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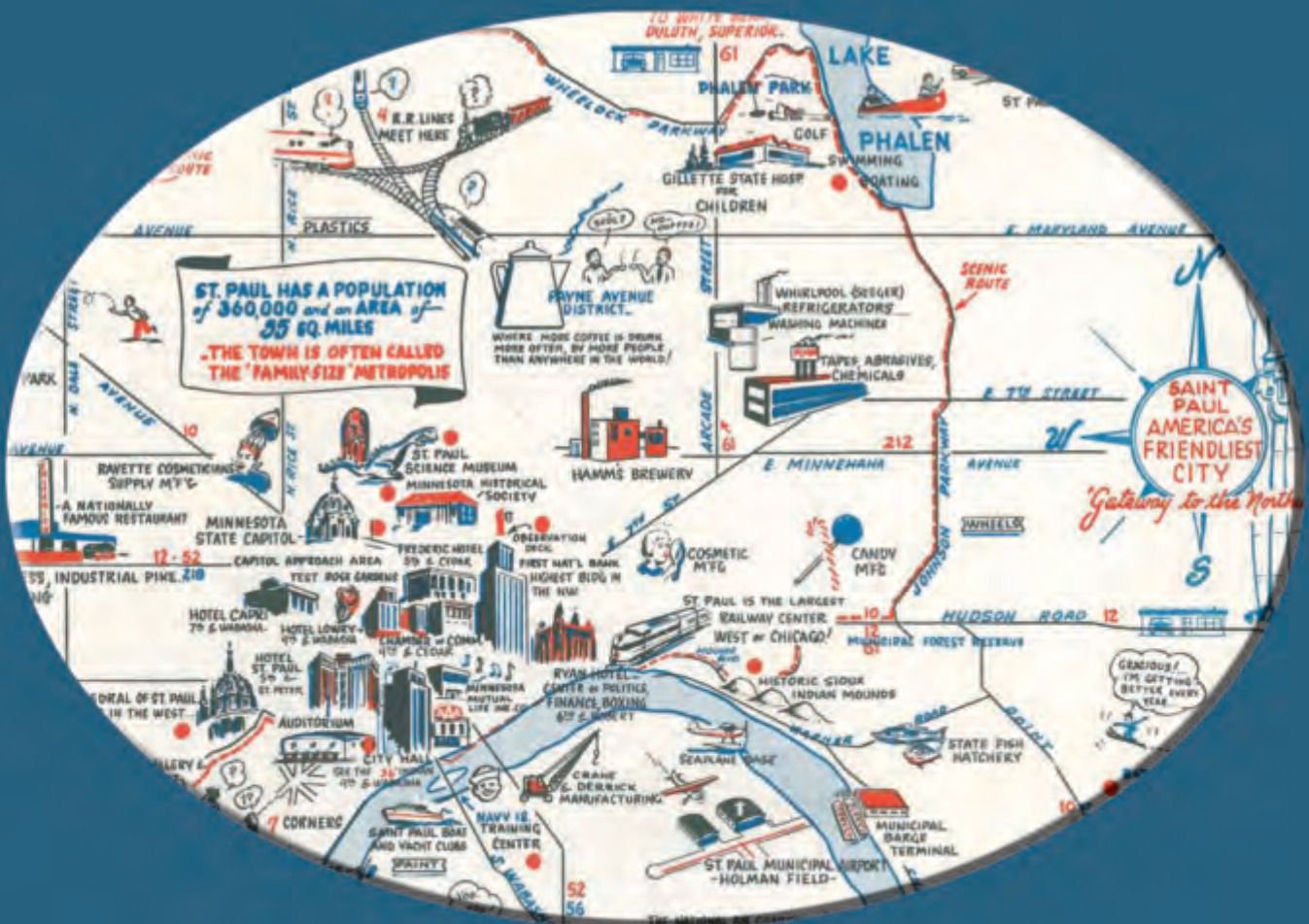
Volume 45, Number 3

“It Was Like Living in a Small Town”

Three St. Paul Neighborhoods That Worked: Dayton’s Bluff, Payne Avenue, and Arcade Street in the 1940s and ’50s

Steven C. Trimble

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A portion of the “Souvenir Guide Map of Saint Paul, Showing Pieces of Historic, Scenic and General Interest” that was circulated by St. Paul’s leaders in 1957. The area reproduced here concentrates on the city’s East Side and highlights the Hamm’s Brewery, the Whirlpool (Seeger) plant on Arcade Street, and 3M’s headquarters and large manufacturing facilities (identified as “MMM”) that turned out “tapes, abrasives, chemicals.” Photo by Maureen McGinn; courtesy of the Collections of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 45, Number 3

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue celebrates the history of St. Paul’s East Side. In our lead article, Steve Trimble examines the ways in which three East Side neighborhoods—Dayton’s Bluff, Payne Avenue, and Arcade Street—worked through national mobilization during World War II and the challenges of adapting to peacetime and the changes of the 1950s. These East Side communities had a strong sense of place that helped them to weather wartime hardships and to prosper despite the challenges of the 1950s and ’60s. In our second article, Paul Nelson profiles the people who called the one-block-long Decatur Street, which ran above Swede Hollow, their home between the 1890s, when the street was platted, and the early 1930s, when the city of St. Paul decided to eliminate Decatur so that Payne Avenue could be connected to East Seventh Street. The Ramsey County Historical Society is especially thankful for the generous support and encouragement for the publication of this in-depth look at the East Side that it received from the Chairman of the 3M Company, George W. Buckley, himself an enthusiastic reader of history, and the 3M Company.

RCHS recently announced at its annual Members’ Event that Barry L. and Joan Miller Cotter had won the 2010 Virginia Brainard Kunz Award for the best article published in *Ramsey County History* in 2008–2009 for their two articles on Truman M. Smith, St. Paul banker and horticulturalist. Because the Cotters were not able to be present to accept their award, they have communicated their thanks in an email that says that winning the Award is a “very gratifying surprise.” The Cotters also stressed that the work they did “was only possible because of the warm and encouraging response” they received from RCHS and the Society’s policy of carefully considering manuscripts written by “people who may not be historians by training but want to add their bit to the ongoing story of Ramsey County history.” Congratulations to Barry and Joan Cotter.

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

“It Was Like Living in a Small Town”

Three St. Paul Neighborhoods That Worked: Dayton’s Bluff, Payne Avenue, and Arcade Street in the 1940s and ’50s

Steven C. Trimble

We have no choice about our sex; we have no choice about our age; we have no choice about skin color; we inherit religion; we don’t even have much choice about a job unless you’re successful. The only time you express yourself is in the choice of residence, and that is what seems to gauge the social and political configuration of most American cities.¹

—Richard C. Wade, urban historian

ing Dayton’s Bluff, Payne Avenue, and Arcade Street had once been economically diverse, by the 1920s the economic elite and much of the middle class had left the area. Many of these people had moved into new homes constructed further away during the city-wide building boom in the late nineteenth and early

When sociologists such as Calvin Schmid wrote about cities in the 1930s, they typically looked at general trends and often focused on how external forces such as the national economy, housing booms and busts, and large demographic changes affected urban communities.² Rather than take this approach, in the pages that follow we will examine three neighborhoods on St. Paul’s East Side that had a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial properties in the 1940s and ’50s to determine how the residents of these communities developed internal responses to the circumstances that shaped their very particular characters and histories and set them apart from the rest of the city.

In the middle third of the twentieth century, Dayton’s Bluff, located south of the multiple buildings that comprised Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing’s facilities; Arcade Street, spreading north from the Seeger Refrigerator plant; and Payne Avenue, consisting of the area northwest of Hamm’s Brewery were communities that worked. This article will show how the people who lived there responded to the opportunities and problems of World War II and the post-war years of the 1950s and examine how these neighborhoods changed over time in response to both external forces and internal community dynamics.

Although the neighborhoods surround-



twentieth centuries. By the 1930s all three areas had become solid working-class neighborhoods.

Census data from four U.S. census tracts indicates that the top three occupations for men in these communities were as craftsmen, operatives, and laborers. Women who worked outside the home most often had clerical, sales, or service jobs. City directories provide even more detail and the 1944 St. Paul edition shows that the residents were almost all blue-collar workers. According to the directory, the men who lived on Brunson Street, Beech Street, and Sims Avenue were employed as laborers, drivers, helpers, printers, painters, and machine operators. Several individuals were also listed as members of the armed forces. In some cases the directory identifies a resident's place of work. Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M), Hamm's Brewery, and the Seeger Refrigerator Company regularly appear in these listings. When the directory identifies a woman's employment, the jobs listed most frequently were those of cook, operator, clerk, or laundry worker.³

The Development of East Side Neighborhoods

Dayton's Bluff, south of East Seventh Street, had been settled from the 1870s to the 1890s by a first wave of residents comprised of Yankee stock and German and Irish immigrants. The community's ethnicity had faded by the 1930s and what remained was found in the two Catholic churches that were "national" parishes. Sacred Heart was established (1881) to serve the German community while, a few blocks away, the Irish attended St. John's (built in 1886). Even if an individual Catholic lived across the street from one of these churches but identified with the other country of origin, through the 1950s that German or Irish descendant usually had to attend services at their national parish rather than worship at the church that was nearby.

