

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Stanford Newel, Proposal Rock,
and Newell Park Widows*

**Newell Park Celebrates
Its Centennial**

Winter 2009

Volume 43, Number 4

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Courthouse Sculptor

Lee Lawrie

Paul D. Nelson

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*Two of Lee Lawrie's architectural sculptures,
Liberty (top) and The People, on the façade
of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County
Courthouse, Fourth Street entrance.
Photo courtesy of Paul D. Nelson.*

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 43, Number 4

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

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

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A Message from the Editorial Board

How often do we drive past a familiar scene and fail to appreciate the history behind it? In this issue, three writers take us on a tour of places we think we know but whose rich stories are rarely told. Paul Nelson gives an in-depth look at Lee Lawrie's architectural sculptures on the exterior surfaces of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. More famous for his artwork at Rockefeller Center in New York City, Lawrie's Courthouse sculptures combine graceful forms with a sense of purpose as they illustrate concepts such as industry, justice, and liberty. Nelson will be giving a talk and guiding a tour of St. Paul architectural sculpture on March 29 at the St. Paul Central Library—join him if you can.

Susanne Sebesta Heimbuch takes us back to the early 1960s with her evocative look at Catholic education at Our Lady of Peace High School, which occupied the current site of William Mitchell College of Law. And Krista Finstad Hanson revisits the story of Newell Park, which for a time in the 1920s and '30s was a neighborhood gathering place buoyed by vigorous community support. Thanks to the efforts of many, today this revitalized park serves as a jewel in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood. Explore your county's roots, and discover new perspectives from your armchair!

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Stanford Newel, Proposal Rock, and Newell Park Widows

Newell Park Celebrates Its Centennial

Krista Finstad Hanson

Newell Park, located in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood in St. Paul, celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2008. Located at the junction of Fairview Avenue and Pierce Butler Route, this historic park is well known for its scenic setting amidst a rolling landscape, a wealth of ancient oaks, and a preserved and intact pavilion that was constructed in 1929. In conjunction with the Hamline Midway Coalition's (District 11) Annual Meeting, which was held on May 20, 2008, the community celebrated the centennial of the park by viewing a number of historical photos and a wealth of research related to Newell Park that the Hamline Midway History Corps, a neighborhood interest group, had uncovered.

The mural on the side of the Mirror of Korea restaurant building (at the corner of Snelling and Englewood avenues) in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood, reminds both residents and visitors of Newell Park's history. In 1982, Minneapolis artist Chris Baird chose a circa-1900 photograph of a family in Newell Park from the Minnesota Historical Society archives to use for painting this mural, which was sponsored by the COMPAS arts agency.

Creating the Park

The acquisition of the land comprising what became Newell Park was discussed during a September 16, 1907 meeting of the St. Paul Board of Park Commissioners. President Herbert W. Topping and Commissioners Daniel Aberle, Dr. Robert O. Earl, William Hamm & a Mr. Robinson, received a "communication from H. S. Fairchild transmitting [a] proposition for the sale of Blocks 1,2,3, & 4 College Place Marshall's Division, for the sum of \$8,880.00, [with] said blocks containing 74 lots at \$120.00 per lot," according to the park board minutes. The official resolution for the creation of the park (Res. No. 1313) came on February 3, 1908.¹

The early history of this land is sketchy. The portion that the Park Board considered making a park was not originally a part of St. Paul itself, as it was located "mid-

way" between St. Paul and Minneapolis, leaving this area in a sort of historical no-man's land. Surviving records report that in the first half of the nineteenth century Cloud Man's band of Dakota Indians, which often spent the summer living adjacent to the Mississippi River in what is today the city of Bloomington, passed nearby en route to the wild rice harvesting grounds at Forest Lake and elsewhere. As the Dakota headed northeast each fall in the 1850s, historical records show they passed through Jane and Heman Gibbs's farm, which lay between the Mississippi and the wild rice lakes, in what is today the city of Falcon Heights at the intersection of Cleveland and Larpenteur avenues. Thus the trail that that Dakota followed may also have passed through today's Midway area, close to the present-day site of Newell Park. We also know that the Territorial Road and the Red River Ox Cart trails cut through this neighborhood as well. What is less certain is whether either Native Americans or white settlers lived in this area on a more permanent basis before the 1850s.

On December 20, 1850, Eli Pettijohn purchased the land grant patent for a portion of this area (the South ½ of S. E. ¼, Sec. 28, T. 29, R. 23) of what became the Hamline Midway neighborhood in St. Paul. He was a missionary



This photo from about 1900 shows a family enjoying the mix of trees and grassland in the Hamline-Midway area that would later become a part of Newell Park. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

turned miller who resided for a time at Fort Snelling. He assisted Gideon Pond, a Presbyterian missionary in the area, when Pond built his cabin in what is now Bloomington. Pettijohn was also an associate of Franklin Steele, a founder of St. Anthony, who was an early investor in lumber milling at the Falls of St. Anthony and a real estate speculator. City directories show that Pettijohn did not settle in this area and was most likely engaged in land speculation.² An 1867 map of Ramsey County by L. G. Bennett (made available by local historian Don Empson) shows that the land that is now Newell

Park was located in what was then Rose Township (T. 29, R. 23) and was part of a forty-acre plot of land owned at this time by (W.L.) Ames & Brent. This area was cartographically notated as being part of a large wetlands system.

