

RAMSEY COUNTY
History

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Chamber and Community
The Midway and Its Colorful History—Page 4



University and Snelling Avenues around 1916. Streetcars were in their heyday and their barns occupied the entire corner. See article beginning on page 4. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue of *Ramsey County History* focuses exclusively on the Midway area of St. Paul. We have done this because the Midway Chamber of Commerce is celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary in October. As you will find in reading this issue, the story of the Midway area is rich and varied, ranging from the early days of settlement and statehood to the present period of industrial, commercial and residential vitality. The Editorial Board thanks the Midway Chamber of Commerce for its help in producing this issue of our magazine and congratulates the Chamber on its many contributions to the Midway area over the past seventy-five years.

John M. Lindley,
chairman, Editorial Board

The Midway Chamber and Its Community

The Colorful History of an 'Unparalleled Feature'

Jane McClure

A noteworthy distinction and perhaps unparalleled feature of St. Paul in futuro, and of the Twin Cities in ultimo, is the 'Midway' or interurban district," Henry Castle wrote in 1912. Once a wide stretch of groves and prairies, of farms and orchards, lying between two struggling little towns ten miles apart, it is now a populous city within itself, with thousands of beautiful homes; with miles of paved and lit streets; with churches and schools and colleges; with elevators and abattoirs, and big factories; with parks and boulevards and bustling marts of trade; traversed by four interurban electric lines; with post office, fire and police stations, newspapers and banks; with the second largest freight transfer in the world."

"The rapid, uninterrupted, irresistible development of this section is a phenomenon, even in this country of constructive marvels and miracles."

When Castle, St. Paul historian and community booster, penned those words, he was predicting a bright future for the thriving young Midway District. Much of that destiny was guided by a diverse group of people, who united seventy-five years ago in October of 1919 to form the Midway Club, predecessor of the Midway Chamber of Commerce. By that time the Midway community had become an important regional hub for transportation, industry, commerce and education.

A century earlier, the establishment of Fort Snelling in 1819 had opened the way for settlement in the 1840s and 1850s of the young communities of St. Paul, St. Anthony Falls and Minneapolis. The future Midway area would be in the center of everything. The well-worn trails of the Dakota people soon became routes for new settlers who crisscrossed the Midway area. In his history of St. Mark's Church and the Midway District, Father Daniel Corrigan notes that St. Anthony Road (now St. Anthony Avenue) was the most celebrated of pioneer thoroughfares.

"In song and story the notebooks of travelers and reminiscences of pioneers

regale their readers with exploits on this bit of road that led to the village of St. Anthony and the far north . . ." Corrigan wrote. "It was the road to romance and adventure and conquest in trade and in human souls amid incredible hardships." Dogs sleds and the famed Red River ox carts passed through the area, following approximately the route of today's Interstate 94, taking goods to far-flung out-

posts and returning laden with furs and pemmican.

One stop for the early travelers was Stephen Desnoyer's halfway house, an isolated inn famous for its wild game dinners. Desnoyer was one of the earlier permanent settlers in western St. Paul, arriving there in 1843. He swapped a barrel of whiskey and two "Indian guns" to squatter Donald McDonald for rights to his claim. The claim, north of modern-day Marshall Avenue and east of the Mississippi River, is part of what is now the Desnoyer Park neighborhood.

Soon Desnoyer was joined by other squatters, farmers and former Fort Snelling soldiers. They staked claims and built crude cabins in violation of the Fort Snelling military reservation boundaries which at the time extended as far north as today's Marshall Avenue.

When the area was officially opened



University Avenue around 1912. This view looks southeast toward St. Paul from the viaduct over the Minnesota Transfer tracks. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

of St. Paul

for settlement and sale of land in 1854, more than 4,500 acres of land went on the block, bringing \$1.25 an acre. Land north of Marshall Avenue was in Rose Town (Rose Township), with Reserve Town (Reserve Township) to the south. The 1860 census recorded 249 residents in Reserve Town and 499 in Rose Town.

Reserve Town and Rose Town began to fill in with farms, and economic enterprises requiring wide open spaces. Early St. Paul settler and business leader Norman Kittson built his Kittsondale stables and driving park (horse track) near the current site of University and Snelling Avenues. The million-dollar facility featured a stable built in the shape of a Greek cross, with sixty-four box stalls. Although the track itself fell to the expanding commerce of the area, the stables stood for many years after the turn of the century.

Commercial development, short line railroad transportation and the growth of the streetcar system played key roles in the Midway area's development. The Interurban Streetcar line, which was completed on December 9, 1890, along University Avenue in St. Paul and Minneapolis, and Minneapolis' Washington Avenue, was hailed as a much-needed link between the two cities' business districts. The Interurban was just one of a number of streetcar line expansions serving western St. Paul, including the Selby Avenue and Grand Avenue lines.

The Midway area's prominence on the streetcar map was also assured by the completion of the streetcar company's Midway shop at Snelling and University. For many years, the shop produced the little yellow trolleys that rolled along Twin Cities streets, manufacturing more than 3,000 vehicles. As many as 500 people worked there at peak demand times.



The gateway to the Midway, University Avenue and Rice Street, around 1900. The building with the tower was occupied by the S. Brand Coal Company. The frame buildings in the center mark the site of Christ Lutheran Church, built in 1910 on the northwest corner of University and Park. Kenneth M. Wright photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

(The shop, which has been used by the Metropolitan Transit Commission for the past few decades, is to be replaced by a facility near downtown St. Paul, and the University and Snelling site will revert to commercial use.)

In the 1880s, the Midway area became home to the Minnesota Transfer Railway Company, the brainchild of St. Paul railroad magnate James J. Hill and another venture that needed room to grow. The railway transfer system provided a way to transfer goods among the nine railroads then serving the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. It would eventually serve more than a dozen railroads. Formally organized on March 10, 1883, the Minnesota Transfer Railway Company went on to fill about 200 acres with tracks, switches and buildings. The company's land holdings and boundaries shifted over the years with the ebb and flow of demand. Its facilities are located in the west central part of the Midway, centering on the University-Prior Avenue area, but the site has extended from South St. Anthony Park all the way into Merriam Park. The Minnesota Transfer Board of Trade was organized in 1889.

Historian Castle called the Minnesota Transfer "the great clearing house for all of the west bound and east bound freight that passes." Every train going into the city rolled into the Minnesota Transfer yard. By 1912, the Minnesota Transfer boasted eighty-two miles of track, 400 switches, nineteen locomotives, 1,000 employees and an average payroll of about \$60,000 per month. Railroads converging there had 55,000 miles of trackage. About 1,500 cars arrived daily.

