

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Building Permits—
Oh the Stories
They Can Tell

Page 19

Winter, 2005

Volume 39, Number 4

Curtain Up in 1933

The Legacy of the St. Paul Opera Association

—Page 4



"Attending the Opera," a gouache by painter Miriam Ibling (1895–1985). This was a 1938 study for a WPA mural at St. Paul's Galtier Elementary School. From the Minnesota Historical Society archives.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 39, Number 4

Winter, 2005

the mission statement of the ramsey county historical society
adopted by the board of directors in July 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Beginning in 1933, the St. Paul Civic Opera Association played a vital and enriching role in the city's arts and cultural life. When in the mid-1970s financial problems caused the St. Paul organization to merge with the Minnesota Opera, local pride in the city's ability to stage and present this grand art form gave way to the realities of what it actually cost to deliver any sustained program in the arts at the end of the twentieth century.

Historian Steve Trimble tells the story of the St. Paul Civic Opera Association with insight based on substantial research, interviews with a number of individuals who were involved in the Opera Association, and sensitivity to the complexity of opera as an art form. Despite the differences of opinion on whether operas should be done in their original language or in English; use homegrown talent for key roles or hire outside, professional voices; or select works for a given season that include Grand Opera, light opera, or musical comedy, the depth of commitment of opera supporters in St. Paul was steadfast until funding problems made all other issues secondary. What shines forth from Trimble's account is how hard many people worked to sustain their belief in the importance and value of the arts as an integral part of civic life in St. Paul.

Juxtaposed to the fantasy and delight of Grand Opera in our winter issue is a detailed examination of the birth, life, and death of the DeLoop Parking Garage on Cedar Street in downtown St. Paul. On the surface, Bob Garland's analysis of the paper trail left by a deservedly forgotten and otherwise unremarkable St. Paul building whose life span paralleled many of the same years when the Opera Association flourished seems not only mundane, but also incongruous.

Yet the painstaking research Garland did in this case study makes a powerful point: the proper preservation of the paper records of the city of St. Paul is essential if historians are going to be able to recount the city's history accurately and in detail. Just as families need to learn how to preserve their own letters, photographs, and other paper records, so cities need to learn how to properly archive their many records. Fortunately, in the case of St. Paul's building permits, in 2003 the city turned these records over to the Ramsey County Historical Society and the Society is working hard to make them more accessible to all who want to search them for answers about St. Paul's built environment.

John Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

RCHS's Collection of Building Permits and The Story of the DeLoop Parking Ramp

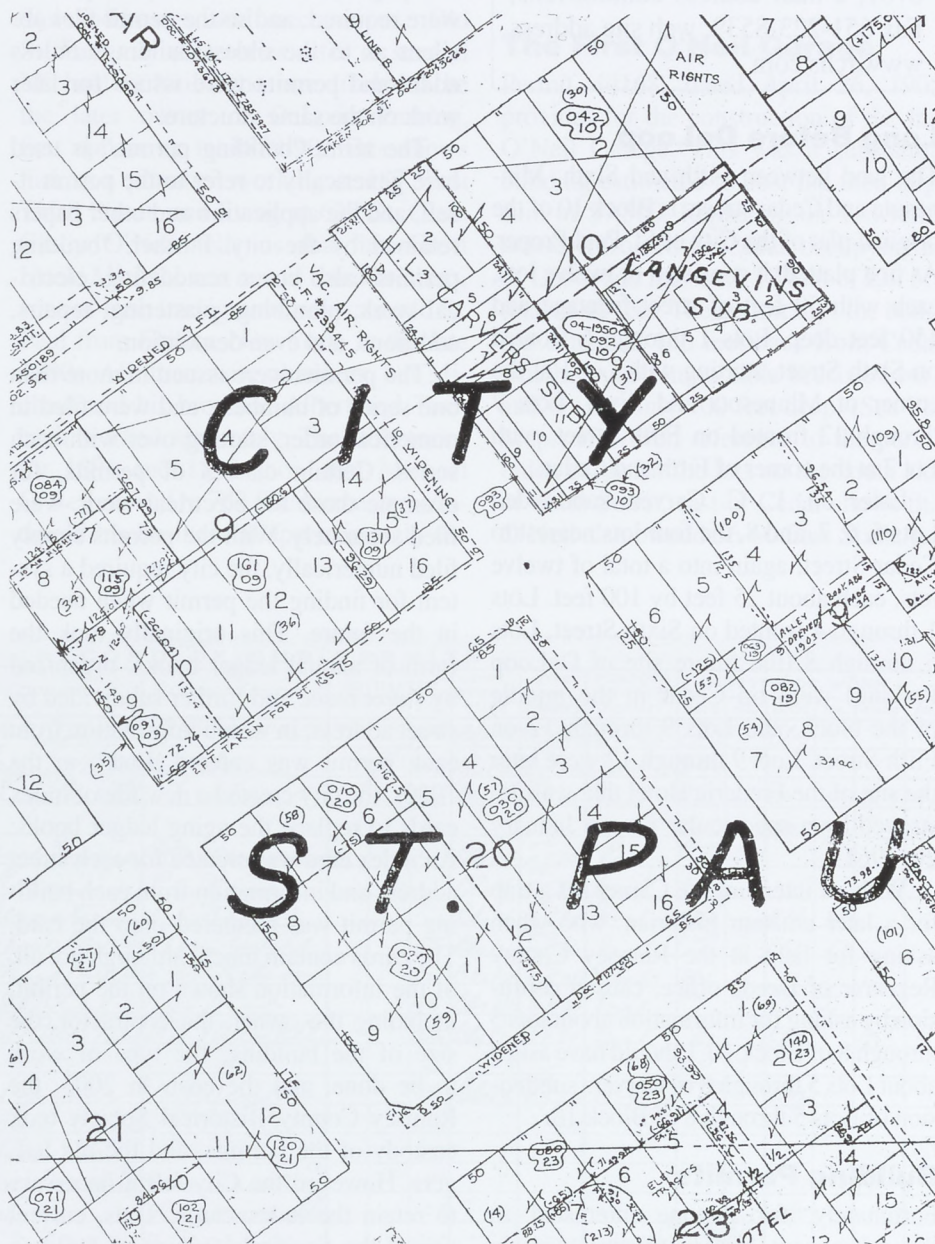
Bob Garland

In 1883, the City of St. Paul began to require permits for the construction of buildings within its city limits. In 1905, Michael J. O'Neil, after obtaining the necessary permit, began to build an automobile garage on the east side of Cedar Street in the city's downtown district. And by the early 1930s, through a series of purchases, constructions, demolitions, additions, extensions, and remodelings, O'Neil and his lessees had substantially created the two-story parking structure that people in St. Paul knew as DeLoop Parking.

In 1938, or so, late on a rainy afternoon, a small boy was impressed by the dark and seemingly mysterious interior of the parking garage, when he had to walk next to the north end of it in order to reach the rear entrance of his great aunt's luggage store. Not quite thirty years later, in 1966, to pave the way for what became the new Norwest Bank Building, DeLoop Parking disappeared under the wrecking ball, along with all other structures on the block bordered by Fifth, Sixth, Minnesota and Cedar.

In 2002, I wanted the challenge of learning and writing about a building of which I knew almost nothing. From that distant memory of a dark, wet day in 1938, DeLoop Parking somehow suggested itself. Early research began at the Minnesota Historical Society, the Ramsey County Historical Society, and the building permits and index cards, then on file with the City of St. Paul's Licensing, Inspection, and Environmental Protection (hereafter LIEP) Office.

This article doesn't pretend to tell everything that might be learned about DeLoop Parking, especially as it largely omits the questions of detailed property ownership that can only be learned from title searches that require training not possessed by the average amateur historian. It does provide an example, how-



Plat map showing Block 10 of the original plat of the City of St. Paul Proper.

ever, of what can be learned by relying mostly on information available from the Ramsey County and the Minnesota His-

torical Societies, especially the Ramsey County Historical Society's archive of building permits.

