

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Lafayette Park—
Vanished Home of
the Elite

Page 4

Summer, 1994

Volume 29, Number 2



A Lafayette Park corner. This charming watercolor was painted by Frances James sometime during the 1880s.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

This Summer issue of *Ramsey County History* features Lafayette Park in St. Paul. Marshall Hatfield's article tells the story of the park, and the two watercolors by Frances Haynes James show how one artistically talented resident saw the park in the 1880s. Although Frances Haynes was born in New Hampshire in 1853, she and her family moved to St. Paul after the Civil War. She married Henry Clay James in 1874, and they lived, at the time she painted these watercolors, on the southwest corner of Lafayette and East Seventh streets. The watercolor on the front cover shows the horsecar tracks that ran along Lafayette in front of their home. The man in the foreground is her husband with their children. The painting on the back cover presents a different view looking west. Both paintings are reproduced here with the permission



Frances James, about 1874. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

of Clifford Sommers, grandson of Frances James.

John M. Lindley,
chairman, Editorial Board

Once Upon a Time—'Tasteful, Elegant'

Lafayette Park and the Vanished Homes of St. Paul

Marshall R. Hatfield

On the northeast corner of Lafayette Road and Grove street in St. Paul stands the glass and red brick building that houses the offices of the Department of Natural Resources for the State of Minnesota. One block toward the river at 444 Lafayette Road is the State Human Services building rising six stories high and occupying a full city block. It was erected, like its neighbor to the north, years ago for warehouse duty.

To the casual observer, the black-topped lot between these two buildings is nothing more than a place to park cars. It is fenced off, sort of, and displays the usual markings which define parking locations. On the lot's periphery are two trees of undetermined age, looking lonely and forlorn as if their presence was neither explainable nor desired. Somewhat toward the center of the lot is a manhole serving, if anything, an obscure purpose.

This is the story of a once-elegant neighborhood, a forgotten corner of St. Paul where, once upon a time, many of St. Paul's elite had their addresses. The push of progress transformed an exclusive residential area into one of rails and warehouses which, in turn, gave way to the present-day community of offices and small businesses.

Sometime during a summer in the 1890s, photographer F. Jay Haynes set up his camera at the approximate location of present day Ninth street and Lafayette, pointed it in the direction of Grove and Lafayette and created a photograph, now in the possession of the Montana State Historical Society and labeled Lafayette Park. The parking lot manhole is clearly revealed in this photo, thereby marking the location of a long-gone Victorian fountain situated smack in the middle of a late nineteenth century neighborhood park.

Lafayette Park was created officially in 1886, one of several new parks of the 1880s, an era of city improvements marking its passage from the pioneer

stage. Lafayette, like most of the others, was an entire city square block devoted solely to vegetation, footpaths, restful benches, and the aquatic display of a Victorian fountain. Although modern curiosity demands an explanation as to its geographical location, its presence in another time was equated with gentility and

virtue. J.G.Pyle, in his nineteenth century photographic collection called *Picturesque St. Paul*, said of the park that it was, "one of the breathing spaces in the midst of busy life which public spirit has secured to St. Paul. Lying as it does in the heart of Lowertown, its cool shades and waters are a delightful transition from the roar of trade only a few blocks distant. It is surrounded by tasteful and elegant homes."

It was only about forty years before Pyle wrote those lines that St. Paul was officially organized by the first Territorial Legislature. Protz, in his *Pocket Edi-*



An idyllic day for youngsters exploring Trout Brook around 1875. These are the grounds of Edmund Rice's property, east of Mississippi street and north of present-day University avenue. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

f St. Paul's Elite

tion of the Original Plats of St. Paul, locates the city's boundaries in 1849 as the Mississippi river on the south, St. Peter street on the west, Seventh street on the north, and Wacouta on the east. The future Lafayette Park then was in a subdivision labeled "Kittson's" (named for pioneer and highly successful fur trader Norman W. Kittson who acquired the property in 1843) and was therefore outside the main town. The whole of St. Paul and its surroundings in 1849 boasted a population of 910.

It is not likely, therefore, that there were, a half-mile from the center of town, many buildings of any description, let alone "tasteful and elegant homes." At the commencement of the territorial period, however, the vicinity around what was later to become Lafayette and Grove streets must have offered a pleasing residential prospect to many of the immigrants who began flowing into St. Paul, swelling the population to about 10,000 in just eight years. The land above the riverside bluffs in Kittson's addition was a relatively flat plateau with an abundance of oak trees. To the north were hills; to the east Trout Brook, a clear stream which meandered from its origin at McCarron's Lake to the river; and to the southeast a view of the white bluffs along the Mississippi.

By the time that Goodrich and Somers, publishers of the *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat*, were preparing the *St. Paul City Directory of 1856-7*, one hundred or so families were living in modest dwellings in the general Lafayette Park area. Although "stately and elegant" homes had not yet made the scene, the forerunner of at least one was under construction.

John Stoughtenburgh Prince, born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1812, came to St.



Lafayette Park and its fountain, as F. Jay Haynes photographed it sometime during the summer of 1890. Montana Historical Society.

Paul as a purchasing agent for St. Louis fur trader Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Co. in connection with their real estate holdings. In addition to his company activities, Prince managed a sawmill at the foot of Olive street and, correctly estimating the economic potential of real estate, devoted effort in this field for his own benefit. In these endeavors he became a significant success, his 1866 income of \$4,683 placing him in the top twenty-five of St. Paul citizens, according to the *St. Paul Pioneer* of December 1, 1866, at least for tax purposes. Among other accomplishments of his career, he was a founder of the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company, a member of the state Constitutional Convention of 1857, a five-term mayor of St. Paul, and a bank president.

In 1856 John Prince built a brick house on the north side of Eighth street between Neill and Kittson streets. It cost \$10,000. In 1867 he remodeled and added on to it at an additional cost of \$10,000, doubling its size. The *St. Paul Pioneer* of November 14, 1867, reported that, "It now has 20 rooms, in 3 stories, with an elegant mansard roof, making one of the handsomest and most elegant residences in the city." Wrote T.M. Newson in his folksy *Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minn.*, published in 1866: "I remember him [Prince] as among the first to erect a

dwelling in lower town, and following [him] Thompson, Sibley, Merriam, Wilder, Drake and others constructed elegant residences near him, and what had hitherto been considered a sand bank, with low scrubby brush, became all of a sudden a popular part of the city and has remained so ever since."

At the same time that John Prince was replacing "scrubby brush" with a fine residence, city leaders of the Protestant Episcopal Church were acting to fill the need of their parishoners in rapidly growing Lowertown for a place to worship that would be more convenient than Christ Church, the city's first Episcopal church but located several miles away in downtown St. Paul. The resolution by the Vestry of Christ Church to expand the Episcopal presence in the city was reported in Tanners' *History of the Diocese of Minnesota*. Apparently a consideration of their religious competitive position was not excluded from their thinking—"by which the early foundation of a second parish with a view to caring for the poor in the remote parts of the city and to conciliating the interests of residents and owners of property to its support before other religious bodies should have occupied the ground."