One early venture that enjoyed greater success elsewhere was a proposed stockyards facility near the Minnesota Transfer Railroad site. The stockyards did operate there for some time, providing a rest and a feeding stop for animals en route from western ranches to Chicago. But South St. Anthony Park developers, mindful of the potential problems a neighboring stockyard could create, looked askance at the notion of a larger stockyards there. That led the investors to establish the St. Paul Union Stockyards in South St. Paul, where the first shipment of cattle arrived for slaughter in the fall of 1887.

However, the presence of the railroads

and the Minnesota Transfer Railway Company did spur significant commercial and industrial growth. Early Midway industries provided a vast array of goods for residents of the northwestern United States, including mattresses, beds, chairs, tables, pianos, furnaces, stoves, radiators, brooms, linseed oil products, and farm equipment.

The Midway area's open spaces also attracted St. Paul's early colleges, including Hamline University, Concordia College, the College of St. Thomas, the Norwegian Lutheran Seminary, Luther Seminary, Macalester College, the College of St. Catherine, the St. Paul Seminary, and the University of Minnesota's College of Agriculture.

The farms that had covered the area began to disappear in the 1870s and 1880s, replaced by clusters of homes and business buildings. The old William Finn farm became the St. Thomas campus. The Baker farm was where much of Merriam Park was first platted. The J.W. Bass farm became part of the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus.

The Marshall Avenue bridge (forevermore known as the Lake Street Bridge on the Minneapolis side of the river), connected the cities in 1889, joining earlier railroad spans. Late nineteenth century community boosters sought to link Minneapolis and St. Paul as "one great city."

Newspaper editorials from the 1880s and 1890s expressed enthusiasm for such a plan, calling for the Midway area to be the center point. Archbishop John Ireland liked the name "Paulopolis" for the merged communities. Ireland made his feelings about the Midway known at the 1890 dedication of the extended Grand Avenue streetcar line. His comments, reported faithfully in newspapers of the day, no doubt drew even more attention to the area.

"Tread reverently upon this ground. It is the Midway, the very heart of the coming great city. Look at it! Admire it! Has not Providence been generous to it? No wonder that friends of mine across the river covet it," Ireland declared. "It is the precious gift by which St. Paul will woo and win fair Minneapolis."

Archbishop Ireland had made a considerable investment in Midway property, much of it in Merriam Park. He and other visionaries dreamed of the area as a site for a new Cathedral of St. Paul, a state capitol and a bustling union depot. The cathedral was to be located at the northeast corner of Laurel and Cleveland Avenues. The Merriam family offered twenty acres of land in the Merriam Park neighborhood, north of Marshall and west of Cleveland Avenue. Houses and the Town and Country Golf Course cover that area today.

Hopes were high in 1891, when an anonymous author produced a pamphlet describing the fanciful notion of Federal City. Looking forward a quarter of a century, the author outlined his vision of how the Midway District "had been transformed into the present magnificent urban area, unapproachable in its beauty by any city in the country, except possibly the National Capitol (*sic*)." A new city hall, state capitol, post office, library, museum and art institute, central hospital, exposition building, labor temple and club halls were part of the author's dream. A central or union depot would be built when a "new mode of transportation" replaced the steam locomotive. The author didn't explain what that transportation would be.

The author's enthusiasm was shared by the region's newspapers. The concept of Federal City was celebrated at a splendid banquet in Merriam Park. Midway merchants used the "Federal City" designation on letterhead. It also appeared in old city directories.

Hopes were dashed when the 1893 Minnesota Legislature decided to build a new capitol north of downtown St. Paul. Financial panic caused considerable anxiety for Archbishop Ireland, and he divested himself of his land holdings in the Midway. The new cathedral would wait until after the turn of the century to occupy its Summit Avenue site. A new capitol would wait, too, until 1904.

And the union depot? Castle, in his *History of St. Paul and Vicinity*, continued to lobby for such a venture. He stated that it was an "open secret" that such a depot would be located near the Minnesota Transfer yards. Castle and others vigorously pushed for a relocated depot after St. Paul's old Union Depot went up in flames in 1913.

Edward Paradis, the colorful editor-publisher of the *Midway News*, also agitated for a depot, protesting when it was built on its present site in Lowertown. (It should be noted that Paradis was an original member of the Midway Transfer Board of Trade.) "Economy and convenience for all time to come, and not the cost of the real estate, or the pipe dreams of ghost dancers, will determine the choice," he wrote optimistically.



The YMCA's old building at Prior and University Avenues. The \$6,000 building opened its doors in the Fall of 1921. Kenneth M. Wright photo from the Midway Chamber of Commerce.



Norman W. Kittson's stables at University and Snelling before their demolition in 1942. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

The census of 1910 indicates that the Midway area was the fastest-growing part of St. Paul. While the rest of the city showed a loss of almost 1,300 citizens between 1900 and 1910, the Midway area exhibited phenomenal growth, with a population of 21,134. Wards 10 and 11 also contributed mightily to the city coffers, with property taxes of about \$50 million by 1920.

The dreams of a depot were fading away when the Midway Club, forerunner to the Midway Chamber of Commerce, was founded in 1919. The club's cry for others to "get involved" drew members from throughout the area. Soon the Midway Club would support and promote the young business communities of North and South St. Anthony Park Merriam Park, Macalester Park, Groveland Park, Como Park and Highland Park. Those were the days when Griggs Cooper and Company's fine new facilities at University and Fairview were a point of community pride. The imposing three-story building was thought to be the only factory of its kind in the country, with a capacity to produce and package six tons of candy and 3,600,000 crackers daily. Work rooms "as light as outdoors" and other amenities were hailed in the \$300,000 building. Employees turning out those mountains of crackers were en-

joying the innovative design of a work area all on one floor of the building.

Brown and Bigelow, located at the Quality Park complex, was a major employer of area residents, enticing them with work that was "pleasant and congenial" and pay that was "fair and liberal." The company's remembrance advertising business was near University and Hamline avenues. "The Waldorf Daily Plan—Produce the best that mortals can"—was the watchword at Waldorf Paper Products, Inc. That firm had operated in the Midway area since 1886, and was establishing itself as a national leader in the paper products business.

Some ventures were just getting started. Harvey Benjamin Fuller's stove-top experiments to produce wallpaper paste at a workshop downtown were evolving into the H.B. Fuller Company. That company was also destined to move to the Midway and play a prominent role in the area. Banks dotted the neighborhoods. The Minnesota Transfer State Bank at University and Prior boasted "resources of \$1,000,000." The new Midway State Bank was nearby at Raymond and University, along with the Interurban State Bank. The Snelling State Bank and Liberty State Bank were in Merriam Park

Dozens of once-familiar household products were manufactured and shipped

from the Midway. Griggs Cooper and Company's Home Brand Foods graced many a table. The Fleischmann Yeast Company made homemakers' bread rise.