To assist other researchers and writers, the Ramsey County Historical Society will hold a St. Paul Building Permit Collection Workshop on Wednesday, March 23, 2005, at Landmark Center, 75 West Fifth Street, St. Paul. For more information, contact the Society at 651-222-0701; e-mail address admin@rchs; Fax 651-223-8539; web site address www.rchs.com

Long Before DeLoop

The land between Fifth and Sixth, Minnesota and Cedar streets is Block 10 of the original plat of the City of St. Paul Proper. As first platted, it consisted of twelve lots, each with 50 feet of street frontage and 150 feet deep. Lots 1 through 6 fronted on Sixth Street, starting with Lot 1 at the corner of Minnesota and Sixth. Lots 7 through 12 fronted on Fifth Street, with Lot 7 at the corner of Fifth and Cedar.

Later on, L. C. Carver, subdivided Lots 5, 6, 7, and 8, the four lots nearest to Cedar Street, again into a total of twelve lots, each about 25 feet by 100 feet. Lots 1 through 4 fronted on Sixth Street, Lots 5 through 8 (the future site of DeLoop Parking) were on Cedar in the middle of the block, and Lots 9 through 12 on Fifth Street. Lots 9 through 12 were later the site of the Frederic Hotel that was destroyed by a spectacular fire on January 20, 1961.

Without intending to, Carver set a trap for a later amateur historian, who when asking for help at the Ramsey County Registrar of Deeds office, caused confusion by asking for information about lots 5 through 8 of Block 10. I should have asked about Lots 5 through 8 of Carver's subdivision of Lots 5 through 8 of Block 10.

Building Permits

Fortunately, for anyone interested in the subsequent history of structures in St. Paul, the city began to require/issue building permits in 1883. The first of these was issued on August 3 of that year and pertained to a "Coal Office" at 302 Prince Street. In early years, the permit document filed by the city was the detailed application for the actual permit.

Later on, the file document sometimes is, or includes, a copy of the permit itself. A few permits include copies of blueprints, but unfortunately, this was not the case for any of those studied for this article. The applications took a variety of forms; originally they were on "legal size" paper, and folded for filing like a legal document. There were, of course, many buildings built in St. Paul before permits were required, and so the permit files are silent as to the oldest buildings unless additional permits were issued for later work on the same structure.

The term, "building permit," is used here generically to refer to the permit itself, and the application and other papers retained by the city. Further, "building permits" also cover remodeling, electrical work, plumbing, plastering, repairs, additions, and even demolition.

The permits were issued in more than one series of numbers, and were filed in numerical order, starting over with each series. Certain classes of permits, for example those for electrical work, were filed separately. With the permits simply filed numerically, the city required a system for finding the permit when needed in the future. This originally took the form of annual ledger books, organized by street name and further subdivided by street address, in which information from each permit was entered. Later, in the 1930s, the city created a new file of index cards to replace the aging ledger books. An index card was created for each street address and information from each building permit was reentered onto the card. The cards contain much, although not all, of the information shown on the permit, including the owner, the contractor, the size of the building, the type of work to be done, and the cost. In 2003, the Ramsey County Historical Society took custody of the permits, and the old ledgers. However, the City felt it necessary to retain the index cards. Thus, current use of the Society's archive of building permits usually requires first a visit to the LIEP Office to consult the index card, and then, knowing the permit number, a check of the files of permits now preserved by the Ramsey County Historical Society.

The organization of the permit index

cards by street address is logical and easy to use, assuming one knows the street address of the building under study. Unfortunately, in 2002, when I began to learn about the DeLoop parking structure and was referred to the building permit files then in LIEP Office, I had no idea of the street numbers that once had existed on the east side of Cedar between Fifth and Sixth, the space now occupied by the massive west side of Fifth Street Center (formerly Norwest Bank). However, visits to several other downtown St. Paul north/south streets between Fifth and Sixth gave the approximate numbers, and the LIEP Office employees were more than helpful in guiding me through my first researches. The first thing I learned was that I was interested in the buildings located on the four 25-foot lots at 374, 376, 384, and 386 Cedar, the numbers running south to north, away from the river, just the reverse of the numbering of Lots 5 through 8, which run north to south.