The cornerstone of St. Paul's Episcopal Church on the northeast corner of Olive and Ninth streets was laid on July

14, 1857, by Bishop Jackson Kemper, a pioneer Episcopal leader in the northwest. In his address to the second convention of the newly formed Diocese of Minnesota, he noted that the building was not yet complete but that "in due time it will be a very interesting and beautiful edifice and a great ornament to this city. The Rector . . . is a most valuable acquisition to the small number of our clergy . . ." The rector of whom he spoke was the Reverend Dr. Andrew Bell Paterson.

Dr. Paterson arrived in St. Paul in 1849, the year Minnesota became a territory with St. Paul as its capital. With some financial means of his own, he had purchased land in the vicinity of St. Paul, which may, in part at least, account for his presence at that particular time. He was also undoubtedly moved by a religious spirit, for he was willing to pay for a good portion of the cost of construction of Christ Church. In addition, he gave three acres of his newly acquired property for use as a cemetery. This cemetery was recorded on the Nichols' 1851 map of St. Paul as located at the intersection of Pine and Spring streets, about one-half block north of present-day University and Pine and at the foot of what was known as Williams Hill.

The architect for the new church building, apparently selected by Dr. Paterson himself, was Lewis Smith of New York. Built of stone, the original structure was about 100 feet long with an 85-foot transept. A 45-foot stone tower with a 55-foot spire was completed in 1860, thereby setting the height of the steeple at just 100 feet. "A handsome gilt cross was placed at the top which could be seen a great distance," the *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat* reported, adding that "when the grounds are enclosed, the church will make the handsomest appearance of any in the city."

On September 1, 1842, Martha Brunson of Ohio, aged fourteen years and four months, married Jacob Wales Bass, an old friend of the family. Five years later, Bass's endeavor to establish a lumber business at Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin came to an end when a huge thunderstorm, flooding the Chippewa River, sent two years' accumulation of logs worth

about \$50,000 "over the falls and down the river, which had risen over twenty-five feet," Martha Bass revealed in her memoirs on file at the Minnesota Historical Society. "It was a grand sight", she wrote, "to see them going over the high rocks in the foaming surging water, tho it meant all we had was gone." Martha noted that her husband "was perfectly prostrated at first, but he soon rallied and began to look around for some new enterprise."

Bass had a friend who urged him to come to Cincinnati but Martha's brother, Benjamin Brunson, wanted him to come to St. Paul. The dilemma was resolved when Bass stated, "We will take the first boat that comes along. If it goes up we go to St. Paul, if down, then to Cincinnati." The decision, therefore, was made for them by the old steamer, *Menomonie*, chugging its way north along the Mississippi.

Shortly after their arrival in St. Paul in August, 1847, Martha noted that Jacob bought for \$150 "a log house about fifty feet square that had just been built and only just plastered between the logs, one story and a big loft." With some lumber from Stillwater, partitions were constructed making two bedrooms and a kitchen, with a place for four beds in the attic. After acquiring groceries and provisions from Galena, Illinois, Jacob and Martha became proprietors of the first hotel in St. Paul. It stood on the northeast corner of Third and Jackson streets.

With the influx of people into the area, business was good, and all profits were immediately re-invested for growth. So Jacob found himself short of cash in 1848 when the land office opened at St. Croix Falls in Wisconsin Territory, Minnesota not yet having achieved territorial status. He had already selected eighty acres on Trout Brook and by selling both his and Martha's watches, and adding a little extra, he was able to acquire the land for about \$100. When the town of St. Paul was organized, his "Trout Brook" property was contiguous to and just north of Kittson's addition and was labeled "Bass's Addition to Saint Paul and Addition of Out-Lots to Saint Paul" on the *Original Plats of Saint Paul*. Street names from an undetermined source

were included and, though many (including Woodward avenue, Madison street and Monroe Place) would have been familiar to nineteenth century St. Paulites, almost none are recognizable today.

In the spring of 1857, Bass began construction of a large residence on Woodward avenue just three blocks north of John Prince's place on Eighth street. The Panic of 1857 and the severe financial problems it created on the national scene were mirrored in St. Paul, dampening the real estate bustle of the 1850s as well as the building of Bass's new home. Martha stated that "the great crash of '57 came and everything went down. We had begun out on Trout Brook that spring. Father [Martha's husband, Jacob] had a man from Cincinnati to come and build it and he brought all the inside woodwork from there." To her son: "You remember the fine large doors and high ceilings. The walls were up and all enclosed that summer, and the man, McConnel and his wife lived in the kitchen which was made comfortable, and they worked inside." She goes on to say that, "times grew harder that year and in '58 father could sell nothing, so found it impossible to furnish the house entirely and concluded to get one half on the east side furnished so we could move into it".

Before the house was completed in 1860, their future neighbors, the Hales and the Thompsons, accepted the hospitality of Martha and Jacob Bass while their own homes were under construction. Finally, on September 8, 1860, the *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat* was able to describe the new residence in detail, a portion of which is quoted here:

"Residence of J.W. Bass, Esq.-This elegant structure, which has been in the course of erection for three years past, has so nearly approached completion, that its magnificent proportions and exquisite workmanship can now be fully appreciated. The lot on which it is situated embraces about two acres of ground, a portion of it gently sloping towards Trout Brook, but most of it is as level as a floor. It is well covered with shade trees, the majority of which are majestic oaks of large growth. The water for all purposes, is from the clearest and coldest springs, and is conveyed to a milk house,