Buck Horn Brand Varnish was a product of the North Star Varnish Company. Buckbee Mears Company, Engravers and Commercial Photographers, announced that "every sort of advertisers service is produced 'resultfully.'"

Some of the area's early rural flavor remained. The Booth Fuel and Feed Company at 472 Prior Avenue offered draying and teaming, as well as coal, wood, hay, feed and poultry supplies.

But the new club's role wasn't confined to that of boosting businesses. The Midway area itself at that time consisted of a broad spectrum of distinct St. Paul neighborhoods, including Frogtown, North End, Hamline, Iris Park, Union Park, Como Park, South St. Anthony, North St. Anthony Park, Merriam Park, Desnoyer Park, Macalester Park, Groveland Park and the new Highland Park development. Those were the days when St. Paul's tradition of strong neighborhoods took shape. The club represented these neighborhoods and provided critical leadership on countless neighborhood and regional issues during the crucial years of major growth and development in the western half of St. Paul.

One of the greatest such challenges for the new Midway Club was that of finding common issues for a large and diverse area. From its earliest days, the club tried to serve business and industry, residents and institutions in an area from Rice Street west to the city limits of St. Paul; north the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus and the Minnesota State Fair and south to Montreal Avenue.

"It [the area] is growing by leaps and bounds, and each surge ahead offers greater expansion to both cities—greater opportunities to serve the Northwest—affords, in fact, a quickening of the pulse that is traceable in every St. Paul activity," one Bartles Oil Company advertisement boasted.

Through the years, club members lobbied hard for civic and educational improvements for these neighborhoods. It's not surprising to see in the club minutes that members were visiting Randolph



The Minnesota Transfer Railway yards around 1915. The system provided a way to transfer goods among nine railroads serving Minneapolis and St. Paul. C. P. Gibson photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

Heights, Baker, Gutterson, Richards Gordon, Longfellow and Tatum schools.

These were the days of unabashed local boosterism through efforts which seem quaint now. Midway Club members could muster 1,000 people to pack a St. Paul Association gathering and to cheer and clap for silly skits. By 1921, the Midway Club had its own "Midway Booster" song, written by Hal Geer

"M—is for the million things we're doing,

I is for the interest we have shown,

D is for the dollars we are spending,

W for the work that we have done,

A is for the action we are getting,

Y the year in which we'll meet success,

Put them all together, and they spell MIDWAY, The club that we all love the best."

By January of 1920, the Midway Club had 702 members, up from 454 on December 1, 1919. The Membership Committee did its task "to get them in and keep them in." Soon, the cry for 1,000 members echoed through the community. Other standing committees were established to oversee a variety of issues. One group worked to attract new industries and "study methods to make industrial sites attractive." Another worked to

generate good publicity about the Midway area, crowing proudly when a front-page article on the club's formation appeared in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. Less than two years later, 100,000 fliers publicizing the Midway district were sent around the United States and into Canada.

Yet another group concentrated on civic improvements, including streets, health and safety, education and recreation. Arthur Caines of the Minnesota Transfer Railway Company led the Local Improvement Committee for a number of years. One daunting task was that of getting dirt streets scraped and improved by city crews. Members had to pester the city to cut the weeds on vacant lots. They watched with interest as street lights were installed on University Avenue. The idea of a network of paved neighborhood streets was a more lofty ambition. Many streets at that time were "paved" with cinders.

The Local Improvement Committee soon spun off a subcommittee of schools, which worked with the Mothers' Club from each school. In 1922, Midway Club members were asking why none of the city's five new schools were being built in the district. They called for improvements at schools and for new schools,

and they lobbied hard for junior high schools to be built in Merriam Park and Hamline.

Another critical need was for recreation space. In the early 1920s, the only city-owned playground in the area was Dunning Field at Marshall and Hamline Avenues. Neighborhood residents and business people clamored for more. The Midway Club urged its members to take part in a citywide campaign to create more play spaces for St. Paul's children, so they could enjoy the healthful benefits of outdoor recreation.

One of the first playground efforts the Midway Club became involved with was that of establishing the Hamline Community Playground Association in June of 1920. That group's efforts would result in Hamline Park Playground. At about the same time, club members were working with the city and the Iris Park neighborhood to convert the small pond in the park into a cement-lined wading pool for area youngsters. Libraries were sought for Merriam Park and Hamline.

The club's concern for recreational activities was also demonstrated by its support of the Minnesota Transfer YMCA. Y and Midway Club directors began meeting in early 1921 to discuss the need for a new YMCA building with bowling alleys, billiard tables, gymnasium equipment and floor space for indoor athletics. The new building, with a price tag of about \$6,000, opened its doors that fall near University and Prior Avenues.

One committee provided entertainment, including dances and social events, for members. At one opening ball game for the St. Paul Saints, Ted Kaysen of Anderson Company provided a seven-foot bat that club members presented to Saints Manager Mike Kelley. "We put ourselves on the map that day as baseball fans," the club's newsletter stated. That would start a long affiliation with the baseball team.

The first newsletter, a tradition which continues to this day, appeared in April of 1920. "That there is a kindly interest displayed in the welfare of our club, and a belief in the value of a publication of this kind, has been evidenced by the spirit in which the advertising space was taken," it reported.



Two little girls at Lake Iris Park, around 1925. Serene residential neighborhoods were as much a part of the Midway district as were its factories and railroad yards. C. P. Gibson photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

One of the Midway Club's busiest committees dealt with streetcars and telephones. The club's January, 1920, minutes reported the news that Midway telephone patrons would be listed in the next issue of the Minneapolis telephone directories. Phone service was an issue that vexed the commerce community. "After vainly trying to 'get central' to ask us to report that they couldn't 'get central,' several Midway Club patrons of the telephone company called on us personally," the newsletter reported in 1920. A delegation trooped to the Tri-State Telephone Company where they were told that 200 more operators were needed to meet the growing area's demands for phone service. In those days, student operators were paid \$2 per day. More experienced

operators took home \$16 to \$18 per week.

One early accomplishment was the opening of the Minnesota Transfer Postal Station at Raymond and University. "This is called to your attention for the purpose of urging all business men within the surrounding district to support this office by purchasing, at that station, their stamps and postal requirements," the February, 1920, club minutes stated. "If there exists any procurement of stamps outside of St. Paul this shall be discontinued. The development of our postal service in St. Paul is dependent upon the gross receipts had within this city." This apparently worked, as the minutes stated that "Postal receipts are showing a gratifying increase at the Min-

nesota Transfer Station, Raymond and University."