What the Permits Tell Us

384 Cedar Street: The first permit for work on what later became the O'Neil/DeLoop property, was issued June 3, 1887. At that time, Lots 5 and 6 were occupied by a one-story building, with Ray Lawrence identified as owner. This was a frame building, 12 feet wide, and 14 feet deep, with a peaked roof. We don't know when it was built, for this permit, already number 11431, was only for re-shingling the roof at a cost of \$200.

376 Cedar: C. Egleston (owner) and W. E. Warner (builder) received permit 19069 on May 13, 1889. The work was a brick addition to an existing two-story brick dwelling on Lot 7, and to repair damage caused by fire to an older addition. The added structure was 14 feet wide by 14 feet deep. The cost of the work was \$1,000. Then on November 21, 1894, Mrs. M. Egleston, of Minneapolis, received permit 31625 for \$500 of repairs required by damage from another fire. These included plastering, painting, and papering. The permit application describes the building then at 376 Cedar, as a two-story, brick dwelling, with a flat roof covered with tar and gravel, 25 feet wide by 80 feet deep and 30 feet high. Apparently, the Egleston building was

later sold, because on August 25, 1919, St. Paul Gas Company (owner) and George J. Grant (contractor) received permit 74314 for the construction of a one-story boiler room addition, 11 feet wide, and 27 feet deep. The addition was brick and concrete, with a flat roof covered by "rubberoid" roofing material.

This is all the permits can tell us about the structures that existed before Michael O'Neil came on the scene. The Lawrence and Egleston buildings appear on the 1885 Plat Map, published by G. M. Hopkins, 320 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA, now in the possession of Alfred R. Sundberg, Jr. They are correctly identified as of frame and brick construction, respectively. The same buildings are shown on the Sanborn Insurance Map for 1903, now in possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

It doesn't appear that there was another building on Lot 5, at 386 Cedar, because the permit for Lawrence's 1887 shingling job describes his building as being on both Lots 5 and 6. As to the south end of what became DeLoop Parking, Lot 8, at 374

Cedar, the permits are silent. There appears not to have been a building at 374 Cedar, because none appears on the 1885 Plat Map, there is no building permit for one after that date, and there is nothing shown on the 1903 Sanborn map.

Michael J. O'Neil

Building permits also tell us little about the owners and contractors, except for their addresses and occupations. Old St. Paul city directories refer to several Michael O'Neils, the one likely to be the later owner of DeLoop Parking, first appearing in 1889-90. This shows him as a plumber, working at 187 West Third Street, and living at 637 St. Clair. Casey O'Neil tells us that his Great Uncle Michael was one of three brothers, sons of Irish immigrants, who came to St. Paul from Elmira, New York, in the late 1800s. All three were plumbers, but Michael and his brothers, Albert and Tom, each worked separately. The directories for 1891 and 1892 show that Michael O'Neil moved to 783 Sherburne, but continued his business at approximately the

same address on West Third. He sold gas and electric fixtures, gas stoves, ranges, and grates, and also plumbers, steamfitters, and gasfitters supplies. By 1905, Michael O'Neil had moved to 56 - 60 East Sixth Street. Still later, he had his place of business in the Exchange Bank Building, and then in the New York Building. By 1920, he had moved his residence to 702 Goodrich Avenue.

The First O'Neil Garage

Permit 44168, dated April 26, 1905, provides for the construction of the first O'Neil Garage. This was a substantial building estimated to cost the then large sum of \$7,500. Replacing the Lawrence house, it fronted on Cedar, occupying all of Lot 6, and the south 17 feet of Lot 5, a total of 42 feet. The permit says the building extended 130 feet back from Cedar, which seemed impossible because Lots 5 and 6 were only 100 feet deep. (See Plat Map.) However, reference to the permit index cards for the lots on the south side of Sixth Street, east of Cedar shows that O'Neil also owned 56-60 East Sixth, Lot