From the topography and the presence of an oak savannah, it appears that at the time the Bennett map was drawn the area had not yet been settled or developed for homes or farmland. The site that eventually became Newell Park is just south of where the train tracks for the Saint Paul & Pacific Railroad were laid in the early 1860s when the railroad built Minnesota's first line between St. Paul and St. Anthony. In the 1870s James J. Hill and his partners acquired this railroad, which later became the Great Northern. Hill subsequently acquired ownership of acreage including and to the north of the railroad tracks. Additionally, the 1867 Bennett map shows scattered homesteads located in the vicinity of what would later be known as Newell Park, but a search of existing records has not turned up any pre-1885 building permits that note the existence of early dwellings in this area. Visual examination of currently existing homes surrounding the park does not indicate that any of these residences include some remnant of a home that might have been built in the years before 1885. In fact most of the homes directly across from the park on three of its sides are notable for having been built during the 1920s to 1940s.

The College Place Divisions

A property abstract from a home built in 1888 on Hewitt Avenue near today's Newell Park shows that this land was being bought and sold over the years by such well-known St. Paul business leaders as Henry H. Sibley, Amherst Wilder, John Greenleaf Clark, and Horace Thompson.³ According to the property abstract, on November 14, 1873, William Fry bought "64" deeds from Horace Thompson and his wife. Subdivision of these plots was then done by George B. Wright and wife, Horace Thompson and wife, and William Fry and wife on March 12, 1875, thus creating a College Place East Division and a College Place West Division and a College Place Taylor's Division.⁴



During a 1927 picnic at Newell Park, many of the girls who were there participated in a foot-race on one of the park's open, grassy fields. K.L. Fenney Company photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The "college" in question was Hamline University, which had been looking to leave its home in Red Wing, where it got its start in 1858, and move to the growing metropolitan area of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In 1872 Girart Hewitt, Elias F. Drake, and other St. Paul leaders offered Hamline a tract of eighty acres in the Midway area that was to be part gift and part land sale as an incentive for the college to relocate there. Active fundraising subsequently allowed Hamline trustees to build the large campus building known today as "Old Main" and classes at the college opened for the first time in this new location on September 22, 1880. The area around the college became known as the village of Hamline with its own train depot and post office. University Hall (Old Main) was designed by noted church architect Warren H. Hayes, who also designed downtown St. Paul's Central Presbyterian Church among others. University Hall suffered a fire in 1883 and its restoration, with one less story than the original, was completed in 1884. Today this college landmark is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁵

In 1885 St. Paul annexed Hamline village and the area that is known as the Midway and made it part of an expanding capital city. By that time several homes had been built near the campus and the



Lavaun Beerbower sitting on Proposal Rock in Newell Park in 1938, when Marshall Hankerson asked her to marry him. Photo courtesy of Stephanie Hankerson.

village was growing. The oldest known homes still remaining in the neighborhood are those immediately around Hamline University. They include the John C. Stevens house at 1541 West Minnehaha Avenue, built in 1886, and the Oric O.

Whited house at 1538 W. Englewood Avenue, which was built in 1887.⁶

William R. Marshall, who had served as Minnesota's fifth governor in the late 1860s, purchased the area that became Newell Park and further subdivided his portion of "College Place" to include a "Marshall's division." Marshall was also actively buying up land for speculative purposes. He and his brother-in-law, Nathaniel Langford, were very successful in developing the nearby neighborhood of Saint Anthony Park, for instance.⁷ An 1886 plat map (courtesy of Don Empson) shows the Newell Park area subdivided with approximately 12.5 acres of this forty-acre plot now being owned by Horace E. Thompson, the son of Horace Thompson Sr. In the mid-1880s the younger Thompson was the president of the St. Paul Linseed Company and had a residence at 379 Woodward Avenue in Lowertown. The 1886 plat map

also indicates that a James Young owned 6.44 acres and that several smaller parcels in the tract had been sold to M. D. Wright & an individual who is identified only as "Wells." At that time, Fairview Avenue was called "Grove" and the western border of this forty-acre plot was "Wright" Street.