It's worth noting that many Midway companies used the address "Minnesota Transfer, Minnesota" when shipping items to and from their businesses. This address predated the Midway Club by about fifteen years. Using St. Paul as a postal address and Minnesota Transfer as a railroad station or shipping address seems to have "led to a great deal of confusion and annoyance to receivers of freight, both car load and local." Many companies were billed for additional freight charges, and experienced costly delays in receiving or sending items. Over the years, the Midway Club would wrangle over the use of "Minnesota Transfer" as a proper address or identifi-

cation as to area.

Community doings meant that internal club affairs sometimes had to wait. The club spent much of its first year looking for a permanent home, using the Anderson Company for office space, the Brown and Bigelow dining room for social functions and Central Warehouse spaces as temporary quarters. Therefore, it was a proud day, on November 22, 1920, when Midway Club members viewed their new club rooms at the Hackney Building at Prior and University Avenues. The second-floor facilities boasted a secretary's office, cloak room, card room and a lounging room furnished with "large, comfortable chairs and divans, library tables, piano, billiards tables, etc." It was a handsome facility for an organization seeking to recruit as many as 1,500 members.

"They are your club rooms and we want you to enjoy them," the November 1920 newsletter said. One month later, the club announced that members' wives could arrange for meetings at the club, too. Soon, a modern Flexlume illuminated sign was purchased to put over the clubroom door. A library table, displaying the latest newspapers and magazines, was set up. The clubrooms enjoyed steady use, for meetings, informal get-togethers and the all-popular "smokers." Those were the days when a smoke-filled room was a sign of male conviviality, not a health hazard.

On April 28, 1921, Montgomery Ward and Company opened its new Midway store with great fanfare, hosting "Midway's Big Night." For just \$2 per couple, visitors could see the area's finest and newest commercial building. A fifteen-piece orchestra, Katherine B. Hensler's ten-piece Ladies' Band, and singers and dancers provided entertainment. The *St. Paul Daily News* described the event as "the largest purely social entertainment of its kind ever held in Minnesota."

More celebrating was ahead that May, as revelers feted the new street lights. Midway had its much-awaited "Great White Way" along University Avenue. After a daytime parade of 300 decorated floats and touring cars managed to wind through both downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, people flocked to the lighting

ceremony. That night, everyone gathered in front of the Montgomery Ward store for a community dance, at which a military band provided "inspiring" entertainment. A cheer went up at 9 p.m. as the street lights were turned on.

Those were exciting times for the Midway Club and its communities. About 500 people toasted the area's success at a banquet held in August of 1920 at the Brown and Bigelow main building in Quality Park. City Council members (then known as city commissioners), members of the St. Paul Association and prominent downtown business people were honored guests. The gala was believed to be the largest banquet ever held in the Midway, complete with music by Chidester's Orchestra and floral decorations from the W.E. Tricker and the Merriam Park Floral Company.

The banquet wasn't entirely a social event. One key topic was the streetcar system and the retention of a "one-fare zone" in the area between Snelling Avenue and the western city limits. Streetcar routes and fares provided ongoing headaches for the Midway Club's Public Utilities Committee. For many years, the club wrangled with the streetcar company, the state Railroad and Warehouse Commission and just about everybody else over possible increases in streetcar fares.

One of the club's lengthiest debates centered on the one-fare zone and a so-called "neutral zone" that encompassed much of the Midway District. The quarrel would spill from the community to City Hall to the Ramsey County Courts and all the way to the Minnesota Supreme Court. The change would mean increasing streetcar rates from six to seven cents.

Since the mid-1890s, streetcar riders had paid one fare. When the Midway District began to grow, the Twin Cities Street Railway Company adopted a plan to encourage housing, commercial and industrial development in the area between downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis. This was the "neutral zone" and it was served by the interurban line along University and Washington Avenues. That is, a streetcar rider traveling to the Midway from Minneapolis

wouldn't be charged the double fare usually charged riders going from one city to another. By 1905, the city and the streetcar company had agreed that the neutral zone's boundaries should be Snelling Avenue and the city limits.

In the summer of 1920, the Twin Cities Street Railway Company considered eliminating the neutral zone. Howls of protests were heard throughout St. Paul. The city's newspapers took up the cry. Business people met and plotted strategy. A vigorous lobbying effort was launched.

The initial effort to combat the proposed fare changes prompted Midway Club members to raise \$5,000 for the 1920 lobbying efforts. Newspaper advertising, a petition drive and the costs of the aforementioned banquet were among the expenses that had to be met. The wrangle lasted until May of 1922, when the Minnesota Supreme Court gave the streetcar company the right to abolish the neutral zone. Business people mounted an effort for the one-fare zone again in 1924, but that met with little success.

But the streetcar's days were numbered. The Midway area was already home to companies manufacturing motor vehicles, including the Willys-Overland Company and, briefly, the Duesenberg Company. During the same year the neutral zone fight ended at the Supreme Court, Midway Club leaders were preparing for the opening of a new Ford Motor Company plant in Highland Park. By 1926, some club members were calling for a modern bus route on University Avenue, to replace the streetcars.

Another major challenge for the fledgling Midway Club was the need for a hospital in the area. At the time the club began, the only hospital in the area was a small facility in Merriam Park, known as the Cobb Hospital or Merriam Park Hospital. A second hospital, the original Midway Hospital, had shut down by that time. It was located in a remodeled boarding house on North Snelling Avenue.

In 1921, efforts to build a Midway Park Hospital were unveiled. Club members pledged support for the new hospital. About 7 1/2 acres of land near the corner of Aldine and University Avenues were set aside as a site. Past discussions

of a hospital had included representatives of Mounds Park Sanitorium and the Merriam Park facility. When the fund-raising drive got underway in the fall of 1923, it was under the auspices of the Northwestern Baptist Hospital Association, the Mounds Park facility's new parent organization. The association promised to donate \$2 for every \$1 the Midway Club raised in the hospital funding drive. Work began in the summer of 1925. The hospital opened a year later.

Through it all, the Midway kept on growing. In 1923 alone, more than \$8 million in new buildings went up. The next year Montgomery Ward added a \$750,000 nine-story expansion. The addition would provide the neighborhood with its landmark Ward's Tower.

