul's farmer's market drew to a close on December 14, 1981. On that date demolition crews began ripping up the corrugated iron roofs that covered the open stalls of the market on Tenth and Jackson streets.

Earlier, concerned citizens fought to save the 80-year-old market site by nominating it as an historic site, but the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) decided against designation. While the HPC recognized the established tradition of a farmer's market as an integral part of St. Paul's history, the commission felt the site itself did not merit designation either historically or architecturally. The city subsequently sold the site to a California developer to erect a motel. At the same time a search commenced for a new market site.

In the spring St. Paul's new farmer's market opened in Lowertown at Fifth and Broadway streets. The design incorporates modern materials in a style reminiscent of the Jackson Street market. Corrugated fiberglass provides shed style roof coverings for the 167 open air stalls. Bricks pave the walkways. An added feature will be the proposed restaurant and market related businesses on the first floor of the adjacent Cardozo building.

Whether today's planners realize it or not, this new market will recreate in some ways the atmosphere of St. Paul's 1880s market at Seventh and Wabasha streets. And the site of the new market at Fifth and Broadway lies in the vicinity of one of two areas selected in 1853 by the St. Paul town council for a farmer's market.

IN 1853 ST. PAUL was a frontier town. Police and fire departments were not yet

organized. Log cabins, frame buildings, barns, stables, and shanties stood along dirt streets. Marshland, ravines, and streams ran through what is now St. Paul's central business district. Indians roamed the streets.¹

Yet even in its infancy St. Paul had already experienced considerable growth. J. Fletcher Williams' *History of St. Paul* estimated the town's population in 1849 at 840. By 1853 St. Paul's population, many of whom were French-Canadian, had swelled to 4,700.²

Up until this time, steamboats from St. Louis shipped in most of St. Paul's supplies. But this arrangement became unacceptable as the town grew. Shipping and distributing costs inflated the price of produce which by the time it reached St. Paul had already begun to rot.

In 1852 an article in the *Minnesota Pioneer* newspaper called for an organized farmer's market:

"A MARKET HOUSE — This is one thing greatly wanted in St. Paul, not only for the convenience of purchasers, but also of sellers. There would be twice as much produce brought into town for sale, if producers knew where to meet those customers who most wanted their produce"

The article continues to point out that a market would eliminate shipping problems in addition to establishing an exchange of goods between town and country.³

Evidence suggests that there probably were informal sporadic farmer's markets in St. Paul before 1853. Market Street, which runs along Rice Park, appears in the 1849 plat of that area. The 1854 plat of Kittson's Addition in Lowertown also included a Market Street. T. M. Newson credits a Little Canada woman for being the first person to bring produce to market. The year was 1849.⁴

Vetal Guerin, one of St. Paul's early settlers, answered the call for a market. In 1832 Guerin, a French Canadian, arrived in Mendota where he was employed by the American Fur Company for three years. By 1840 he

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had settled at present-day Seventh and Wabasha streets in St. Paul. In the following decade he amassed what could have been a fortune in land-holdings within the city, but he gave much of it away. He donated some of it to the county for the courthouse, and some to the St. Paul archdiocese as a site for the second cathedral, thus distinguishing himself as a philanthropist. Whether for economic, political, or benevolent reasons, Guerin also became St. Paul's first market-master.⁵

In 1853 Guerin had a two-story brick building constructed on his land at Seventh and Wabasha. This simple Greek revival building became St. Paul's first market house. As the building neared completion, the unincorporated town of St. Paul passed its first market ordinance. The ordinance restricted sales exclusively to the market house, giving Guerin a monopoly. The city, however, retained the right to construct its own market house in either Leeches' addition in the Uppertown area near Ramsey and Fort streets, or Kittson's addition in Lowertown near Broadway and Fourth streets. Guerin issued a public notice announcing the market's opening day, September 10, 1853. Lack of refrigeration at the market itself and in the 19th century kitchens of the city's residents required that the market operate frequently. In its first year the market was open Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 4 a.m. to 6 p.m. While fresh produce was available only in season, other items such as dairy products, flour, cakes, and candies could be purchased year-round.⁶

ST. PAUL'S BUILDERS envisioned their farmer's market as a gathering place for the entire community. First floor stalls inside and out provided space for growers, but the second floor was reserved for community functions such as meetings, plays and courtroom hearings.