From oral and written histories found in Hamline University's yearbook, *The Limer*; there is evidence that Hamline students regularly made their way to what eventually became Newell Park. These accounts also mention a Frog Pond in the Newell Park site; however it is not currently known what happened to the pond and where exactly it was located. Additionally Hamline University students promoted the existence of a "Proposal Rock" in the park. Today visitors can still see several large rock outcroppings in the park, but there does not appear to be anything that is clearly the celebrated

Proposal Rock. Some accounts claim that at an unknown time in the past, Hamline students carried the Proposal Rock to the campus and that is where it may be found today, serving as an alumni marker with the graduation years of certain classes carved into the stone.

Current Hamline-Midway resident Stephanie Hankerson was kind enough to share with the Hamline Midway History Corps a photo of her grandmother, Lavaun Beerbower, sitting on Proposal Rock on March 17, 1938, when she was proposed to by Marshall Hankerson, who was then a Hamline University student. Stephanie's ninety-two-year-old grandfather, Marshall Hankerson, has a sharp memory, but his mind isn't filled with the details of where the rock was located! Fortunately the Hankerson family has this picture of the radiant Lavaun and a view of the landscape of the park in 1938.

Who Was Stanford Newel?

H.S. Fairchild, a St. Paul real estate agent, brokered the sale of the land that became Newell Park to the Park Board. The 1908 *St. Paul City Directory* reports that Henry S. Fairchild operated a real estate and loan office at 207 Court Block and he resided at 147 Kent Street. Fairchild also suggested that the new park be named for Stanford Newel, a former member of the St. Paul Park Board. Nothing in the records relating to the origin of Newell Park explains how the misspelling of Newell with two "Ls" made it into the Park Board minutes, but this public honoring of Stanford Newel's service has remained uncorrected for a century.

Stanford Newel was a civic-minded attorney who served a two-year appointment on the St. Paul Park Board. Newel founded and was for a time secretary, treasurer, and president of the Minnesota Club in St. Paul. According to his obituary, he was also the president of the Pioneer Press Company at the time of his death in 1907.⁸ He is best known, however, as the U.S. Minister to the Netherlands. President William McKinley appointed him to this post and he served from 1897 to 1905. Newel was subsequently appointed the first U.S. Minister to Luxembourg, an

office he held between 1903 and 1905. While he was a U.S. minister, Newel attended the First International Peace Conference, which was held in The Hague in 1899.⁹

Most of the information that is available locally on Stanford Newel can be found in the various early history books of Minnesota or St. Paul that recount the accomplishments of notable men of the day. Unfortunately, no personal papers appear to be in the collections of the Ramsey County Historical Society or the Minnesota State Historical Society. Newel does have some personal papers,

undoubtedly from his days as a U.S. minister, in the holdings of the Library of Congress. Luckily, a thorough biographical profile of Stanford Newel was published in the May 1899 issue of the *American Monthly Review of Reviews*. This article, as well as an extensive obituary in the *Pioneer Press*, provides most of what is known about Newel.

Another Yankee Leader

Stanford Newel, was born on June 7, 1839, to Stanford and Abby Lee (Penniman) Newel in Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁰ Online genealogical postings show that Stanford Newel came from an old Rhode Island family that operated clothing manufacturing companies in the early 1800s. Newel's family moved to St. Anthony Falls in Minnesota in 1855. According to the *Pioneer Press*, Newel was then sixteen years old and was "living with his parents at St. Anthony's Falls, near his uncle G.O. Morrison, one of the pioneers." Newel graduated from Yale in 1861 and from Harvard Law

School in 1864. According to all accounts written about him, Newel was a popular student at Yale where he made many life-long friendships. His newspaper obituary mentions that he was a member of the Skull and Bones Senior Society at Yale.

Newel then returned to Minnesota, where he passed the bar and began his law practice in 1864, first partnering with George B. Young (a former law school classmate) and then later establishing a practice on his own. According to the *Collections of Minnesota Historical Society*, Newel and Young were “fellow students in law school” and that “after 1875 they practiced law as partners for several years in this city.” This information disagrees with the date of 1864, but it seems likely that Newel would have been a partner in a small firm before he decided to set up as a sole practitioner rather than the reverse.

According to the 1875 *St. Paul City Directory*, Stanford Newel was a partner with George B. Young in the law firm of Young & Newel, with offices at 60½ E. Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard). No residence is listed for Newel; however his obituary states that “during his bachelor life he roomed for a number of years with H.P. Upham,” who owned a large home in Lowertown.¹¹

Newel married Helen Fielder, daughter of Ernest and Helen M. Fiedler of New York, on June 24, 1880. According to Stanford Newel’s obituary, they had no children. The 1900 U.S. census indicates that she was born in January 1841 in New York and that her father was born in Germany and her mother was born in New York. A thorough examination of the local and society pages of the newspapers of that time might reveal more about her life, but at present nothing more is known about Helen Fielder Newel.