RECORD OF SUB-PERMITS													
TYPE OF PERMIT	PERMIT NUMBER	DATE ISSUED	DATE LAST INSPECTION	OWNER	CONTRACTOR	ESTIMATED COST	TYPE STRUCTURE	TYPE CONSTRUCTION	PURPOSE OF PERMIT	TYPE OF WORK			
										CODE	NO.	CODE	NO.
Elec	53773	9-14-29		Whiteagle Oil	J. O. Nelson		Bl/14	TC2200	Inst	EP2	3	EP3	3
Plb	5386	9-24-29		L. Bergquist	H. Miller	105	Bl/12	TC 0530	Inst	EP20			
Elec	7683	10-23-29		DeLoop Park	W. E. Wient	400	Bl/12	TC 0530	Inst	EP6	4	EP2	51
										EP2	6	EP2	51
Plb	7840	10-28-29		Garage	M. M. Gormanson		Bl/14	TC 0530	Rep	PLA			
Elec	8868	11-21-29		L. Roseman	P. C. Nicol		Bl/14	TC 0530	Inst	EP3		EP6	1
Elec	8804	11-24-29		Bernstein	P. C. Nicol		Bl/14	TC 0530	Inst	EP3		EP6	1
Elec	10576	2-20-30		DeLoop Park	W. E. Wient	15	Bl/14	TC 0530	Inst	EP4		EP6	1
Elec	13791	3-28-30		DeLoop Park	J. O. Nelson	75	Bl/14	TC 0530	Inst	EP6	6		
Plb	32880	4-20-30		M. O'Neil	R. O'Neil	45	Bl/14	TC 0530	Inst	PA	1	PA	1
Elec	32946	4-25-30		Loop Park	W. J. Winkler	25	Bl/12	TC 0530	Inst	EP5		EP3	2
										EP2	3		
Elec	38875	10-2-34		L. Roseman	M. J. Winkler	85	Bl/14	TC 0530	Inst	EP2	1	EP2	1
Elec	40887	9-11-34		John Hayes	H. L. Lide	25							
Elec	79876	11-24-34		Harold Star	Edmond	5							
Elec	106340	7-20-35		Firestone Tire	Roseman	100							
Elec	106341	7-22-35		O.P.A.	Roseman	100							
Blb	186581	11-24-46		O'Neil	G. B. Borsal	400			Inst				

Index card from the 1930s.

CITY OF SAINT PAUL
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS
DIVISION OF BUILDING INSPECTION

APPLICATION FOR PERMIT
CLYDE R. MAY, COMMISSIONER

TOTAL FEE COLLECTED \$ 16.00

DOUBLE FEE COLLECTED

ACCOUNT ORDINANCE VIOLATION

To: BUILD INSTALL ADD ALTER REPAIR MOVE WRECK HANG

MARK SQUARES BY X

DATE 9/4 1931

STRUCTURE USED AS Parking Room
Delivery Station

OWNER M. J. O'Neil ADDRESS W. Y. Bldg
Louis P. O'Neil & Louis M. Klass (licensees) 384 Cedar

CONTRACTOR Ramb ADDRESS

NUMBER	STREET	SIDE	BETWEEN WHAT CROSS STREETS
<u>384</u>	<u>Cedar</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>5th + 6th</u>

WARD	LOT	BLOCK	ADDITION OR TRACT
<u>4</u>	<u>5, 6, 7 + 8</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>H. L. Carvers Sub</u>

FRONT OR WIDTH IN FEET	DEEP OR LENGTH IN FEET	HIGHT IN FEET	NO. OF STORIES	PROJECTION BEYOND BUILDING OR PROPERTY LINE IN FEET	LOWEST POINT OF GROUND IN FEET	MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION	APPROXIMATE AREA OF BUILDING SQUARE FEET	ESTIMATED VALUATION
<u>108</u>	<u>130</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>160000</u>	<u>160 @ 10 = 1600</u>	<u>\$ 10500.00</u>

SEPARATE PERMIT REQUIRED FOR GARAGE SPECIFICATIONS FOR PRIVATE GARAGES:
TO BE AT LEAST 10 FEET FROM DWELLING ON SAME LOT
TO BE AT LEAST 20 FEET FROM DWELLING ON ADJOINING LOT
TO BE AT LEAST 30 FEET FROM FRONT STREET
TO BE AT LEAST 8 FEET FROM SIDE PROPERTY LINE
CONSTRUCTION ON VACANT LOT PROHIBITED
GARAGE DOORS MUST NOT OPEN INTO ALLEY

NO PERMIT ISSUED UNDER THIS APPLICATION WILL COVER PLUMBING, ELECTRICAL, PLASTERING OR WARM AIR FURNACE WORK.

