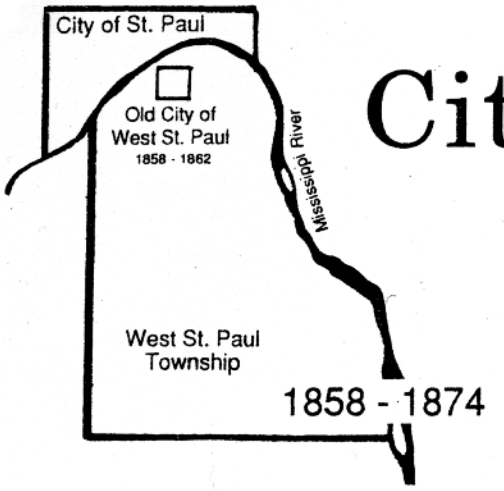
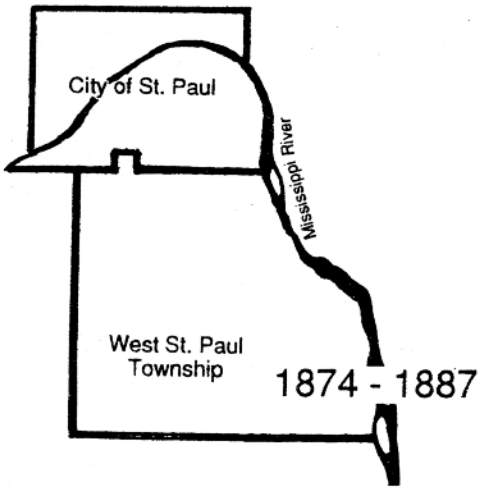
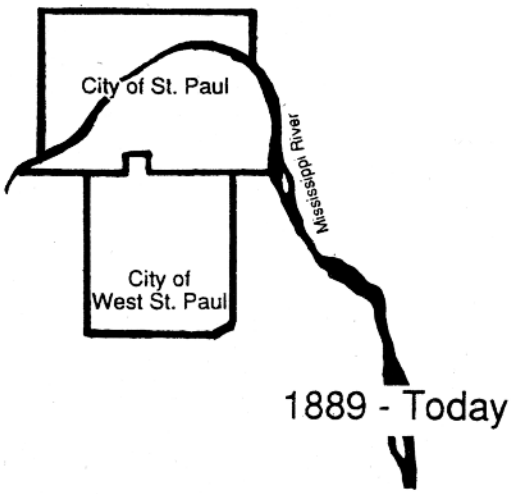






An historical glimpse of the

City of West St. Paul

The name West St. Paul first appeared on March 6, 1858, when Dakota County commissioners met in the Indian village of Kaposia to create county townships. Forty-one years later, and following a series of unusual events, today's City of West St. Paul emerged. This folder describes the evolution and some of the people, places, and events in the history of West St. Paul as a progressive Minnesota city.

Two West St. Pauls...a city and a township

On March 22, 1858, before citizens could organize their new township, settlers in the township's northern area organized a city calling it West St. Paul. The city was located at the foot of today's Wabasha Bridge. Two months later, on May 11, 1858, the township of West St. Paul organized. Now there were two West St. Pauls, a city and a township.

One might wonder how there could be enough people to form a city. Actually the county was opened to settlement in 1854 following Dakota County's formation in 1853. Some settlers and speculators started staking claims as early as 1851, anticipating the treaty with the Dakota Indians which would open the land to settlement.

The City rejoins township

The old City of West St. Paul didn't last long. Four years after its formation it went bankrupt returning to the township on March 8, 1862. However, the old city had become the Mississippi crossing point to St. Paul for township farmers. All primary township roads, the German (Oakdale), Charlton, and Dodd Roads, converged at the crossing.

Township loses northern tip

In 1859 St. Paul built a toll bridge (Wabasha Bridge) at the crossing point. Township citizens didn't like the toll. St. Paul, for several reasons, desired to annex the old city area. In 1874 Ramsey and Dakota County citizens voted to approve the annexation. The toll was dropped. Township land north of Annapolis St. joined Ramsey County as St. Paul's Sixth Ward. Excluded from the annexation was Philip Crowley's 40 acre farm due to his being Superintendent of Dakota County Schools. Crowley's exclusion resulted in West St. Paul's unusual "Forty Acres."