In contrast, the Payne and Arcade neighborhoods retained more of their ethnic heritage up to about 1960. In the 1940s and '50s, there were still many specialized businesses that catered to the needs of ethnic families who lived in these areas. St. Ambrose Catholic



An interior view of Hamm's Brewery, 681 East Minnehaha in 1937. Photographer: A. F. Raymond. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Church (established 1911), located in the Railroad Island area, served Italian residents, while further up the avenue the Scandinavians attended Lutheran churches. In the Arcade Street community, much of the sizable Polish population attended services at St. Casimir's Catholic Church (founded 1892).

City directories from various years provide a more comprehensive understanding of ethnicity in the working class areas of the East Side. For example, upper Payne Avenue, which has often been called a Swedish neighborhood, and lower Payne, which has been identified as an Italian one, is not totally accurate. These areas were actually ethnically mixed. In 1944 the residents of Brunson Street, to cite another example, were almost all Italian, but two blocks away on Otsego Street, only four out of seventeen households were headed by people with Italian surnames.

Some urban historians have used the term "concept of visibility" to explain this kind of labeling. By this they mean that when a main street in a city has many institutions and businesses that delivered services to a particular ethnic or other group, these commercial establishments and other institutions helped define a neighborhood's character. Thus lower Payne was often referred to as "Little Italy" and the northern part of the same avenue as "Snoose Boulevard," even if there were many other ethnic groups present, because of the large number of shops that catered to each group's special needs.⁴

In all three of these East Side neighborhoods, people generally lived near their jobs and walked to work, to school, to attend social functions, or to seek entertainment at numerous movie theaters, restaurants, or bars. The three neighborhoods were socially resilient because they were tied together by multiple bonds. They not only lived together, but often attended the same church, patronized the same merchants, and belonged to local clubs and organizations. There were also a number of large venues where East Siders could gather for meetings, weddings, and various get-togethers. These institutions included the Dayton's Bluff Commercial Club on East Seventh,



A group of Railroad Island kids mug for the camera on a car in the late 1930s. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

the Polish-American Club on Arcade, Italian Hall on Payne, and, of course, many churches and a variety of fraternal organizations.

If an individual in one of these neighborhoods suffered some hardship, typically their family and friends pitched in to help out. The three main business strips that went through these blue-collar communities were Payne Avenue, Arcade Street, and East Seventh Street, all of which had come of age along with the East Side streetcar lines beginning in the 1890s. There were close to a hundred small businesses on each of the major commercial streets, containing groceries, meat markets, taverns, and other small businesses that served almost all of the area's needs and whose proprietors developed close relationships with their customers.⁵

Although the national and Minnesota economies had slowed considerably during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the East Side fared somewhat better. After the 1933 repeal of prohibition, Hamm's Brewery went back into full production and added jobs. Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M) was increasing its workforce to make more Scotch tape. Seeger Refrigerator was also doing fairly well because the company had a major contract with Sears, Roebuck to produce refrigerators that Sears sold under its Coldspot® brand.

The coming of World War II and the subsequent postwar years brought increasing prosperity to the three neighborhoods. When the United States entered the war in late 1941, East Side residents rallied to the cause and did a remarkable job of producing goods that met the military's needs and providing men and women in uniform who helped defeat the Axis powers. Between 1940 and 1960, employment grew in the Dayton's Bluff, Payne Avenue, and Arcade Street neighborhoods and provided a good life to many of the people living on St. Paul's East Side.

Between 1940 and 1960 these neighborhoods were experiencing considerable change. St. Paul's total population was increasing in this period, but the growth rate had slowed considerably compared to the years between 1880 and 1920. Between 1940 and 1960, St. Paul grew from 287,736 to 313,411 residents, an average of only 1,284 persons a year.

Over the same period, the population in three of the census tracts clustered around the East Side's major industries declined (see the table below). The only population gains were in Tract 16. The growth in this tract is largely attributable to the new housing that was built in its northern section following World War II. By 1960 Tract 16, like Tracts 15, 30, and 31, had also experienced population decline. In sum, during the roughly twenty years examined here, employment was up and many enjoyed good wages, but overall the population was declining. How the people of these East Side neighborhoods worked together to deal with the changes of the 1940s and '50s and how they shaped these working-class neighborhoods is a compelling story.

East Side Population by Census Tract, 1940-1960*

U.S. Census Tract	1940	1950	1960
Tract 15	4,514	4,416	4,060
Tract 16	3,873	4,287	3,870
Tract 30	2,697	2,630	2,366
Tract 31	3,689	3,446	2,438

*Some changes were made to the boundaries of the census tracts each decade; consequently individual tracts may not reflect precise population figures in these decades.⁶

The East Side Goes to War

I quit school at sixteen and went to Seeger's in the morning and started my job that afternoon. It was wartime and we were making bomb racks, flexible machine gun chutes, and bombing flares to light up the night. . . . They were very strict in how a place should be run. . . . It was tough working, but I didn't know anything different. I had a good life at Seeger-Whirlpool, raised seven children, and my wife stayed at home.⁷

—Clinton Conrad

World War II brought the U.S. economy out of the Great Depression. Military requirements ramped up production and provided jobs for many additional workers. Even before the United States entered the overseas conflict, the government had initiated some efforts toward military preparedness. In October 1940 Congress established a civilian draft. That same year, the U.S. Army gave Seeger Refrigerator Company, which was located on Arcade Street, a major contract to build large refrigeration units. Shortly after the contract was awarded, labor-management issues led to an impasse.

The 1940 Seeger Strike

The Seeger Company and the Refrigerator Workers local had been in prolonged negotiations since their contract expired in June 1940. Finally, on August 23, the union voted to strike. The main demands were eight cents an hour raise for day workers with a six cent raise and a continuation of the piece workers' rates at their current level. The walkout was not immediate and meetings continued. Governor Harold Stassen's office stepped in and tried to conciliate matters, but his offers were rejected. Negotiations eventually broke down and

a second vote endorsed a walkout but delayed picketing for a time. Seeger management then laid a compromise contract on the table, but it was not accepted and on September 16, 1940, sixty picketers showed up outside the plant. With 1,500 people leaving their jobs, it was the biggest labor action in St. Paul since the 1922 railroad strike. A federal labor conciliator was called in because of the army's order for 1,300 refrigeration cabinets for the "preparedness program," and there were suggestions that not making them was unpatriotic. The union countered and offered to allow a skeleton force of workers to return and work only on the army cabinets to "counteract assertions that the strike is impeding national defense."⁸



Two picketers at the Seeger Refrigeration Company on the first day of the 1940 strike. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Anticipating colder weather, the strikers set up an enclosed kitchen on the west side of Arcade Street to dispense food and coffee. The strike finally ended and the employees went back to work on October 29. The new agreement gave the day workers a raise of six cents an hour; the piece workers received an increase of four cents and a slight increase in the maximum rates they could get for their production. The union was also pleased to get a two-year contract.⁹

Soon after the strike was settled, the

armed forces of Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and other strategic bases in the Far East, thereby propelling the United States into the war. Beginning in 1942, the *Dayton's Bluff Booster*, an East Side newspaper, began printing letters from area soldiers who were overseas. Two days after the disaster at Pearl Harbor, Warren Hammegren sent one to his parents that read: "I'm perfectly well and am fairly safe. . . . All our letters will be censored from now on. . . . I can't say an awful lot about what is happening out here," he pointed out. "You people back there can't begin to realize just what it is actually like to be in an air raid under fire. I think I aged ten years in the last three days. Our morale is strong, and we all feel that we will win. . . . Your loving son, Warren."¹⁰ East Side residents, whose morale was also strong like Warren's, pulled together in those difficult times and did their part on the home front.

The war years would have a major impact on the three East Side communities. With the local workforce largely unionized, many of the businesses in the area provided employment with good wages and there were plenty of jobs. Nevertheless, economic and social trends that had begun in earlier decades began to accelerate. By 1940 the three neighborhoods were less economically diverse than in the past and most of the available jobs were blue collar.

The East Side's three biggest employers were all affected by the war, but their responses to the new situation were different. Hamm's continued to make beer, but when it received orders to produce six million cans of beer a year, the brewery had to increase production substantially and add workers for round-the-clock shifts. In addition, two "government men" were assigned to Hamm's to see that the beer was "properly put into cartons and wired up for overseas shipping."¹¹

Seeger Refrigerator also added shifts, starting in the metal shop in 1942 when the company began producing military goods. Their engineers developed flexible steel "ammunition chutes," to feed projectiles into guns. Workers built bomb racks for the "Superfortress" airplanes, parachute flares, precision aircraft parts, and huge coolers used by the navy.