In March, 1854, St. Paul became an incorporated town, adopting its first city charter. Chapter IV, section 18, of that charter gave the common council power to "establish public markets, and make rules and regulations for the government of the same; to appoint suitable officers for overseeing and regulating such markets and to restrain all persons from interrupting or interfering with the due observance of such rules and regulations."⁷ Perhaps Guerin realized that the city might build its own market house, or perhaps St. Paulites resented his monopoly. The exact reason is not apparent, but Guerin relinquished his right to operate the market

and leased it to the city on May 22, 1854. The city assumed supervision of the market, passing the second market ordinance on June 1, 1854. A market committee was formed to oversee its operation,⁸ and the market was opened for daily business, Monday through Saturday.

This event marks the beginning of a transitional period in the market's history. Under Guerin's jurisdiction, St. Paul regulated the market, but it was privately owned and operated. In 1854 the building was still privately owned, but the market was now both run and regulated by the city.

Even so, during the 1850s the farmer's market stirred public controversy. Numerous petitions and violations of the market ordinance appear in city council proceedings between 1856 and 1858. Residents protested the location of the market, desiring additional markets to serve their respective areas of the city. At one point the St. Paul council considered purchasing land for two markets, one in Uppertown near Walnut and Fort streets, and one in Lowertown near Eighth and Jackson. Eventually, the council decided to retain one central market, giving the city attorney the power to prosecute violators of the market ordinance.⁹

AN ADDITIONAL PROBLEM occurred in 1857 when a dispute arose concerning the city's lease of the market building. In 1854, when Guerin leased his building to the city for a three-year period, he also gave W. H. Getchell a lease which would begin at the end of the city's lease. Getchell assigned his lease to Charles Whitney who took over the building around May 20, 1857. Though the lease was rightfully his, Whitney allowed the city to continue operating a market in the building. This confusion over the lease prompted the market committee to recommend that the city purchase the market house.¹⁰

Mayor Norman Kittson objected to the proposal, continuously vetoing council resolutions for purchase of the market. He explained:

*"My first objection to the above resolution is that the amount offered is more than the property is at present worth. . . . My second objection to this resolution is that the city of St. Paul is not at present in a condition to make this purchase The market receipts for rent of stalls, &c., never has paid the rent, but on the contrary has brought the City in debt some hundreds of dollars each year"*¹¹



St. Paul's first public market house, the simple Greek Revival structure Vetal Guerin built at Seventh and Wabasha streets in 1853. This photograph shows it about 1870.

Kittson recommended that the purchase be deferred. Yet, St. Paul citizens apparently wanted a public market. The council overrode each of Kittson's vetoes. City bonds were finally issued for \$25,000 and on August 24, 1858, a warranty deed conveyed the market site and building to the city. This purchase completed the transition from a private to a public market.¹² The farmer's market continued to operate in Guerin's building until 1879. In that year the city set up a temporary market at Seventh and Cedar and construction on a new market building began at Seventh and Wabasha.¹³

THE NEW MARKET building reflected the transformation which was taking place in the city. St. Paul was no longer a frontier town, but a bustling city experiencing a remarkable rate of expansion. The population, estimated at 4,700 in 1853, grew to 50,000 by 1881.¹⁴ Waves of immigrants came to Minnesota seeking opportunities in the lumber, flour milling, and agricultural industries. Trains supplanted steamboats as the major form of transportation. James J. Hill was on the scene and, at his instigation, St. Paul's first Union Depot opened in 1881. Guerin's building may have burned in 1879 but, more likely, the city constructed a new market building in response to the need for a larger facility.

The city engaged Abraham Radcliffe, a prominent St. Paul architect, to design the

new Market Hall. Cost of construction amounted to an estimated \$85,000.¹⁵ The market, much larger than its predecessor, extended along Seventh Street from Wabasha to St. Peter. The ornate and picturesque qualities of Radcliffe's Italianate/Romanesque design reflect the changing architectural styles. In turn, the design along with the cost reflect the importance that Market Hall had for the city.

