

viewfinder

In Ramsey County, the most memorable places aren't always the ones marked on a map. Beyond the familiar landmarks of St. Paul lie quiet corners, overlooked buildings, and tucked-away landscapes that hold rich, often untold stories. This feature invites you to look closer—down side streets, behind historic facades, and into spaces that rarely make the spotlight. From forgotten gathering places to subtle traces of the past woven into everyday surroundings, these hidden locations reveal a deeper layer of the county, waiting for curious explorers willing to slow down and notice what others pass by.

By Renoir Gaither



Safety Patrol in Sneakers

Spring blossoms with things familiar and newfound. In St. Paul, green buds pop on boulevard trees as children thread their way to school. Many of these kids have peers who help keep them safe while crossing busy streets. Youth crossing guards are one of the city's lesser-known historical gems. They summon my own memories as well.

As a sixth grader, I'd accepted the role of crossing guard at my school in Indianapolis, Indiana. I remember strapping a strange pale belt around my waist and right shoulder, then tromping off towards school, earlier than usual, to await schoolmates at my assigned corner of the earth. Their infectious laughter, awkward gaits, and raucous tin lunchboxes merge into a parka of memories. "Don't run," I'd bark as one sprinted across the street after some vehicle had exited our small rectangle of levity, vapid jokes, and innocence. They'd look back at me, all smiles in sneakers.

Little did I know then that other such youngsters in St. Paul had helped pioneer the school safety patrol concept over a hundred years ago today. Early decades of the twentieth century saw a significant increase in automobile travel. Formal programs for driver training and pedestrian safety were in their infancy. In 1927, the public school district in Gilbert, Minnesota offered the first distinct driver's training course. [1]



Efforts to increase traffic safety awareness involving youth took root in the Twin Cities in 1919. The Minneapolis police department began a program to train Boy Scouts to direct traffic during a city-wide “No Accident Week.” St. Paul Police designed a program to train “school police” among public school youth the following year, and St. Paul’s Catholic schools soon joined the effort. [2]

The principal of the Cathedral School in St. Paul, Sister Carmela Hanggi, developed the idea to train school children as crossing guards. Sister Hanggi reportedly garnered the idea after observing mothers helping children cross busy streets during her travels around the country. She instituted crossing guard training for students, and on February 21, 1921, the first monitored crossing took place outside the Cathedral School at the intersection of Summit Avenue and Third Street (Kellogg Boulevard). [3]

The program was a huge success and expanded citywide in 1922. Its legacy is felt today by millions of children worldwide. A flagpole and plaque now commemorate what many consider the first school crossing guard program. The historical landmark is located on a knoll on Cathedral Hill Park in St. Paul’s historic Cathedral Hill neighborhood.

[1] Robert Tate, “Remembering the Early Days of Driver’s Education,” MotorCities National Heritage Area, April 17, 2017, <https://www.motorcities.org/story-of-the-week/2017/remembering-the-early-days-ofdriver-s-education>.

[2] Eric W. Weber, “Origins of the School Safety Patrol, 1921,” MNopedia, October 29, 2012, last modified March 19, 2026, <https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/thing/origins-school-safety-patrol-1921>.

[3] Ibid.



Visit the monument at
215 Summit Ave,
St. Paul, MN 55102.



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