Luciano Cochiarella (left) and Filomena D'Aloia with fresh homemade bread baked in an earthen oven in the Railroad Island area in 1940. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Although the company stopped making civilian refrigerators, it continued to produce a limited number of items for the general public.¹²

3M followed a different path than Seeger. Instead of shifting to the manufacture of totally new products, the com-

pany built on its traditional adhesives and abrasives and came up with a hundred kinds of tape designed for use during the war. One of the new products was "Safety Walk," a granulated material that made walking on wet or oily ship decks and airplane wings safer. Roofing granules were made in camouflage colors to be used in military structures. Raw rubber used for adhesives was very scarce, so artificial substitutes were developed. 3M even ran advertisements apologizing to homemakers for the scarcity of their tape, explaining that most of their available supplies had been diverted to the war effort.¹⁴

Everyday Life on the Home Front

During the war, Carl Kuhrmeyer, who lived at 919 Beech, attended Harding High School and worked at C. Thomas Grocery on East Seventh. He remembered Dayton's Bluff as a solid neighborhood at the time. "Generally the husbands were breadwinners and women stayed home." He remembered that many East Siders worked

Jerry D'Aloia and the Wedding Chickens

In an interview many years after the war, Jerry D'Aloia told this story of chickens and an upcoming family wedding celebration.

During World War II, you know, meat was rationed. I was selling papers downtown and right across from the post office, there was a poultry house. . . . We're trying to figure out how we were going to feed the people for the wedding. . . . I walked by there and I see those chicks. . . . I think I bought 150. . . . A lot of them died. We took the chicks home and we had them in a big old cardboard box . . . in the basement. . . .

Going down Seventh Street, there was a flourmill there. They would unload boxcars and there was always grain on the ground. . . . I'd go down there . . . I had a sack of papers and I'd fill it up with grain, as much as I could gather and we fed the chicks. . . . They were getting big, so . . . Russell [his

brother] and I . . . built a chicken coop out of old refrigerator doors that he got from the railroad. . . .

The day before the wedding . . . we butchered all the chickens. . . . We put them in the icehouse until the next morning so they could be chilled. The next day, we got up early in the morning. . . . We had pots and pans from all over the neighborhood to cook all these chickens. In the meantime, I went over and started a good fire in Lena Fellace's garage, which is two houses down, a big outdoor oven in the garage, outside oven, a brick oven. . . . Put the chickens in there and then we went to the wedding. . . . We had enough to feed the whole wedding party, all the family, and all the friends and relatives that were invited to the wedding.

When he raised the wedding chickens, Jerry D'Aloia was living at 470 Hopkins Street along with his sister, Michelina, and brother, Russell.¹³

at the three large employers—Hamm’s, Seeger, and 3M—as well as at railroads such as the Northern Pacific and Great Northern, and at other businesses. “Most of [these workers] were not poor, but were hard working people.” For adults “church activities were a very important part of their lives.” There were also frequent family get-togethers at the homes of family and friends where people often played cards.¹⁵

Kuhrmeyer recalled the shortages and sacrifices that the neighborhood residents were willing to endure on the home front: “It was very traumatic because everyone was leaving between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five or thirty-eight to go into the service. . . . All my neighbors and all my relatives in that age group were in the service, so it was very different.” He added:

Of course, there was rationing going on. Gasoline was in short supply and an awful lot of foods were in short supply. When I was fifteen, in 1943, I started working in a grocery store on Seventh Street. I really got to know what was going on in the food industry at that point because of the problems with shortages of chocolate, bananas, meats, cheeses. There were an awful lot of things you just couldn’t buy. . . . Sugar and coffee were in short supply. . . . You had to have rationing stamps in order to buy certain of those items.¹⁶

Tom Hilpisch also remembered Dayton’s Bluff in the late 1940s as a blue-collar neighborhood. His family mostly stayed near home. “I can remember on Saturday my mother and I walked down East Seventh Street to shop,” he said. “We’d stop at Dorothy Ann Bakery to get Vienna bread and went on to Memmer’s butcher shop and got wieners and then to Sanitary Bakery to get a blueberry pie.” There was an occasional streetcar ride to visit in North St. Paul. “That was huge to us since we didn’t have a car during the war. You couldn’t get tires, you couldn’t get gas.” His aunt, who didn’t drive, applied for gas coupons to help out. They had to get tokens for certain foods, but, he



About 1942, a group of young men gathered at the Williamson Service Station on Arcade Street near the corner of Jenks Avenue and interrupted the work of clearing snow. Shortly thereafter, some of them may have traded their civilian clothes for a military uniform. Photo courtesy of Linda McShannock.

concluded, “My Grandpa was a butcher so we usually had meat.”¹⁷

Betty Johnson’s Swedish-born father owned a Payne Avenue grocery that was also affected by the war. As was common at the time, the store did not have fresh meats but did sell lunch meats and had big boxes of wieners. There were a lot of items in big bins and a bunch of bananas always hung from the ceiling. She helped out, grinding coffee beans, scooping ice cream, waiting on customers and, of course, cleaning up. The family of nine “worked hard,” and was able to buy a house on nearby Reaney Street. Time for entertainment was scarce, although they took automobile rides almost ever Sunday and sometimes went to the Swedish movies that were still occasionally given at the local theater.

Betty’s family sometimes took in overnight boarders, usually Hamm’s drivers. “They had to lay over while their trucks were being filled and they slept at our place.” There was nothing unusual about this and “many houses had ‘room for rent’ signs.” According to her, “war time presented new challenges. Those were tough times . . . everyone had to have little red tokens to get rationed items.” Her father was an air raid warden and he had to go around the neighborhood in the dark and make sure people were honoring any blackouts. She went with him at times “in the dark with our

flashlights. If we could see a light, he’d have to knock on the door and tell them to shut their drapes.” Johnson summed up her memories of the neighborhood at the time, saying “we all had gardens and a lot of togetherness. We all knew each other and knew what was going on. They were good times.”¹⁸

The *Booster* gave weekly glimpses of some of the ways that area residents responded to wartime. For example, Robert Preifer of 1044 Reaney, and his pal, James Kordosky of 1191 Beech, left on January 13, 1942, for the navy. Bob soon wrote back and said that in his group of recruits there were “nine boys from Harding [High School] and

four boys from the Mining [3M].” They were all “having a good time.” The paper reported that a new tradition had developed at Joe Ondrey’s Bar. Some of the boys who were leaving for the service were taking a dime, wrapping it in cellophane tape, “putting their name on it, and sticking it up on the mirror in the back bar. The dimes will remain there until they get back.”

Home front activities were also frequently covered by the newspaper. One issue reported that Mike Pfeffer of 843 Reaney was heading up a series of first aid classes for civilian air wardens in the area at Mounds Park Elementary School. Another issue contained an interesting classified ad: “Will Rent: 2 plots (235x125) for Victory Garden. 1165 Burns Ave.” Local homeowners looking to help with their own finances leased out space. A typical *Booster* ad from that period read: “For Rent: 553 Forest. Nice room, private adult house, near Minnesota Mining and Seegers, 2 blocks to street car. Employed lady or gent.”¹⁹

The war years demonstrated the resilience of East Siders as they dealt with difficult times. They were willing to help each other in these tight-knit neighborhoods. Take the case of Nellie Luchessi, who decided to move. She was having trouble finding a van, so her old pals from Johnny’s Recreation had a “moving bee,” and hand carried boxes and furniture several blocks to her new residence. The *Booster* saw

this as a good example of the continuing strength of the community and wrote that it was “just another manifestation of the friendliness that has existed among neighbors here for several generations and is another reason why the Bluff is the best place in the world to live.”²⁰

Some families had multiple members in the uniform. In 1943, the *Booster* reported that Mrs. Eliason of 1069 Hudson Road had been dubbed “Dayton’s Bluff’s No. 1 War Mother.” Three of her sons, Clarence, Lawrence, and Harold—better known locally as “Pug,” “Monk,” and “Shorty”—had all left their jobs at a South St. Paul packing plant and were in the army. Don, a fourth son (no nickname given), had also signed up but his entry was deferred until after his graduation from Macalester College. The Horrisberger family, who lived at 781 East Fourth, had four sons who were in the service.²¹

Families living on Lower Payne Avenue had multiple sons in service as well. A local newsletter mentioned that there were seven Italian “four star mothers,” each of whom had four sons in the service. One of them merited a special mention. According to the newsletter, “Mrs. Lombardi was operating the beer tavern known as Geno’s Café. She has earned herself the distinction of being one of the best spaghetti makers in the city. Over the bar are pictures of her four fighting sons.”²² Neighborhood historian Gentile Yarusso later wrote that during the overseas conflict “nearly every boy in the district went to war. I remember many times, in many of the homes of seeing little Italian mothers sitting at the kitchen table with rosary in hand, moving the beads from hand to hand imperceptibly . . . [as] . . . these little mothers were praying for the safe return of their sons from the war.”²³