Though the size and style of the market building changed dramatically with the 1881 building, the new Market Hall retained the same functions as the earlier building, but on a grander scale. In 1853 the city had sanctioned a market mainly to satisfy St. Paul's need for a local food network. In 1881 the market still provided a necessary service in St. Paul, but the city now intended to create a market which would be the focal point for the entire community. St. Paul residents could purchase supplies such as vegetables, meats, dairy products, nuts, and baked goods from vendors on the first floor, go to lunch or dinner in restaurants in the basement, and attend meetings, plays or dances in the second floor hall. Market Hall in 1881 was a 19th century supermarket and civic center.



Temporary market set up by the city in 1879 at Seventh and Cedar streets.

*"Well may the city feel proud of such a noble, commanding, and useful a structure In a short time, it will be the beehive of the city All will contribute to our market house. The grocery man, dairy man, game man, and tea man, pork and sausage man, all will claim a place to do business in our emporium. Everything a family can eat or drink will be found here. Also a hall where the young can trip the light fantastic toe or listen to the eloquence of the popular orator. Not satisfied with this, step in the great room where even justice will be meted out daily The basement is all that could be desired for convenience. Here you will find dining room tables laden with choice viands and tempting the appetite; also the lunch counter, laden with Yankee pork and beans, fried cakes and coffee, chickens and cheese, pretzels and Switzerland — everything good to eat, from a five-cent lunch to a twenty-five cent dinner These attractions will call people to our market house and make it the great trading mart of the city."*¹⁶

The grand opening on February 22, 1881, was a lavish, gala event. Minnesota's governor, legislators and prominent citizens attended the affair which included a concert, dance, and a great banquet:

"The scene, with the brilliant throng of elegantly costumed swaying to the bewitching music, was one to long be

*remembered. In point of attendance, in perfection of detail and harmonious finish the reception has never been excelled in Minnesota."*¹⁷

The opening of Market Hall was timely. A week later, on March 1, 1881, a spectacular fire consumed the state capitol, a few blocks away at Tenth and Cedar streets. Even before the fire was extinguished, St. Paul's mayor had offered the new Market Hall to the state for temporary quarters. The legislature convened in Market Hall the next day and, along with state offices, continued to share space with growers until completion of a new capitol in 1882.¹⁸

Despite its size, Market Hall became obsolete within a decade. By 1890 St. Paul's population had doubled its 1881 figure; by 1900 it had more than tripled to 163,000. Market Hall could no longer accommodate the increased trade. Supplementary markets on Sixth Street between Rosabel and Broadway and on St. Peter between Third and Fourth streets operated in the 1890s.¹⁹

The location and style of the new market which would be constructed at Tenth and Jackson streets also suggests that the Seventh and Wabasha site was no longer adequate. St. Paul's bid request in 1898 mandated that proposals include: "... the necessary structures and facilities capable of accommodating 400 market gardeners' teams, at any one time" ²⁰ One can imagine the congested

conditions and sanitary problems generated by 400 teams of horses converging in the heart of the downtown at Seventh and Wabasha.

In 1899 the public library moved into Market Hall and the city established a temporary market on the south side of Third Street between Wabasha and Seven Corners. A special committee appointed by the city council commenced a search for a new market site.²¹

THE DEBATE TO relocate the market dragged on for a year. The city dissolved and reappointed the site selection committee several times in an effort to find a suitable location. Finally, in 1900 the city approved the Tenth and Jackson Street site. A bond issue for an estimated cost of \$252,000 was approved. Construction of the new market began in 1901.²²

The 20th century ushered in a new era of expansion for St. Paul. Horsedrawn streetcars had given residents some mobility in the 19th century. But the electric streetcars of the 20th century magnified people's ability to travel throughout the city. Residential neighborhoods which out of necessity had coexisted with the downtown business district now grew up along the streetcar lines, relinquishing the downtown area to commercial

enterprises. Zoning laws in 1926 completed the separation of residential and commercial districts. Similar businesses gravitated toward each other within these commercial districts.