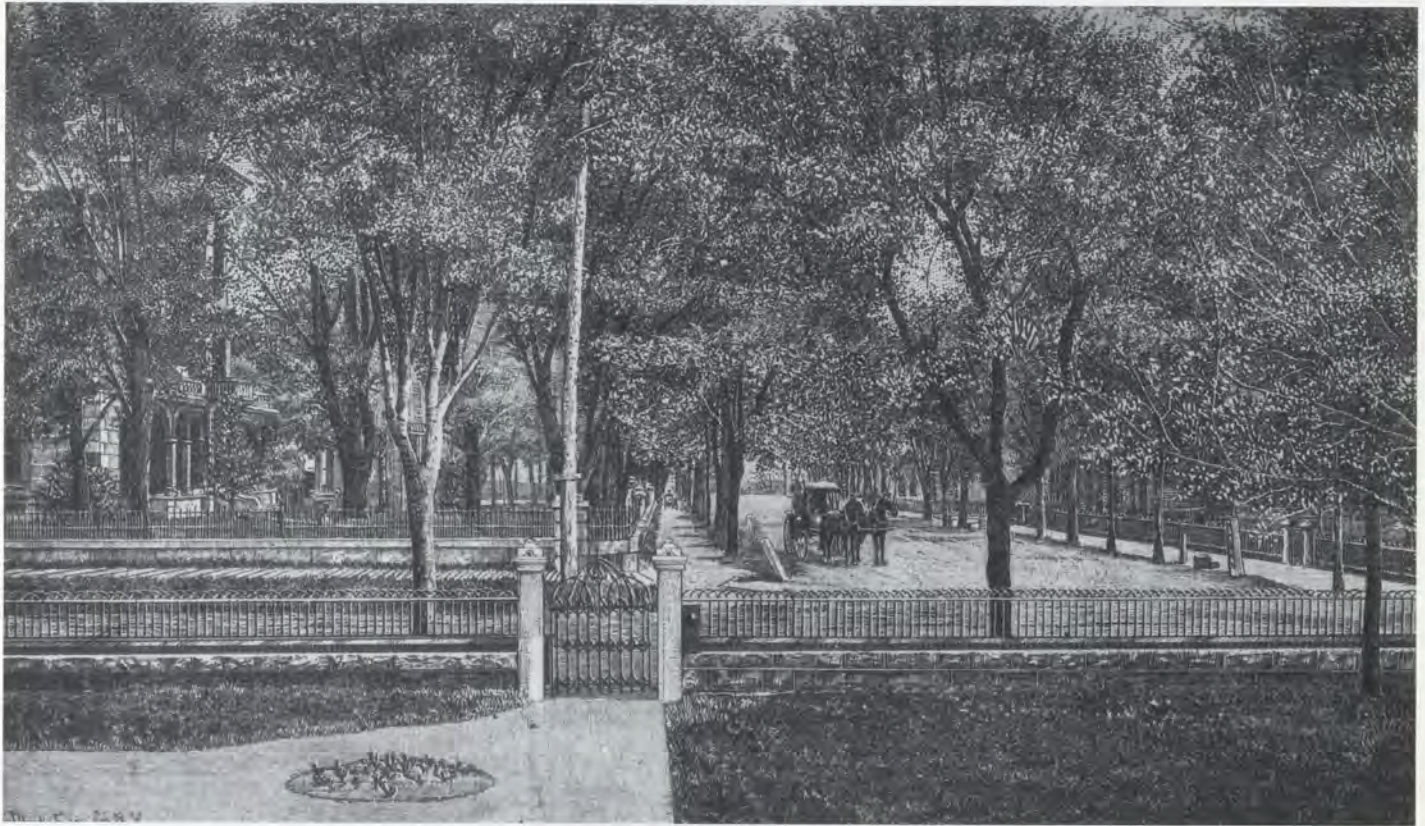
The 1867 Ruger lithograph panorama of St. Paul. Jefferson is now Lafayette. The Bass-Sibley property shows in the upper righthand corner, above "Woodward." Directly west is Horace Thompson's home. Amherst Wilder's house stands on northeast corner of Woodward and Monroe. These and other sites are numbered on the map below, drawn by the author: 1, Elias Franklin Drake; 2, Horace Thompson; 3, Henry H. Sibley; 4, Amherst H. Wilder; 5, Maurice Auerbach/Dennis Ryan; 6, John Merriam; 7, John S. Prince; 8, Philip McQuillan; 9, Bruno Beaupre; 10, St. Paul's Episcopal Church; 11, St. Mary's Catholic Church; 12, Lafayette Park. The panorama is from the Minnesota Historical Society.

barn, kitchen, and, in fact, all over the house. Its romantic situation, overlooking the entire city, the river for a long distance, and a large extent of the country, is so well known, that further description is unnecessary.

"The house itself was commenced at a period when materials and labor were very high, and probably cost three times as much as any other in the city—the labor, particularly, being done by the day's work, and in the best manner, cannot be excelled in any building that may be hereafter erected."

In addition to a detailed description of this residence of greater than sixteen rooms, the article takes note of the "handsome stone house in the process of erection for Mr. Thompson, of the firm of Thompson, Paine & Co., bankers."





Woodward avenue, as it looked in the 1880s. Horace Thompson's home is on the left and the walk to Elias Drake's house shows in the foreground. From *The Industries of St. Paul*, Andrew Morrison, 1886. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

In its closing paragraph, the article notes that "Gov. Sibley is the owner of a large and handsome lot, enclosed, in front of Mr. Bass', and hopes are entertained that he will, at no distant day, make a residence among us." Although not in the manner envisioned, these hopes were realized in 1865 when Henry Sibley purchased Jacob Bass's property. Sibley made this Woodward avenue address his home until he died in 1891.

The real estate speculative bubble, which had been ballooning since St. Paul's earliest territorial days and suddenly burst in the Panic of 1857 saw prices plummet and a more realistic attitude toward future growth assumed. Prices were still at a low ebb at the beginning of the 1860s when, for example, houses which rented for \$18 to \$20 per month in 1857 were now available at \$5 to \$6. Whiskey cost 25 cents for a gallon, which led historian J. Fletcher Williams to comment in 1874: "Alas! that those halcyon days should have fled forever."

Immigration, however, began to revive and led to a restoration of con-

fidence in business and ultimately to the establishment of the wholesale trade for which St. Paul became well-known. As Williams noted, "out of the nettle disaster, we plucked the flower prosperity."

After recovering from the economic impact of the Civil War, the last half of the 1860s witnessed the residential construction which led to Pyle's remark about "tasteful and elegant homes." By the end of the decade, Woodward avenue between Jefferson street (now Lafayette Road) and Trout Brook, with the spacious homes of Horace Thompson, Henry Sibley, Amherst Wilder, Maurice Auerbach, Jacob Bass and Theodore Borup, became the center of the "aristocratic residence district of the city," according to pioneer real estate man H.S. Fairchild in an article for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* of April 9, 1911. Nearby, residing in houses also built during this decade, were the families of Elias Drake, John Merriam, Stephen Champlin, Philip McQuillan and Bruno Beaupre.

By the time that the Ruger 1867 lithograph panorama of St. Paul was pub-

lished, many of those "elegant" homes were in place. The Bass-Sibley home on the grounds occupying an entire block, clearly shows in the upper right corner directly above "Woodward." The tower of the Thompson mansion, west of Sibley's, protrudes from the landscaped space of another full block, and Amherst H. Wilder's \$8,000, "two story and basement" dwelling appears in yet another full block at the northeast corner of Woodward and Monroe streets.

It is to be presumed that the chickens clucking around loose on the Wilder premises were a natural and accepted part of the contemporary scene but, as a letter in the handwriting of Henry Sibley, dated September 26, 1871, makes very clear, cows were another story altogether:

"Un-official but Urgent"

"The memorial of the Undersigned, humble citizens of the fifth Ward to Hon. E.F. Drake of said Ward, respectfully represents that the memorialists have, in an unpretending, but considering the impecunious state of their finances, expen-



Henry H. Sibley

sive fashion, devoted much time and attention to making their homesteads and their surroundings satisfactory to their own tastes and attractive to peregrinating strangers who visit our Saintly City—that these labors of love and expenditure of their scanty means to accomplish so desirable an object, are likely to be rendered useless and abortive, by the pressing and determined endeavors of a certain horned and mischievous animal commonly and vulgarly designated as a cow, said cow being of a dark brown color, and believed by the memorialists to appertain to and belong to the said Hon. E.F. Drake afore-said- the said horned cow being expert in the use of her said horns in opening gates, and particularly ravenous in devouring the very plants and shrubs, which the memorialists most affect, when she has gained admission into the premises of the memorialists. Wherefore the memorialists humbly pray that the Hon. E.F. Drake may take such order with the horned animal mentioned, as his known wisdom may dictate, and his memorialists will ever pray—.”

Signatures to this letter, in their own handwriting, were Horace Thompson, A.H. Wilder, H.H. Sibley, J.W. Bass and W.D. Kirk.

Elias Franklin Drake's property, from which his nettlesome cow was wont to forage, was located on the northwest cor-



Henry H. Sibley' house on Woodward avenue, about 1889. This was the Jacob W. Bass house, which Bass began building in 1857 and completed in 1860. Sibley purchased the property in 1865 and lived there until his death in 1891. Northwestern Photo Co., Minnesota Historical Society.