In R.L. Polk’s 1880–81 *St. Paul City Directory*, Stanford Newel’s residence was at 24 Dayton Avenue in St. Paul and the Young & Newel Law Firm was located at 62 East Third Street. By 1884–85, Stanford Newel’s partner-



Stanford Newel.

ship with George Young had ended and Newel had his own law office in room 23 at the First National Bank Building. By that time the Newels were living at 251 Dayton Avenue and his former partner had become a judge and a partner with William H. Lightner in the firm of Young & Lightner, with offices at 24 and 25 in the Gilfillan Block in downtown St. Paul.

Newel’s residence at 251 Dayton Avenue is now referred to as the “Lasher-Newell” house, according to architectural historian Larry Millett.¹² Millett describes the home as a limestone French Second Empire-style house that was first built in 1864. An 1886 addition of a tower, porte cochere, and western wing to the house designed by architect J. Walter Stevens “after Stanford Newell acquired the house from its first owner.”

Newel and Politics

The lengthy Newel obituary in the 1907 *Pioneer Press* provides more details about his personal life and his local achievements. The article states that Newel was “the intimate friend of businessmen as well as of politicians over the Northwest. He was groomsmen when James J. Hill was married.

He counted Theodore Borup, Richards Gordon, Judge Greenleaf Clark, former Governor John S. Pillsbury . . . and Charles A. Pillsbury, of Minneapolis, among his nearest friends.”

The article further states that, “Mr. Newel was the one who helped draft the first system of wards for St. Paul in 1887, and so wisely and fairly was it done that it remains practically unchanged now. He was also a large factor in the appointment of the congressional districts of the state as made in 1880 and 1890.”

According to the Minnesota Historical Society’s Biography Index card, Stanford Newel was chairman of the Republican State Central Committee from 1888–1894 and was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1884 and 1892. Newel’s obituary in the *Pioneer Press* also states that Stanford Newel was “responsible for the nomination of Gov. [William R.] Merriam for his first term and for his re-election two years later.”¹³

On May 6, 1897, *The New York Times* carried the headline “Named by the President: Stanford Newel of Minnesota Nominated for Minister to the Netherlands.” The article further details that “Mr. Newel, appointed Minister to the Netherlands, is one of the prominent Republicans of Minnesota. He has never held public office, but has been connected with the Republican State Committee, and during some of the most important campaigns was its Chairman. His appointment is due to the request of the Republicans of Minnesota, without regard to faction.” The president at this time was William McKinley.

The May 1899 issue of the *American Monthly Review of Reviews* paints a grand picture of Stanford Newel with the statement, “It is the universal opinion of those who have known Mr. Newel well that he is one of the most unselfish and disinterested of men—a gentleman by nature, cultivation, and instinct.” Further on in the article, the unidentified author conjectures that Newel’s appointment as minister may

have been a consequence of Newel having been “one of the members of the great national convention that met in Minneapolis in 1892 who then cast a vote for William McKinley, the presiding officer of the convention, and who thus set in motion a movement which resulted in Mr. McKinley’s nomination and election four years later.”¹⁴

According to the *Dictionary of American Biography*, Newel was “known as one of the outstanding lawyers of the Northwest.” This sketch of Newel explains that “with a private income which made it unnecessary to depend upon his profession for support, he took less and less interest as time went on in litigation, and made it his aim to keep his clients out of lawsuits whenever possible.” The profile also states that “a large part of his practice was devoted to giving counsel to those who could not afford to pay regular fees.”¹⁵ According to the *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society*, “The Minnesota Club of St. Paul was founded principally by Mr. Newel, and he was several times its president.” Additionally, Stanford Newel “became a member of the Minnesota Historical

Society in 1869, and was elected to life membership November 10, 1879.”¹⁶

The State of Minnesota death records confirm that Stanford Newel’s wife, Helen F. Newel, died of apoplexy in Ramsey County on January 28, 1906. Her death notice appears in the *Pioneer Press*, which announced that her funeral would be held later that afternoon in her home. Notable pallbearers included Louis W. Hill Sr. and W. R. Lightner among the eight active and six honorary pallbearers.¹⁷

A little over a year later, Stanford Newel died on April 6, 1907 at age 67. According to his death certificate index card, Stanford Newel died of a metastatic carcinoma of the lungs. His obituary details his troubles with pleurisy and a long-term affliction with asthma, complicated by his slipping and falling “on the steps of the Minnesota club” where he “broke one of his ribs.” He and Helen are buried in Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul with a large obelisk marking their graves.¹⁸

In summarizing the character of Stanford Newel, the anonymous writer in the 1907 *Pioneer Press* obituary states that “Mr. Newel was almost an ideal citizen. Broadly educated and traveled, a man who knew Paris as he did St.

Paul, acquainted with foreign customs, and prominent men of many nations, a power in the business and political life of his state and city, yet without the slightest trace or thought of demagoguery, ever zealous for real public welfare, but never asking favors for himself, advising and helping his friends, Mr. Newel’s loss will be keenly felt.”

