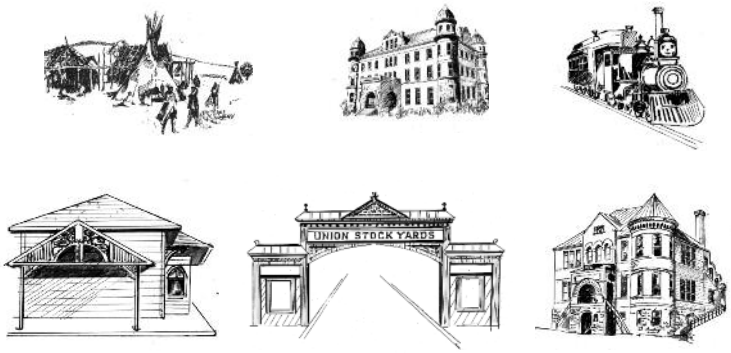


A brief history of
South St. Paul
and map of historic sites

Facing spring floods in 1826 Dakota Chief Big Thunder, Little Crow IV, moved his village of Kaposia from the east bank of the Mississippi River to the west bank. Kaposia's heritage and site are the foundation of today's South St. Paul.

Kaposia - 1826 to 1853

Big Thunder welcomed missionaries and teachers to Kaposia. When Red Nation, Little Crow V, succeded Big Thunder in 1845 steamboats routinely stopped at the village. In 1851 Red Nation signed the treaty transferring Indian lands west of the Mississippi to the United States for money and reservation lands. In 1853 Red Nation moved his village to a Minnesota River reservation. The name Kaposia and its mission buildings remained.

Nine years later Little Crow V led the Dakota people in the largest Indian war in U.S. history.

1853 to 1886

When Dakota County opened to settlement in 1853 the South St. Paul area was quickly claimed. Several claims were made by individual mission workers. Kaposia was the first Dakota County seat and post office location. The seat was moved to Mendota the next year and later to Hastings.

In 1858 Dakota County organized its first townships. The South St. Paul area was part of West St. Paul Township. That township extended from today's Delaware Ave. east to the Mississippi River and from 60th Street in today's Inver Grove Heights north to the Mississippi. In 1874 Ramsey County annexed the northern portion of the township creating St. Paul's West Side.

In 1886 Charles Clark acquired township property along the river including the Kaposia area. Soon after, Alpheus Stickney laid plans for a stockyards along the river. A major change was in the making!

1887 Birth of the City of South St. Paul

Industry in South Park and the stockyards to the south fostered a population explosion along the river, the future South St. Paul area. New businesses, workers, and families required services from sewers and water to police and fire fighters to grocers, schools, and churches. To provide the services, South Park and stockyards leaders proposed incorporating as a city. The township leaders, primarily farmers, decided to join in forming the new city.

On March 2, 1887, the entire West St. Paul township became the City of South St. Paul. In three days the first city meeting was held at the McClung School near Annapolis and Oakdale.

Industry versus the Farm

It quickly became obvious that western farmers' expectations were not compatible with those of industry and stockyards people in the east. Initially westerners dominated the city council but 1888 elections shifted the power. The east won virtually every contest. Frustrated, western leaders obtained state approval to form their own city. The City of West St. Paul organized on February 22, 1889, with five northwestern sections of the former South St. Paul.

A new City of South St. Paul was created including approximately six northeastern sections of the former city. Four remaining southern sections were added to Inver Grove township.

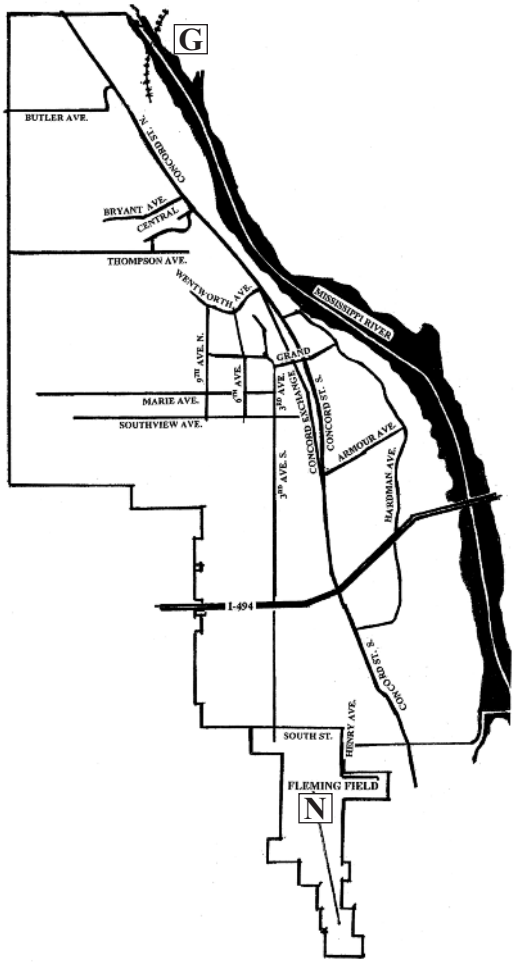
The new city of South St. Paul

The Stockyards Exchange Building, completed in 1887, served as a city hall until a new one could be built. On July 28, 1890 South St. Paul's first real city hall opened its doors on the bluff in the fork of Grand and Third Avenues.