Home-Front Activities

Recycling was an important part of the home-front activities. There were drives to collect metal, newspapers, rubber, and other commodities. Dornfeld’s Mobil, located at Point Douglas and Old Hudson roads, had a huge pile of old tires that was estimated to weigh five tons. The pile was quickly recycled. Besides the patriotic feelings that came from doing something

to help the war effort, people received a penny a pound. Organizers of the long-time Payne Avenue Harvest Festival continued their fall event, complete with bands, banners, food, and lots of fun. They decided to feature the upcoming scrap drive for their popular parade and ar-



A 3M ad in the *Dayton's Bluff Booster* for hiring men and women during World War II. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

ranged to have an empty lot next to a café as the drop-off spot for metal. According to the executive director of the Payne Avenue Business Association, this focus was “being staged to add impetus to the citywide scrap salvage campaign.”²⁴

Sometimes the area’s popular culture was affected and the half dozen local movie theaters changed their usual formats with special activities. The Radio Theater on East Seventh announced in February 1942 that it would give out defense stamps at shows. The main feature that Sunday was “Keep ‘Em Flying,” starring Abbot and Costello. Owner Eddie Velat said that women would get in for free if they brought in any old aluminum pot or pan.²⁵ Boy Scouts participated in scrap and paper drives and gathered old clothing to send overseas. Louise Doerr, Cub Master of Pack #14, suggested that “the day may come when we have blackouts here and they may end up helping you get home.” The scouts knew first aid, she added, and “we are ready to do our part to help the man in the trenches or at the front.”²⁶

East Side Youth and the War

Teenagers living on the East Side did not sit back and watch. Students at Harding High School, then located at the northeast corner of Third and Earl, pitched in to help the war effort. Their first project was a government-sponsored program to have boys in science classes build model airplane replicas of allied and enemy aircraft that were needed to improve recognition and for gunnery practice. Female students were encouraged to make patriotic posters in art class or put together “utility kits” for soldiers in home economics. These kits consisted of a diary, pencils, knives, combs, postcards, paper and envelopes, shaving cream, playing cards, and a sewing case.

A Harding “War Council” was appointed in March 1942 to oversee defense projects assigned to school clubs and to plan school war efforts. The council soon decided on major projects. The first was a “Service Flag” that would list the names of all “Hardingites” who were in the armed services. The next project was selling defense stamps in all of the classes. The third was the collection of all sorts of waste paper—including lunch bags that were to be baled into bundles with a machine loaned by a local business. Finally, the group urged students to participate in scrap metal drives.²⁷

In February 1942, Johnson High School, located on York just off of Arcade, established a similar “Defense Council” that consisted of teachers and students. One of their early projects was to increase the frequency of flag saluting, declaring “each student should learn the pledge.” Two teachers were going to offer special health courses so participants would be “physically able to meet the demands of war.” There was a committee for salvage work and a “committee on home defense” that started a bike club to conserve car tires and gasoline, and provided information on how to “black out” structures and what to do during an air raid. Other activities included talks in classes, urging students to buy defense stamps and listening to a talk from a F.B.I. agent on “the dangers of saboteurs and spies.”²⁸

The Christ Child Center (established 1908; today known as Merrick Community

Services), a Catholic social settlement then located on lower Payne Avenue, created a publication called *The Chatterbox*, which was to be sent to local servicemen. In the spring of 1944, the first issue was in the mail. Father Luigi Pioletti of St. Ambrose, a veteran of World War I, called it “a personal letter to those boys from the dear ones whom they have left behind.” It often contained home-front snippets. “Gee, I wish you could see the boys and girls play war,” an early issue of *The Chatterbox* said and “how they make believe they’re parachute troops or spies or sentries.” There were return letters from many of those in the service. One letter printed in the second issue stated: “I cannot tell you in words how much I enjoyed reading ‘The Chatterbox.’ It brought back memories of the days I spent at the center with all the boys who are now making this a better world. Say ‘hi’ to Miss Dowling [Eleanor G. Dowling was the Center’s energetic director for many years]. . . . One of the boys, Vic Tedesco.”²⁹

Women’s Work during the War

Minnesota Mining had employed women for many years prior to Pearl Harbor, but their numbers had been reduced in 1939 when company management decided that a woman would have to quit if she got married.³⁰ In February 1942, however, 3M management and the Employees’ Association decided that because of the “present war emergency” to change that earlier rule to allow a married woman to work at 3M if her husband was in the service or was 1-A for the draft.³¹ Because 3M was increasing production volumes, the company ran ads in the neighborhood newspapers looking for additional workers, specifying that most would be women. In January 1945 they sought 80 men and 120 more women “to operate rolling, punching and slitting machines.” A later advertisement stated that they were now looking for 20 men and 172 women. As with the earlier ad, most of those hired would be operating “rolling, punching and slitting machines used in processing of abrasives and tape.” In addition, these new hires would be paid during their training.³²

In 1943 a 3M publication stated: “Men continue to march off to war and



Members of the Harding High Civil Air Patrol as they appeared in the 1945 *Saga*, the school’s yearbook. Photo courtesy of the Saint Paul Collection, Saint Paul Public Library.

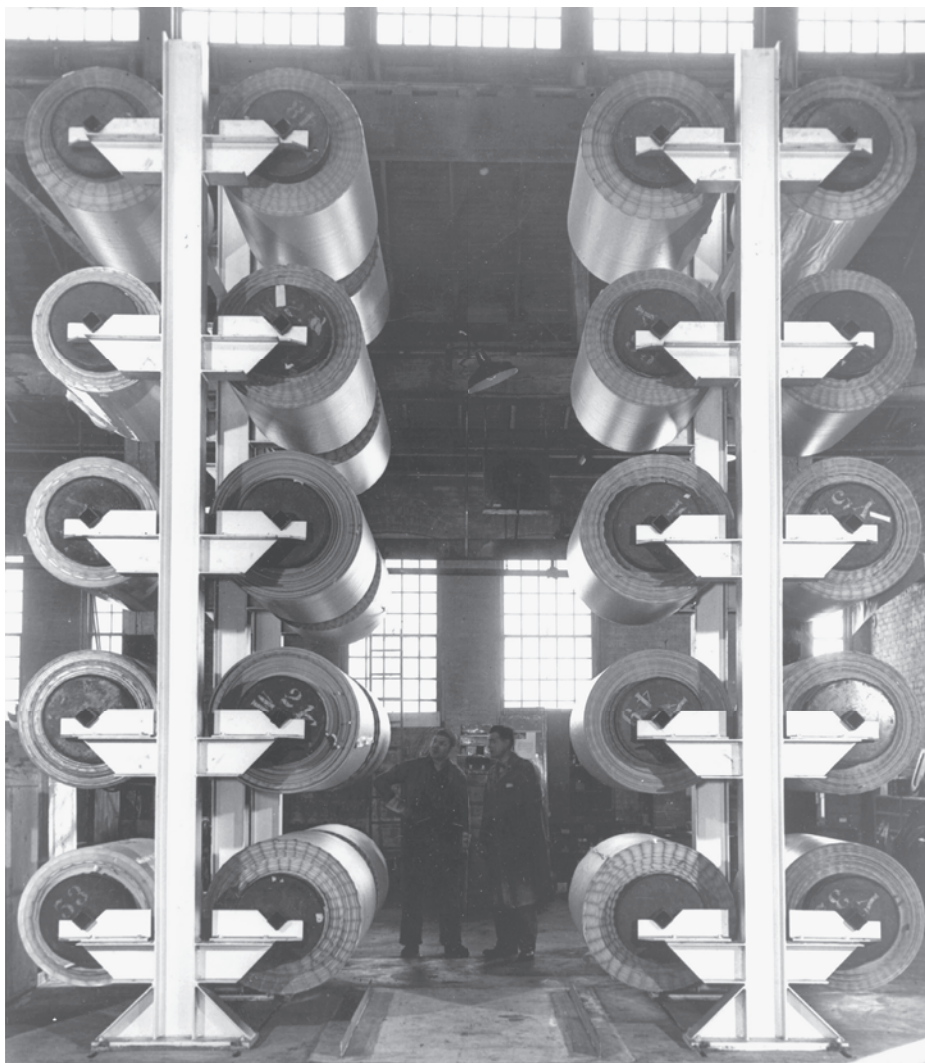
women take their place in daily increasing numbers.” By then around 2,000 male employees had either volunteered or been drafted into the military services and many of their places were being filled by female workers. The company created a position that was titled supervisor of women’s employment and added personnel counselors to “acclimate” women to the large-scale operations and “mass production methods” that 3M used. These counselors covered topics ranging from arranging transportation to and from the job to how to punch in and out on a time clock to wearing safe working clothes and dealing with long hair. In addition over the next several years, 3M assisted several hundred women in arranging their child care needs.³³