By all accounts, Stanford Newel took seriously his obligation to serve St. Paul, which included the years he spent on the Park Board. For this service, he was later honored after his death with the dedication of Newell Park. The *American Monthly Review of Reviews* summarized that service by stating that Newel had “never held a public office before his appointment to The Hague, excepting for a few years his unpaid membership in the St. Paul park board, where as a good citizen he rendered such services as he could on behalf of the establishment of parks and pleasure grounds.” Although the land for St. Paul’s Newell Park was acquired in 1907, the official dedication of the park and the naming of it in honor of Stanford Newel took place in 1908.

The Newell Park Improvement Association

Perhaps the most vibrant part of the history of Newell Park is the story of how a group of neighbors banded together to make the park the center of their community. As early as 1912 a number of people living in the neighborhood of the park formed the Newell Park Improvement Association. Their motto was “Improve and Prosper, Know Your Neighbors.” President Charles E. Parish, Olof Westlund (vice president), B. J. Barry (secretary), and Henry G. Eyrich (treasurer) were among the group who, with their smartly designed, letterhead stationery, sent off communications to Herman C. Wenzel, the St. Paul Park Board commissioner, and George L. Nason, the superintendent of parks, with their suggestions and recommendations



This May 1929 photo shows local men clearing land with teams of horses in Newell Park. Photo courtesy of the St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department.

for the improvement of the park. Some early ideas were to install portable toilets, benches, baseball diamonds, a sand pit, water service, and a portable bandstand. There was a desire to create a place for a big bonfire and also to have the grass cut.¹⁹

A 1923 “Map of the Great Midway” (as seen on the Hamline Midway History Corps website: www.hamlinemidwayhistory.org) shows this area fully delineated as Newell Park with Wheeler Street forming the eastern border of the park, now located between the streets named at that time as Fairview and Wheeler, and Hewitt and Topping (now Pierce Butler Route) streets on the south and north, respectively.

The Newell Park Improvement Association began raising money with the goal of constructing a pavilion that could be used to hold gatherings. A July 15, 1927 *St. Paul Dispatch* article details the formal opening of the incomplete pavilion in a three-day celebration that included a parade, dancing, movies, athletic competitions, a boxing bout between Ernie Berg and Eddie Burch, and fireworks. The president of the Improvement Association at the time was Fred Ubel, who lived at 1755 West Minnehaha Street. His wife was one of a group of so-called “Newell Park widows” who had been “left to pine alone in the family homes while their husbands toiled in Newell park to prepare the recreational spot for its formal public opening.” These men were involved in grading the land with horses, as well as laying the concrete foundation for the pavilion, which the city delayed building until the summer of 1929. At the opening, the concrete foundation was put to use as a dance floor during the festival.²⁰

During this time period, the city’s Parks and Recreation Department was busy acquiring and grooming land for the River Road and Lexington parkways, as well as negotiating with the railroad to get a bridge built on Lexington that crossed over the tracks and would allow visitors a safer journey to Como Park. The Newell Park Improvement Association continued to raise money and advocate for the building of the Newell Park pavilion, which was to be built with donated materials from local businesses, as well as work done by the members of the Newell Park Improvement



Another photo from May 1929 shows the partially completed pavilion in Newell Park with its distinctive façade of a single entry centered between two sets of three arched windows. Photo courtesy of the St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department.

Association in conjunction with St. Paul Parks and Recreation staff.²¹

Design of the Park’s Pavilion

St. Paul City Architect Frank X. Tewes designed the Spanish Mission-Revival style pavilion that we see today. Commissioner Wenzel proposed a bond issue to include \$8,000 for the pavilion with toilets, and \$4,000 for grading along the roadways, creation of a kittenball field, a children’s playfield, and tennis courts at the adjoining Clayland Park. In a letter to the Newell Park Improvement Association, Commissioner Wenzel stated “This will make Newell Park a very high-grade park, because the best part of Newell is already there. That is, the existing trees will make the park, and the amount of money absolutely necessary to make a high-grade park out of it is not so very great, as there is nothing to do except to take the present beautiful Newell conditions and make the area more accessible and useful to the public.”²²

The St. Paul Parks & Recreation’s downtown St. Paul office has the architectural plans for the pavilion. Architectural historian (and current St Paul Heritage Preservation Commission chair) Paul Clifford Larson has examined the signatures on the plans because prior attribution for the pavilion’s design had been given to Charles A. Bassford, who had followed Tewes as the city’s architect. The dates

on the most complete set of plans are those from January 1929, when Herman C. Wenzel was parks commissioner and Frank X. Tewes was the city architect.

Larson also noticed, however, an unusual correction in one of the sets of plans. In this set, the name of Tewes had been covered over and replaced by Charles A. Bassford’s name as the city architect. A search in the Minnesota death certificates database shows that Frank X. Tewes died in St. Paul on October 6, 1929. James C. Niemeyer then served a one-year appointment as city architect before Bassford replaced him. Thus Larson concluded from studying the plans and correlating the information they contain with the dates for the design and the construction of the pavilion as reported in the newspapers of the day that Tewes should be given the credit for the pavilion’s design.

