

FOUR NINETEENTH CENTURY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

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Few people made their home in the Hill District or beyond before the Civil War. Although it was a beautiful, pastoral landscape, a prairie dotted with clumps of hardwood and traversed by small streams, the high cliff was a considerable barrier to travel. Developers considered it inaccessible, and only a few intrepid households established themselves on the edge of the cliff during this period.

Although the suburban villas commanded an excellent view of the ragged city, they were not in the city's most prestigious neighborhood. Indeed, they stood in the midst of farms, such as Josiah Selby's west of the present cathedral. Before paved streets and mass transit systems, few liked to commute long distances through the dust and the mire that passed for roads. Wealthy and poor alike lived close to their places of employment, whether the fine residential districts near the city's center, such as Irvine Park and the Lafayette Square, or the working class areas close to factories on the edge of the city.

During this period, known as the walking era, houses were built close together and over fifty stairways were constructed throughout Saint Paul to enable pedestrians to take significant shortcuts on their way to and from work.

After the Civil War, the pace of urban development increased dramatically, resulting in the ascent of an affluent middle-class. Repelled by the congestion and pollution of the industrializing center city, this new class clamored for the life of the country squire. Even before streetcars and trains opened the surrounding countryside to settlement, land speculators promoted the exceptional attributes of their newest suburban offering.

At first these were located east of downtown, but after construction of the railroad along Trout Brook, the noise and soot of coal-burning engines made the eastern bluffs an unpleasant and inconvenient neighborhood for those who could afford to move elsewhere. Thus, Saint Paul's development moved westward.

The Historic Hill, Saint Anthony Park, Merriam Park, and Macalester Park followed a similar pattern, as mass transportation provided the vehicle for nineteenth century urban sprawl. Each community, however, developed the quite different character that is apparent even today.

Historic Hill District

In the 1870s, developers of Woodland Park and Terrace Park in the Hill District expected to entice the middle class away from other locations by advertising the beauty and healthy climate of these additions to the city. To make their developments accessible to downtown, they actively promoted the horsecar transit system. Two horsecar lines, one on Western Avenue built in 1879 and one on Laurel Avenue built in 1882 were constructed to serve the area. The steep hill was conquered by cable cars on Selby Avenue in 1888. The cable cars were slow, however and were replaced by streetcars with an elaborate counterweight system that enabled them to more rapidly climb the hill.

During the prosperous years between 1886 and 1892, the Historic Hill area became the city's most fashionable place to live. Land speculation, a major economic activity in all frontier cities, was particularly rewarding here. Settlement spread out from Summit, Marshall and Grand Avenues. The eastern section of the neighborhood known as Saint Anthony Hill was the most popular area for both merchants and politicians, as well as skilled workers and middle-class families.

In 1905, a streetcar tunnel was dug from the base of the cliff at Kellogg Boulevard, westward until it emerged in the middle of Selby Avenue at about Nina Street. This made it possible for the streetcars to travel up the hill under their own power. The tunnel reduced the travel time from downtown drastically and as a result, the western portion of the district was platted and settled.

Families moved into this area from other neighborhoods in the city or new families formed from established households in the eastern part of the Hill District, moved farther west within the same neighborhood. At this same time, the basic Hill District pattern of residence began to emerge. Wealthier people lived in the eastern and southern areas while middle and low income groups lived to north and west.

Until the 1930s, the city's most influential families lived in mansions lining Summit Avenue and in large frame homes in the vicinity. Partly in response to the craze for building duplexes and apartment houses, in 1915, Summit Avenue residents petitioned for a restricted residential district under a state law permitting residents of an area to limit development. Several lots were left out of the district but for the most part of the restrictions, together with zoning laws, protected Summit houses from uncontrolled subdivision until World War II, after which absentee landlords created many warrens along the street that were tolerated by the city.

In the 1940s and 1950s, some of the structures were divided into multiple family units or occupied by institutions, their former occupants having abandoned the area or passed away. It was generally believed that these houses could never be occupied as residences again because they were designed when domestic help was available and presumably, no one in the modern era could afford to maintain them. But in urban rebirth of the 1970s Summit Avenue is once again becoming an architectural showcase. It has impressed visitors and residents for generations.

Crocus Hill, the southeast part of the Hill District, was developed gradually between 1880 and 1920. Few homes were built in the area until the Grand Avenue horsecar was replaced by electric service in 1890. Houses were, for the most part, constructed for individuals by contractors and occasionally with the services of an architect. But many places used prefabricated decorative details, both wood trim and leaded glass, available from catalogues or lumberyards.

