

RAMSEY COUNTY
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*Honoring F. Scott in St. Paul:
35 Years of Fitz and Starts*
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Spring 2017

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*A Legacy of Civic Engagement:
The Junior League of Saint Paul, 1917–2017*

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These photos show the many ways in which the Junior League of Saint Paul has been actively engaged in the community then, left, and now. Photos courtesy of the Junior League of Saint Paul.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 52, Number 1

Spring 2017

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

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A Message from the Editorial Board

In 1917–18, the new St. Paul Junior League was just beginning its long tradition of service with volunteer women leaders in the community helping local charities. Scott Fitzgerald was living intermittently in St. Paul, starting his career as a writer. And in less well-known circles, Claude and Daisy White, a young couple, survived the famous Cloquet fire before moving to White Bear Lake and sadly, succumbing to the “Spanish” influenza pandemic. All of these events, described in our magazine in this issue, formed a mosaic depicting life in Ramsey County just one hundred years ago. We are fortunate that the St. Paul Junior League and the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society chose us to help tell their stories. We are proud of the Junior League’s tradition of involvement and that the Fitzgerald Society has chosen St. Paul as the site for their biennial conference this summer. History is important, and as readers, you can participate by honoring these organizations and learning more about how the past has informed our present. Here’s to the next hundred years!

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Honoring F. Scott in St. Paul: 35 Years of Fitz and Starts

David Page and Lisa Heinrich

In the fall of 1982, the University of Minnesota's Office of Continuing Education organized a weekend devoted to "F. Scott Fitzgerald: St. Paul's Native Son and Distinguished American Writer" in various venues throughout St. Paul. The conference featured such notables as Fitzgerald's daughter, Scottie Fitzgerald Smith, esteemed literary critic Malcolm Cowley, and biographers Matthew Bruccoli, Scott Donaldson, and Nancy Milford. The conference sold out and local media fell all over themselves to tell and re-tell the story of the chronicler of the Jazz Age, one of the first self-made bad boys of the modern era, who gave and still gives readers some of their most vivid literary moments.

Inspired by the success of the weekend, a loosely knit group of area Fitzophiles pushed for some kind of permanent recognition by the City of Saint Paul for its brightest international literary star. To the surprise of a few members who had not grown up in Minnesota's capital, there was pushback due to what the *St. Paul Pioneer Press/Dispatch* dubbed "St. Paul's curiously ambivalent attitude toward its famed native son."¹

Even the suggestion by then-City Councilman James Scheibel to name the newly constructed I-35E parkway after Fitzgerald met with resistance. "There already is a street called Nina next door to the Cathedral," wrote Mrs. Peter M. Lang in a *St. Paul Pioneer Press* letter to the editor on August 31, 1983. "Nina was the madame of a near-to-downtown bawdy house many years ago. Do we need another [street] right below the Cathedral named after a man, who, although no doubt talented, ended up an alcoholic?"

It would not be the last time the author of *The Great Gatsby* would be castigated in the local press, most frequently for his drinking, but occasionally for his social pretensions as well. Wrote one *Pioneer Press* editorialist in 1995, ". . . he never made the inner circle of [Summit] avenue's wealthy." Never mind

that Fitzgerald and his family counted among their good friends Lou Ordway Jr., whose father founded 3M; Lou's wife, Josephine, whose father headed Nabisco; Marie Hersey, whose father was a lumber baron and who herself married William Hamm Jr., of Hamm's Beer fame; Tom Daniels, whose family helped create Archer-Daniels-Midland Company . . . the list goes on and on, all the way up to the Weyerhaeusers and Hills, whose families ranked numbers 1 and 2, respectively, in wealth in St. Paul during Fitzgerald's time in the city.

Insider or not, alcoholic or not, the author of *This Side of Paradise*, *The Great Gatsby*, and some of the English language's best short stories certainly deserved a park or a statue in his hometown, supporters of the move to honor Fitzgerald argued. Some city officials countered that St. Paul had already done enough to display its esteem for Fitzgerald.