In reviewing the architectural plans, Larson noted that initial references to the structure that was to be built in Newell Park called it a “shelter house” not a pavilion, as it is called today. He also cautioned that designs such as the one for Newell Park were typically collaborative efforts involving several of the city’s draftsmen as well as the city’s architect. Thus conclusive designation of a single architect for a building designed by the office of the city architect is problematic.

By 1931 the Newell Park Improvement Association’s two-day annual festival

had become known as the “Newell Park Fete.” It included kittenball games (an early name for softball), track and field events, a motor parade, a doll and buggy parade and music from Otto’s Little German Band, as well as the Newell Park Harmony Four and the Newell Park Band. A 1931 photograph of the festival shows the packed crowd and decorated interior of the pavilion being used for the Newell Park Improvement Association’s First Annual Banquet.²³

Three years later, the Newell Park Improvement Association had raised \$4,500, enough money to enlarge the basement of the pavilion and to build a meeting room there. According to updated plans available in the St. Paul Parks & Recreation’s archives, Clarence “Cap” Wigington was the draftsman who developed the plans for this remodeling. “The money being used for the current repair work was raised by entertainments and card parties.”²⁴

The work that the Newell Park Improvement Association did on behalf of the neighborhood was not unusual in the first half of the twentieth century. In his book *The Street Where You Live*, local historian Donald Empson writes that the neighbors who lived adjacent to the twenty-two acres that would become Linwood Park at Victoria Street and St. Clair Avenue petitioned the city to acquire the land and make it into a park. The city agreed, and in 1909 it bought the property and assessed the nearby landowners \$32,000 to cover the cost. Similarly, in 1929 St. Paul acquired the one-acre park known as Cathedral Square, across from the Cathedral of St. Paul on Summit Avenue, after the archdiocese asked the city to turn this space into a park. In this instance, the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis also agreed to pay the assessment for the land acquisition and other costs. Development of this park had a double benefit. To make the park, the city first had to remove the dilapidated tenements that covered the space and relocate the people who occupied them. Once that was done, the new park “provided an open space in a crowded part of the city” and “was able to open up an impressive view of the cathedral from downtown.”²⁵



When the Newell Park Improvement Association held its first annual banquet in the park’s pavilion in 1931, the dining area was packed with people. The Improvement Association’s banner is clearly visible in the center background of this photo. Midway Studio photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Uses of the Park

The *1935 Report of Playground Activities*, written by Frank J. Drassal, details that year’s wide variety of events that were held in the parks located throughout the city, as well as attendance numbers counted by the park staff, which included William Thayer, the director, and Josephine Burns, who was his assistant. Newell Park’s pavilion was apparently a busy place in the winter months, as the park itself was in warmer months. The park contained a kittenball field, the adjacent Clayland Park tennis courts, an ice skating rink, and was host to a variety of sports teams including a men’s volleyball team which won the seventeen-team, citywide championship held at Margaret Playground in 1935.

This report gives a wealth of information about the social life of Depression-era St. Paul. The Newell Park pavilion was used for social dance instruction, ping pong, club-room games, and arts and crafts instruction. Miss Helen Larkin supervised this activity at all the centers. “The Senior Dramatic Club under Mrs. Muriel Abel and Mrs. Gwetholyn Beedon gave the three-act play ‘Here

Comes Charlie’ very successfully twice at Palace and once each at Highwood and Newell Park with the following attendance: Newell, 1 performance, 300 spectators.”²⁶

Community programs held at Newell Park in 1935 included four card parties, two free entertainments, five business meetings, and four dancing parties, with grand total attendance of 1,940 people.²⁷ The City Wide Safe & Sane Halloween Night was comprised of bonfires, wiener roasts, marshmallow roasts, a variety of races, costume parades, a chamber of horrors, fortune telling, dancing, recreational games, and novelty stunts with an attendance of 600 people.²⁸ A Patriotic Thanksgiving Program had 20 participants and 250 spectators.²⁹ A Christmas Community Program that year consisted of Christmas plays, recitations, tableaux, songs, and music. Various booster clubs provided bags of candy and nuts to the youngsters who were under fourteen years of age. These programs had 62 participants and 750 spectators.³⁰

A *St. Paul Pioneer Press* headline on July 20, 1937, that proclaimed “Newell Park Fete Attended by 5,000” shows



A recent photo of the pavilion in Newell Park shows how the building has been restored with certain modifications to its façade and entry doors. Photo courtesy of Krista Finstad Hanson.

how popular this annual event had become. Although all of this diverse work of community building and civic effort was carried out through the years of the Great Depression and was continued into the early 1940s, the Newell Park Improvement Association soon began to be less and less involved in supporting the park following World War II.