DETAILS OR REMARKS:
160 @ 10 = 1600 fee.

The undersigned hereby makes application for a permit to do Building Work as herein specified, agreeing to do all work in strict accordance with all ordinances of the City of Saint Paul, Minnesota.

SIGNED Louis P. O'Neil
and Louis M. Klass

BY _____

M. J. O'Neil's application for a permit in 1931.

4 of the original Block 10. This larger lot was 150 feet deep from Sixth Street, and thus was behind Lots 5 and 6 of Carvers Subdivision. The garage must have simply extended back onto the other O'Neil lot. The building was to be 24 feet high, with a flat roof, covered with pitch and gravel. The roof structure was trusses, 2 x 10 inches. The building had one chimney and was heated by steam. Foundations were stone, 20 inches thick. The walls were of brick, with pilasters, which are thicker columns built into the walls. Ceilings were of 2 x 8s. The architect was A. H. Wheeler, who had offices in the Globe Building, and lived at 443 Marshall Avenue. He is known to have also designed buildings for the Northwestern Shot and Lead Works, and a house at 1700 Portland Avenue. It appears that O'Neil acted as his own general contractor. A Mr. Quinlivan, a city building inspector,

checked the work on May 2 and May 19, and reported it finished on August 2.

The Store Next Door

Almost simultaneously, on the other side of the Egleston/St. Paul Gas building at 376 Cedar, O'Neil received permit number 44347, dated May 19, 1905, for the construction of a brick store building at 374 Cedar, Lot 8. Costing \$250, this was a small building by today's standards; 12 feet wide, and 18 feet deep. It was 10 feet high, with a flat roof, covered by tar and gravel. Stoves heated the building. Construction did not take long, as Quinlivan reported it finished on June 9.

Garage Expansion

The garage must have been successful for, on September 7, 1910, O'Neil received permit 55506 providing for the construction of an addition. This was a

brick structure 8 feet wide and 20 feet deep, occupying the remaining portion of Lot 5 at the north side of the original garage property. The cost was \$100. Quinlivan reported it complete on September 28, 1910. This is the first of the building permits pertaining to DeLoop where a copy of the actual permit appears in the file. On this permit, as on the earlier ones, O'Neil's address is given as 60 East Sixth Street, a few doors east of Cedar.

After the 1905 construction and the 1910 garage expansion, the permit files show no building activity on Lots 5, 6, 7, and 8 for about the next twenty years, with the exception of the 1919 expansion of the St. Paul Gas building at 376 Cedar. The 1926 Sanborn Insurance Map shows only the garage built in 1905, identifying it as having the capacity of twenty-five cars, and also including a supply warehouse, plumbing shop, and repair shop. It may be that this structure also served O'Neil's plumbing business on East Sixth Street.

Demolition and Construction

The building permit information was doubtless clear to those involved at the time, but is not always so decades later. For example, on October 15, 1928, permit 34192 authorized the demolition of the buildings on Lots 7 and 8 (376 and 374 Cedar). These apparently were the St. Paul Gas Building and the 1905 O'Neil store, although the buildings do not appear on the 1926 Sanborn map. The 1905 garage structure, on Lots 5 and 6, does appear on the 1926 Sanborn map, but there are no references on the building permit index cards to its demolition in 1928. An added complexity is that permit 34192 was originally issued for Lots 5 and 6, where the garage was located, but was then corrected to Lots 7 and 8. In any event, the 24-foot high, 1905 garage building must have been taken down or greatly modified in 1928 or soon after, for reasons that will be explained below. The cost of the demolition work was \$1,000. Inspector Branson reported the wrecking half-done on October 23, and practically finished on October 28, 1928. He said no further inspection was necessary.

