

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

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Fall 2015

Volume 50, Number 3

Building Through
the Crash

*St. Paul's New Directions in
the 1930s*

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Finding A Way. Together.

ALLY People Solutions: 50 Years of Service
to Individuals and the Community

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

A Message from the Editorial Board

In this issue, we are pleased to publish Eileen McCormack's inspiring history of ALLY People Solutions, a St. Paul organization that assists and advocates for people with developmental challenges. It began with a dedicated group of parents who sought an alternative to institutional care for their children in the 1950s and has now grown into a comprehensive program that partners with businesses, who hire participants for jobs in a competitive workplace. We also share Jim Stolpestad's fascinating history of St. Paul city planning and development in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. The spurt of development taking place then reflected the ideas of the City Beautiful movement that originated with the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. St. Paul created a city planning board in 1918, and despite the Great Depression, prior approval of bonding and new government programs allowed construction of some of St. Paul's iconic projects, including the makeover of an outmoded Third Street into the spacious avenue now known as Kellogg Boulevard. Finally, check out our new RCHS website. It is easier to read and navigate, with links to synopses of all of the magazine articles since we began publishing in 1964.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Building through the Crash

St. Paul's New Directions in the 1930s

James A. Stolpestad

The end of World War I was an inflection point for St. Paul. The armistice enabled the city to return to peacetime routines. As people refocused on their surroundings, they realized that much needed to be done. The East Side and Highland Park, taking up large swaths of terrain, were mostly undeveloped, and downtown had a disjointed and ramshackle appearance. The influential founding generation was passing on, including its dominant figures. It was in this context that a remarkably able cadre of younger men and women emerged to assert itself during the 1920s and '30s. They were inspired by novel urban planning ideas taking hold in eastern cities that would help chart St. Paul's immediate future.

Urban Planning in the United States

Urban planning got started in the U.S. in spectacular fashion in Chicago. The launching pad was the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, held to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World in 1492. It was the most famous fair ever held on American soil. It also marked the end of the spectacular building boom of the 1880s in the American West.¹

The fair was a vast extravaganza of neoclassical architecture on 668 acres on Lake Michigan, with lagoons, canals, and more than 200 temporary buildings, all painted white, resulting in the name "White City" for the site. The basic statistics were staggering. The dome of the Administration Building was 277 feet, topping the height of the U.S. Capitol. The Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building measured 787 by 1,687 feet, making it the largest roofed structure in the world. The newly invented Ferris Wheel rivaled the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Thirty-six countries and forty-six states and territories participated in the six-month event, at a construction cost of \$28 million (more than \$700 million in 2014 dollars), and drew 21.5 million paid visitors. Almost everyone agreed the fair was one of the wonders of the world.²



Edward H. Bennett was a leading figure in American urban planning during its early years. He and his Chicago firm produced the Plan of St. Paul in 1922, much of which the city implemented in the 1930s. Photo courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.

The Exposition profoundly impacted architecture and planning in Chicago and the rest of the country. The White City epitomized the "City Beautiful" movement in the U.S, which was inspired and led by the fair's chief proponent and designer, Daniel H. Burnham of Chicago, one of the most prominent American architects of the era. Disciples of the

movement believed that it was possible for a city to be both attractive and efficient and that a beautiful and orderly city would function more effectively than an unappealing and disjointed one. With his reputation greatly enhanced by the fair's enormous success, Burnham was hired to plan part of Washington, D.C. in 1901, Cleveland in 1903, and pre-earthquake San Francisco in 1904. Initially providing vital assistance to Burnham in these projects, and then surpassing his mentor in expertise and reputation in the urban planning field over the next thirty years, was Edward H. Bennett.³

The most famous of the nation's early urban plans to champion City Beautiful concepts was the 1909 Plan of Chicago, produced by Burnham and co-author Bennett and sponsored by a group of the city's business elite. The plan took three years to complete and included beautiful drawings and classical designs and layouts for parks, roads, bridges, and monumental civic buildings, mostly conceived and drawn by Bennett. The finished product was presented in book form—almost two inches thick, weighing over five pounds—that was formally adopted in 1911. The Chicago Plan was enthusiastically received in most quarters and effectively shaped that city's development over the following decades.⁴

Other cities fairly quickly decided they wanted their own plans. The architect of Minnesota's State Capitol, Cass Gilbert, and the landscape architect for New York's Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted, joined together in 1910 to produce a report for the city of New Haven, Connecticut. Virgil Bogue created a "Plan of Seattle" in 1911 and Carrere & Hastings completed a "Plan of the City of Hartford" in 1912.⁵

But it was mainly the Plan of Chicago's co-author Bennett who exploited the new opportunities in urban planning. In 1910,



George H. Herrold (1867–1964) served as St. Paul’s planning director from 1920 to 1951 and was a key participant in carrying out the Plan of St. Paul. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Bennett left Burnham and started his own Chicago firm, Bennett, Parsons and Frost. He spent the next twenty years helping the City of Chicago implement the 1909 plan. During that time, his office also turned out twenty-one plans for cities across the nation as varied as Brooklyn, Palm Beach, Pasadena, San Francisco—and Minneapolis and St. Paul. Bennett began working with Minneapolis as early as 1910 and his plan for the other twin city released in 1917 was nearly as extensive and well-illustrated as the Chicago plan.⁶