Mrs. Ella Horgan of 916 E. Lawson worked in 3M’s tape department, where she sealed overseas packages. “Any woman who slings a mean brush in touching up the kitchen table . . . can do this job,” she stated. “I will admit there was a heap of glue spatters about when I first started,” she joked. “My brother has been in the service for two years,” she added and “I am proud to do something that is sure to help him.”³⁴ Virginia Hesse, another 3M worker, was seventeen years old when she got a job working in the sandpaper division in 1942. She was part of a nineteen-person crew, dominated by

women. It was led by a “matron” supervisor who always told the group to try to double their quotas. Virginia remembered thinking: “We’ll win the war and bring the boys home. The girls worked like heck. . . . What camaraderie we had in a crisis. It felt like we were doing something with our hearts, souls and guts. Most of us lived in apartments within walking distance of 3M.”³⁵

Over 250 Hamm’s employees joined the armed forces and more than 100 women worked there during the war, especially in the ice plant and bottling house and they were “doing a highly satisfying job.” Almost all of them were wives of servicemen and, as if it was a given, the *Chatterbox* presciently added, “but of course they will be replaced by the boys in the service when they return.”³⁶ Lucille Nagel was not only working in a war production plant, she was also taking classes at the St. Paul School for War Training on many evenings. Her involvement away from her home on East Idaho Street totaled over seventy hours a week. But she was not complaining and told a reporter:

How any woman can content herself with sitting home and being willing to have men fight for her . . . is beyond me. . . . I don’t like to have my hands get rough and dirty, but work must be done. . . . But when it is all over I, for one, will be able to hold my head



The massive size of the equipment and materials such as can be seen in this 1950s photo taken in the 3M machine shop typified the industrial muscle of the East Side. Photo courtesy of Jim Reinsberg, the third generation of his family to work at 3M.

high up when the soldiers and sailors come marching home. I will have done my part.³⁷

The 1945 Brewery Union Dispute

During the war, another East Side labor dispute arose, but it was not between management and the workers. This conflict was a “jurisdictional dispute,” in which different unions vied to represent employees. It pitted the Teamsters Union against the Brewery Workers Union at Hamm’s, Schmidt’s, and Yoerg’s breweries. The Teamsters said that they should represent the beer delivery men. At one point the Brewery Workers Union agreed to let the outside drivers who currently belonged to their union leave and join

the Teamsters, but the Brewery Workers refused to give up those members who operated vehicles inside the premises of the three breweries. The Teamsters, however, refused to agree to this compromise and stayed off the job and began to picket Hamm’s on December 13, 1944.

The War Labor Board subsequently ordered the men back to work. It said that the strike action violated the no-strike pledge in defense plants. At the time, Hamm’s was under contract to produce 500,000 cases of beer per month for the armed forces and the Labor Board suggested that steady production of beer was also “necessary to civilian morale.” The Teamsters responded by branding this allegation ridiculous and kept on picket-

ing.³⁸ In February 1945, a judge issued an injunction against the pickets, but a district court subsequently ruled that there could not be a permanent injunction against picketing and allowed the strike to resume. Then Governor Edward Thye established a five-man committee whose mission was to help settle the picketing. The committee went to Chicago to talk to the heads of the two unions involved and reach an agreement to end the labor strife. Eventually, the Brewery Workers yielded claim to the outside drivers who delivered beer to customers, but they retained as members the drivers inside the plants. This ended the dispute.³⁹

Looking to a Postwar World

By 1945, most people felt the war would soon end and businesses began looking forward to the return of peacetime activities. “3M Company has grown steadily during the war period. This growth has been due in a large measure to the fact that 3M products were urgently needed by war industries,” a company publication stated. “Most of these products have peacetime uses as well, and we are making definite plans for expansion following the war.”⁴⁰

At Seeger, management was making similar plans. “Frozen fresh foods at your fingertips all year. A dream? Not at all. When the war is won, Seeger Refrigerator Co. will make your dream a reality,” an advertisement said. “Yes, you’ll be serving your family summer-fresh foods . . . in a ‘Seeger Freezer’ storage cabinet.”⁴¹

There were many celebrations when the war was over. One of the earliest was at the Christ Child Center, which had a huge “Victory Program” on April 26, 1945, “for the benefit of the soldier boys of our district.” There were folk dances from all of the allied nations, a drill squad, and a “Kiddy Revue” where the girls were dressed as Red Cross nurses and the boys were in military uniform. Father Pioletti spoke as did Miss Dowling, the Center’s director to whom Vic Tedesco had sent his greetings in his wartime letter to Fr. Pioletti. Mayor John J. McDonough then honored the neighborhood’s seven “four star mothers,” each of whom had four sons in the service.⁴²

During the war, Marthelia Kinney wrote to her husband, Howard, who was in the

army. She filled him in on family matters in Dayton's Bluff, often describing what was going on and how they were coping with the situation. "I had a busy day today ironing my clothes—and tried to make [son] Jimmy's glider in-between times. He was so happy I made it. (I didn't do too bad a job, if I say so)." Marth, as she was called, later wrote, "We are trying to make our own butter these days just to save on red points. It's rather expensive, nearly 80 cents a pound, but it's so good and it saves on points." But one of her most uplifting letters had to be the one she sent on August 14, 1945, the day Japan's surrender was announced. "Dearest Howie," she began:

Well, the victory is won and you should hear the excitement here in St. Paul. The kids took their drums and bugles and are still down at Donnie's. . . . I wish you were here so I could . . . squeeze you and get the emotions within me out of my system. . . . Gee it's noisy right now—they are announcing from downtown and is it ever exciting. Confetti and noise-makers, cars, people— . . . All the businesses are closed down for a couple of days . . . Good thing the taverns will be closed . . . probably enough drinking as it is. I'm keeping our bottle unopened and I'm going to help you drink it the first day you are home. . . . Love, Marth"⁴³

The Postwar Years

World War II made a big change. Up until then, people were born and lived on the East Side and stayed on the East Side. . . . But when the kids came back out of the service, a lot of them married and moved out of the neighborhood. . . . Years ago, you had faithful customers who would never think of going off Payne Avenue to buy things. But as the kids moved away, you lost that loyalty.⁴⁴

—Walter Blomquist,
Payne Avenue merchant

At the end of 1945, *The Booster* predicted that great times were coming. During the four years of war, America had been "deprived of most of its needs for normal civilian life," and added that "factories will be running at top speed for many years to catch up." The number of homes for returning veterans and their families that would need to be built "to meet modern demands will take years to accomplish."⁴⁵

As *The Booster* had foreseen, much of the lower East Side experienced continued prosperity in the postwar years. The larger businesses were expanding and the union jobs they offered were well-paying and stable. A family breadwinner could make a good living even without a great deal of formal education. Often only one parent needed to work outside the home to enjoy a good standard of living. As the years passed, however, and the local economy began to change with the construction of new highways and suburbs, the tight-knit and almost self-contained neighborhoods became increasingly blue collar in their composition.

In the early postwar years, the number of jobs in the East Side's industrial corridor was increasing. Hamm's Brewery, for instance, underwent a major expansion. Between 1946 and 1954, the plant grew to cover twenty acres, employed more than 1,300 workers, and the company increased its volume of national sales to the point where Hamm's ranked fifth in the country.⁴⁶ 3M had also been growing during the 1940s and the expansion continued during the postwar years. With the permission of federal officials, 3M had constructed a new tape plant during the war and as sales increased, the company's main campus on the East Side continued to expand. By 1949 the company employed 4,300 people at their St. Paul facilities.⁴⁷

Seeger Refrigerator also grew and was making freezers and vacuum cleaners. Many of these appliances were produced under a contract with Sears, which itself was experiencing much greater consumer demand. After the war, Seeger executives constructed five new buildings behind the main plant and increased the company's payroll to around 2,000 employees. In 1954, Seeger and Whirlpool decided to merge. Whirlpool, which at the time manufactured washers and dryers, was the larger company, but it was in debt. Seeger, on the other hand, had large cash reserves but wanted to increase its national sales. On September 15, 1955, the two corporations became a single entity. After the merger, the Seeger plant remained on Arcade Street, but decisions would now be made from a national office.

There was also plenty of work in smaller local businesses. The Klinkerfues Brothers clothing factory on East Seventh was flourishing and there were jobs nearby with the railroads and any number of smaller businesses. St. John's Hospital underwent a major expansion with the construction of building additions in 1951 and 1959 that added seventy-five beds. The hospital soon became one of the largest community employers with 850 workers.