What exactly had the city done? In 1957 the city had created McQuillan Park at the corner of Mackubin Street and Laurel Avenue to pay tribute to Arthur J. McQuillan, head of the venerable McQuillan Brothers plumbing and heating firm. The plaque at the park explains that McQuillan's second cousin, the novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, was



A publicity photo of F. Scott Fitzgerald after the publication of his first novel, This Side of Paradise, in 1920. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

born a half block east of the spot at 481 Laurel Avenue on September 24, 1896. That was the total extent of the skin the city had at the time in what would turn out to be a decades-long game to give Fitzgerald his due.

599 Summit Avenue

In the 1980s, the most well-known Fitzgerald site was 599 Summit Avenue, for it had been honored in 1971 as a National Historical Landmark and a bronze plaque hung over the door announcing it as the F. Scott Fitzgerald House. According to its then-current owner, Ethel Cline, who had purchased the property in 1945, the person behind the recognition effort was Russell Fridley, director of the state Historical Society.² The application for National Historical Landmark status noted that F. Scott Fitzgerald "embodied

the essence of the disillusioned post-war literary outlook.”

Scott’s father, Edward, mother, Mollie, sister, Annabel, and a servant had moved into the brownstone in September 1918 while Scott served in the U.S. Army. Known as Summit Terrace, it had been designed by William H. Willcox and Clarence Johnston in 1889. Fitzgerald famously described it as “a house below the average/Of a street above the average.” After his discharge at the end of World War I and after a miserably failed attempt to make it as a writer in New York City, Scott returned to St. Paul determined to become a successful novelist and regain the heart of Zelda Sayre.

During the summer of 1919, according to his friend and neighbor Richard “Tubby” Washington, Scott settled into a third-floor room at 599 Summit Avenue, “writing at a table, in pencil, which faced the window. He had an outline and schedule pinned to the curtain and stuck firmly to it.” Offered a marketing job by his friend Benjamin Griggs of Griggs, Cooper & Company, a wholesale foods distributor, Fitzgerald turned it down to pursue his literary ambitions.³

On September 4, 1919, he handed the manuscript of *This Side of Paradise* to Tom Daniels, who lived down the street at 786 Summit and in 1923 would become treasurer of what would become Archer-



The row house at 599 Summit Avenue, where Fitzgerald rewrote *This Side of Paradise*, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1971. Photo by David Page.



A photo taken of Scott and Zelda at White Bear Lake in the summer of 1921. It was used to illustrate one of Thomas Boyd’s columns on books for the St. Paul Daily News. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Daniels-Midland Company. Daniels delivered the pages in person to Scribner’s, which on September 16 accepted it for publication.⁴ In his *Crack-Up* piece entitled “Early Success,” Fitzgerald recalled his own happiness:

Then the postman rang, and that day I . . . ran along the streets, stopping automobiles to tell friends and acquaintances about it—my novel *This Side of Paradise* was accepted for publication. That week the postman rang and rang, and I . . . woke up every morning with a world of ineffable toploftiness and promise.⁵

“It was like a dream come true,” remembered Tubby, who dropped in on Scott at 599 Summit. “Scott was running around like a wild man.”⁶

Hundreds of people paid homage to Fitzgerald while Cline owned the brownstone. Japan topped the list for overseas tourists, according to Cline, followed by England and France. However, some in St. Paul were mystified by the hoopla associated with the property coming on the market in 1984. According to the late historian Jack Koblas, who wrote several books about Fitzgerald’s neighborhood, at least one reporter called him wondering why all the fuss when the brownstone was listed for sale. “Fitzgerald was better

known around the world than in his own hometown,” Koblas said.⁷

Fitzgerald Theater

Former *Prairie Home Companion* host Garrison Keillor deserves a lot of the credit for initiating the promotion and preservation of Fitzgerald’s legacy in St. Paul. In 1994, he convinced Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) to rename the World Theater as the Fitzgerald Theater. St. Paul’s oldest theater, it entertains several million people a week by virtue of being

the home base for the weekly radio show “A Prairie Home Companion,” formerly hosted by Keillor.