Beginning in the early 1950s, the Historic Hill area rapidly lost a great deal of its status. The northern part along Selby Avenue was occupied by families of lower income and minorities forced to relocate when Interstate Highway 94 was built. Many of the large houses on Summit Avenue were turned over to the Catholic church and other institutions for office buildings or residence halls. By the early to mid-1960s, the area north of Summit Avenue was generally regarded among the middle class as an undesirable neighborhood. The area to the south, Crocus Hill, continued to maintain a certain amount of status, but even its future was becoming less certain.

Several racial conflicts along Selby Avenue, the construction of super highways

easing access to suburban areas, changing patterns of work and family life, and less expensive, more easily financed suburban housing lured families out of the older city. In the late 1960s, however, the trend began to reverse as the lower prices and aesthetic amenities of older houses attracted the attention of younger couples looking for a house. Deteriorated neighborhoods began to reverse direction; areas, such as Crocus Hill, escaped the fate of eventual decline.

The Hill District has been the scene of phenomenal amount of restoration and redevelopment. In addition to the refurbishing of single-family houses, apartment buildings have been rebuilt as condominiums. As a result, many parts of the Hill District are now dominated by owners rather than tenants. The private redevelopment programs have been complimented by attempts to promote the construction of new "market rate" housing. Today, the area contains some of the newest, as well as the oldest, housing in the city. It is home for a wide variety of people and is the most cosmopolitan part of Saint Paul.

Grand Avenue's development in the Hill District began in 1871 when William S. Wright, John Wann and their partners platted the residential district between Lexington and Dale running from Laurel to Osceola. This area, called Summit Park, was to be a prestigious development.

In 1872, the city's first horse-drawn trolley lines ran on Grand Avenue. It is interesting to note that Wann was the streetcar company's president and Wright served on the board of directors. This early line ended at Grand and Victoria, one block away from Wann's Home. During the 1880s and the 1890s, when the city's population nearly tripled, Grand Avenue served as the backbone of western suburban expansion.

Grand Avenue is not a neighborhood in the strict sense of the word. One of Saint Paul's most popular shopping districts, this street is a mixture of multiple-family units and small scale commercial establishments. Most of the existing buildings date from the 1920s when the excellent streetcar service attracted a large number of apartment developers and other promoters.

The commercial base of the street grew slowly and consistently until the 1960s. Always a street of small businesses, Grand Avenue suffered from the competition provided by suburban shopping centers and the decline in the population of the inner neighborhoods. In the mid-1960s, a series of disturbances on Selby Avenue all but destroyed the viability of that commercial strip, and many observers of Grand forecast a similar fate for it. Several of the old line businesses, such as the car dealerships, had either gone out of business or relocated. The buildings on the street, now nearly a half-century old, were thought to be obsolete. Shoppers complained of a lack of parking and a fear of street crime. But the street did not die.

In the early 1970s, new and young entrepreneurs located businesses on the avenue, taking advantage of the low rent and exploiting the decorative potential of the old buildings. These people began to promote Grand Avenue as a complement to the historic neighborhoods. Many of the older businesses have gone, but their places have been taken by a wide variety of new establishments.

Saint Anthony Park

Saint Anthony Park was laid out as a politically independent railroad suburb in 1883, but was annexed by Saint Paul in 1887. The area was designed by Horace Cleveland, a Chicago landscape architect who had planned several suburban developments in the northeastern part of the United States, as well as Minneapolis' parkway system. Cleveland's designs exemplified "garden suburb" planning, with gently curving streets, open parks and houses set among groves of trees.

Although designed as a village in 1883, Saint Anthony Park did not begin to grow until after 1885 when a railroad line was laid through the area dividing it into two sections. Advertised as having beautifully wooded grounds, graded streets, a public park, two railroad stations, and its own school, it was touted as one of the most desirable residential locales in the inter-urban area between Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Located three and one-half miles from the Minneapolis Union Depot and six and one-half miles from the Union Depot in Saint Paul, Saint Anthony Park residents could enjoy the amenities of both cities while living in the country. It was significant to note that the features that attracted suburbanites in the 1880s were exactly the same as those that would attract people to suburbs a century later.

The greatest impetus to the growth of Saint Anthony Park was not the railroad, however, but the establishment of the University of Minnesota campus in the 1880s. In 1881, the university had purchased the Bass farm or the site of its agricultural campus. After a rocky beginning, the campus was put on firm financial footing in 1887. Many of the staff and students at the St. Paul campus lived in Saint Anthony Park, therefore the residential district did not develop only as a garden suburb with a large commuting population as was envisioned by its founders.