During the 1950s, most of the major employers and their unions sponsored



A double wedding of sisters at St. Ambrose Church in May 1946. Newlyweds Rafaela Cortez and Carlos Garay are in the center of the aisle and Ruby Cortez and Joseph Moreno are to their right. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



A wheelbarrow race at a 1950s 3M-sponsored company picnic in Phalen Park. Photo courtesy of Jim Reinsberg.

sports teams and had family events that were welcomed by the East Siders. Seeger sponsored annual picnics, had Santa visits, softball teams, men and women's clubs, fishing parties, and awards banquets. 3M had a golf league, softball teams, table tennis club, rifle league, tennis, city baseball, a cribbage league, bowling groups, a women's chorus, a band, and occasional events like fishing contests, dinners and dances.⁴⁸ In a 1950 report, 3M management said that 94% of the company's 5,900 employees took part in some activities. While it was expensive to run the activities, 3M believed "the exceptional morale its recreation program builds" was "immeasurable."⁴⁹

The local unions also actively promoted participation in social events aimed at solidarity of working families. The Refrigerator Workers at Seeger, for instance, even had standing committees for dance, softball, and fishing parties. Their spring event at the Polish-American Club on Arcade Street—the usual location—featured a dance band and refreshments. Admittance was gained by showing a paid-up dues book. The Brewery Workers Union's big event every year was a fall picnic. At one of these gatherings, the organizers provided the usual food and beer as well as a ball game and a dance with music provided by Norm Johnson's "clown orchestra."⁵⁰

In the immediate postwar years, East Side business leaders established two new local organizations. In 1946 they organized The Arcade Street Business Association to look after the "business and civic interests of the Arcade section of the East Side." There were a hundred charter members, mostly small businesses. The group was also concerned with the schools, since "education of the young means better business, better understanding and peace to the world."⁵¹

Four years later, an East Seventh Street Business Association was organized. Its goal was "to promote civic and social welfare, to foster and develop business relations and to promote the aims and interests of its members." It engaged in a variety of activities designed to bolster the image of the business strip and it was a consistent supporter of many local organizations.

The Day the Mining Blew Up

The most dramatic event of the 1950s on the East Side has often been referred to as "The Day the Mining Blew Up." It happened a little after eight o'clock in the morning of February 8, 1951, as 4,000 people had just reported for work. The trouble started in Building 12, where a butane storage tank was being filled. A break in the supply line allowed gas to seep into the building and suddenly a

huge explosion shook three buildings at the corner of Arcade and Fauquier streets.

Windows throughout the neighborhood were shattered. A piece of heavy machinery landed in the middle of Arcade Street. A woman at 869 Beech was knocked off her kitchen stool. People living miles away reported feeling the concussion. A service station owner at 847 E. Seventh told a *St. Paul Dispatch* reporter that "suddenly there was a terrific blast and then up from the mining plant rolled a huge ball of fire. . . ." A blast of air followed and "it rocked me and the customer, almost knocking us off our feet. We could see paper, dirt and other junk passing high over our heads."⁵²

Employees were pinned under falling floors, walls, and ceilings. Sixteen people died and around fifty others had to be transported to hospitals. In the days following the blast, 3M established an emergency aid committee to help families reestablish themselves and to make sure that workers' compensation and insurance payments, as well as company benefits, were paid to the survivors. Because the day after the explosion was a payday, a special window was created to distribute wages on time. One manager later said that they tried to report "on the humane things, the thoughtful things that happened." He added that he believed that "what happened . . . was an excellent illustration of the company concern for people."⁵³

Everyday Life in the Postwar Era

Clubs continued to be an important source of entertainment in the 1950s and groups like the Polish-American Club boomed. "The boys came home," a club history noted, "membership began to swell; younger hands took over the administration of the Club; the heart and spirit of the members was lifted anew." A new Ladies Auxiliary was organized in 1950 as a self-governing body with its own elected officers, meeting times, and a separate treasury. They sponsored frequent outings for the organization and grew from eight to a membership of 150 in three years. The men, after being in existence for twenty-five years, had a membership of around 250.⁵⁴

Some new informal social groups were

formed in the postwar era. One of them was “the Girls Club” in the Payne Avenue neighborhood. A dozen or more women would meet one evening every month. “On rare occasions a new member was added,” one of their daughters recalled. “What the criteria was [*sic*] to join I never knew, but it didn’t hurt to be married, Lutheran, or Scandinavian.” They discussed family, friends, and church over dinner. “They shared recipes, swapped family photos, loaned each other patterns. . . . When my mom hosted I recall . . . bringing up extra chairs from the basement.” The best dinnerware was brought out. “As for my father . . . he would slip away to his heated garage or drop in on his service station buddy, Johnny Swanson, until the scene was clear.”⁵⁵

East Siders always looked forward to the annual Harvest Festival that was sponsored by the Payne Avenue Association. In September 1952 its highlights included a parade, sidewalk sales, and a talent show. The activities ended with a big street dance on Drewery Lane, just east of the Hamm’s Brewery. The 1958 event was even bigger with 90 groups marching down Payne Avenue with Governor Orville Freeman and Senator Hubert Humphrey at the reviewing stand. Some of the major events were a booya, the contest to select a Harvest Festival Queen, and a dance.⁵⁶

Many of the residents spoke fondly of the way that neighbors took care of each other in times of need. Angie Krismer’s husband was injured on the job and laid up, putting pressure on their family budget. She was awakened by noise on the front porch of the family’s Hopkins Street home. Looking out a window, she saw a neighbor scurrying down the street and upon opening the door found two bags of groceries, including milk for the children’s morning cereal. “I never got over that because it wasn’t something that they could really afford.” She thought at the time that it was so nice of people to worry about us and “she didn’t want us to know where it came from. . . . Living on the street was like living in a small town.”⁵⁷

Student Life in the 1950s

In the postwar years, the interests of high school students shifted from war-



The aftermath of the 3M plant explosion on February 8, 1951. Minneapolis Star photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

related tasks to a broader range of activities. There were still many clubs, but they tended to be more academic or social-service oriented. The girls no longer were part of a war effort and were encouraged to enter domestic groups. As Harding High School’s 1949 yearbook said: “Amidst mixing bowls, spoons, tape measures, needles and threads, the girls of Harding’s chapter of the Future Homemakers of America have found time to put together a centennial cookbook . . . put on teas, and keep up with club work.”⁵⁸ Music was increasingly on the minds of teenagers. The Harding school newspaper took a “rock and roll poll” and found that rock music was the runaway favorite among the students and only one ballad was chosen. Elvis Presley’s 1956 hit, “Heartbreak Hotel,” was at the top of the poll among the rock tunes. Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers’ recording “Why Do Fools Fall in Love” came in second. In 1949, the Johnson High School senior class bought a jukebox that played every day at both lunch room shifts as well as some of the dances. The Girl’s Club donated money to buy the latest records.⁵⁹

East Side families typically followed closely the performance of their high school sports teams. “All Hardingites know that Johnson is our arch rival,” the school newspaper stated in October

1946. “This has grown from our annual game with the Governors.” The fall football competition was always played in packed stadiums with the winner taking home the wooden “Hatchet Trophy.” At the time the Harding Knights may have had the strongest football program in the city.⁶⁰ Johnson in these years was particularly powerful in hockey. They won the state tournament in 1947, 1953, and 1955, which earned them the nickname the “Grand Army of Phalen Creek.” The team toughened up by playing outdoors and Johnson vs. Harding games at the St. Paul Auditorium and other venues could draw thousands of spectators.⁶¹

East Side Businesses Face Changes

East Side business strips contained almost everything a person needed and drew large crowds of shoppers. Russell Boogren, who worked at Borgstrom Pharmacy recalled that “Saturdays were the busiest days in the 1940s and 50s. . . . On the weekends, we always had the kids and the special people who were walking down from the neighborhood. They were doing their shopping on Payne Avenue.” Kitty Anderson, who ran a religious book and card store, confirmed his observations: “Saturday mornings from 1950 to 1960, our street was as busy as any day on Grand

Avenue. People would come down for all those wonderful Swedish things.” She pointed out Steele’s meat market that “still spread straw on the floor and put the lute-fisk outside in a barrel.” Wilfrid Anderson often talked about the vitality of the small shops on Payne. His father ran a store that “sold all kinds of clothes. Work clothes, ready-made suits, everything else on the side.” He also noted that he had to make sure “to stock union labels because the East Side was full of union workers.”⁶²

Arcade Street, where John Kaphingst “hung out in the 1950s,” was also a busy business thoroughfare and tight-knit community. “It was the kind of neighborhood you could feel safe in,” he said. “I walked around the streets as a kid around midnight like it was broad daylight.” He remembered the abundance of grocery and drug stores, restaurants, and small shops and how busy they were, especially on weekends. “Everything that I needed was there,” he said. A movie theater was



Harvest Festival decorations on Payne Avenue looking south from Jenks in September 1952. St. Paul Dispatch & Pioneer Press photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



*The 1955 Johnson High School hockey team, winners of that year’s state tournament, as shown in the **Maroon**, the school yearbook. Herb Brooks, on the far right in the back row standing next to coach Rueben Gustafson, went on to star for the University of Minnesota. Brooks later coached the U.S. national team to an upset victory over the heavily favored Soviet Union squad, which helped the U.S. win the gold medal in the 1980 Winter Olympics. Photo courtesy of the Saint Paul Collection, Saint Paul Public Library.*

less than two blocks away and even as a youngster he walked there and back at night since “there was nothing to worry about. . . . It seemed like everyone was on your side.” He described the Arcade Street area as “a neighborhood filled with “hard-working people where everybody trusted everybody.” He recalled stopping one time at a local service station for some gas. “You must be Ed’s kid,” the owner

said. Asked how he knew, the man replied “Well, you’re driving his car.” John didn’t have enough money to fill the tank; however the owner responded, “That’s all right, you can owe me.”⁶³