European immigrants soon arrived seeking employment, thus resulting in a diverse population.

South St. Paul Population

1890...	2,242
1900...	2,322
1910...	4,510
1920...	6,860
1930..	10,009
1940..	11,844
1950..	15,909
1960..	22,032
1970..	25,016
1980..	21,235
1990..	20,197
2000..	20,167



Some memorable places in the history of the

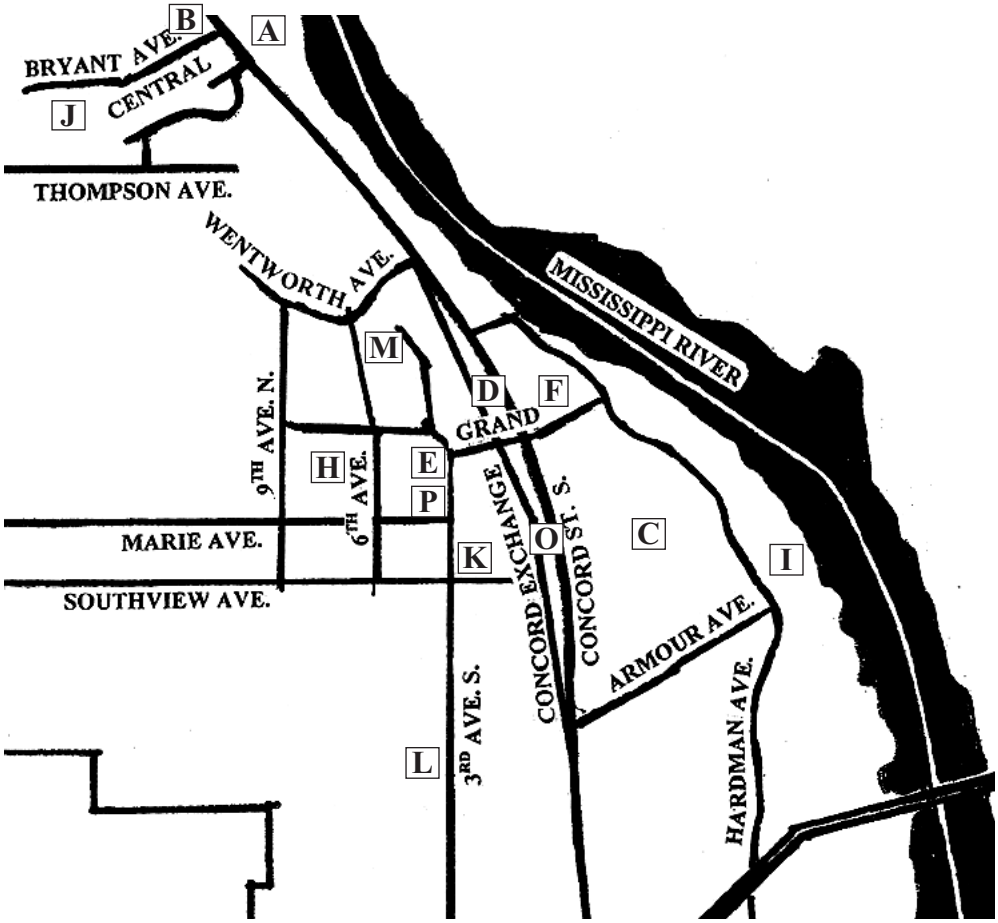
City of South St. Paul

A **Village of Kaposia**

The Dakota Indian village occupied several sites within the city between 1826 and 1853. The most likely location in a Seth Eastman painting is Bryant and Concord, logical as a steamboat landing, mission setting, and 1853 county seat. Site markers are at Concord and Butler and a quarter mile south on Concord.

B **Bryant Block in South Park**

In 1886 C. W. Clark envisioned a planned community in northern South St. Paul, "South Park." Plans called for industry between Concord and the river, retail services along the street, and housing on the hill. At Concord and Bryant a grocery store often served as a church. The adjacent three-story former Odd Fellows Hall still stands as an apartment building.



Prepared by W. G. Wolston 0905

The Stockyards

The St. Paul Union Stockyards opened on June 30, 1886, when railroad man Alpheus B. Stickney brought men and money together to build and service a stockyards. He selected 260 acres between the river and the bluff. Fill was moved from the bluff to raise the land five feet, creating a flat area suitable for railroad tracks, roadways, and hundreds of livestock pens and chutes.

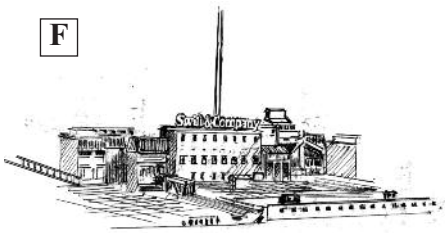
Located in the natural hub of one of the nation's most productive livestock and agricultural areas, South St. Paul's public market served as the pulse of the Northwest livestock economy and became the largest market from 1974 to 1981. At its peak, more than 5,000,000 head of livestock were handled annually, resulting in millions of dollars changing hands.