When it was built in 1910 for \$165,000, the theater was called the Sam S. Shubert Theater, modeled after the Maxine Elliot Theater in New York, and designed by the same people, the architectural firm Marshall and Fox, based in Chicago. It was named for Sam S. Shubert (1878–1905), one of three brothers who built a theater empire across the United States. “By 1916, the Shuberts had become

the nation’s most important and powerful theatre owners and managers,” says the Shubert Foundation’s website. The Shuberts’ success was marred by tragedy, however, when Sam died in a train crash in 1905 at age 26. His brothers Lee and J.J. built four special theaters in his memory, including the one in St. Paul.

When the building was still the Shubert Theater, there was a Shubert Hotel next door. Besides providing an entrance for the theater, the attached hotel also served as a convenient place

Getting Into Fitzgerald

F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century. Modern Library named his novel *The Great Gatsby* the best American novel of the century. He wrote four novels, left one unfinished novel, and penned numerous short stories. Fitzgerald died before achieving wide acclaim, but his works have been widely read and praised since then. *The Great Gatsby* has been made into popular films five times, most recently in 2013.

For local ties, read the novel *This Side of Paradise*, which the author completed while living in St. Paul. *The St. Paul Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, edited by Patricia Hampl and Dave Page can deepen the reader’s sense of Fitzgerald’s times in St. Paul; *A Guide to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s St. Paul* by John J. Koblas and *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota* by Dave Page and John J. Koblas both focus on local Fitzgerald sites.

Fitzgerald sites in St. Paul (some mentioned in the accompanying article, some not) include the birthplace at 481 Laurel Avenue, 599 Summit Avenue where the author famously completed his first published novel, and 286–294 Laurel Avenue, known as Laurel Terrace or Riley Row, where Fitzgerald and his sister lived with their grandparents in 1908. Saint Paul Academy, where the young Fitzgerald attended school from 1908 to 1911, is at 25 North Dale Street, and though the academy is long gone,

there’s a statue of Fitzgerald on the steps. Another statue is downtown in Rice Park.

Some local hangouts were the Commodore Hotel at 79 Western Avenue, now a restaurant, W.A. Frost Pharmacy at the southeast corner of Selby Avenue and Western Avenue, and the Town and Country Club at 300 North Mississippi River Boulevard by the Marshall Avenue/Lake Street Bridge. At the University Club at Summit Avenue and Ramsey Street, Scott, his wife Zelda and friends staged a “Bad Luck Ball” on Friday, January 13, 1922, complete with black crepe hangings and “The Daily Dirge” newspaper, to welcome in the Lenten season.

Scott Fitzgerald lived in St. Paul as an infant and toddler from 1896 to 1898, again as a prep school student 1908–1911, intermittently 1912–1919, while he attended Newman School in New Jersey, studied at Princeton University and served in the army, and in 1921–1922 with Zelda, when they returned to St. Paul to have their baby, Scottie.

In St. Paul as a budding writer, Fitzgerald spent time with other local writers and artists at the Kilmarnock Bookstore, run by Thomas Boyd, and at the gatherings of the Nimbus Club, a group of writers and artists. Charles Flandrau, a local newspaper writer and novelist, was a mentor to Fitzgerald. His sister-in-law Grace Flandrau is said to have introduced Fitzgerald to his future literary agent. Local artist Clement

Haupers was another member of this talented group.

The era when Fitzgerald was attached to St. Paul ran from the turn of the century into the 1920s, a decade which Fitzgerald named the Jazz Age. That age ended with the stock market collapse on October 29, 1929, which ushered in the Great Depression.

The first decades of the twentieth century witnessed a wide variety of events and major shifts in society that certainly had deep effects on Fitzgerald and his contemporaries. Primary would be World War I—in all its enormity, a massive shock to the entire world. The 50th anniversary of the American Civil War took place 1911–1915, and that war’s effects still reverberated across the country. Scott Fitzgerald was enormously interested in the Civil War. On a smaller scale, the first Lincoln penny was minted in 1909. The Industrial Revolution was coming to a close and tycoons like Minnesotans James J. Hill and Frederick Weyerhaeuser dominated the country’s business world. Despite the tycoons’ immense power, social issues like conservation of natural resources and better working conditions were increasingly topics of conversation. Cities were thriving and growing at the expense of the countryside and small towns. These shifting sands provided material for Fitzgerald and other artists to draw upon in their works.