Changes were coming, however, that would threaten many of the smaller businesses. In May 1948, for instance, Klein’s Supermarket opened at 1165 Arcade. The large, 10,000-square-foot establish-

ment was a “cash and carry” concern with wide aisles and seven checkout stands. A reported 10,000 people showed up on its opening day. In addition to groceries, it contained a large bakery section, had forty feet of refrigerated fruits and vegetables, and a self-service meat department that was said to be “the first of its kind” on the East Side. A final attraction was “a large parking lot adjoining the store” with “plenty of parking space at all times.”⁶⁵

The development of these large “cash and carry” establishments would have a detrimental effect on the small groceries, which had smaller inventories and whose delivery and credit policies meant higher operating expenses. Betty Johnson said that they definitely were “affected by the supermarkets” and explained that “people would pass by Dad’s shop when they had money.” At the end of the month “If they didn’t have money, they came in to charge and didn’t always pay.” When her father’s grocery closed, there were a lot of folks “still on the books.”⁶⁶

Some East Side businesses adapted to the modern technology that was beginning to affect the community. The Tower Radio and Electric Store on East Seventh, for example, invited people in the neighborhood to come in the store

and watch television. "This marks the beginning of a new radio era in Minnesota," *The Booster* said. One of the workers at the establishment had built a television set on his own. A few weeks later, Walt Nelson's bar was attracting patrons because it had installed a TV. Northwest Bank on East Seventh was modernizing. According to the bank's president, Walter Dorle, his bank was proud to have introduced "electronic banking" for deposits, checking, and statements. In addition, it had off-street parking.⁶⁷

Work Life in the 1950s

There was a change in the labor representation at "The Mining," as local people still called it. The C.I.O. argued that the 3M Employees' Association was an illegal "company union." Consequently a committee representing the Association traveled to Chicago to meet with the War Labor Board in late December 1943. The federal board later announced that the "interests of the hourly workers" "will best be served by a dissolution . . . at this time."⁶⁸

The old organization turned itself into an independent union and in May 1945, it won an election at 3M by a handful of votes. The C.I.O. was not ready to give up, as several hundred veterans who had returned to their jobs signed a petition asking for a new election. There was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction among workers whose overall take-home pay suffered because there was less overtime after the war and a contract recently signed by the independent union was not a particularly lucrative one. The C.I.O. organizers argued that a nationally affiliated organization would fight more effectively for better pay for 3M workers.

One of the early activists in the union was Chester Jablonski, who started working at 3M shortly after he returned from the service. "I felt that we had to have a new union. . . . I saw people get fired for looking out the window or workers told they could only have fifteen minutes for lunch. So we were organizing and I was right in the middle of it." He and others had been putting leaflets around saying "Do you want a better vacation?" and things like that."⁶⁹ Eddie Lancette, a fellow worker, had a job that required him to go to most departments in the plant

DeAnne Marie Cherry Remembers Payne Avenue in the 1950s

Growing up on Payne Avenue was like living in a small town. My family knew all the merchants, and Payne Avenue was where we spent our money. . . . There was a furniture store, barber shop, meat market, bakery, funeral home, hardware store, and a drug store, just to mention a few. . . . My bedroom window faced the alley, and in the summer the smell of fresh baked bread and rolls woke me up before sunrise. . . .

The 1950s was a time when teenage girls had pajama parties. In our baby doll pajamas, we spent the night eating junk food, playing our 45-rpm records, doing each other's hair, and calling boys on the phone. We also called the local radio station and requested songs. . . . We were at the hockey game when the Johnson Governors . . . won the state tournament. A young Herbie Brooks of "Miracle on Ice" fame was a member of this championship team.

My friends and I did not miss a dance at school, and there were plenty of them with names such as 'Sock and Sweater Hop,' the "Hobo Dance," and the "Sweetheart Swing." We danced the "Bunny Hop," "The Stroll," the "Bop" and the "Slow Dance." . . . We spent time at A&W Root Beer on Arcade Street, Jerry's on White Bear and Porky's on University Avenue. . . . With the wonderful fifties music blasting, we waited for the carhops to take our order. We never worried about calories as we devoured hamburgers, French fries and 5-cent root beers. . . . Payne Avenue offered me a wonderful place to grow up. It had friendly people saying "hello" on the avenue, merchants standing outside their shops, and people looking out for each other.⁶⁴

and according to a union newspaper, "his pockets were filled with application blanks for the CIO United Gas, Coke and Chemical Workers union."⁷⁰ "All of a sudden," Chester remembered, "I was called into the office . . . and they fired me for passing things out." The union finally convinced 3M to hold another election "and we won. One of the first orders of business was to get me in good standing," and he was rehired.

"I was shop steward and responsible for the guys," he recalled. "Mining treated us good, but there were things that they didn't always know about. Lots of things were wrong and we had to straighten them out. I remember one time," he continued "there was an unpopular supervisor who would whistle at people and point to where he wanted them to be." Jablonski submitted a written grievance to 3M, saying "we're not dogs, if you want us to move, just tell us." The company ended up transferring the supervisor. "With the union things were looking better," Chester remarked. He

served two terms as the president of the union in the late 1940s.⁷¹

East Siders had a work culture that did include "some shenanigans." Bob Anderson, who also worked at 3M, gave an example: "When a new man would come into our department," he said, "we would send him to the machine shop for a bucket of emery sparks or a tape stretcher."⁷² Chester Jablonski smiled as he remembered another incident. "One time I was working on the midnight shift," he said. They had this boss who was a jerk. "He had a bum leg and used a cane." "So when he fell asleep at his desk, . . . we sawed a few inches off the bottom and replaced the rubber tip." He eventually woke up "and he almost fell on his fanny because of the difference in height." He was really angry and said he was "going to can someone. I said 'weren't you sleeping on the job?' That "quieted him down right away and did we ever laugh."⁷³

While things may have been improving for the men at work, it was a different story for many of the women who had

been hired during World War II. Although some did stay on the job following the end of hostilities overseas, the predictions that their places would be given to returning veterans were correct. Virginia Hesse, for example, always had the expectation that most jobs for women would be temporary. "We were bounced off the machines when the heroes came home," she recalled. "Nobody said we were heroes . . . most of us married them."⁷⁴ The 1955 contract that the Brewery Workers Union signed with Hamm's took things even further. It explicitly adopted a clause saying that no women were to be hired "except in case of urgent necessity with both parties agreeing."⁷⁵



Klein's Supermarket at 1165 Arcade in 1948. It was among the first chain stores on the East Side and a harbinger of changing retail practices. St. Paul Dispatch and Pioneer Press photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Concerns about Juvenile Delinquency

Hollywood movies like *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) fed into the widely held belief that teenagers, often left unattended during the war years, were becoming increasingly troublesome. The city of St. Paul unveiled a new plan "to combat juvenile delinquency" and to prevent the formation of groups "which spend their leisure time in rowdying and activities that are potentially dangerous." The plan included having a new youth worker at the Dayton's Bluff Playground. There would be dramatics and crafts for the girls. There would be support for the "Jive Hive" at Harding High School and numerous other programs.⁷⁶ The Bluff Playground, among others, tried to keep youngsters occupied with positive pursuits. Besides an area for games, it had a workshop where many a boy made a bowling-pin lamp for their home. The



Looking north toward the Whirlpool (formerly Seeger) plant on Arcade Street from East Seventh in 1959 shows the concentration of small retail businesses along this key East Side artery. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

girls were kept busy with a basketball team, a chorus, as well as tap dance and baton twirling groups.⁷⁷ There were also dances. According to a woman who attended them, "for the guys it was a place to stand against the wall and eventually work up the courage to ask a girl to dance," she recalled. "For the girls, it was fun to show off those special new blouses, skirts, and saddle shoes, dance to the 'fast ones,' and whisper amongst themselves about which boys they hoped would ask them to dance the 'slow ones.'"⁷⁸

In May 1947, the Christ Child Center had one of its annual open houses. This one was special and people were invited to come see a "gay new exterior." According to a newspaper article, "everyone from infant to war veterans" had been "wielding paint brushes to decorate the place." The open house was going to include musical numbers, a style show, boxing matches, and exhibits. "The highlight of the event," the article said, "will be the presentation of a talkie-movie projector purchased with contributions."⁷⁹

There were other, internal community responses to changing times that created some new institutions. Sixty concerned East Side parents who wanted more youth activities turned out at a 1955 meeting and decided to start Parkway Little League, a baseball organization. On June 6 that year, the first ball was pitched to a young

batter and the group, located in Dayton's Bluff, was launched. About two hundred boys took part during the season, using temporary fields. The next year, the group conducted a door-to-door fundraising effort and bought three lots on Third Street and two fields were graded with the support of local businesses.⁸⁰