The 1920s saw growth with a new Central Warehouse, Minnesota Chemical building, Krank Manufacturing building, Worch Cigar Company, Austin-Western Road Machine Company, Midway Varnish Company, and the new Highland Park Golf Course. Griggs Cooper and Company and Waldorf Paper were among firms expanding. Other companies cited for significant growth were Willys-Overland, Northland Ski Manufacturing, Louis F. Dow Company, the Twin City Wholesale Grocery Company, Brown and Bigelow, Minnesota By-Products Coke Company, and Brown Sheet Iron and Steel. Twin City Fumigating Company celebrated its tenth anniversary by building and demonstrating a model fumigation chamber.

One small but significant addition was the opening of the area's first White Castle hamburger stand at 1945 University Avenue. (White Castle remains in the Midway today, near Lexington Parkway and University.)

As for the Midway Club itself, it, too, grew and changed. The longtime tradition of luncheon meetings with an informative guest speaker began in late 1923. (That tradition continues to this day.) The membership ranks were opened to women in 1924. Members competed with one another to "write the best article about the Midway." The article would be used in publicity materials for the Midway.

The 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression brought challenges and



The Barrett and Zimmerman Sale Stables at University and Prior around 1900. The stable occupied this area from 1896 to 1922. The Transit House was in business from 1895 to 1903. The Overland building (below), at 2572 University Avenue in 1918, represented a form of transportation that would overtake horses, rails, trolleys. Minnesota Historical Society photo.



change to the Midway community. Commercial and industrial growth slowed to a trickle. Some companies and stores shut their doors. Far more cut back, tightened their belts, and did what was necessary to continue. The National Recovery Administration provided a set of sometimes complex rules for employers to follow. A concerted effort was made to get people back to work. One 1933 canvass of the business community indicated that more than \$1 million in annual payrolls and 1,137 new employees were added under the NRA program. Another government program, the Works Progress Adminis-

tration or WPA, provided employment and public improvements throughout the area. In early 1940, WPA employees moved to the former Krank building at 1885 University Avenue, consolidating a number of varied programs under one roof.

The club's membership ranks were somewhat thinned at times. Caines, C.A. Lund of Northland Ski Manufacturing Company, Pascal Bedford of E. J. Sitwell Paper and A.L. Ritt of the Midway National Bank provided leadership during these lean years. It was a sad day, however, when longtime leader Arthur

Caines died in February of 1933. His years of activity with the club were at a time of great industrial expansion, and a 65 percent growth in the area's population. The spring membership drive was held in his honor.

By the mid-1930s, the Midway Club was bouncing back. Membership topped the 1,000 mark. The club was out of the red financially, and there was even a small cash balance left over from month to month.

Members discussed what to do about rising phone and utility rates. Brown and Bigelow announced construction of a \$150,000 playing card factory. A six-story office and warehouse building was planned near University Avenue and Raymond, as was a factory to manufacture heaters for automobiles.

The Midway Club still lobbied hard for school and community improvements. A proposed underpass for the Minnesota Transfer Railway near University and Prior was planned for many months before opening in late 1935. The influence of more motor vehicle traffic was being felt. Club members also wrangled with city officials over the need for traffic signals and safety islands for an increasingly busy University Avenue. The days of a policeman standing on busy corners, stop-and-go signs in hand, were over.

The battle over the traffic islands dominated city newspaper headlines in 1930 and 1931. The safety isles were blamed for twenty-eight traffic accidents during the spring and summer of 1930, including one fatality. Half of those accidents occurred at the Pascal Avenue intersection. Midway Club members appeared at city meetings to urge that safety isles and signals also be viewed as an aid to pedestrians.

The Midway's thriving trucking industry contributed its share to the increased traffic. By the mid-1940s, Midway would have almost forty trucking firms. Luncheon speakers discussed everything from Mahatma Gandhi to gangsters. In 1939, business people spent one luncheon meeting hearing about the growing military strength of Japan.

In the 1940s, with the outbreak of World War II, the tight times of the past

decade gave way to rationing books, scrap metal collections, and efforts to win the war. The war affected the Midway community in numerous ways. The young Northwest Airlines, located at that time on University Avenue, operated a vital military cargo route to Canada, Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. (The company's experience would be called upon again later for the Great Circle air express route used during the Korean War.)

Northwestern Aeronautical Corporation was involved in efforts to build and rebuild war planes, with the world's largest troop-carrying glider ranking as one of the corporation's most unusual accomplishments. A large production plant on Minnehaha Avenue was dedicated in 1944.

Many area residents worked at the Twin Cities Ordnance Plant in New Brighton. International Harvester and National Can Company set up wartime manufacturing facilities nearby. Wartime products were shipped in and out of the Minnesota Transfer yards. "Far from the battle lines as it is, the Transfer somehow seems to be right smack in the middle of the battle," one magazine article stated.

Freight shipping and trucking, numerous manufacturing concerns and small businesses carried on despite sometimes cumbersome wartime restrictions. Northwest Plastics was one of several area companies honored during the war for outstanding production of needed supplies.

The Minnesota State Fair was involved, staging a United Nations exhibition and a war trophies display in 1943. The St. Paul Winter Carnival Association, which included Midway leaders Clarence Maley, Arthur Eggert, Henry Lund and Harry Frost in its ranks, substituted a "St. Paul Production for Victory" show for the 1944 carnival.

Community leaders also did their bit. Old clippings and club records indicate that several members marched off to war. Their exploits and visits home were chronicled faithfully in the newspapers. Former Mayor William H. Fallon worked to help rebuild war-torn areas in Europe. Carl Gray, Jr., an executive with the Chicago, St. Paul, Milwaukee and

Omaha Railway Company, served as director-general of the army military railway services in the European Theater.

Not all was serious business during the WWII era. University of Minnesota Professor William Boss was honored with the John Deere Medal, a prestigious national award given to those who excel "in the application of science and art to the soil." He was honored for his long career at the School of Agriculture. Boss had ended his retirement and gone back to work at the University during the wartime employee shortage.

Fleischmann Yeast Company owner Leo Fleischmann was feted at a St. Paul Saints game as "King of Fans" for his devoted support of the club. The patriotism even extended to the golf links, as savings bonds and stamps were given as prizes at at least one golf tournament.

Forward-thinking Midway Club members looked ahead to the days when the soldiers would come home. More companies moved to the area, and some mainstays expanded. American Can Company bought a new site near Como Avenue, and announced it would build a \$6.5 million plant after the war.

Glendenning Motorways, Inc., purchased a new terminal at Pelham and Wabash. The Minnesota-Illinois Truck Line opened its doors on Wycliff Street. Minneapolis-Moline Power Equipment Company, Pepsi Cola, Groff Paper, Skelly Oil and John Rihm Motor Company were among the firms announcing new or remodeled facilities. Property transactions picked up in 1944, as everyone prepared for the post-war boom period. Another building boom began in June, 1945, led by a \$5.2 million expansion by Brown and Bigelow, three new housing developments and a new agricultural building at the state fairgrounds.