Then on November 2, 1928, permit 34655 authorized the construction of

a filling station, 22 feet by 22 feet, at a cost of \$2,500. M. J. O'Neil is identified as the owner, with L. Rosiner as lessee. Unfortunately, sometime before this date, the City stopped showing the architect on the permit, so we don't know the architect of this or later DeLoop structures. The permit is somewhat unclear as to exactly where this relatively small structure was located, as reference is made to all four lots, and to 374, 376, and 384 Cedar. The building was 14 feet high and of masonry construction. Construction was exceedingly rapid by today's standards. Inspector Branson reported excavation complete by November 16, and footings done by November 25. By December 5, the building was "under roof," the concrete block walls were finished, the gasoline pumps were installed, and the curbs cut. The building was finished by December 20, and a final note refers to site beautification to be done in the spring. Hopefully, Rosiner's gasoline station business was not too badly hurt by the 1929 stock market crash and the following depression.

The Mystery Permit

At this point, the story told by the permit index cards seemed to become inconsistent with other information. On the one hand, the story the index cards told was of the 1905 garage, and a modestly sized gasoline station built in late 1928, somehow occupying all four lots, perhaps with surface parking, and subject only to a modest amount of plumbing and electrical work for the next fifteen years. On the other hand, the excellent 1931 photograph of DeLoop Service Station and Parking, in the files of the Minnesota Historical Society, clearly showed the impressive second-story parking ramp, although there seemed to be nothing in the permit files to account for its construction. This situation was frustrating, and another visit to the archives of the Ramsey County Historical Society was obviously required.

I decided to consult the old ledger indexes, thinking that a permit might have been posted to the wrong card during conversion to the cards in the 1930s. I also wondered if permits numerically preceding or following the 1928 wrecking and filling station construction permits had

provided for the parking structure. Luckily, I also reviewed my photocopies of the index cards and noted one other building permit, very modest in dollar amount, that I hadn't previously examined because it couldn't possibly have pertained to the construction of an entire parking ramp.

Initial results of my research were disappointing. The index ledgers for the years 1919 through 1938 must have been lost many years ago, for they were not received from the city. Those lost included the ledgers I hoped to consult. Building permits numbered just before and after those issued in 1928 proved to pertain to totally different addresses. However, the one small permit, number 5386, shown on the index card as issued on September 4, 1931, for \$105 in construction work, was an entirely different story and the key to the mystery.

In fact, the permit itself shows that it covered construction of a "parking roof" to the filling station, costing not \$105, but \$10,500! One of the clerks working in the 1930s to post the new index cards had made a mistake!

The "Parking Roof"

Permit 5386 was issued September 4, 1931. It showed M. J. O'Neil as the owner, although this is crossed out, perhaps for reasons indicated below. Louis Rosiner and Louis Klass are shown as lessees. The permit provided for a "parking roof" structure 108 feet wide, 130 feet deep, and 12 feet high. Again, the structure must have extended north and east over the other O'Neil properties fronting on Sixth, as, by this date, the permit index cards tell us that O'Neil owned the lots at 42-60 East Sixth Street. It is hard to understand how the 12-foot high "parking roof" would fit over the 14-foot-high gasoline station built on the property in 1928, much less over the 24-foot-high 1905 garage. Thus, the garage must have been virtually demolished in 1928. Perhaps the heights on permit 5386 are inexact, or the roof of the 1928 gas station was modified during the 1931 construction.

Work apparently began in late September 1931 for the concrete footings were complete on October 5. By October 15, the structural steel columns and

beams were in place and the ramp leading up from the street level to the roof was also finished. The "roof" or deck, made of two-inch planks over the steel beams, was complete on November 2, 1931, the painting on November 6, and Inspector Branson reported the entire building completed on November 10. The exception was the driveway leading from the street, and that was to be done by the city. This work completed DeLoop Parking in substantially the form shown in the 1931 photograph. The Sanborn Insurance Map for 1941 (in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society) shows the same structure.