Stockyards Exchange Building

The Exchange Building opened in 1887 at Grand and Concord as the nucleus of the stockyards. It housed commission firms, railroad offices, banks, a post office, a radio station, even a temporary city hall. Every office had a fireplace. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.

South St. Paul City Hall

The first City Hall building opened its doors on July 28, 1890, at the intersection of Grand and Third Ave. N. Following its demolition in 1954, the site became Lawshe Park.



Swift & Co.

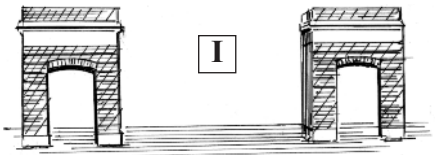
Chicago's Swift & Co. established a meat packing plant in 1897 with 300 employees. Twenty years later, more than 3,500 people were employed, with a peak of 5,000 during WWII. Its annual payroll topped 23 million dollars. Swift's whistles became the city's time piece. Swift's expansions brought many managers and engineers who became civic leaders and consultants for municipal projects.

St. Paul Bridge and Terminal Railway

A Mississippi bridge and 5 miles of track provided essential stockyards services. Built by Stickney in 1907, this line moved thousands of stock cars holding millions of heads of livestock between the Pig's Eye Transfer Yard and the stockyards.

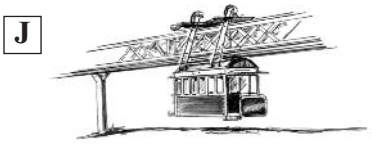
Central High School

Central High opened with 40 students in January 1907 at today's Central Square location. The first and second floors held 16 classrooms. The third floor had an 800 seat auditorium.



Armour & Co.

With construction starting in 1917 and completed in 1919, Armour & Company opened its state-of-the-art meat packing plant with about 2,500 employees. At its peak during WWII, it employed 4,000 with an annual payroll of 26 million dollars. The brick gates which opened to the plant are still standing. Many members of its work force became civic leaders.



The Monorail

On May 9, 1888, Charles Clark's electric monorail carried passengers up and down Bryant Hill to Concord Street. A plaque is at the Clark Memorial Church at 15th and Bryant.

South St. Paul Public Library

The American Legion was instrumental in funding this beautiful colonial-style library on Third Avenue which was built in 1927. The South St. Paul library preceded the Dakota County system.

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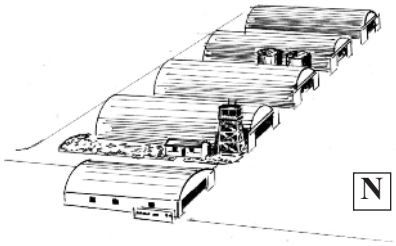
National Register of Historic Places

In addition to the Stockyards Exchange Building, the Serbian Home on Third Ave. S., built in 1923, and St. Stefan's Romanian Church on Grand Ave. W. built in 1924, became National Register sites in 1992 and 2004 respectively.



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Fleming Field

The Hook-Em-Cow flying club field was a year old when acquired in 1940 for U.S. Navy flight training. Hangars housed 100 Stearman bi-planes.

In the early 1950s the field was transferred to the City of South St. Paul. The field honors Captain Richard E. Fleming, USMC, Medal of Honor recipient.

O

Concord Street

Without question, Concord Street was South St. Paul's most historic place. To review its significance would take volumes.

A few historic buildings survive on today's Concord Exchange ("Old Concord") and a few more can be seen on South Park's Concord and immediate vicinity. Concord was the path to Swift's, Armour's, the stockyards and virtually every store in town.

For years downtown South St. Paul was at Concord and Grand. Thousands passed this point daily on foot, horse, and streetcar and later by car, bus, and truck.

Buildings such as the Schult, Flat Iron, Hamm, Anderson, Grand Mill, Hub, Stockyards National and Drovers Banks and the Post Office graced the area. Between and in the buildings were grocery, clothing, furniture, and hardware stores, beauty and barber shops, restaurants, numerous saloons, pool halls, rooming houses, and a movie theater. Today the Stockyards Exchange Building, matching the city in age, prompts memories and tales of yesterday.

Today a business park is located in the space formerly occupied by Swift & Company, the north end of the formerly sprawling stockyards complex, and Armour & Company. Along the Mississippi River's edge is a green space which offers a picturesque river walk, picnic areas and a boat launch.

Fortunately, the people who built a booming economy also fostered a proud and resilient community. Schools, churches, residences, and businesses large and small make up the changing face of South St. Paul.

City of South St. Paul Municipal Building

In 1953, today's South St. Paul City Hall opened its doors to serve the community. The three story building houses the Police and Fire Departments, as well as various city services.

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Sponsored by the South St. Paul Chapter of the Dakota County Historical Society.
To learn more, visit the Society's Museum in South St. Paul.

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