Bennett’s expertise was not so much in designing individual structures as *ensembles* of civic buildings and their attendant boulevards, parks, bridges, and other contextual elements. He was also an early zoning advocate, even before that term was widely used. His firm prepared the first zoning ordinances for many of its client cities, including St. Paul.⁷

The influence of Bennett and his firm was wide spread. In 1923, only 250 cities across the country had comprehensive plans and only about 100 had adopted zoning ordinances. By 1929, there were 650 plans and 754 zoning ordinances. Most of these plans reflected the shift from City Beautiful of the Chicago Plan to City Functional, as planning became

more professional and focused on practical matters like addressing the challenges presented by the automobile.⁸

Early Planning in St. Paul

The first serious attempt at urban planning in St. Paul began in 1906 when the Minnesota Legislature created the Capitol Grounds Commission to carry out Cass Gilbert’s plan to create a landscaped “approach” to his magnificent new Capitol building.⁹

Gilbert’s concept was very much a part of the City Beautiful movement, as he was a leading exemplar of its design principles. Two of the five members of the Commission were Gilbert and Pierce Butler, who was then Ramsey County Attorney, whose family’s business, Butler Brothers Construction, had been the general contractor for the building. While the Commission helped acquire land for a city park west of the Capitol in 1912 and decided where to place the first State Historical Society building in 1915, its legislative charter expired in 1929 without accomplishing much more. It would be thirty-eight years before a drastically scaled back version of the grandiose Gilbert plan was finally completed in 1967.¹⁰

Other early planning efforts went nowhere. In 1912, Park Board member A.B. Stickney brought out his self-financed “Forest Park Plan,” which aroused little interest. That same year Chicago planners John Nolen and Arthur C. Comey presented a plan to the St. Paul City Club adopting most of the Gilbert’s concepts, which led to widening Robert Street but otherwise had little impact. In 1913, a planning conference was announced for the city, which died for lack of funding. A year later, the City Council finally authorized the creation of a planning board, but World War I intervened and the board never got going.¹¹

In 1915, the Minnesota Legislature adopted a measure to allow property owners in St. Paul and other cities of the “first class” (which included Minneapolis and Duluth) to go through a procedure to create “restricted residence districts” as a means for controlling development. Several such districts were set up in ensuing years, including one in 1916 for the city’s grand Victorian boulevard, Summit Avenue. But

restricted residence districts were quickly eclipsed by the new concept of zoning, which regulated the height, bulk, and siting of all new buildings in a municipality.¹²

Starting with New York City in 1916, zoning laws were widely adopted in the U.S. by 1921. As described later, St. Paul followed in 1922. The concept was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1926, in spite of a dissent by then *Justice* Pierce Butler.¹³



Laurence C. Hodgson (1874–1937) was a strong advocate for urban planning in St. Paul during his two terms as mayor (1918–1922 and 1926–1930). Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

New City Planning Board

In 1918, for the first time in its history, St. Paul created and set in motion an effective city planning board. It was part of a new commission form of city government that had just begun operation. Passage of the ordinance creating the board was the result of a citizens committee organized the year before by new planning director George H. Herrold, which had representatives from nineteen different civic groups in the city. Eleven representatives from city government staff were also included, for a total of twenty-six members. Mayor Laurence C. Hodgson, the longest-serving mayor in city history until George Latimer took office in 1976, appointed fifteen of the most prominent members of the citizens committee to the new planning board.¹⁴

Among the initial appointees were Franklin Ellerbe and John A. Seeger. Ellerbe founded the architectural firm (retaining his name in 2014) that collaborated with Holabird & Root of Chicago on the design of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse project. Ellerbe's small firm also designed other important St. Paul buildings in the 1920s and '30s. Seeger was the founder of Seeger Refrigerator Company, one of the city's largest employers located on Arcade Street in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood on the East Side. In the 1950s, his company was involved in an ill-fated corporate merger with out-of-state Whirlpool, which eventually led to the demise of a once-proud St. Paul company. Before then, Seeger was an important city leader who was involved in many significant civic initiatives.¹⁵

Planning Director Herrold was a visionary proponent of urban planning who deserved much of the credit for the new city planning board's initial success. Born in 1867 in Fulton, Illinois, he moved to California, attended Stanford University, and began his engineering career with the City of San Diego. He came to St. Paul in 1901 to work for the Omaha railroad and then took a position with the city in 1912. Eight years later, Mayor Hodgson appointed him to the top planning position, which he held for thirty-one years until 1951. During his tenure, Herrold was active in planning groups, wrote articles for national journals, and developed a wide following. Overall, he effectively campaigned for a better city, even if he occasionally clashed with colleagues in city and state government and lacked the interpersonal skills needed to win others to his point of view.¹⁶

The Plan of St. Paul

In 1920, the new planning board retained Edward H. Bennett and his firm to produce a city plan for St. Paul. Planning director Herrold selected Bennett and helped him research and write the report. Herrold's name was included on the cover and the members of the planning board were listed on an inside page. The resulting document was more utilitarian than the Chicago Plan or even the plan Bennett completed for Minneapolis in 1917.