When the St. Paul farmer's market opened in 1902 at Tenth and Jackson it represented a major transformation in style and function, reflecting new trends in transportation and economics. No longer an enclosed building, the market now consisted of open sheds. A cast iron and wood framework supported corrugated iron roofs over cement platforms in each of the six sheds. Earlier buildings had been designed in the style popular during their period of history. This new shed design focused exclusively on the function of the site. The market was easily accessible for growers and customers alike. Farmers could now pull into a stall and sell directly from their wagons instead of unloading produce into a building.

THE NEW MARKET also represented a change in St. Paul's perception of the market's role in the community. Now on the

The ornate, picturesque Market Hall, Designed by St. Paul architect Abraham Radcliffe, it stretched along Seventh street from Wabasha to St. Peter.



fringe of the central business district, it functioned solely as a farmer's market. It became a seasonal open air market catering to the produce business, while neighborhood grocery stores along streetcar lines sold goods formerly available at the year-round market.

A new auditorium on Fifth Street would provide space for civic events. This split, encouraged by population growth and the era of specialization, set the stage for another major change in the farmer's market. In 1853 the market's purpose had been to provide a retail exchange among St. Paul consumers. But in the 1900s the market gradually changed from a retail to a wholesale market; then, from a local to a regional industry.

The first signs of this change occurred in the Tenth and Jackson Street neighborhood. In 1903 private dwellings surrounded the market. By 1928 all houses across from the market on the west side of Jackson Street had been replaced by businesses. The Produce Exchange Bank and numerous large fruit and produce stores and warehouses extended along Jackson and on either side of the market. Acting like a magnet, the farmer's market attracted similar businesses until the retail and wholesale produce business dominated the area.²³

Business boomed in the early 1900s and farmers continued to sell Monday through

Saturday during the growing season. But another major event — the invention of the automobile — enhanced even further the market's place in a regional wholesale produce trade. The open shed stalls were easily adapted to trucks instead of wagons, and trucks enabled growers and customers to transport produce greater distances than ever before.

By 1930 St. Paul's market was recognized as being a major center of produce trade in the midwest region:

"Huge, five and six-ton vans gather about the market and are stuffed to the roof with garden greens which are destined for points as far away as Fargo and Grand Forks, Duluth, Spooner, Superior and Eau Claire Smaller trucks hover in the vicinity while operators buy up quantities of truck to haul to nearer points such as St. Cloud, Stillwater, Lake City, Hudson and Taylor's Falls St. Paul is the headquarters for such operations because it is the only large city in the Northwest which operates a municipal market and because of the many excellent gardeners who pile the six block-long

The Jackson Street market in 1951





The market in 1956.

*sheds of the market with about 100 tons of garden stuff at 6 A. M. daily.*²⁴

Again, crowded conditions created a need to enlarge the market. In May of 1933 the city council considered plans to expand the market. A \$200,000 city bond issue, a \$70,000 federal grant and WPA labor enabled the city to implement these plans in 1935. St. Paul acquired the necessary land through condemnation, razing between thirty and forty structures to the east of the market. The expansion included three new sheds to the north of the market, and ninety-foot additions on the east end of the existing sheds. A second-story addition joined the restrooms and market master's buildings, built in 1926, to create a large meeting room. The new market, ready for the 1936 growing season, encompassed four city blocks, increasing its capacity from 382 to 682 stalls.²⁵

Yet, the auto industry, though it fostered the growth of the market, created problems of its own. In December, 1936, St. Paul opened the market site for auto parking during the week to relieve the congestion in the downtown area. Although the market site

acquired this new function, which in future years would prove to be incompatible with the market itself, the St. Paul farmer's market continued to operate on a daily basis, flourishing as a center of produce trade throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Letters from a variety of cities around the country asking St. Paul about methods for establishing a successful farmer's market confirm the market's reputation.²⁶

While the auto age transported St. Paul's market into its heyday, it also dealt several severe blows to the market in the 1950s and 1960s. Automobiles, offering people unlimited mobility, nurtured a new trend in living — the suburbs. Suburbia, in turn, led to shopping centers. At the same time, the technology of prepackaged foods sold in supermarkets came on the scene. Soon, shopping at a farmer's market was neither convenient nor fashionable. Week-day sales were limited to 6 a.m. to noon. In 1954 St. Paul again designated the market site as a parking facility and, by 1957, parking receipts exceeded market receipts.²⁷



Market Day in 1956, about the time parking receipts were exceeding market receipts. At left, demolition of the old corrugated iron roofs was underway late in 1981 after a fight to save the 80-year-old site had failed.