Mrs. Henry H. Sibley

ner of Lafayette and Woodward streets. His home, designed by architect Monroe Sheire and built in 1866, faced east, across Lafayette from the Thompson place. According to the *St. Paul Press* of July 15, 1866, it was “the finest dwelling being built this season.” It was a 50 by 75-foot, two-story stone structure of



Augusta Sibley. Whitney photograph from the Minnesota Historical Society.

twenty rooms and undoubtedly a complement to the neighboring residences.

Drake, an attorney who built several railroads in Indiana and Ohio, came to St. Paul in 1860 under contract to build Minnesota's first. A number of earlier abortive attempts to get the state a railroad

was well-known history, but with praise-worthy self-confidence Drake brought with him not only the track to be laid, but also the locomotive to pull the first train. Minnesota's first locomotive was named the *William Crooks* in honor of the railroad's chief engineer and superintendent. It is presently the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and resides at the Depot Museum in Duluth. On July 3, 1862, the *St. Paul Pioneer* reported: "The Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad commenced yesterday to run three trains a day between the city and St. Anthony . . ." A schedule published in the same issue showed that the travel time from St. Paul to St. Anthony was twenty-five minutes. The return trip required an extra five minutes for an undisclosed reason.

The clamor in the future of daily trains chugging to and from St. Paul apparently was not an important consideration for those deciding to build their homes a mere two blocks away from the railroad tracks. Build them, they did, either after the trains were already running, or before, with the knowledge of their coming.

Reading a paper at a meeting of the Executive Council of the Minnesota Historical Society on May 11, 1903, Henry S. Fairchild peered into a somewhat clouded crystal ball and attempted a long view by stating that, ". . . it is a safe statement and prediction that below Wabasha street has always been, and always will be, the business district of St. Paul, and that the principal residence district will always be in the west end.

"All this, and the changes of business from Third street to Sixth, Seventh, and other streets, and the change of residence centers from Eighth street between Jackson and Sibley, from the corner of Sixth and Broadway, from lower Eighth and Ninth streets, from Woodward avenue and vicinity, and from Dayton's bluff, to a final resting place, St. Anthony hill, are legitimate and easily deducible results of the topography of the city. The first man to foresee these changes and predict them was A. Vance Brown, whose warning to Horace Thompson not to build on Woodward avenue many of you will remember."

Horace Thompson built where he pleased, on Woodward avenue. It was



Pen-and-ink drawings by Frances James of Lafayette Park scenes, about 1886. Above, the steeple of one of the neighborhood's many churches is swathed in scaffolding. Below, St. Mary's Church looms in the distance. Both sketches are from the Minnesota Historical Society.



still his home when he died, as it was for his wife, Carrie, when she followed him a decade later. His family remained there until shortly after the turn-of-the-century, forty-plus years after Horace had ignored Brown's warning. Grudgingly, it is to be trusted, they moved to their magnificent new mansion on Summit at the corner of

Avon when the railroad finally threatened to occupy their front yard.

The future Lafayette Park, just south of the intersection of present-day Lafayette Road and Grove street, although not yet an official municipal entity was obviously an area set aside for recreational purposes. Presumably, this land, Block 9 of Kittson's Addition, was owned jointly by the Thompson and Merriam families who must have maintained it for use by the community as a park. Incidentally, the house of John L. Merriam, brother-in-law of Amherst Wilder, also shows on the Ruger Panorama just south of Madison and Grove streets, facing the park.

The gaslight era began for St. Paulites on September 19, 1857, when the St. Paul Gas Company (forerunner of Northern States Power) opened the valves to provide light for seventy-two stores and residences along three miles of pipeline. Presumably the first customers were located within a short distance from the plant at Fifth and Olive streets where gas

was manufactured from coal. Early growth of the service was insignificant, and by 1865 a mere fifty street lamps had been installed, with only twenty-seven in use. Clearly the company was fighting for its life when Henry Sibley became its president upon his retirement from government service in 1866. He then served for twenty-three years, struggling to replace oil (kerosene) for lighting with the more efficient and less dangerous gas derived from coal.

Sibley had "always been apprehensive of an accident [with kerosene lamps]," according to an article in the *St. Paul Pioneer* of November 16, 1867, which also stated that he had gas pipes put into the house only a few days earlier. Ironically, the news item was published to report a tragedy that caused the agonizing death of a young servant girl named Maggie Murphy and was to have a lasting effect on the Sibley family.

The *St. Paul Pioneer* reported that, "On Thursday night, shortly after midnight, one of those heart rending accidents that occasionally startle the community occurred at the residence of Gen. Sibley. A kerosene lamp exploded, burning one of the servants so badly that she died in a few hours, and badly burning Gen. S., Mrs. Sibley, and Miss Augusta Sibley, their oldest daughter." Even though Sibley had gas to his Woodward avenue home at the time, the article stated that "only for the fact that some extra light was wanted on the evening in question, kerosene would never have been used in the house again . . ."

The news story concluded with the following paragraphs: "The accident created a profound sensation throughout the city. Numbers declared they would never use kerosene again, and a grocer informed us last evening that a large demand had actually been created for candles.

"Only last summer two young girls were burned to death in the city by an explosion of kerosene, and now a third is added to the long list of victims to the Moloch of kerosene."

In a letter dated December 28, 1867, Henry Sibley wrote to his lifelong friend, Hercules Dousman, that "My daughter Gussie has had a fearful time of suffer-

ing. She was a little better to day, and we are in hopes that she will continue to mend from this time forward. The poor child has undergone a life time of agony within the last six weeks." It was not until May 18, 1868, that he was able to report that "Gussie is getting along comfortably."

The May 22, 1869, issue of the *St. Paul Pioneer* reported the death of Sarah J. Sibley, Sibley's wife. The obituary, written in the flowery tone of the day, was apparently nonetheless sincere and it closed with the following statement: "The health of Mrs. Sibley has been more or less delicate since the year 1859, when she experienced a violent attack of pneumonia, which left her lungs very sensitive to climatic changes. Loss of rest, anxiety, and the shock attendant upon the fearful accident from the explosion of a kerosene lamp, which for a long time imperiled the life of her oldest daughter, no doubt aided to undermine a once robust and vigorous constitution." As Henry

Sibley struggled for twenty-two more years to build the St. Paul Gas Company through the strategy of replacing kerosene, he was surely motivated by something more compelling than monetary gain.

As a desirable residential community, the Lafayette Park area reached a zenith during the decade of the 1880s. Churches were everywhere, with a denomination to suit any need within just a few minutes' walking distance. The concern over religious competition which prompted the Episcopalian leaders to erect St. Paul's Church was not necessarily shared by all their parishioners, some of whom contributed significant sums to the construction of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church just two blocks away at the corner of Ninth and today's Lafayette Road. The English Gothic structure, dedicated on July 28, 1867, was built of dressed blue limestone and boasted, at its southwest corner, a campanile which, when completed several years later, was 80 feet



St. Paul's Episcopal Church, ca. 1903, at Ninth and Olive streets. The house on the right is the rectory, 383 East Ninth. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

high and topped with a cross. Although it has been gone for many years, the simple classic beauty of old St. Mary's can be viewed today at the corner of Bald Eagle avenue and Fourth streets, where its clone, St. Mary's-of-the-Lake, now stands in White Bear Lake.