The area's colleges and universities also expanded, with new buildings going up at St. Thomas, Hamline and the University of Minnesota. Returning war veterans flocked to the classrooms and campuses, creating serious housing shortages in the process. More and more people moved to the area, which exhibited 40 percent of St. Paul's total growth in the 1940s.

One exciting venture was KSTP's

broadcasting of daily television programs. The RCA Service Corporation had its headquarters in the Midway. Give them a call, its advertisements stated, and have that new television installed right away.

At KSTP, the 1940s and 1950s were decades of dramatic change. The station got its start in 1923 as WAMD Radio (Where All Minnesotans Dance). It was appropriate, that WAMD produced some of its earliest programming from the Marigold Ballroom in Minneapolis. In 1928, WAMD became KSTP. The reference to St. Paul in the new call letters was also appropriate, as the station had its studios in the St. Paul Hotel for a time.

For many years KSTP has had its headquarters on University Avenue, straddling the city line between Minneapolis and St. Paul. KSTP gave the Midway area a niche in broadcasting history as the first television station between Chicago and the West Coast. The station and its longtime owners, the Hubbard family, continue to combine community involvement with pursuit of cutting-edge broadcast technology.

The Midway area saw other dramatic changes during these years. Of course, some things did stay the same. Midway Club committees and scores of volunteers continued civic efforts, lobbying for school bond issues and youth recreation needs. They celebrated when \$2.5 million in improvements were slated for area schools, and when work on a new \$1 million YMCA building began in 1952. Businesses and industries raised funds for the campaign to save Como Zoo in 1955 and joined in the enthusiastic Minnesota state centennial parade in May, 1958, when more than 300 floats and marching units traveled from University and Snelling to the State Fairgrounds. Members celebrated Minnesota's statehood centennial with a formal dance at the Prom Ballroom featuring Guy Lombardo.

Midway Club members also continued their long tradition of involvement in the St. Paul Winter Carnival. Many a member's picture can be found in the faded clippings of past carnivals of the 1950s and 1960s, as they served in the Royal Court, took up arms as Royal



Changing Community. The Episcopal Church Home bought the Hinkle Mansion at 1879 Feronia in 1920, then added on to it through the years. Photo from the Midway Chamber of Commerce files.

Guards or tweaked the royalty as merry Vulcans.

The Midway Club of the 1920s and 1930s deserves credit for helping to keep the Winter Carnival tradition going during those years when a city-wide event wasn't held. Midway business leader J.L. Shiely, Sr., who went on to be Boreas Rex in 1940, was the biggest booster of the Midway events and the ultimate revival of a city-wide carnival in 1937. The members continue to join in Winter Carnival festivities by sponsoring the annual Midway Winter Ball.

The Midway Club sponsored huge festivals in the 1920s and 1930s with winter sports contests and children's games, banquets, parties, parades and queen contests. Neighborhoods from throughout the area competed to see who could build the best float, or sponsor the prettiest queen hopeful. Neighborhood children liked to hitch the family dog to a homemade conveyance and enter the *St. Paul Daily News* Dogsled Derby at Lake Como. The high point of these events came in 1930, when an ice palace graced

Dunning Field.

Not all was work. Midway Club members still bowled with gusto. They organized outings at Midland Hills Country Club and the venerable Town and Country Club, which welcomed golfers with a new \$600,000 building in 1956.

They supported the St. Paul Saints, and they were bursting with pride in 1956, when the new Midway Stadium went up to replace old Lexington Park. Who would have guessed that in ten years the Saints would be no more? Alas, hopes of attracting the Minnesota Twins to the Midway faded, and the new stadium lasted less than twenty years before it was replaced with Municipal Stadium.

The changes of the 1950s also brought internal change to the Midway Club which changed its name to Midway Civic Club as a result of a vote in February, 1952. The new name was meant to more adequately describe the club's activities.

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At about the same time, the club board approved its first dues increase in thirty-three years, from \$10 to \$15 per member. The funds would be used to publish a monthly newsletter, start an operating reserve fund and modernize its quarters at 1931 University Avenue, which it had occupied since 1936. The improvements were unveiled in the Fall of 1953. Another renovation took place in 1960.

The club's primary activities continued to center on economic development, the promotion of the Midway as a good place to shop and live, and snaring the area's share of city property tax dollars. In March, 1950, longtime club secretary Henry J. Lund pointed out that, "A hotel, theater and retail stores are all that are necessary to complete the transition of the district to a metropolitan area." Club members decided to contact department stores in downtown St. Paul to see if any wished to move to the Midway.

That kind of effort was indicative of the rivalry that sometimes emerged between Midway and "the loop," as downtown St. Paul was known. In a 1951 president's report, William A. Smith of First Security State Bank pointed out that the Midway area was paying \$5 in property taxes to every \$3 paid by "the loop." Between 1930 and 1950, Smith noted, Midway area real estate taxes went up by \$177 million, while those paid downtown decreased by almost \$500,000. This was a part of being what Smith called the "liveliest, fastest growing section of the metropolitan area."

Lund's plea for a theater didn't pan out but he got his hotel. Plans for a "swank motel" were announced in 1955. The site, bounded by St. Anthony, Foster, Dunlap and Griggs, was known by locals as the "circus lot" because traveling shows pitched their tents there.

It would be impossible to count every new or expanded Midway industry and commercial venture in the 1950s and 1960s. Between 1951 and 1955 the area saw more than \$15 million in new construction or renovations. Waldorf Paper, Huot Manufacturing, Graybar Electric, Marshall-Wells, Midway Terminal, Central Warehouse, Northland Ski, H.B.

Fuller, Smyth Printing, McGill Printing, Deluxe Corporation, Pentair, Mutual Service Insurance, Anchor Casualty, Brown and Bigelow, Midway Hospital, the Twins Motor Hotel, Montgomery Ward and Fisher Nut Company were among the firms expanding or locating there.

The 1960s began with \$15 million in construction projects from Highland Park to St. Anthony Park. The corner of Snelling and University changed in 1960,



Joe Shiely, Sr., booster of Midway events and chairman of its Winter Carnival committees, played cowboy for the 1930 Carnival.

when Midway National Bank moved into a new \$1.2 million building. The grand opening was a happy occasion for bank employees and fellow business people as well as for the Ritt family members who had steered the bank through years of growth.