A second blow to the market came in the 1960s, and this time it affected the site itself. With the expansion of the suburbs and the increase in auto travel came the need for improved travel conditions. The construction of a freeway now threatened the site. In 1963 the state of Minnesota acquired approximately one-half of the market site on the north side, including almost two-thirds of the sheds. Interstate 94 claimed the three sheds added in 1936, two of the original sheds and ninety feet of the truck platform.²⁸

A few growers were still selling at the market on week-days between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. in the early 1970s. Yet stall rentals plummeted. Full-time parking from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on week-days took over the site. Eventually, growers sold at the market on Saturdays only.

For a time it seemed that St. Paul's market might fade into history. But, new trends are causing a resurgence in sales and stall rentals.²⁹

Today's consumers are concerned about the prices and quality of food. They are disenchanted with chemicals, colorings, and

preservatives which are added to food to enhance its shelf life. Some of the causes are new but, just like their 1850s counterparts, St. Paul citizens have seen a need to maintain a local food network.

St. Paul in the 1980s also has a new image. Individuals and developers are rehabilitating neighborhoods which fell to urban decay in the 1960s. In-town condominiums have become the latest fashion in housing. Contemporary issues center around efficient land use and redevelopment of the city which since 1960 has experienced a steady decline in population. These issues dictated moving the market once again.

As in the past, the St. Paul farmer's market fired up controversy. Relocating the market meant determining what its future role would be in the community. In addition to community and consumer issues, city residents

were concerned about maintaining the historic tradition of a farmer's market in St. Paul.

The market has ebbed and flowed with time, responding to the issues and causes in each stage of its development. Now the market has a new look, reshaped to suit its 1980s context. Yet in some ways the St. Paul farmer's market has come full circle. Founded as a retail market, it turned to wholesale operations. Now it is once again a retail market. Originally a private market housed in year-round indoor facilities, it shifted first to public ownership, then to a seasonal open air market. Now the new market will combine public and private ownership in open air and indoor facilities. And today's market has come to rest near one of the areas selected in 1853 by St. Paul to house its first farmer's market.