Driven by the same compulsion as their Episcopal and Catholic counterparts, the trustees of the First Presbyterian Church initiated construction of a new building on the southwest corner of Lafayette and Woodward to which the congregation moved in 1875, some twenty years after their founder, the Reverend Edward Duffield Neill, had left them to form the competitive House of Hope. The new Presbyterian church structure was a frame building of modest proportions. It served a relatively small congregation perhaps limited by the House of Hope as another Presbyterian choice and certainly by the several Lutheran institutions which occupied substantial houses of worship in the vicinity.

In 1892 the Methodists could boast about their new Richardsonian building at the corner of Van Slyke Court and Olive street designed by architect Cass Gilbert. Baptists had to go a little farther for their Sunday meetings, the First Baptist Church at the corner of Ninth and Wacouta being the nearest. From any location and looking in any direction, the scene would surely have included a church steeple or bell tower.

In watercolors painted during the early 1880s from her home on the southwest corner of Lafayette and Seventh streets, artist Frances Linda James revealed two contemporary views of a neighborhood now long gone. Church steeples appear in both. In 1886, perhaps on a lazy, partly cloudy afternoon, she sketched with pen and ink the surroundings in two directions from her row house on the corner of Grove and Olive streets. Churches are revealed in both, along with fences, board sidewalks, unpaved streets, and the nineteenth century architecture of homes owned by St. Paul notables George Farwell, Charles T. Miller and Louisa McQuillan. Evidence of her meticulous desire to record reality is presented in one of her sketches which

shows a pile of rubbish accumulated from the construction of new row houses at the corner of Grove and John streets.

By 1886 the neighborhood was in fact changing—people of more modest means as well as a growing number of humble entrepreneurs invading these lofty precincts. Six sets of multiple dwellings existed within two blocks of the intersection of Lafayette and Grove, a clear indication of a large increase in population density. Perhaps with this in its collective mind, the city decided to municipalize the block of land that residents had been using as a neighborhood park for twenty years. Its intention was reported in a Minneapolis newspaper in 1883:

“Another park will be added to St. Paul's breathing spaces. It is the whole of Block 9 in Kittson's addition, bounded by Ninth, Tenth, Locust and Willius sts., and fronting north on the intersection of Lafayette and Grove. The price of the block is about \$30,000, of which the city pays one-half, the remainder to be raised by subscription.

“Of this, \$12,000 has been subscribed, and the rest must, of course, be easily raised. This block has already been used for a private picnic ground and has on it numerous trees in good condition, so that

it will be a matter of less expense to render it fit for public use than some of the other new parks. It will, however, be embellished with flower beds, lawns and fine walks, and a fine statuary fountain . . . This addition will be christened Lafayette Park.”

According to a report in Vol. XV of the Minnesota Historical Society Collections, the park was indeed acquired by the city by 1886 at a price of \$18,088.80 and improved at a cost of \$1,513.80. Just what value was received for the \$1,513.80 is not revealed, but it is clear that a reporter for the *St. Paul Dispatch* was not favorably impressed. On August 24, 1886 he reported:

“Lafayette Park is every day assuming the appearance of a juvenile burying ground. The graveled walks are generally disappearing from view, being covered with quite a promising growth of grass and weeds. At every few paces there is erected a little white, painted structure in the shape of a cross, with the printed words ‘Keep Off The Grass’ looking for all the world as if the wishes in this respect of the park authorities were buried in the soil below. There is a perfect little forest of these painted signs, but everybody religiously passes them by unheeded. Everywhere may be seen scat-



John L. Merriam's home on Willius street, ca. 1875. Minnesota Historical Society photo.



John S. Prince's massive Second Empire residence at 487 East Eighth street, about 1890. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

tered the withered leaves and refuse of the dead year, and even the trees overhanging all present a decidedly funereal appearance, many of them standing weary and leafless, having long since apparently given up the ghost. No citizen whose heart is overburdened with woe can find anywhere, throughout the city, a more appropriate resting place."

Such criticism notwithstanding, City Council records show that Lafayette Park received attention equal to other parks of comparable size. Furthermore, photographs taken in the 1880s and 1890s clearly reveal a well kept "square" with a trimmed lawn, abundance of trees, improved walkways, and the inevitable park benches. In the center stood an elegant fountain sporting six statuary cherubs with outstretched arms, water spraying from their hands in all directions. At the south end of the park was an orchestra stand providing a stage, perhaps, for the local North Star Music Band, Frederick Norquist, leader.

Norquist was a printer apparently employed by a little job printing company occupying a small frame building at 464 East Ninth street, across Willius street to

the southeast from Lafayette Park and across Ninth street to the south from John L. Merriam's residence. The company started business around 1885 as Breed and Price; a year or so later in 1887 it became Price and McGill, then McGill Printing and now McGill-Jensen. The little business was launched by two young men, Westcott Price and Elias Breed, presumably with the financial assistance of their parents who were neighbors in the Lafayette Park community. Charles H. McGill, son of Minnesota Governor Andrew McGill, became involved in 1887 as a partner with his former classmate, Westcott Price, after investing \$300 which he borrowed from his father.

Six months after this infusion of capital, their work had so increased that they moved from their modest quarters to a more spacious location downtown on Sibley street, an area that later became known as "Printers Row." Their Lafayette Park friends, relatives and neighbors were, no doubt, not only happy for their success but also relieved to witness the removal of that lone commercial enterprise from their "bedroom" community. No record is readily available detailing

how quickly the little frame building was razed after the move. Suffice it to say, however, that no evidence remains of the 464 East Ninth street address in the 1891 Rascher atlas of the city.

Evidence of the city's positive attitude toward the smaller parks is provided in a Park Board report of 1896-97, which stated: "The small parks are well patronized by the children in their respective neighborhoods and much appreciated by the parents. While it cannot be contended that small parks located in the thickly populated districts of the city fill the want of health-giving resorts to the masses, they must be recognized as contributors of pure air and to the happiness of the people and furnish play grounds for the children in easy reach."

The archives of the Minnesota Historical Society contain reminiscences, written in 1947-48, of Polly Bullard* who, as a child, lived on John street just north of Grove during the years 1884-1888. She noted that at one end of John street was a small hill (Williams Hill) and that the other end "bumped into Lafayette Park, the grave of which remains to-day." She used the word "grave," she said, because "all that is left is a dingy grass plot where once was our beloved fountain."

Her written memories also include a glimpse of childhood life surrounding her modest home. "Each small frame house stood in its tiny grassy yard—but each yard was surrounded by an iron or wooden fence. At the sides, high solid board fences separated the yards. Two-by-fours nailed horizontally about six inches below the tops of these side fences gave acrobatic training for those of us who, neatly balanced like tight-rope walkers, trod them end to end, getting intimate glimpses through side windows in the process."

She noted that John "was about half the width of to-day's residence streets and paved with wood blocks. There we could play in almost complete safety, for the only traffic was the slow-moving

Lafayette Park to page 16

*Polly Bullard: *Remembrance of Things Past*; copy at Minnesota Historical Society.

Lafayette Park from page 13

dray, grocery wagon, milk cart, an occasional buggy, all horse drawn and slow plodding."