Not all of the change was in the form of bricks and mortar. One change that would be felt around the world began in the old Northwestern Aeronautics glider factory in the Midway in the late 1940s. This was the home of Engineering Research Associates (ERA) and the birthplace of early innovations in computer technology. The company, which has been through several mergers and changes, is now part of Cray Research. Another company born in that old glider factory was the Control Data Corporation. Former WWII enemy code-breakers working for ERA were also in the forefront of the computer revolution.

The forces of change that shaped the Midway in the 1950s and 1960s had a dramatic impact on the entire Twin Cities region. Increasing amounts of motor vehicle traffic, construction of the interstate highway system, the suburbanization of the Twin Cities, the decline of the railroads and countless family lifestyle changes made themselves felt. Only seniors might fondly remember the old Zimmerman and Barrett Horse Market at University and Prior, with its rows and rows of tethered animals. Others thought of University Avenue as "auto row." You could even dine in your car at Porky's Drive-In.

As more people owned and drove motor vehicles, businesses and the community responded to demand. Midway businesses that face a parking shortage today might be surprised to know that their earlier counterparts were discussing such problems in 1950. In the fall of 1953, the installation of parking meters at University and Snelling was announced. "Merchants have bowls with nickels in them in their business establishments to refund customers who have parked to make purchases," the September, 1953, Newsletter stated.

The automobile and the ability to go beyond one's immediate neighborhood to shop had major repercussions on small businesses throughout the Midway area. So, too, did the focus on convenience. The modern shopping center was launched in the St. Paul area, led by Harold and Marie Slawik's landmark Har Mar Mall. By the end of the 1950s, Har Mar would have plenty of competition.

Motor vehicles played a major role in the development of modern shopping centers. The \$1 million Highland Shopping Center opened in time for Fall, 1952, back-to-school shopping. Midway Shopping Center was on the drawing boards for several years before work began in 1958. Highland Shopping Center and Powers Department Store were going up in Highland Park at about the same time.

The \$6 million Midway Shopping Center development would include Klein's Supermarket, Woolworth's,

Walgreen's, Lerner Shops, Kinney Shoes, Fanny Farmer, Bonnie Shoes, Edison Shoe and G.C. Murphy Department Store. (Klein already had a warehouse in the neighborhood, along with Fairway Foods.)

Even old Lexington Park, the former home of the Saints, was slated in 1958 for redevelopment, with a \$3 million shopping center. The old stadium and the Coliseum Roller Rink would soon be little more than memories, making way for a Red Owl and other stores.

Some shopping centers didn't materialize as planned. One 1952 proposal called for a \$10 million development, bounded by Highway 36, Fairview and Snelling Avenues. A four-story Golden Rule, and space for seventy-five other stores would be provided. A \$1 million center, called Snelling Hub, was planned for Snelling Avenue and County Road B.

It was a change from the days of corner grocery stores and filling stations, five and ten-cent stores, jammed-packed little hardware stores, meat markets, and dairies that delivered milk in clinking glass bottles. Who remembers Consumers Milk Company, the Minnesota Dairy, St. Paul Milk Company and Sanitary Dairy? Or Midway Hardware and Heating, the Selby Hardware Company and Twin City Hardware and Heating Company? Or Michaud Brothers' Stop and Shop, LaSalle Grocery, Kissins' Cash and Carry Grocery, Groveland Grocery, National Tea or Coppes Home Food Market?

Some small businesses closed. Others tried to meet the challenge, and hung on. One note in a November, 1953, Midway Civic Club News indicates that Lee's Village Inn owner Frank Lee was studying the possibility of a "take-home" cooked food chain.

The increasing number of motor vehicles on city streets hastened the demise of the streetcar system. One April, 1952, newsletter account was headlined "Streetcars to be replaced by new-type buses." That summer, the Twin City Rapid Transit Company announced it would sell part of its property at University and Snelling Avenues. The Univer-



Employees' coffee break at Sanitary Foods, Inc., 1916. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

sity Avenue streetcar line, the old "interurban," ceased operations in October, 1953, and was replaced by buses.

Many of the vehicles on Midway's streets were purchased at the community's array of motor vehicle dealerships. The area's status as a place to shop for a new or used vehicle took hold in the 1930s, when Burseth Motor Company, Buy-Rite Auto Mart, Kline Motor, McDonald Chevrolet, Kramer Diehart Inc., Raudenbusch Motor Company, Twin City Four Wheel Drive Motor Co., University Durant Company, Kriesel and Miller, Midway Chevrolet, Even and Kimmel, Federal Motor Truck Sales, Owens Motor Sales, Uni-Dale Motor Sales, W.J. Irish Motor Sales and the Hupmobile Agency were among the early stops for serious tire-kickers.

They were later joined by Harold J. Slawik, Inc.'s, DeSoto and Plymouth sales business, Arrow Pontiac, Midway Comet Mercury Motors, Midtown Motors and Ron Saxon Ford. University Avenue competed with Grand Avenue as the place to buy a car in St. Paul.

Not all of the traffic was in family sedans or small trucks. This was a time when the Midway's trucking industry boomed, solidifying its status as a leading national transportation center. In the summer of 1950, four new truck termi-

nals made plans to locate in the Midway. Mueller Transportation, Bruce Motor Freight, Ajax Transfer Company and Northwest Freight Lines were relocating to the area and joining longtime firms, including Murphy Motor Freight, Merchants Motor Freight, Midnite Express, and the Wittee and Short companies. The newcomers brought the total of trucking firms to almost sixty. Companies that sold trucks and trailers and serviced the massive fleets of vehicles also flourished in an area where their services were in demand.

Other changes that also affected the Midway were the coming of superhighways or freeways. Envisioned by the Eisenhower administration as a way to link major cities, and then as part of a national defense strategy, the freeway system for the area began to take shape in the mid-1950s.

Business people watched with a mixture of interest and concern as plans for the area's interstate highway systems were outlined. The convenience of quick access to other places meant the loss of numerous Midway office, industrial and residential properties. Some neighborhoods, including the Rondo and Merriam Park communities, lost key portions of their business districts. The Rondo neighborhood, the heart of St. Paul's African

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Midway was one of several St. Paul neighborhoods that staged their own Winter Carnivals. Waldorf Paper Products employees (right) were appropriately costumed for the 1929 Carnival parade, and Brown and Bigelow employees dressed to fit a Carnival theme. Below: "Miss Industrial Midway." Midway Chamber of Commerce photos.



American community, was especially hit hard when Interstate 94 came through.