Township disappears with creation of South St. Paul

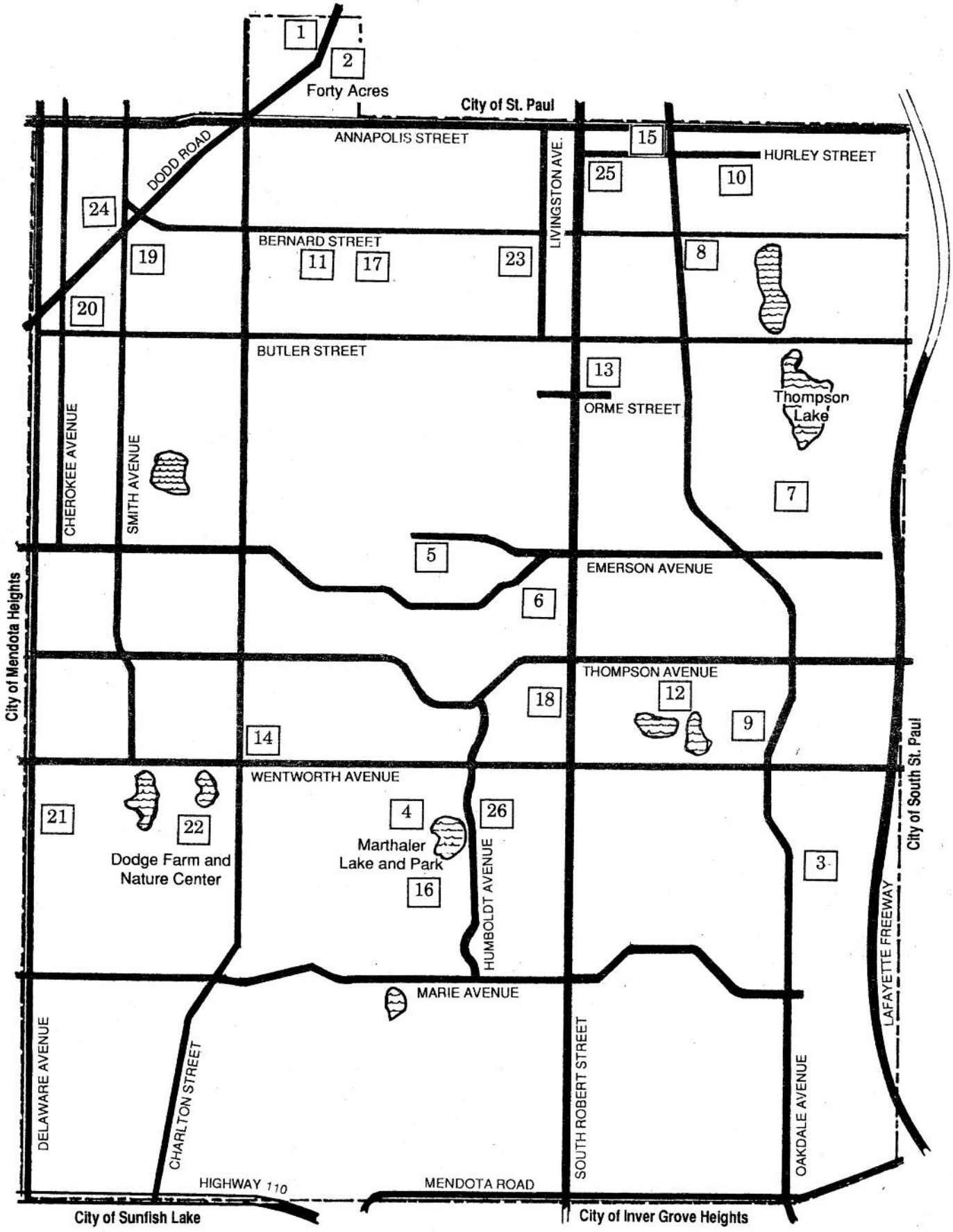
In 1886 a group of industrial developers started buying eastern township land along the Mississippi. Soon an industrial park and a stockyards led to a rapid increase in population. The new businessmen proposed forming a city. The state legislature approved the proposal. On March 2, 1887 the entire township became the new city of South St. Paul. The name West St. Paul disappeared from the map.

The City of West St. Paul is born

The initial friendly relationship between western township farmers and the developers quickly dissolved when the farmers lost representation in the first city election in 1888. The western citizens petitioned the state legislature to form a city of their own. They were successful. On February 22, 1889 today's City of West St. Paul was born.

City of West St. Paul historic site map and descriptions on following pages

The City of West St. Paul



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Looking back at People, Places, and Points of the City's Heritage

1

The 1868 home of Philip Crowley at 763 Dodd Road. Crowley became the first Mayor of the City of West St. Paul in 1889. He was a surveyor, city engineer, and the first teacher at the Somerset School.

2

The Forty Acres. The 40 acre farm of Philip Crowley excluded from the annexation by St. Paul in 1874. The area was saved for West St. Paul because Crowley was Dakota County Superintendent of Schools.

3

Farm home of Jacob and Regina Marthaler at 1746 Oakdale; 1852 pioneers. The home was constructed of native limestone in 1863 for $400; high for the time due to the Civil War. Jacob was a city founder and leader.

4

Marthaler Park and Lake honors "Jake" Marthaler, grandson of Jacob. "Jake" served the City over 35 years as a Councilman and Treasurer.

5

Government Hill. Location of government survey marker, is now the location of Imperial Drive. The hill is the second highest point in city at 1101 feet above sea level. Originally the farm of Thomas Wallace.

6

James Locke's 1851 claim. Locke, a lawyer, performed the area's first marriage ceremony in 1855.

7

William Thompson's 1851 claim. Remembered by the naming of Thompson Ave. and Thompson Lake.