Before 1900, the Saint Anthony Park Company, a real estate speculation firm, was instrumental in the development of the area. Its president, Charles Pratt, was a religious man and refused to allow the sale of liquor in this part of the city; a tradition that persists. Gradually the neighborhood was built up by individuals who purchased lots and constructed homes to their own requirements. As a result, the area has a variety of house styles and sizes in contrast to the modern suburban development where the speculator builds the houses.

As the population of Saint Anthony Park increased, merchants realized it would be an excellent location for a commercial district, and shops were built along Como Avenue, which was also the route of the streetcar line. These commercial activities remain, and today a distinctive cluster of shops serves residents and visitors alike. In addition, as the twentieth century progressed, several industrial establishments were located along the railroad tracks that divide Saint Anthony Park into its northern and southern districts.

North Saint Anthony Park, or Saint Anthony proper, is one of the most popular residential areas in the Twin Cities. The steady growth of the university has drawn students and faculty to this quiet, wooded neighborhood. Residents have restored most of the older homes.

In 1928, the University of Minnesota regents set aside a portion of their campus, University Grove, as a housing area where tenured faculty and staff could build their own homes. This land is still owned by the university and leased to the faculty or staff member. Homeowners were required to engage an architect and the plans of each house had to meet a set of specifications established by the university. When any houses were sold they could be purchased only by another tenured faculty or staff member. Politically

a part of Falcon Heights but functionally part of Saint Paul, University Grove exhibits the range of single-family architectural styles popular from 1920 to the present - a "showcase of architectural modernism."

The initial plan for University Grove was developed in 1929 by the firm of Morell and Nichols with consulting architects and landscape architects. The plan was based on the turn-of-the-century concept of large blocks with open spaces in the center and pathways connecting each residence with this common open space. However, the narrowness of the sites and the existing street patterns did not allow the "natural" layout of streets, as in Saint Anthony Park.

Located to the south of University Grove on Scudder Street near Blake Avenue are some of the finest older houses in Saint Anthony Park. Notice as you go along Scudder that new and old houses are mixed together, the mix on this street tending toward new housing. Also notice the additions to some of the houses and the intrusion of two-story apartment buildings. At the corner of Scudder and Langford is a fine collection of Queen Anne houses; three are particularly worth study. 2203 was designed by architect W. A. Hunt for Governor Andrew R. McGill and built in 1888 by W. P. Hemenway. It was extremely modified in 1930 when the wrap-around porch on the first floor, the second-story porch and the carriage house were removed. The house is a typical Queen Anne style asymmetrical design with a two-story tower sided in clapboard, as is the rest of the house. Two adjacent houses, 2201 Scudder (1895) and 2205 Scudder (1887), are variations of the Queen Anne style. Pay particular attention to 2201 and the old hitching ring still standing in front of it. The location of these houses on the brow of the knoll protects them from the deleterious influence of the apartment houses across the street.

Territorial Road in South Saint Anthony Park is the last fragment of the road that ran from the confluence of the Saint Croix and Mississippi rivers at Point Douglas through the villages of Cottage Grove and Red Rock, through Saint Paul and on to the Falls of Saint Anthony and up the Mississippi to Fort Ripley. The route parallels that of the Red River oxcart trail, which lies further south. For many years a center of trucking, this general path has been the primary connection between Saint Paul and Minneapolis from the days of carts to railroads to trucks.

Merriam Park

In 1882, Merriam Park was designed as a garden suburb to compete with Saint Anthony Park. Originally it had a slight advantage over Saint Anthony because it was closer to the downtowns of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Lying across Territorial Road on the slope of a picturesque hill overlooking the river gorge, Merriam Park was a twelve-minute train trip from either city. Like most suburban developers, Colonel H. John Merriam planned the suburb to be a home for the wealthy, although he did not build a suburb in the picturesque style of Cleveland's Saint Anthony. Deed restrictions provided that no house could be built for less than \$1500.

The land just to the west and the south of the center of Merriam Park has long been controlled by the Catholic church. In 1887, a Catholic industrial school was built on the grounds of what is now the College of Saint Thomas, near the junction of Cleveland and Summit avenues. The Saint Thomas Aquinas Seminary was established in 1885, the same year as the incorporation of Merriam Park and the rest of the Midway area into the city of

Saint Paul. (Special legislation exempted Merriam Park from paying off existing indebtedness to the city and prohibited saloons and liquor sales within four miles of Merriam Park.) Two years later, in 1887, Archbishop John Ireland laid the foundation for the Cathedral of Saint Paul near the corner of Laurel and Cleveland. Although the foundation was constructed, the project was abandoned in favor of the present location.