Writing of horsecars she mentioned that they traveled past Lafayette Park, "bells on the horses jingling merrily, like sleighbells, the driver sitting on his miniature front porch holding the reins. How I loved to put the pennies into the slot by the nearest window and watch them roll down the metal incline into a box near the driver!" An ingenious mechanism for fare collection that has faded into history.

Lafayette Park was just a private playground when the St. Paul Street Railway Company was incorporated on May 9, 1872. Of the fifteen founders, seven (Horace Thompson, Elias Drake, Amherst Wilder, John Merriam, Philip McQuillan, Henry Carver and William Lee) lived within three blocks of the future park, probably within earshot of the jingling horsecar bells. In fact, the first two-and-one-half miles of track laid in St. Paul included a stretch from Seventh and Locust to the eastern terminus at Lafayette and Westminister (approximately the present intersection of Lafayette and University).

Service to the city was formally opened on July 15, 1872, with a ceremonial trip that included members of the City Council and other prominent citizens. On July 16 the *St. Paul Pioneer* reported this celebration in detail, noting that two cars were provided to accommodate the many guests and that the trip was further observed by cheering bystanders who lined the sidewalks. According to the *Pioneer*, "the trip to the eastern terminus of the road was made without incident, in excellent time. Arriving at the point, the engines were reversed and the train started on its return trip." Apparently the turnaround was as simple as unhitching the horses from one end and hitching them up again at the other. A turntable was installed sometime before the 1880s—technologically superior, perhaps, but probably no more practical.

The newspaper stated that, "The street railway is a fixed fact in St. Paul. The cars will run at stated periods over the en-

tire line now finished. They will start at 6 a.m. and run until 10 or 11 p.m. Walking is played out."

It was perhaps on a warm Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1888 that the Reverend Elisha Thomas of St. Paul's Episcopal Church exited his rectory at 383 East Ninth street and descended the two steps from the front porch to the walk. Turning east on Ninth, he crossed John street, walked by Dr. Flagg's house and then past St. Mary's Church to the corner of Locust. As he crossed the street he would have been careful not to stumble over the horsecar tracks and, as a matter of routine, would have avoided the inevitable hazards left by the beasts of burden.

He probably used the gravel path northeasterly across Lafayette Park where the fountain cherubs were merrily tossing water in every direction. Care would be taken again so that the protruding manhole cover near the fountain would not be the cause of a nasty fall.

At roughly the northeast corner of the park, Grove and Madison streets intersected. To the left was the handsome, five-year-old, three-story brick home of Frederick Fogg and his wife, Louise

Miller, adopted daughter of Horace and Carrie Thompson. Banker Thompson was gone now—he had died quietly of pneumonia while visiting New York City in 1880. He was buried in Oakland cemetery after a First Baptist Church funeral that drew remarkable crowds of mourners on an icy February day. The *St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer Press* gave the proceedings unusually extensive coverage ending with the comment, "And as the clouds of Oakland closed around the loved remains, than which none had ever been animated by a sweeter soul, every heart might truly have said of Horace Thompson, 'he was a man, take him all in all, whose like we shall not look upon again'." Carrie Thompson was to follow her husband in December, 1889, at her winter home in Georgia where, coincidentally, she died of pneumonia contracted while visiting New York City.

As Reverend Thomas approached Woodward avenue, he must have been impressed with the tasteful and elegant character of his surroundings. The Second Empire mansion on his right as he proceeded north on Madison had been erected years ago for Maurice Auerbach but owned and occupied for most of the



Maurice Auerbach's Second Empire mansion on Woodward avenue, about 1888. By this time the house had become the home of Dennis Ryan, who had come to St. Paul to build a hotel. This picture is from Pyle's Picturesque St. Paul. Minnesota Historical Society photo.



The home of Philip F. McQuillan, who owned a wholesale grocery business. When this photograph was taken around 1905, change had arrived in Lafayette Park, and McQuillan's house at 397 East Tenth street had become Luther Hospital. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

last ten years by Dennis Ryan, who came to St. Paul to build a hotel.

To his left, at the corner of Lafayette and Woodward, stood the Italian Villa style Thompson home, still occupied by members of the Thompson family. And on his right, where the ground sloped down toward Trout Brook, was the old Wilder place, now the residence of one of Henry Sibley's daughters, Sally, and her husband, Elbert Young.

Normally his mind might have dwelt, with perhaps a little foreboding, on the changes that had taken place in recent years. John Merriam, Cyrus DeCoster, Dennis Ryan, Channing Seabury and Amherst Wilder had recently vacated their substantial dwellings in this area, moving to the St. Anthony Hill community. John Allen, George Farwell, William Kirk, Charles T. Miller and Elbert Young were soon to follow. Row houses were now becoming a common sight and the many railroads over in Trout Brook valley were a source of constant noise.

But on this Sunday afternoon, Reverend Thomas's thoughts were upon the aging owner of the property directly in front of him. The house at 417 Woodward was a fine mansion, massive and solid, quadrangular in form, topped with



Philip F. McQuillan. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

an ornate, octagonal cupola which must have afforded a pleasing view in all directions. The ground on which the house stood had a frontage of 333 feet, and a depth of 220, the whole area being "beautiful with the foliage of oak trees, maple and box elder." Rows of stately elms lined the sidewalks, "the mansion stand-

ing some hundred feet within the lovely, planted ground, and accessible by paved and graveled walks."

General Sibley, normally a faithful attendant at divine services, once again was not in his regular seat this particular Sabbath morning. At seventy-seven years of age, the old gentleman's health was failing and it was concern for his well-being that had led Reverend Thomas to his door.

Stepping across the threshold, the pastor would have entered surroundings as described by Nathaniel West in his 1889 biography of Henry Sibley: "The interior of the mansion with its high ceilings, large doors, broad staircase, heavy rails, elaborate chandeliers, frescoes and fine tapestry, reminds one of the grandeur of baronial times. There are oil paintings on the walls of his living room, one of 'Mendota in 1836,' and of his favorite hunting dog, 'Lion,' and fine engravings of the United States Senate in 1850, and others. There is a fine library and parlor containing many paintings and articles of interest."

The meeting with the man on whom Earle Goodrich had conferred the title, "the first gentleman of Minnesota," took place in the library and was described by Thomas in an article in the *Pioneer Press* in 1893.

"I found him seated in his study with his hand resting upon hand as if in deep meditation. As I entered he did not rise as was his wont, but simply extending his hand said, 'I am very sad to-day. I have been thinking over my life and have decided that it is well nigh a failure.'"

These words must have come close to transporting the good Reverend into a state of shock. Henry Sibley had been Justice of the Peace of Iowa Territory, which included part of Minnesota; delegate to Congress in 1848, who secured the passage of the act organizing Minnesota as a territory; territorial representative; first governor of the state; one of the original regents of the University of Minnesota and later president of its Board; commanding officer of the military forces in putting down the Dakota Conflict in the early 1860s; board member of the Indian Commission; president of the Chamber of Commerce, the Min-

nesota Historical Society, the Oakland Cemetery Association, the Minnesota Mutual Insurance Company, and the St. Paul Gas Company; and director of the First National Bank and the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad.

Henry Sibley a failure? "If yours is a failure, my dear General," responded Thomas, "whose can be a success?" "Oh," said Sibley, "I am nearing the end of my course, and as I look back the only thing that gives me real satisfaction is the little good I have done. And I have neglected so many opportunities of doing good." It is not revealed whether Elisha Thomas chose to create a homily around the implications of Sibley's words, but perhaps it is sufficient to note that Reverend Thomas became Bishop Thomas shortly thereafter.