McQuillan Park is named for the plumbing side of the McQuillan family, while Fitzgerald descended from the wholesale grocery side of the family. Before the corner became a park, little F. Scott Fitzgerald and his nurse used to walk to retail stores here from his birthplace, just a half a block east. Photo by David Page.

to house the traveling actors. Vaudeville performers did not have the best reputations. “With its own hotel,” said Tony Bol, who used to manage the building for Minnesota Public Radio, “the theater could guarantee a place for the actors to stay when other hotels might have turned them away.”⁸

Fitzgerald had firsthand knowledge of such discrimination. One night after attending a show in 1917, Fitzgerald sent the leading lady a note asking if she would go out dancing with him. “She accepted,” wrote biographer Andrew Turnbull, “and he and a friend took her and another actress dancing. Next day the four of them lunched at the University Club, creating a good deal of talk though it was all perfectly innocent.”⁹

In addition to the hotel, the Shubert property included a speakeasy. “Legend has it that Fitzgerald’s signature was in the bar,” Bol said, although employees were never able to confirm that after MPR purchased the first floor and basement of the old hotel.

As the years passed, however, the theater could not compete with the success of the newest medium, film. In 1933 the Shubert became a movie house and was renamed the World Theater because it showed inter-

national films. Minnesota Public Radio bought the World to serve as a home base for “A Prairie Home Companion” in 1981 and oversaw a detailed restoration that was completed in 1986.

The 1000-seat Fitzgerald Theater is located at 10 East Exchange Street in St. Paul. It offers concerts and literary events in addition to housing “A Prairie Home Companion” when the show is not on the road. The monthly newsletter published by the theater is called “The Gatsby” after F. Scott Fitzgerald’s famous novel.

Not everyone was enamored with the theater’s new name. In a somewhat tongue-in-cheek piece, *Minneapolis Star Tribune* columnist James Lileks wrote in 1994: “Not to suggest that naming the World Theater after F. Scott wasn’t the right thing to do . . . but theaters would be more attractive places if we named them after patrons who are there right now, instead of waiting for one to get famous and die wooden liver. . . . at least they’d be named after people who didn’t leave.”¹⁰

The renovated and renamed theater gained national prominence as the setting for the 2006 movie *A Prairie Home Companion*. A bronze bust of the theater’s namesake, one of three cast by sculptor Michael Price for a statue of

Fitzgerald commissioned by Garrison Keillor, is on display in the theater. At the end of the movie, actor Kevin Kline picks up the bust from its display area in the lobby and leaves by the backstage door. When the movie came out, the staff at the theater realized anyone could mimic Kline’s theft and affixed the bust in a more permanent fashion.

In honor of the theater’s 100th anniversary in 2010, a fifty-foot-tall mural of Fitzgerald was commissioned for a blank space on the hotel’s south wall. The painting, based on a photo of Fitzgerald taken at White Bear Lake, looks out over Seventh and Wabasha streets. The theater was also named to the National Register of Historic Places that year.

100th Birthday

In 1995, Keillor put together a committee of high-powered locals to organize a blowout hundredth-birthday party for Fitzgerald the following year, and once again hosted a celebration on Fitzgerald’s birthday, including a marathon reading of Fitzgerald short stories, which featured Keillor and Fitzgerald’s granddaughter, Eleanor Lanahan, a mini-parade, and a Roaring Twenties dance.

The celebration of the centennial of Fitzgerald’s birth in St. Paul was quite the affair. Anyone who didn’t know about



A mural of F. Scott Fitzgerald painted in 2010 and based on the photo of him and Zelda at White Bear Lake covers the back wall of the Fitzgerald Theater. Photo by David Page.

Fitzgerald's connection to the city would certainly have a difficult time maintaining ignorance after that. A marathon reading of *The Great Gatsby* included such notables as novelist Joseph Heller, poet Donald Hall, memoirists Patricia Hampl and Tobias Wolff, short story writer Bobbie Ann Mason, and Pulitzer Prize-winner Jane Smiley.