8

1880 farm home of John Hurley at 1010 Oakdale. John and brother Joseph claimed land in 1853 in their father's name being too young to make a claim. They wintered in a sod hut on the shores of Thompson Lake.

9

Farm home of George Wentworth at 1575 Oakdale. The only West St. Paul home on the National Register of Historic Homes. Wentworth settled in 1873 on 160 acres. He was a South St. Paul alderman and leader in forming City of West St. Paul.

10

Site of McClung School, 248 E. Hurley St. Officers for the new City of South St. Paul were selected here.

11

Sibley Elementary School site. It was built in 1887, used as kindergarten in 1940, and closed in 1964.

12

Site of Gladstone School. George Wentworth gave the property to the city in 1887. The school's foundation is preserved as part of swimming pool behind the home at 212 Wentworth.

13

Site of original City Hall built in 1890 at South Robert and Orme for $5,000. The second floor served as a courtroom and schoolroom for many years. The building faced Hurley Lake a favorite swimming hole for the neighborhood. The building was demolished in 1971.

14

Site of the McGrath School at the corner of Wentworth and Charlton on land donated by Councilman James McGrath. Four schools were built that year with similar architectural design. McGrath, a state legislator in 1888, is credited for gaining support approving the new city of West St. Paul.

15

West St. Paul's first church. The "Oakdale Chapel", was established by the Hebron Baptist Church of St. Paul as a mission in the McClung School in 1887. The next year a plot of land was donated at Hurley and Oakdale for the new interdenominational chapel building.

16

Site of the Lothenbach farm and grove, and today's Marthaler Park. Balthazar and Frances Lothenbach purchased the property from pioneer William Dixon in 1889. The Lothenbach Dairy had a herd of 45 milk cows. In later years a dance pavillion was built in the grove and motorcycle races were held on the hill.

17

Site of John Wolters 1890 brickyard and today's Wolters flower and garden business, 184 W. Bernard. When the clay ran out Wolters started a truck farm which has evolved into the family greenhouse and landscaping business.

18

Site of William Stassen farm on South Robert between Thompson and Wentworth. The home was the birthplace of Harold Stassen, Minnesota Governor and signer of the United Nations Charter. William was active in community affairs and served as Mayor for three terms.

19

Site of Dodd School. Served as a grade school, temporary city offices, and headquarters of the Dakota-Scott Regional Library; 1960-62.

20

Site of Weschcke swimming pool, built in the early 1940s at 1090 Cherokee. It was the only swimming pool in town and was generously offered for years to teach community children how to swim.

21

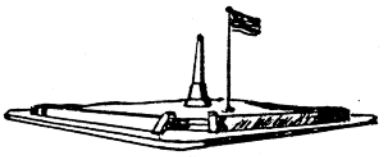
Dixie Slope. Home of Olivia Dodge at Wentworth and Delaware. Originally built in 1909 by Charles Stickney, son of the founder of South St. Paul's stockyards. It was purchased by Horace Klien in 1914 who made it a horticultural showplace. After acquisition by Arthur and Olivia Dodge in 1964 adjoining farms were added creating the Thomas Irvine Dodge Nature Center and Farm.

22

The Thomas Irvine Dodge Nature Center. With entrances on Charlton Street the center covers 130 acres including the Beulke farm, one of the last operating farms in the city. The farm was included in the Dodge nature center in the 1960s and has been preserved. Each year tour groups and individuals participate in the Nature Center and Farm activity programs and tours.

23

Site of Emerson School built in 1915. The city's first public school with classes beyond the sixth grade and electricity and indoor plumbing.

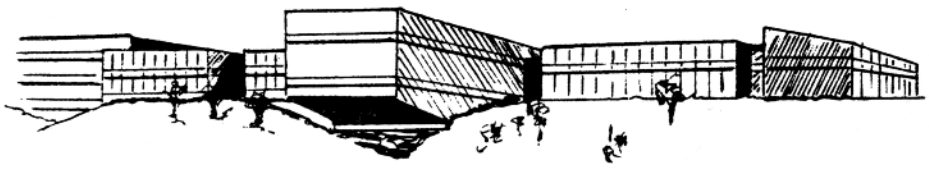


24

Albert Park. The small triangle at Smith and Dodd intersection. Named for Albert Lefevre who drowned in the Mississippi in 1930 on a Boy Scout activity. Albert's adoptive father obtained permision to erect a plaque and plant flowers on the little city plot. The obelisk monument was dedicated in 1968. Ripley called it the "smallest park in the world."

25

West Twins theater, 924 South Robert. Opened in 1939 by W. R. Frank, it was called the finest this side of Chicago. Frank also made films including "The Devil and Daniel Webster" and "Dan Patch." The theater seated 1,200, had a revolving roof top dome, and an adjacent fine dining room and lounge. It closed in the 1960s suffering the fate of most large, single screen theaters.



26

Today's West St. Paul Government Center, 1616 Humboldt Avenue. By 1964 the city outgrew the old City Hall. City offices except police, fire, and street departments were moved to the former Dodd School. In 1969 the Center was completed for all city offices. The modern center faces Marthaler Park.

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