The days of booming freeway construction and the mega-projects of the 1950s and 1960s were busy times for the J. L. Shiely Company, which had its headquarters in Midway for many years. The Shielys, who got their start with St. Paul's first ready-mix concrete plant, have long been associated with major regional transportation and public works projects. It was only fitting that the company would become one of the region's largest suppliers of crushed aggregate, a crucial material in twentieth century transportation systems.

Henry Lund stepped down as the club's executive secretary, and was suc-



ceeded by Clifton "Swampy" Holmgren, a former journalist and military officer, in January, 1961. Holmgren's work was cut out for him, as he and other club leaders watched the Midway continue to grow. A new Twins Motor Inn, a new Hamline University building, a new \$1.5 million addition at Montgomery Ward—the changes went on and on.

What is now the Midway Chamber of Commerce changed, too. Members no longer gather at their own club to meet, eat lunch, discuss issues and smoke Havana cigars. Now they spend far more time in the community than they do in

their present offices at University and Raymond Avenues above First Bank Midway. It's worth noting that today the Midway Chamber offices are just across the intersection from the Midway Club's first permanent home. The Chamber's name has changed, too, as the Midway Civic and Commerce Association of 1975 became the Midway Chamber of Commerce in 1992.

Interaction with community groups also has changed. The Chamber works with district planning councils, Midway institutions and business associations throughout the Twin Cities area. One of

the Midway Chamber's greatest innovations in recent years has been its support of University United, an umbrella group of neighborhood and business organization working together on common issues.

But much has stayed the same. The Midway Chamber continues to be an effective voice in St. Paul and the region. The tradition of luncheon meetings with informative speakers remains as popular as ever. A newsletter to communicate with members has been resurrected.

Some members of the business community would be familiar names to the Midway Club of old. Shaw Lumber, which has been in St. Paul for more than 100 years, is still on Como Avenue. Paper, Calmenson and Company remains a Midway fixture, as do H.B. Fuller, Waldorf Corporation, Plastics, Inc., and a host of other companies large and small.

Dan and John Baker, whose family founded the Minnesota Chemical Company in 1915, point out that businesses and industries with strong family ties have helped make the Midway into the community it is today. Their father, an immigrant from Ireland, started modestly, but was able to build Minnesota Chemical into one of the largest "chemical houses" in the region. Minnesota Chemical began as a laundry supply firm, diversifying and expanding its wares to meet the changing times.

The Bakers, the second generation to run the business, have now retired. Minnesota Chemical is in its third generation of family ownership. They attribute family ties and a sense of camaraderie and community to the area's continued economic strength. "The Midway business community has always been able to rise to the challenges of the times," John Baker said recently.

And the Midway today? It, too, has grown and changed with modern times. Obsolete buildings were torn down or revitalized in the urban renewal push of the late 1960s and 1970s. Some area mainstays moved to more spacious sites in the suburbs. Other enterprises disappeared as a result of corporate mergers or company sales. In recent years, Midway Chevrolet and Ron Saxon Ford have been left as the only new car dealers on what once was "auto row."

University Avenue has enjoyed a unique revival at its east end, with a number of enterprises started by Southeast Asian business people. These businesses have joined companies owned by leaders in St. Paul's African American community. They united with residents to drive out the adult entertainment industry and reclaim the streets for community development. This part of University Avenue, envisioned as the future site of a multicultural retail-entertainment center at University and Dale, is one of the most ethnically diverse in the Twin Cities.

In the Hamline-Midway and Snelling-Hamline neighborhoods, the planned Midway Marketplace is generating great excitement as the Chamber celebrates its seventy-fifth birthday. The new retail complex will replace the current Montgomery Ward store and add a new K Mart and F & M Drugstore. To the west, Midway Center has a refurbished facade and new expansion, while a Slawik Properties effort, Spruce Tree Center, has perked up University and Snelling with its distinctive design. Snelling Avenue was the focus of a Neighborhood Partnership streetscape beautification program several years ago.

One of the most ambitious Midway area efforts was the Wilder Foundation's renovation of the former Northern Pacific Railroad's Como shops into Bandana Square, the St. Paul Children's Museum and what is now a Holiday Inn. The public-private partnership between Wilder affiliate AHW, the St. Paul Port Authority and the City of St. Paul also planned the Energy Park development nearby. Today, Bandana Square is enjoying a renaissance and Energy Park has evolved into a mix of housing, retail, office, light industry and health care services.

The St. Paul Port Authority is involved in five Midway industrial parks—Empire Builder Industrial Park on Pennsylvania between Rice and Jackson Streets; Energy Park on Energy Park Drive between Lexington Parkway and Snelling Avenue; West Energy Park between Snelling Avenue and Highway 280; Midway Industrial Park near Transfer Road and University Avenue, and the Westgate Industrial Park, bordered by University Avenue, Eustis Street and

Highway 280. Old sites are gaining a new life under the Port's guidance.

It's worth noting the crucial role in St. Paul's development that was played by a man whose company got its start in the Midway area. St. Paul industrialist Norman Mears was president of Buckbee-Mears, a firm his family founded in 1907. Buckbee-Mears, one of the oldest companies in St. Paul, is still claimed as one of Midway's own.

Before his death in 1974, Mears also was a leader in efforts to revitalize the city's Lowertown neighborhood in the 1970s, with his renovation of what is now Park Square Court. The building had housed the wholesale operations of the Noyes Brothers and Cutler drug company, and the B.W. Harris Fur Company. The park across the street, Mears Park, was renamed in his honor. After years of good-natured Midway and "loop" rivalry, it's somehow fitting that a long-time Midway name is so prominent downtown.

If the original Midway Club's President John H. Anderson, and other early leaders could come and visit the Midway of today, they would no doubt be pleased with what they'd see. Herbert Bigelow might wonder where Quality Park and Brown and Bigelow are, but he'd be sure to enjoy the display of memorabilia featured at the Sheraton Midway on his plant's old site.

John B. Feuling of Central Warehouse might marvel at the innovations in the warehousing and freight transfer business. Arthur Caines might be cheered by the sight of an old Minnesota Transfer engine clattering through the area, still doing duty for the Minnesota Commercial Railroad Company.

And Ed Paradis, that editor-agitator who wanted a large union depot? He might visit the Amtrak station near University and Prior, and watch as the trains streak out on their daily runs. Trains and trucks have replaced ox carts and steam locomotives, but the Midway remains at the center of everything.

This is Jane McClure's fourth article for Ramsey County History. She is a freelance reporter and feature writer for neighborhood newspapers in St. Paul.



Hamline Park Playground candidates for one of the Midway's Winter Carnivals, probably 1929 or 1930. Can anyone identified these young women? Midway Chamber of Commerce photo. See article beginning on Page 4.

R.C.H.S.
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