The highlight of the weekend-long celebration was the unveiling of a slightly larger-than-life-size bronze of Fitzgerald in Rice Park. Central to downtown St. Paul, Rice Park was founded in 1849, when St. Paul banker John Irvine and fur trader Henry Rice, the great-uncle of one of Fitzgerald's friends, Susanne Rice, donated the land on which Rice Park currently sits. In the 1860s, St. Paul Mayor John Prince, who owned the building that at one time housed the wholesale grocery business of Scott's grandfather Philip McQuillan, added shade trees. A bandstand and fountain were erected during the next decade. Electric lights were installed in 1883 in honor of "a visit by President Chester A. Arthur, ex-President Ulysses S. Grant, and William Tecumseh Sherman to celebrate the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad."¹¹

The Fitzgerald statue, created by sculptor Michael Price, stands in the northeast corner of the park across from the castle-like Landmark Center, the venue for many of the 100th birthday weekend's festivities as well as the office of former U.S. Congressman Andrew Volstead, who authored the National Prohibition Act of 1919. Price created three busts of Fitzgerald. One sits on the statue, a second was raffled off as a fundraiser, and the third is on permanent display in the Fitzgerald Theater. "I found Fitzgerald to be an honest and generous person," Price said, "and I wanted to express those qualities in the work."¹²

Scott no doubt made use of the park, which is slated for a multi-million dollar renovation this year, since he stayed for a brief while at the St. Paul Hotel, which lies just east of the park; probably visited the St. Paul Public Library, which spreads just south of the park; and often attended performances at the Orpheum Theater, which used to sit kitty-corner from the park.



The 1994 celebration of the renaming of the World Theater as the Fitzgerald Theater. Left to right, former Prairie Home Companion Host Garrison Keillor, U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy, Bobbie Lanahan (Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald's granddaughter), Bill Kling (president of Minnesota Public Radio), Fitzgerald biographer Scott Donaldson, and memoirist Patricia Hampl. Photo by David Page.

Despite the dozens of positive articles about the event and statue, controversy erupted a few years later when St. Paul City Councilman Dave Thune told *Pioneer Press* columnist Joe Soucheray that Fitzgerald "was just a bohemian drunk" and that cartoonist Charles Schulz was more deserving of recognition than Fitzgerald.¹³

Perhaps the oddest Fitzgerald statue moment came in 2000 when a BBC crew arrived in St. Paul to film a documentary about Fitzgerald. Rice Park was undergoing renovation and a heavy garbage can had been placed in front of the statue. When the producer asked the city if it would be possible to move the can so the camera person could get a clear shot of the statue, he was told no. Fortunately, a local admirer of Fitzgerald with some clout called a city official and got the can relocated.

In 2002, the International F. Scott Fitzgerald Society held its biennial conference in St. Paul. Over 300 scholars from around the world descended upon St. Paul. Besides academic presentations, public events included receptions at such Fitzgerald hangouts as

the Commodore Hotel and University Club, students from St. Paul Academy performing in one of Fitzgerald's juvenile plays, *The Captured Shadow*, and Norman Mailer, his wife Norris Church Mailer, and George Plimpton reading the play *Zelda, Scott, & Ernest* in its Midwestern premiere.

Former St. Paul Academy

Given all the interest in Fitzgerald, it's not surprising that other local Fitzgerald fans would take it upon themselves to create lasting monuments to the author, including another privately funded statue at his alma mater, St. Paul Academy, a school for boys that began at 155 Western Avenue in 1900.¹⁴ It soon outgrew its space and relocated to a Gothic Revival building at 25 N. Dale Street on land owned at one time by F. Scott Fitzgerald's grandmother, who lived for a brief time just south of the school on Summit Avenue. Fitzgerald was enrolled at SPA from 1908–1911. His first published work, "The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage," was printed in the school magazine, *Now and Then*, in September 1909.

“He was a sunny, light-haired boy,” wrote his English teacher, C.N.B. Wheeler, “full of enthusiasm, who fully foresaw his course in life, even in his schoolboy days.”¹⁵ At times young Scott Fitzgerald was no doubt too energetic and talkative, and he “endured the humiliation of seeing the school paper . . . print in 1909: ‘If anybody can poison Scotty or stop his mouth in some way, the school at large and myself will be much obliged.’”¹⁶ Five years after Fitzgerald left, the school expanded into a building several miles away at 1712 Randolph Avenue.