Frank J. Drassal's 1961 *History of St. Paul Community Service Organizations at St. Paul Public Recreation Centers and Playgrounds, to 1961* documents how quickly use of Newell Park declined after the war. Drassal states that the Newell Park Booster Club was formed in 1932 with William Dunn as its president. "The club carried on many activities especially during the W.P.A. period when leadership was plentiful."³¹ Drassal goes on to state, however, that "during the years 1939 and 1942, when W.P.A. assistance was withdrawn and city funds were not available, the center was closed for year-round operation, and the clubhouse was leased to a civic organization for their functions and maintenance." Drassal writes that "the Newell Park Booster Club disbanded in 1942, and it has not revived since that time."³² Because there is no mention of the Newell Park Improvement Association in Drassal's report, it is not clear whether the Newell Park Booster Club was an extension of the earlier

Improvement Association under a different name.

Newell Park Today

In the years after the war and into the prosperity of the 1960s, "progress" reached Newell Park. At some time in the 1950s, the windows of the pavilion were bricked in and the interior of the building was used as a gymnasium. The building continued as a recreation center in this manner until 1992, when remodeling was done to remove an "insensitive building addition" that was added in 1963.³³ From 1992–1993 community efforts to

rehabilitate the pavilion through a partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department allowed for SKD Architects of Minneapolis to be hired to oversee a historically sensitive restoration of the building that opened up the bricked-in windows and returned the building to its original architectural character. The project was not a complete restoration as only four of the six south-facing windows were restored, and the interior no longer sports the brick-faced walls. The work that was done is certainly a sensitive and much-appreciated preservation effort which was acknowledged by a 1993 City



Improvements that the St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department has made at Newell Park have included the installation of an expanded playground area for children positioned adjacent to a grove of trees. Photo courtesy of Krista Finstad Hanson.

of St. Paul Heritage Preservation Award nomination. A Grand Opening of the restored pavilion was held on Saturday, February 27, 1993.³⁴

Today neighbors living around Newell Park continue to be involved and active in advocating for their beloved park, although in smaller numbers and with less intensity than during those early years of the park's development. In 1997 neighbors enlisted then-city council member Jay Benanav's help when playground equipment in the park was destroyed in an arson fire. Today the park's two areas of newer playground equipment for older and younger kids is a popular draw. A

"vintage" set of swings and a relaxing, bench swing can be found in the lower-level area of the park.

Currently the restored pavilion in the park is primarily used for the annual meeting of the area's district council, the Hamline Midway Coalition; however, the pavilion can be rented for other meetings and parties. The two covered picnic shelters are popular sites for work, school, and family picnics and these can be reserved in advance or are available on a first-come-first-served basis. The ball field remains, as well as a basketball court, but the ice skating rink is no longer set up in the winter. The historic stone

fire ring remains a charming feature of the park, along with the restored historic building, the period-appropriate lamp-posts, and the park's scenic landscape. The mock orange bushes that are scattered around the park are so fragrant in spring and the park's many stately oaks have such a shimmer in the autumn light that they make this park, now 100 years old, truly a historic landscape worthy of celebration and continued preservation.

Krista Finstad Hanson is a member of the Hamline Midway History Corps and the author of Minnesota Open House: A Guide to Historic House Museums (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007).

Endnotes

1. St. Paul Park Board Minutes, vol. 2, *14th Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City of St. Paul for the Year Ending December 31, 1904* (St. Paul: Review Publishing Co., 1905) at the Minnesota History Center, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn. Newell Park may have gotten its start in a Park Board policy decision of 1901: "The attention of the board has heretofore been directed mainly to the acquisition and improvement of our larger parks. . . . But we are not unmindful that it is highly important to acquire . . . while so much vacant land is available for the purpose, small tracts of land . . . for neighborhood parks and playgrounds in the residential parts of the city. . . . The older portion of the city is well supplied with these small parks. . . . but most of the other residence districts of the city are destitute of these small neighborhood parks. . . . As these districts become filled up with a denser population, it will be regretted that the present opportunity was not improved to set apart frequent breathing places for the adornment and enjoyment of these compactly built up neighborhoods of the future" (*Report of the St. Paul Park Commissioners for 1901*).

2. Pettijohn's reminiscences of his early years in Minnesota are in Lucy Leavenworth Wilder Morris, editor, *Old Rail Fence Corners: The A.B.C.'s of Minnesota History; Authentic Incidents Gleaned from the Old Settlers by the Book Committee* (Austin, Minn.: F.H. McCulloch Printing Co., 1914), 9–16. Eli Pettijohn died in 1918. See also the property abstract for 1712 Hewitt Avenue.

3. According to the *1875 St Paul City Directory*, Thompson was the president of the First National Bank, the city's largest bank at that time, and resided in the then fashionable Lowertown neighborhood at 33 Woodward Street, where Sibley and Wilder also had mansions.