Churches on the East Side continued to be important neighborhood institutions, serving the spiritual and many of the social needs of local families, but they also had to adapt to a changing and aging community or choose to move away. On Dayton's Bluff, Sacred Heart Catholic Church remained and even dedicated a new building in 1951. Like other congregations, its numbers were dwindling and some of its members drove in from the newer areas of the city to attend services. In a 1956 booklet about the church, the author affirmed the predominately working-class nature of the neighborhood it served. "For most part," the publication said,

our parishioners belong to the wage earning class of people—factory workers, laborers, tradesmen, office clerks, food purveyors, bankers, small businessmen, and a sprinkling of professional; namely, nurses, teachers, doctors—each and all earning their bread by the sweat of their brow as the Lord ordained.⁸¹

Peace United Church made a commitment to remain in Dayton's Bluff, even

though many felt the surrounding area was becoming undesirable. Although the number of church members was beginning to decline, the church added a new a Christian education wing in 1955. They also maintained their church softball team as well as volleyball and bowling teams. The determination to stay in spite of concerns may well have expressed the attitude of many area residents. “We are surrounded by a declining neighborhood, industrial factories, taverns, a high degree of vandalism and theft and a ‘no parking’ situation,” a church publication commented. Some members wondered why the church did not move to a “better” location. The church’s response “included a number of reasons involving mission and commitment to the community . . . and the interrelatedness of our people, with pride of heritage.”⁸²

The End of Swede Hollow

Swede Hollow—one of the city’s local landmarks—had been occupied since the 1860s by waves of different immigrants. In the postwar era, it did not just change. It ceased to exist. Lola Herrada Galvan, one of its last residents, remembered that Our Lady of Guadalupe Church had arranged to have a boxcar installed along Phalen Creek to serve as a chapel. She spoke of the small homes: “I guess they would be what a lot of people referred to as tar paper shacks. . . . I just don’t think that we lacked for anything. When we moved down there in 1942, there were seventeen homes.” Out of those there were “maybe three white families, the rest were all Mexicans.”

Sixteen families lived in Swede Hollow in 1956, with eighty-seven people living in thirteen homes. The city provided no services and the residents were getting water from a spring the city health department found to be contaminated. There were no property taxes, but each home was required to pay a nominal five dollars a month rent to the city. One social worker seemed amazed to find that residents of Swede Hollow did not just live there because it was cheap, “but because they liked it.” The structures were condemned and after the last evictions, the St. Paul Fire Department doused the ramshackle

houses with gasoline and on December 11, 1956, burned them to the ground.⁸³

Hamm’s Brewery Strike

The 1950s was a fairly quiet time for local labor relations on the East Side. There were grievances, of course, a few strike votes, and a union jurisdictional dispute, but leaders of labor and management were able to come to agreement and settle whatever issues had caused them problems. Jerry D’Aloia, a Railroad Island resident, always felt that the workers and the management of Hamm’s Brewery got along fairly well. Because “it was a small union” that included two St. Paul breweries as well as the soft drink workers, “It was interesting,” he said. “Everybody got along together. . . . We negotiated our own contracts, you know.”⁸⁴ The brewery workers were even able to bargain for an all-union shop. Their 1955–57 agreement contained a clause requiring that after thirty days all employees in the bottling house and malting department had to join the union. Another clause included the union check-off for payment of their dues.⁸⁵

In the late 1950s, fear of technological unemployment became a major issue for many unions. Workers like D’Aloia recognized it as a problem. “Automation took over big time,” he said. “We couldn’t fight it, you know. That was one of those things.”⁸⁶ Although the number of Hamm’s employees had risen from 730 to 1,266 workers during the decade following the end of the war, by the end

of the 1950s management had instituted some layoffs. The number of bottlers, for instance had decreased by a hundred. To counter this, the union argued that jobs could be saved if the brewery went to a thirty-five-hour work week. “Wages are not an issue in dispute,” a spokesman told the *Union Advocate*. The major disputes over contract provisions were the ones “dealing with union and job security.” The old contract expired in June of 1959, and soon afterward the union struck. “We wouldn’t be striking now if such action hadn’t been necessary to preserve job security and other vital provisions of the contract.”⁸⁷ Hamm’s president W.C. Figge sent out a letter to the employees expressing “regret that after many years of peaceful collective bargaining, we now find ourselves with a work stoppage.” He feared that the demands might “make it impossible to maintain our present level of business and employment.”⁸⁸

The strike lasted for ten days and, as is usually the case, the agreement was a compromise. The workers did get a two-year contract that provided wage increases. Vacations were improved with some workers getting a fifth week off, and there was a new floating holiday. The number of hours in a work week was not reduced, but both sides agreed that more holidays would help job security.⁸⁹

The unsettling effect of technology that was behind the Hamm’s strike was only one indication that change was coming to the East Side. At the same time, the



Parkway Little League “Phillies” baseball team in 1959. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

demographics of its older neighborhoods were shifting. The significant decline in population that had begun in the 1940s continued through the 1950s. As children grew up and moved away from the East Side, those who remained were older.

Many of the men and women who returned to these neighborhoods after the war were ready to start families and find a home of their own. Consequently substantial numbers of the community's younger residents moved away. They settled in new starter homes built on undeveloped land inside the city or in the nearby expanding suburbs. The home financing provisions of the G.I. Bill helped facilitate this residential migration. As automobile ownership increased, it had an adverse impact on the East Side business community. Increasingly, people would jump into their cars and drive to one of the newer outlying shopping areas rather than buying from East Side merchants. Thus by the early 1960s, the East Side's historic working-class communities were beginning to break up.

According to Lucille Carlstrom, whose family operated an East Side fuel business at the time, "Payne Avenue was gradually going down in the 1950s and '60s." The neighborhood around Payne Avenue "used to have many grocery stores . . . [and] a number of meat markets. The bakeries were absolutely great and Olson's meat market was known all over the Twin Cities for making Swedish sausage and sylta [a traditional Swedish head cheese or jellied meatloaf]." ⁹⁰

On the other hand, Betty Johnson thought the neighborhood was still strong in the 1950s. "We still had people in our area that owned their own homes, but it was starting to change some," she remembered. "There was a great movement," and when people moved further out, some of the churches followed them. "The stores changed. The bakeries and the meat markets that we grew up with, little by little they were gone." ⁹¹ Jerry D'Aloia explained that "we were young people at that time and we outgrew our houses. We had two at the time and we only had one bedroom." His sister Michelina added: "How did we decide to move? I suppose everybody was moving." But "we always kept in touch with the neighborhood." ⁹²



Flames engulf homes on December 11, 1956, when the city of St. Paul burned all the residences in Swede Hollow. St. Paul Dispatch & Pioneer Press photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Wilfrid Anderson agreed, saying that Payne Avenue "peaked in the Forties and Fifties," but "started shriveling" as people moved away. Then chain stores came into the East Side. "When the small stores go, you lose something, control of the neighborhood." ⁹³ Ottavio Savina, who lived off Payne Avenue, recently looked back at the old community. "It's always been a working-class neighborhood." As a result, the rents were always lower, "so you've always had that change of people bettering themselves and moving out. . . . Interestingly enough, . . . almost all of them moved east. It's like once an East Sider; always an East Sider." ⁹⁴

The 1940s and '50s were a good time for the residents of the lower East Side and the working-class culture of that area flourished. Prosperity would continue into the 1970s, even as the neighborhoods had to use their well-known resilience to struggle with a deteriorating housing stock, the growth of absentee landlords, and the flight to the suburbs. The feeling that people were abandoning the neighborhoods increased following the construction of the new Johnson and Harding high schools (both opened in September 1963) in the outer reaches of the East Side. Greater use of automobiles added to the problems that small East Side businesses with little off-street parking already had. In the 1960s, the building of Interstate Highways 35E and 94 encouraged people who worked in the

East Seventh Street, Payne Avenue, and Arcade Street neighborhoods to live in distant places and commute to their jobs.

Over time, the pace of change increased in the 1960s and the East Side's population continued to age and decline in numbers. And, as happened in other large cities, "deindustrialization" would take its toll on the community as major employers shut down (Hamm's and Seeger) or built new facilities elsewhere (3M) and many of the jobs that had allowed the blue-collar families of the East Side to prosper in the postwar years began to disappear.

Change is a constant for cities. People have always moved in and out of neighborhoods. There have always been new groups who arrive and, like those before them, bring their own cultural traditions to a new place and develop their own institutions. The neighborhoods they make reflect their choices as to residence within the context of both internal and external forces of the time. The struggles and successes of those who lived along Payne Avenue, or on East Seventh Street, or down Arcade Street during 1940s and '50s has become a part of the East Side's proud heritage, a heritage that today still influences those who live in these neighborhoods that worked.

A long-time East Side resident and urban historian, Steve Trimble is a member of the Society's Editorial Board and a frequent contributor to this magazine.

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Colorized photo of the 3M campus, probably in the 1950s. Note the older version of the 3M logo on the tall stack in the lower right foreground. Photo courtesy of Sheila Strobel Smith. Photographic reproduction by Maureen McGinn.