A fire in mid-century destroyed much of the charm of the building on Dale Street. False ceilings were installed, and many of the windows were boarded up. In the early 2000s, Ed Conley purchased the building and restored its woodwork, removed the false ceilings, added tile to the floors, and hung alabaster chandeliers that had once graced the offices of the late owner of the Minnesota Twins. Because so many high school students stopped by to take photos of Fitzgerald’s old school, Conley hired Aaron Dysart to create a life-size sculpture of a young Fitzgerald on the school’s front steps. Conley believes the spirit of Fitzgerald continues to walk the halls and rustle papers.¹⁷

Fitzgerald’s Birthplace and Alcove

Another national award came to Fitzgerald in 2004 when his birthplace at 481 Laurel Avenue was named a National Literary Landmark. Because the *St. Paul City Directory* lists the Fitzgeralds’ address as 481 Laurel, and copies of Scott’s birth certificate offer no more detail, for many years no one was sure in which apartment his mother Molly had given birth. In the early 1980s, some neighbors who had gathered for Christmas caroling stopped across the street at the home of Mary Weeker, who ran a beauty shop one block away on Selby Avenue for decades. “We were sitting around Mary’s piano when she matter-of-factly told us the Fitzgeralds had lived on the second floor, outside apartment,” Mark Bauer said. “She was definite.”¹⁸

In 1975, Bauer had purchased one of the dozen apartments in the two build-



A statue by Aaron Dysart of the young F. Scott Fitzgerald sits on the steps of St. Paul Academy, the prep school on the corner of Dale Street and Portland Avenue where his first piece of fiction was published. Photo by David Page.

ings at 475–481 Laurel that made up the San Mateo Flats, which had originally housed upscale apartments. During World War II, the two buildings were chopped up into twenty-five units.¹⁹ By the 1970s, “the buildings were very run down,” said Bauer. After threats by the city to flatten much of the blighted neighborhood, Old Town Restoration took over the buildings and saved them from destruction. The renovation of the properties helped spearhead a revitalization of the entire neighborhood.²⁰

Among the original dozen owners, the person who drew the straw for the birthplace apartment was the late Richard McDermott, a retired University of Minnesota professor. Swamped by visitors from around the world, he served as unofficial Fitzgerald ambassador for years.

On Fitzgerald’s birthday in 2004, St. Paul’s Central Library celebrated by opening the F. Scott Fitzgerald Alcove, located in the Magazine Room on the third floor. The alcove includes a collection of over 400 secondary sources, including books, compact discs, DVDs and periodicals. The library embodies a

lot of local history, beginning in 1900, when St. Paul’s public library moved to the second floor of Market House, located at Seventh and Wabasha streets. In the spring of 1915, the building “burned like kindling.”²¹

Fortunately, construction of a new library on Rice Park was already underway, financed by the generosity of James J. Hill, who offered \$750,000 for the building and an endowment, and Lucius Pond Ordway, who pledged \$5,000 toward the purchase of the site. Architect Electus Litchfield, the son of one of Hill’s friends, was chosen to design the building, whose cornerstone was laid in 1914. The massive pink Tennessee marble structure was not completed until the fall of 1917. The adjoining James J. Hill Reference Library was not opened until 1921.

The *St. Paul Daily News* had no more than put out an article on September 28, 1919, stating that Scott’s first novel would be published by Scribner’s²² when head librarian William Dawson Johnston asked Mollie McQuillan for a literary biography of her son. Scott answered on September 30, 1919. “I haven’t really got any writings yet except my book,” he wrote. “I’ve started at the magazines and sold one story to Smart Set (Sept 1919 issue), one play to Smart Set (Nov 1919 issue), a poem to Poet Lore & that’s about all. You see I am only 22,” he continued, seemingly forgetting that he had turned 23 the previous week.²³