4. This information is from the building permit records for homes at 1712, 1714, and 1716 Hewitt Avenue. These houses were built by Frederick W. and Homer H. Hoyt. William Fry is listed in St. Paul's 1875 city directory as an agent for the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company. George Burdick Wright of Minneapolis was born in Williston, Vermont, in 1835. He moved to Minnesota in 1856 and settled in Minneapolis. He worked as a surveyor, mapmaker, and land speculator. Today he is credited with founding Fergus Falls, the county seat for Otter Tail County, in 1871.

5. David W. Johnson, *Hamline University: A History* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1980), 13–20.

6. See the 1983 Historic Site Survey files for these addresses at the Ramsey County Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

7. David A. Lanegran and Judith Frost Flinn, *St. Anthony Park: Portrait of a Community* (St. Paul: District 12 Community Council, St. Anthony Park Association, 1987), 2–3.

8. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 7, 1907, pp. 1–2.

9. *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society*, 12 (1908): 800.

10. *Who's Who in America, 1899–1900*, edited by John W. Leonard (Chicago: A.N. Marquis & Co., 1900), 523.

11. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 7, 1907, pp. 1–2.

12. Larry Millett, *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities: The Essential Guide to the Architecture of Minneapolis and St. Paul* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007), 474.

13. Merriam was the son of John L. Merriam, an early St. Paul entrepreneur who had made a fortune in stage and express transportation, railroads, manufacturing, and real estate speculation. John Merriam was one of the founders of St. Paul's Merchants National Bank and his second wife, Helen, was the sister of another leading St. Paul businessman, Amherst H. Wilder. William R. Merriam served for many years as the president of Merchants National Bank while also serving in the Minnesota legislature prior to his election as governor in 1888.

14. *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, edited by Albert Shaw, vol. 19 (January–June 1899): 549–550.

15. "Stanford Newel," in Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 7 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 456. See also Donald L. Empson, *The Street Where You Live* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 196.

16. *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society*, vol. 12 (1908), 800. For the details regarding Newel's role in the founding of the Minnesota Club, see Robert Orr Baker, "The Minnesota Club: St. Paul's Enterprising Leaders and Their 'Gentlemen's Social Club,'" *Ramsey County History* 19:2 (1984): 3–22.

17. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 31, 1906, page 2.

18. 1907 *St. Paul City Directory* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 7, 1907.

19. May 14, 1927 letter from Ernest W. Johnson, superintendent of playgrounds, to Bud Law, general foreman, Como Park office, regarding an undated letter from the Newell Park Improvement Association,

signed by John F. Slattery, secretary, in the St. Paul Park and Recreation archives, St. Paul City Hall Annex. For information on how another St. Paul park, Como, developed and changed, see Andrew J. Schmidt, "Pleasure and Recreation for the People: Planning St. Paul's Como Park," *Minnesota History* 58 (spring 2002): 40–58.

20. *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 15, 1927.

21. St. Paul Park Board Minutes.

22. Letter from Commissioner Herman C. Wenzel to the Newell Park Improvement Association, September 15, 1928, in the St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department archives, St. Paul, Minn.

23. Larson email correspondence and meeting with the author; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 18, 1931 clipping in the St. Paul Park and Recreation archives, St. Paul City Hall Annex.

24. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 13, 1934 clipping in the St. Paul Park and Recreation archives, St. Paul City Hall Annex.

25. Empson, 165 (Linwood Park) and 46 (Cathedral Square) and a telephone interview on October 24, 2008.

26. *1935 Annual Report of Playground and Recreation Activities*, 17, in the Annual Report Collection of Saint Paul, Minnesota Playgrounds Committees, 1904–1963, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, Minn.

27. *Ibid.*, 21.

28. *Ibid.*, 64.

29. *Ibid.*, 56.

30. *Ibid.*, 58.

31. Frank J. Drassal, compiler, *History of St. Paul Community Service Organizations at St. Paul Public Recreation Centers and Playgrounds, to 1961* (St. Paul: St. Paul Department of Parks, Playgrounds, and Public Buildings, 1961), 20. A copy of this report is in the library at the Minnesota History Center.

32. *Ibid.*

33. See the 1993 Heritage Preservation Awards nomination form in the St. Paul Parks and Recreation archives.

34. *Midway Como Monitor*, February 1993.

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In 1909 someone named Clara, who lived on Capitol Avenue, sent a postcard (top right) of the Frog Pond that once existed near Hamline University to a friend in North Dakota. That Frog Pond was then located on the site of today's Newell Park in St. Paul's Hamline-Midway neighborhood. The postcard and the adjacent photo of Newell Park on a fall day in 2008 show just how much this park has changed in 100 years. Postcard courtesy of Steve Trimble; photo courtesy of Krista Finstad Hanson. For more on the centennial of Newell Park, see Krista Finstad Hanson's article on page 11.