Footnotes

1. T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul*, (St. Paul, Minn.: 1886).
2. J. Fletcher Williams, *History of St. Paul*, (St. Paul, Minn., 1876).
3. *The Minnesota Pioneer*, June 10, 1852.
4. Original plats for Irvine and Rice's Addition, 1849, and Kittson's Addition, 1854, County Recorder's Office, Ramsey County Courthouse/City Hall. The current Broadway Street in Lowertown was platted in 1852 as "Broadway" but the 1854 plat of the adjacent area named the same street Market Street. It is not clear whether the street ever bore the name "Market Street." T. M. Newson, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
5. T. M. Newson, *op. cit.*, p. 16-19.
6. *The Minnesota Pioneer*, November 10, 1853, first ordinance. *Ibid.*, August 25, 1853, public notice. Guerin died in 1870. His grave in Calvary cemetery bears a monument with the inscription: "Erected by the City of St. Paul to the Memory of Vital Guerin 1871"
7. *The Minnesota Democrat*, supplement, March 22, 1854. Revised city charters continue to convey this power to the city.
8. *Proceedings of the Common Council of St. Paul*, (St. Paul, Minn.: *Daily Minnesotan*, 1857) p. 43-46. Ordinance 10, first city ordinance book, city clerk's office, Ramsey County Courthouse/City Hall. The 1869 ordinance, which is frequently cited, did establish the Seventh and Wabasha site as a public market, but it was a revision of earlier ordinances.
9. *Proceedings of the Common Council of St. Paul*, (St. Paul, Minn.: 1856-1858). Numerous entries throughout these years contain petitions and violations. *Ibid.*, 1857, pp. 21, 22, 30, 43.
10. *Ibid.*, 1857, pp. 43-46.
11. *Ibid.*, 1858, p. 88.
12. *Ibid.*, 1858, p. 89. Abstract to the Seventh and Wabasha street site, p. 7, St. Paul Port Authority.
13. Photograph of the Seventh and Cedar Street market, photograph collection, Audio Visual Department, Minnesota Historical Society.
14. *The Minnesota Pioneer*, November 17, 1853, population of St. Paul. C. C. Andrews, *History of St. Paul, Minnesota*, (Syracuse, New York: D. Mason & Co., 1890) p. 328. Population statistics after 1880 are taken from U.S. Census Bureau.
15. *St. Paul Dispatch*, February 19, 1881. *Proceedings of the Common Council of St. Paul*, (St. Paul, Minn.: *Daily Globe*, 1880), p. 90. The total cost included \$40,000 in bond issues, with the remaining amount acquired from delinquent tax receipts.
16. *Ibid.*, 1880, p. 205-206. Col. A. Allen, chairman of the market committee, delivered this speech on December 9, 1880 at a council meeting.
17. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 23, 1881.
18. *Ibid.*, March 2, 1881.
19. R. L. Polk Co., *St. Paul City Directories, 1890-1899*, "City Market."
20. *Proceedings of the Common Council of St. Paul*, (St. Paul, Minn.: *Dispatch Job Printing*, 1898) p. 42-43.
21. *Ibid.*, 1899, p. 75, 124, 298, 480.
22. *Ibid.*, 1900, p. 399; 1901, p. 75.
23. Sanborn Company, *Sanborn Insurance Maps of St. Paul*, (New York: Sanborn Co., 1903) vol. 4, p. 459. G. M. Hopkins Co., *Plat Book of City of St. Paul and Suburbs*, (Philadelphia: Hopkins Co., 1928) map 2.
24. *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 21, 1930. The new Minneapolis market, also an open air shed style, opened in March, 1938. Its size and facilities eclipsed those of the St. Paul market, perhaps another reason for the decline in St. Paul's trade.
25. *The Farmer*, March 14, 1936. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, December 22, 1935. St. Paul Building Permits Office, Ramsey County Courthouse/City Hall: Building permit card index, 549 Temperance Street. The market's original address was 549 Temperance Street. Cards of razed buildings are attached to this card.
26. City Market Records, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Minnesota Historical Society.
27. *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 2, 1954. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 10, 1957.
28. *St. Paul Dispatch*, January 31, 1963.
29. St. Paul Grower's Association Records. 1977 rentals: 61 stalls; 1980 rentals: 106 stalls. Increased consumer interest in the market and lack of space at the market site resulted in the opening of satellite markets around the city.



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THE GIBBS HOUSE

at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County Historical Society as a restored farm house of the mid-nineteenth century period.

The Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. Its chief function is to collect and preserve the history of the city and the county and share that history with the people who live here. The Society is the county's historian. It preserves those things from the past that are the community's treasures — its written records through the Society's library; its historic sites through establishment of the Irvine Park Historic District and its successful efforts to help prevent destruction of the Old Federal Courts Building, now Landmark Center. It shares these records through the publishing of its magazine, brochures, pamphlets, and prints; through conducting historic sites tours of the city, teaching classes, producing exhibits on the history of the city, and maintaining its museum on rural county history. The Gibbs Farm Museum, the oldest remaining farm home in Ramsey County, was acquired by the Society in 1949 and opened to the public in 1954 as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler. In 1966 the Society moved onto the property a one-room rural country schoolhouse dating from the 1870s. Now restored to the period of the late 1890s, the school is used for classes, meetings, and as the center for a summer schoolhouse program for children.

Society headquarters are located in Landmark Center, an historic Richardsonian Romanesque structure in downtown St. Paul, where it maintains the center's only permanent exhibit, a history of the building during the seventy-five years it was the federal government's headquarters in St. Paul.

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