Henry Sibley died on February 18, 1891. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported, "At 4:30 o'clock yesterday morning the solemn silence in the room where Gen. Sibley had lain for twenty weeks was broken by a far-away, muffled note from the Swiss clock on the mantel down stairs, and at the same instant the heart of the famous man throbbed for the last time and the foremost man in Minnesota sank into eternal rest."

In a sense, Henry Sibley's demise seemed also to mark the decline and ultimately the passing into history of his neighborhood as a residential community. The sounds accompanying it were neither muffled, gentle nor as melodic as a Swiss clock but rather the constant clamor and clang of the chugging steam locomotive.

After Sibley's death, a Chicago developer announced plans to remodel the old mansion and construct two luxurious apartment buildings on the grounds. But by 1896, instead of a new hostelry, the Sibley real estate was railroad property and the venerable landmark had been torn apart and sold in pieces to the highest bidders.

Within a few years after the turn-of-the-century, the railroads had gobbled up most of the property east of Lafayette to Trout Brook and north of Grove to the bridge. The stately old homes had been razed and "aristocratic Woodward" had become history.



Off its Base. The tornado that roared through St. Paul on August 20, 1904, lifted the old T. B. Campbell residence from its foundation at Woodward and Monroe Place. According to news accounts, three occupants were inside at the time. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

Lafayette Park, with its splashing waters, majestic trees, green grass and gravel paths, remained in place, though evidence of decay crept slowly into contemporary accounts. *Northwest Magazine*, May 1899: "Lafayette [Park] is in the lowertown district, back of Seventh street. It is only a ten or fifteen minutes' walk from any of the hotels, though the East Seventh Street cars will carry you within a couple of blocks of it. This is another old park, where the trees remind one of pioneer days, and where one can linger hours without wearying of the reposeful environments." Although the homes west of Locust were spared the ignominy of wrecking crews for another decade, the pioneer families had fled to St. Anthony Hill and their old dwelling places served varying new purposes.

In 1860 Louisa Allen of Galena, Illinois, married Philip McQuillan, also of Galena, who had moved to St. Paul where, in 1856, he started a wholesale grocery business. In just nineteen years after having built a much lauded enterprise, the unfortunate McQuillan devel-

oped Bright's disease and died in 1877 at the early age of forty-three.

Eight years before his death, the McQuillans had built a large, frame, Second Empire style home on the northeast corner of John and Tenth streets at a cost of \$20,000. In addition to its stylish cupola and bubbling front lawn fountain, the home boasted an unusual walkway made of seashells which created a modest tourist attraction in this part of town.

After McQuillan's untimely death, Louisa chose to continue living at their Lowertown home with her children, one of whom, Mollie, was later to become the mother of F. Scott Fitzgerald. In the mid-1890s they moved to the Summit avenue area and the old McQuillan homestead became Luther Hospital.

Across John street to the west from the McQuillans lived business partner Bruno Beaupre and his family. Beaupre was at one time a competitor in the grocery business, but that all changed when the two entrepreneurs formed the firm McQuillan, Beaupre and Company in 1874. The families must have been at least rea-

sonably good friends but perhaps careful not to outdo one another; they built their homes across the street from each other, at the same time and at the same cost.

Bruno Beaupre died in 1896 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, while visiting his son-in-law. He had lost his business to the financial disasters of the early 1890s. Beaupre's business was sold to an early partner, P.H.Kelly. His large home on Tenth street eventually became a boardinghouse, called "The Iowa" for an undisclosed reason.

Most larger residences ended their existence as rooming or boarding houses after their early owners had forsaken Lowertown. McQuillan's place was one exception, as was the spacious, limestone, Victorian home at the corner of Woodward and Lafayette designed in the 1860s for Elias Drake, who came to Minnesota to build a railroad.

He did what he came to do and a lot more. He was president of several railroads during his long career and, upon retirement from railroad work, engaged in a variety of occupations including milling, lumbering, mining, farming, stockbreeding and real estate. His lifelong interest in politics led him to serve a term in the Minnesota Senate but his influence as a senator was probably exceeded by that derived from many other contacts of a political nature. He was personally acquainted with at least three United States presidents. The Drake family papers in-

clude an intriguing letter from Rutherford B. Hayes, as well as a cryptic poem in Drake's autograph book written by, and in the hand of, John Quincy Adams.

Elias Franklin Drake died in 1892 in San Diego, California, where he had been residing in an effort to improve his declining health. Shortly after his death, his widow, Caroline McClurg Drake, moved to live with her daughter Carrie and son-in-law William Lightner, at 322 Summit avenue. She died there in 1895.

For a few years the old Drake place at 509 Lafayette was, like most others, a boarding house, but in 1906 it became the home of the St. Paul Parental School.

"The wonderful development of St. Paul as a railway center and the demands for increased facilities are destined to revolutionize what is now known as 'lower town,'" stated the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in its May 31, 1903, Sunday edition. A full page was devoted to the business game of chess played by two competitive railroads which led ultimately to the construction of the Soo Line freight terminal between Seventh and Grove streets along Neill. This long building covered, among others, the property of John S. Prince, who built the first of the "tasteful and elegant homes" in the vicinity.

Progress was featured in the newspaper's comprehensive account, but a definite tone of regret was also evident in reminiscences about how it used to be:

"To an old timer, or to any one who is old foggy enough to love the old streets, the old houses and the old folks in them the condemnation of a large slice of Lower Town to the prosaic uses of modern railroading will bring a pang of regret. It is true that not much was left to Lower Town but the memories of departed grandeur. Stately mansions of two or three generations ago still stand surrounded by flourishing if neglected trees; remains of ornamental gardens are around the mossy old homes, and crumbling stone walls and broken iron fences that were in vogue forty years ago proclaim that once the exclusive set of St. Paul dwelt here."

A little over a year later, Mother Nature played her hand. Friday, August 19, 1904, was unusually moderate for that time of year, the official temperature reaching 77 degrees. During the night, a thunderstorm dropped a little less than an inch of rain. Although certainly not a record, the storm portended something worse which occurred Saturday morning when lightning struck a number of buildings, one of which, the Danish-Norwegian Presbyterian Church, lost its steeple. But the real whopper slammed in at 9 o'clock on Saturday night when parts of St. Paul were hit by the now famous cyclone with winds strong enough to lift up and tear off 540 feet of the High Bridge and hurl it 100 yards east into the river bed below.

In an issue devoted almost entirely to the storm and under a first-page howling headline, "Saintly City Survives Its Worst Storm," the *Pioneer Press* ran a column headed "Lower Town is Made Desolate." This narration, with sub-headings of "Many Families are Homeless Through Storm's Fury," "Park is a Wilderness," "Church a Total Wreck" and "Moves House Several Feet," clearly reveals a greatly devastated Lafayette Park community. One church, St. Siegfried's, was totally destroyed while St. Paul's and St. Mary's were severely damaged.

Many residences "once occupied by St. Paul's foremost citizens, and surrounded by beautiful elms, now look like a dismantled ship in a wreck. The roofs of some of them are blown away, the walls of others are caved in, the chimneys



Moving out. As commerce moved into Lafayette Park, families moved out. In this view of the corner of Willius and Ninth streets, St. Mary's Catholic Church can be seen at left. Truman Ward Ingersoll photo, Minnesota Historical Society.