Ownership Information

Building permits and index cards show the names and addresses of the owners and building contractors, electricians, etc. As to ownership, this information is usable, but not absolutely accurate. For instance, Michael J. O'Neil died in June 1931, too soon to see completion of the second level parking structure. Permit 5386 issued in September 1931 still shows M. J. O'Neil as the owner, and indeed permits issued as late as 1934 show the same information. This may be confused with O'Neil's corporation, that was chartered in 1928, and he, and later his corporation, doubtless owned the underlying real estate. The same permit shows Louis Rosiner and Louis Klass as lessees. Local tradition is that Klass was the silent managing partner, and Louis Rosiner was only the operator of the parking garage. Louis Klass probably was the actual owner of the business. DeLoop Parking Garage, Inc. was chartered in 1937. The incorporators were Klass, Phil H. Marsh, and Mayer Shapiro. Klass was president.

Doubtless, the process of actually securing a building permit by busy owners, lessees, and contractors, from equally busy city staff, tended sometimes to be imprecise as to ownership. Those using the building permit archives need to check with actual property records if absolute accuracy as to legal ownership is required.

One More Improvement

The building permit files report no further construction for the next fifteen



The DeLoop Service Station and Parking at 384 Cedar Street. Peter Schawang photograph, Minnesota Historical Society.

years. Perhaps this is accounted for by reduced income during the depression and a shortage of materials during World War II. It is tempting to suppose that one feature of the 1931 construction was never fully satisfactory, because on February 24, 1946, one more permit, number 136581, provided for an improvement badly needed in Minnesota winters. The work is described, obscurely, as applying "transite board" to a "suspended bridge" on Lots 7 and 8. Luckily, the building inspector's report explains this by referring to covering a "tunnel" with transite, leading to the conclusion the permit actually provides for a roof to the ramp leading to the upper parking deck. This is supported by the late 1931 photograph that shows the ramp open to the weather, while the right portion of the 1950 photograph from the files of the Minnesota Historical Society shows the roof over the ramp.

The End of DeLoop Parking

After 1946, the permit files tell nothing more until the end of the structure. For a period of time, however, it appeared that

the aging parking ramp might actually have a future. In 1961, the spectacular fire that destroyed the Frederic Hotel, DeLoop's immediate neighbor to the south, might have represented an opportunity for expansion. In 1963, Grover Diamond Associates, architects, drew plans (now in possession of the Northwest Architectural Archive) for an addition to the ramp to occupy the northeast corner of Fifth and Cedar. However, this was not to be, and on June 7, 1966, building permit 59527 was issued to provide for the wrecking of DeLoop Parking to make way for the Norwest Bank Building.

The Ramsey County Historical Society has made great first steps in preserving the building permits. They are now housed in a clean, dry storeroom, generously provided by Ramsey County. They are in appropriate record storage boxes, located on modern steel shelving, both purchased by the Society. Diligent efforts are underway to obtain funds needed to microfilm the vital index cards so that users will no longer have to make the extra step of visiting the LIEP Office.

I hope this article shows that people interested in the history of our buildings and other structures can learn a great deal from the Ramsey County Historical Society's archive of St. Paul building permits. As funding becomes available, this process will be strengthened by more convenient access to the index cards now retained by the city. This archive is a significant addition to what has been available from the Society, the Minnesota Historical Society, and the Northwest Architectural Archive. The help of these entities in the preparation of this article is gratefully acknowledged, as is that of staff of the LIEP Office, Alfred R. Sundberg Jr. (1885 Plat Map), and Casey O'Neil, Jay Pfaender, and Jim Miller, fellow members of the Ramsey County Historical Society who provided valuable guidance.

Bob Garland is a frequent contributor to Ramsey County History and a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's board of directors. A freelance writer, he is also the author of mystery novels set in St. Paul.



Mrs. W. Homer Sweney, known to family and friends as Mary Glyde Griggs, a founder of the St. Paul Opera Association. Portrait is by St. Paul artist Carl Bohnen (1871–1951), and is reproduced here courtesy of her daughter Pat Hart. Bohnen, an opera buff, was nationally known for his portraits, including seven governor portraits in the Minnesota State Capitol. Border taken from the Mary Molton Cheney Papers (1872-1950) in the collection of the Ramsey County Historical Society. See article on page 4.

R.C.H.S.
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