Thus far, very little of the Fitzgerald recognition and ongoing renaissance had been spearheaded by the city. That all changed in 2006 when the St. Paul City Council voted to create Fitzgerald Park in a somewhat downtrodden area of downtown St. Paul.²⁴ After two years of work with neighbors of the park, including the Fitzgerald Theater and Minnesota Public Radio, the council adopted the Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan.²⁵ The plan is available online, and the area has officially been renamed Fitzgerald Park; the actual green space is still being developed and will be named Pedro Park (after a major donor) rather than for Fitzgerald as originally planned. The neighborhood chose the name Fitzgerald because of the Fitzgerald Theater being there, according to City

Planner Lucy Thompson. Residents wanted the neighborhood to have a clear identify and requested the plan be developed. The light rail Tenth Street Station, the Penfield apartment with its Lund's grocery store, and new first-floor retail in the Rossmor Building, including a micro-brewery, are recent improvements in the neighborhood, Thompson said.

Permanent Fitzgerald Organization Leads the Way

The most significant effort to keep Fitzgerald's legacy alive has been the incorporation of the non-profit Fitzgerald in St. Paul (FISP) thanks to a gift by McDermott after his death in 2012.²⁶ FISP has hit the ground running and has sponsored or is planning a large number of events.

"Fitz First at Four" is a monthly literary discussion of some aspect of Fitzgerald's works usually held at 4 p.m. the first Sunday of every month at the University Club on Summit Avenue. "We've been very gratified by the reception so far," said FISP president Stu Wilson. "We've been averaging around sixty people at each event." The group has also organized an annual fundraiser at the Commodore Hotel, where people can dress up in twenties costumes and dance in the same room at which Fitzgerald attended afternoon tea dances.

A subcommittee of FISP is serving as the local host for the 14th biennial International F. Scott Fitzgerald Society conference to be held for the second time in St. Paul from June 25–July 1, 2017. Before 2017, the conference had never been held twice in the same location. The other time the society met in St. Paul was in 2002. Around 300 scholars from around the world will be attending. Although it is a scholarly conference, quite a few events are open to the public. Its primary location will be in downtown St. Paul at the 340 Hotel/College of St. Scholastica, but events will extend as far as White Bear Lake, Frontenac, and Duluth to fully reflect Fitzgerald's experiences in Minnesota. The theme for the conference is a phrase Fitzgerald used to describe his occupation following his

discharge after World War I: "was student—am now writer."

FISP is hoping to use the conference as a launching pad for efforts to secure a permanent Fitzgerald visitor or interpretive center in St. Paul. Information about the organization is available on its website, www.fitzgeraldinstpaul.org, and information about the conference is at www.fitzgerald2017.org.

One of FISP's most important events is the annual McDermott lecture, named after the man who provided the group's initial funding. In November 2016 the featured speaker was Dr. James West III, a Penn State professor who has for the past two decades edited the official Cambridge Edition of Fitzgerald's works. Dr. West spoke about what it has meant to him to be so close to Fitzgerald for all those years, his philosophy of editing, and some specific quandaries. When he was finished, audience members were given a chance to ask questions. One local radio personality quickly wondered out loud, "Why should Fitzgerald get the honor of a Cambridge Edition? I can name 100 better writers."

Dr. West tactfully but firmly and succinctly answered the man and then went on to the next question. As two of the audience members, we thought to ourselves: The more things change. . .

David Page is a retired college writing instructor. Two of his previous books on Fitzgerald—F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota: Toward the Summit and The St. Paul Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald—were finalists for Minnesota Book Awards. He helped edit the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Fitzgerald called Last Kiss and wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota: The Writer & His Friends at Home, both of which will be released this year. Lisa Heinrich is a professor emerita of mass communications at St. Cloud State University, where she taught for 22 years. Heinrich holds a master's degree in English literature from the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. in Russian literature and linguistics from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She has written over 90 articles for her column on local history, "Close to Home," for the Villager newspaper in St. Paul.

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Michael Price's statue of F. Scott Fitzgerald was placed in Rice Park in 1996 on what would have been Fitzgerald's 100th birthday. Behind it rises the Landmark Center, finished in 1902 and home to the former Federal Courthouse and Post Office. Photo by David Page. For more on Scott Fitzgerald and his roots in St. Paul, see page 16.