In 1891, the hopes of promoters reached a fever pitch when the Minnesota Legislature decided to build a new state Capitol. While Merriam was a banker and businessman, his son, William Merriam, was Governor of Minnesota from 1889 to 1893, so there is some reason to think that Merriam actually expected that the state Capitol would be located in his subdivision. Governor William Merriam offered the state a twenty-acre site on what is now the Town and Country Golf Course. (Built in 1888, Town and Country Club, together with its golf course, is one of the oldest country clubs in continuous operation in the United States.) This site was favored by residents of the Midway and many people in Minneapolis, as well.

The offer was accompanied by an anonymously published book, entitled *The Federal City*, which proposed the unification of Saint Paul and Minneapolis with the state Capitol, the cathedral and a centralized railroad depot all located in Merriam Park. The writer and developers of Merriam Park could not imagine why the Twin Cities should exist as two separate cities when their stupendous site was available as the state's government and religious centers. They believed that this area would become a truly dynamic city center, far from the noise, congestion and pollution of the industrial and transportation districts surrounding the old city centers.

In 1893, the legislature did select a new Capitol location - the present site north of downtown. Merriam Park was the runner-up. That decision sounded the death knell for Merriam Park's grandiose plans. The developers reconciled themselves to the fact that the only extensive non-residential development would be a small local commercial district.

By 1903, the area immediately surrounding Merriam Park and one block south of Marshall Avenue was completely built up. The rest of the district was built up by 1916. The community remained very stable until the construction of Interstate Highway 94, which divided Iris Park from Merriam Park and obliterated the old Merriam Park, commercial district and the site of the original railroad station that served commuters from that area. Although the streetscape of Iris Park on Iris Lake has changed tremendously due to the intrusion of industrial and commercial uses during the past century, the curved streets still remind us of the former residential neighborhoods. The bottom of Iris Lake is now black-topped and has water in it only after a run off; the lake imagined by the district founders was never to be.

The homes facing the lake are of a variety of styles, most variations of a simple square house plan. The older houses all date from the 1890s to the period just before World War I. Most have been re-sided or have undergone significant other changes since they were first built. At the corner of Lynnhurst and Iris Place, one can see the mixture of functions that have come to characterize this area. There were nursing homes, residential care units and single-family houses, as well as multi-family units.

The vintage brick structure, the Crosby Block, on the corner of Saint Anthony and Feronia evokes an echo of what the commercial district would have looked like in 1900. This building has been greatly modified and now provides homes for several households.

Nearby, commuters caught their trains to either Saint Paul or Minneapolis. As we

cross over the freeway going south on Prior Avenue, we go over the old commercial district. The Telstar Building on the south side of the freeway, with its modern pink brick siding, is a vestige of the old commercial district. The street has been greatly widened, which also changes the character of the neighborhood considerably. To the east are houses that have undergone considerable renovation and modification. To the west, is Longfellow School and Merriam Park Community Center, which provide a strong focus to this community.

At the junction of Prior and Carroll are a set of houses that typify the kind of building that took place in this area at the turn of the century. Looking down Carroll and Prior one can see six or seven different styles of houses. Most of the original siding has been replaced or covered over with asbestos or other kinds of siding, however, and large shade trees have been removed and the gardens changed considerably. On the north side of Carroll is a particularly good example of the Queen Anne style, complete with its tall turret. On the right, in the distance, we can see the impressive spire of Saint Mark's Catholic Church, which dominates this community. In fact, many people refer to Merriam Park as Saint Mark's parish.

Although the promoters of Merriam Park did not achieve their original objective of establishing a genteel upper-class suburb on the banks of the Mississippi River gorge, Merriam Park over the years has developed into one of the city's many middle-class neighborhoods, noted for its strong churches and active neighborhood organizations.

Macalester Park

The smallest of the western suburbs built on the edge of Saint Paul was Macalester Park. The history of this neighborhood is tightly wound up with the evolution of Macalester College. In 1881, the trustees of Macalester College bought the farm of Thomas Holyoke. This farm was a quarter section in size and was bordered by Snelling, Fairview, Saint Clair and Summit avenues. The trustees paid a good price for it - \$150 an acre - and gave forty acres to Macalester College for a campus. In 1883 the remaining portion of the farm was then platted as Macalester Park Addition.