Clearing of a neighborhood. Residences were coming down in 1917 to clear the way for construction of the Eighth street Freight Terminal. The large building (left) at 368 East Ninth street, was occupied from 1894 to 1900 by the Moorehead and Horrigan Livery Stable. This view looks north from Eighth between Olive and John streets. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

of many are gone, windows are smashed, sidewalks are torn up, trees are blown against the porches or across the streets and fences are strewn about the neighborhood." The large, two-story home built years earlier for T.B. Campbell at the corner of Woodward and Monroe streets was "lifted from its foundation, with three occupants in it, and planted several feet away in a wrecked condition."

And perhaps most disheartening of all because of its local symbolism, "Lafayette Park, the pride of the residents of Lower Town, is a complete wilderness. Nearly all the trees are torn up by the roots, the seats are blown away, debris from wrecked buildings is strewn from one end of the park to the other and the district presents an aspect of desolation."

Storm damage to St. Paul's Episcopal Church was repaired and the old church continued to serve until 1912 when St. Paul's-on-the-Hill was erected on Summit avenue at Saratoga street using symbolic portions of the old building in the new structure. After razing, old St. Paul's grounds became a coal yard.

Like its neighbor just a block away, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church was restored to its original condition so that loyal parishioners, such as the James J. Hills and John S. Princes, could celebrate mass in these beloved surroundings. The last Sunday service in the old building

took place on the first Sunday in February, 1922, when the new St. Mary's at the corner of Eighth and Rosabel was ready for occupancy. A fire nearly destroyed the old building in 1930 and it, with its distinctive bell tower chopped off, served as offices for the Lampland Lumber Company.

World War I, which the United States entered formally in April, 1917, was fought on European soil. The scene, however, in St. Paul in late 1917 looking north and west from Seventh and La-

fayette might have been transported from war-torn Flanders.

"More than 250 houses, four downtown schools and imposing hills are quickly vanishing day by day under the claw-hammers of workers and plows and scrapers of grading crews," wrote a reporter for the *St. Paul Press* on June 24, 1917. "One of the most historic parts of this city," the article continued, "is being leveled to be covered soon with busy tracks of railroad terminal yards . . ."

Photographers, probably in the employ of the Great Northern Railroad, faithfully recorded the demolition and devastation from a number of carefully noted vantage points. Many of these very graphic records reside in the photographic collection at the Minnesota Historical Society, thereby interring into history the dissolution of this once aristocratic neighborhood. Infiltration by steel track and other railroad paraphernalia surely presented a bleak and depressing view to the "old fogey" who had experienced the halcyon days of just a few years earlier.

To downtown business interests, however, opportunity was knocking and warehouses burst upon the scene during the teens and 1920s as rail transportation continued as the life blood of commerce throughout the nation. The freight yards surrounding Lafayette Park were daily a beehive of steel-on-steel bustle even as



A collection of weeds and brambles. Lafayette Park (foreground) is a neglected remnant of what it once was in this 1936 photograph of trucks loaded with food for needy depression-era families. In the background is the shell of St. Mary's Catholic Church, now occupied by the Lampland Lumber Company offices. Minnesota Historical Society photo.



Reinvention of a neighborhood. The changeover from residential to industrial was complete in this 1959 photograph. 3M's Benz Building shows in the lower lefthand corner. In front of it, Grove street runs east and intersects with Lafayette. The DNR building stands just beyond the intersection. To the right of the DNR building, the triangular remnant of the old Lafayette Park is outlined by parked cars. The large square building to the right of the park is the old St. Paul Terminal Warehouse, now the Minnesota Department of Human Services building. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

the fountain cherubs faithfully tossed water into the soot-laden air. Clearly, however, the park's remaining time was limited, as predicted in 1913 by Lloyd Peabody in his paper read to a meeting of the Executive Council of the Minnesota Historical Society:

"This ground has for many years served the purposes of a neighborhood park at Grove, Locust, Ninth and Willis streets, where it is situated. It seems likely that this square will pass into history by the encroachment from the surrounding territory of business which cannot well accommodate itself to broken areas and spaces."

The park indeed became history in November, 1948, when the St. Paul City Council knocked off a chunk of its northwest corner so that Lafayette Road could be widened and connected more effectively to the road north of Grove street. At the same time, the council agreed to sell the remainder of the park to the St. Paul Terminal Warehouse Company which had commenced warehouse operations in 1916 with the construction of a large building on the northeast corner of Eighth street and Lafayette Road. The old park which was then just a patch of

weeds became, and remains today, an asphalt parking lot with a plainly visible manhole which once served a sparkling Victorian fountain.

Steam driven switch engines, belching black smoke into the early postwar environment, continued to plague the research scientists who occupied the top three floors of the old Ramer building at the corner of Grove and Olive streets. From a candy factory, the six story, red brick structure turned into a liquor warehouse when acquired by the Benz company and later became a research laboratory when Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company moved in. It is still affectionately called the Benz building by 3M people who started each working day by cleaning railroad grime off their chemical benches and delicate instruments.

But the railroads were on their way out. Though that was cause for rejoicing at 3M's Benz building, their diminishing activity forced a change in direction for those businesses built on loading, unloading and storing boxcar freight. Trucking warehouses appeared where once stood freight platforms surrounded by railroad track. The ground encom-

passed by John, Eighth, Pine and Tenth streets is now covered by a one-story building of massive horizontal proportions where trucking rigs are seen daily moving to and from loading docks. If old St. Paul's Episcopal Church were still standing, its great spire would protrude from the center of the building about fifty feet above the roof.

3M's Benz building still serves a corporate development function and a number of small businesses proudly proclaim their presence but, as of this writing, much of the land in Lowertown once known as the Lafayette Park community, has been developed for contemporary office use by the company now known as the Space Center.

The mighty glacial river Warren, with waterfalls said to have been as great as those of Niagara, once covered the site of the present Twin Cities. It left the area where St. Paul now stands as a flat plateau at the top of white river bluffs and surrounded by seven hills. The oak-covered grove in the vicinity of present Grove and Lafayette streets became a residential district of tasteful and elegant homes surrounding a peaceful Victorian park. After an interlude brought about by railroad construction, the area became a community of perhaps not elegant but certainly tasteful small business and office buildings, including quarters for the State of Minnesota departments of Human Services, Natural Resources, Pollution Control and Labor and Industry.

Hundreds of citizens during the working week walk the paths where once trod St. Paul's elite. Can a new breathing space in the midst of busy life, its cool shades and waters a delightful transition from the roar of trade, be but a short distance into the future? If so, an old manhole in the middle of a parking lot is ready to serve once again.

Marshall R. Hatfield is a retired 3M vice president. He joined the company's Central Research Department in 1950 immediately upon completion of his doctorate at the University of Illinois. He had firsthand experience fighting soot and grime from switch engines in the Lafayette Park area.



Another of Frances James's watercolors of a Lafayette Park scene in the 1880s. This view looks west from the James home, a double house at the southwest corner of East Seventh street and Lafayette. The tall steeple is First Baptist Church at Ninth and Wacouta. The cupola is on the Washington School at Ninth and Olive streets. See article beginning on page 4.

R.C.H.S.
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