During the following ten years the promoters sold lots and a small number of houses were built. They also planted elms along the winding avenues and established a tradition of maintaining large groves of oak trees in the area. Macalester Park is exceptional in Saint Paul. Its winding streets, odd-lot sizes and mixture of housing set it apart from the gridiron pattern neighborhoods that characterized most Midwestern cities in the early twentieth century. Contrary to popular mythology, the curved streets here did not result from the paving over of muddy cattle trails, and the elegant house designed by Cass Gilbert and James Knox Taylor located on the corner of Princeton and Cambridge, famous for its stable and tower, is neither the old farmhouse nor a converted hunting lodge.

Patterned on the design of Shaker Heights near Cleveland, Macalester Park is different from Saint Anthony Park or Merriam Park because it was one of the first electric streetcar suburbs in the northwest. The streetcar enabled the middle class to travel to the edge of the city and avail themselves of recreational opportunities in this bucolic setting: "On holidays and Sundays, and the long summer evenings, the [street] cars are crowded with lovers of nature, eager to escape for a little while from the brick walls and

paved streets to breath the pure air of the country and to wander under green boughs along wooded paths. It is a very orderly crowd, for there are no amusements - no games and no saloons - at the end of the route to attract the rough elements of the city's population." (Northwest Magazine, April 1890)

In 1889, Bishop Ireland and Thomas Cochrane (one of the founders of Macalester College) had contracted with the Saint Paul City Railroad Company to build and equip an extension of the Grand Avenue line from Victoria Street to Cretin Avenue, serving Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Thomas College. The promoters of this part of the city agreed to pay the streetcar line a bonus of \$250,000 if it was completed within six months. Macalester College granted the streetcar company a right-of-way through its campus and contributed \$6,500 to the construction fund. The new electric line was completed on schedule, and an editorial in the St. Paul Pioneer Press (February 1890) hailed the technological improvement, but cautioned readers to be wary when buying land along the tracks.

Cochrane and others had hoped that their streetcar-based suburb would boom in response to the accessible natural environment and the presence of the college. Naming streets after famous schools, such as Cambridge, Princeton, Dartmouth, and Amherst, the promoters hoped to attract a large number of middle-class intellectuals to Macalester Park, providing a large endowment for Macalester College from lot sales.

Despite the beauty of the landscape and the presence of the streetcar, the area did not grow as the original syndicate had projected. Instead, the neighborhood developed gradually as single houses and occasional duplexes were built.

The mixture of houses in Macalester Park, popularly known as Tangle Town, is best seen along Cambridge Avenue between Grand and Princeton. At the corner of Lincoln and Cambridge is a 1920s duplex; to the northwest is an eclectic cube style house built in 1909. Kitty-corner across the street is another house of the eclectic cube style dating from 1906 and on the southwest corner is a 1920s bungalow (63 Cambridge). Next to the bungalow is a somewhat newer eclectic cube dating from around 1914-15. Then at 92 Cambridge we have a newer house with a distinctive roofline, dating from the 1920s. At 98 Cambridge is another house in the eclectic cube style. 99 Cambridge is a Dutch Colonial with extensive grounds and pricket fence. At 105 Cambridge we see some newer houses dating from the 1920s. At 123 Cambridge we come to one of the oldest houses in the neighborhood, dating from the 1890s. Look behind it and you will see a very distinctive stable. It is worth a short trip down the alley to look at this interesting structure. On the other side of Cambridge, at 130, there is an eclectic cube, followed by several 1920s bungalows. The Queen Anne house at the corner, mentioned earlier, is one of the best in the neighborhood. It has an exquisite wrought iron fence and fine stable barn, as well as an excellently tended garden. Notice, also, the carriage step bearing the name of earlier inhabitants, the Summers.

At the five-corner intersection, turning right on Princeton, we see somewhat newer houses. In this area we get the flavor of the gradual development of Macalester Park. Fine Federal Revival style houses can be seen along this street, as well as some excellent Colonial Revival houses, particularly 1743 Princeton.

The oldest building in the area, visible from Grand Avenue across Macalester College's mall, is Old Main. Visitors are always welcome on the campus, especially Mac Alums!

In Conclusion

Saint Paul's residential neighborhoods did not just happen accidentally. They were born out of the hopes and dreams of promoters. The Hill District was not the first of these neighborhoods, although it became the most prestigious. Close to downtown yet safely removed by geography from the encroachment of industry and commerce, the Hill District spans the period from the horsecar to the streetcar, just as developments farther from the center of Saint Paul depended on transportation for their success.

We've looked at four developments that represent the major westward expansion of the city from the post-Civil War period to World War I. Extending outward in other directions, similar neighborhoods can be discovered - the mark of a city's development left on the landscape.