Yet the Plan of St. Paul that emerged in 1922 was a groundbreaking document for the city. It represented a radical departure in attitude and approach from anything previously attempted. It was adopted over the opposition of entrenched real estate interests like the St. Paul Real Estate Board, which was evidence of its widespread support by city council members and influential city organizations.¹⁷

The Plan was a dense sixty-seven page treatise, packed with photographs, maps, tables, charts, diagrams, footnotes, and appendices. The narrative began with the history of local planning (such as it was) and continued with a survey of existing conditions—topography, streets, railroad lines, land uses, population density, traffic patterns, parks and playgrounds, and the like. The Plan then made specific recommendations for major streets like Summit Avenue, Robert Street, University Avenue, truck routes, grade separations for roads and railroads, the river flats and levees, the airport at Holman field, extensive parks, and the central business district (CBD).¹⁸

The CBD part of the plan advocated a Union Depot plaza, a Capitol approach, a Third Street Mall, the placement of monumental new civic buildings, and specific bridges into the CBD over the Mississippi to the south and the Trout Brook railroad corridor to the east. The CBD section also included analyses and recommendations for street and sidewalk widths and configurations and other changes to improve business conditions. The Plan concluded with proposed charter changes and a zoning ordinance patterned after the law adopted in 1916 by New York City. The appendix had sections on parks and other topics.¹⁹

For a community with no previous comprehensive planning experience, the Plan of St. Paul was a remarkable document for its broad scope, detailed recommendations, and public acceptance. While the format and some provisions were no doubt "boilerplate" taken from other city plans written by Bennett's firm, and while the text lacked the soaring rhetoric of the Chicago plan, St. Paul's new plan contained a vast amount of practical information and advice, largely compiled by planning director Herrold himself. It was a program the city could put to immediate use.



Constructed in 1931–1932, the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse is an imposing part of today's skyline in the city. Architectural historian Larry Millett has called it a "masterpiece of American art deco" design. The building was a key part of the massive Third Street Esplanade project of the 1930s. Photo by Kenneth M. Wright. Photo courtesy of Jay Pfaender.

United Improvement Council and 1928 Bond Issue

City government almost immediately began the mammoth task of implementing the Plan. The first smaller projects were funded by special assessments levied against benefitted properties and single-purpose municipal bond issues. But city leaders soon realized they needed more potent financing to raise substantially more money more quickly.²⁰

A proposal was put together to combine the Plan's larger projects into several separate bond issues that would be placed on the fall election ballot at the same time. Officials planned to have one bond issue for building a new City Hall and Courthouse, another for the widening and landscaping of Third Street, another for construction of airport improvements at Holman Field across the river from

downtown, and so on. Since the proposed bond issues would be backed by the city's full faith and credit, state law required voter approval, which depended on broad civic support.²¹

This ambitious but uncoordinated approach ran into immediate opposition from the influential St. Paul Association, the predecessor to today's St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce. The Association offered its support for some of the projects but not all of them. It particularly opposed the disjointed manner in which the separate issues were combined and packaged. The Association flatly urged the defeat of the entire financing plan. The voters got the message and voted it down in 1927.²²

Soon after the election, the Association announced it would conduct its own study and offer a more thoughtful and unified program the following year. By August of 1928, true to its word, the Association put out a new five-year program of public improvements for the city. Like the collaboration that backed the City Planning Board ten years earlier, a "United Improvement Council" was formed to promote the program.²³

John A. Seeger led the group, which represented a cross-section of twenty-five businesses, labor groups, and charitable organizations. Like Seeger, many Council members ran the most successful businesses in the city. Serving without pay, volunteers examined community needs, studied financial records, and pared down the list of potential projects from \$45 million to a still large but more targeted figure. The Council called for a single issue of general obligation municipal bonds of \$15 million (\$208 million in 2014 dollars), earmarked for specific needs. The Council enlisted the city's three daily newspapers (*Dispatch*, *Pioneer Press*, and *Daily News*) to sell the program to city residents.²⁴

Under the campaign slogan "Answer the Call for a Better St. Paul," voters passed the bond issue by a wide margin on November 6, 1928. The State Legislature provided the requisite approval and the bonds were quickly sold to investors. It was a close call, as the stock market crashed ten months later on October 29, 1929, and the municipal bond market collapsed shortly thereafter. But the city now had the money



This photo from 1936 shows just how impressive the Third Street Esplanade was when it was first proposed in the 1922 Plan of St. Paul. Today Third Street is known as Kellogg Boulevard. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

it needed for the most important pieces of the Plan of St. Paul.²⁵

Civic Lessons Learned

Civic leaders had learned that public initiatives would only succeed with broad support for needs that were clearly articulated. These elements were present for the new City Planning Board in 1918 and the United Improvement Council of 1928. This model would become standard practice for the city in the future.

St. Paul's public needs were closely tied to pent-up demand in the private sector. Modern office and retail space was in short supply downtown; manufacturing and office facilities were needed in Dayton's Bluff; Grand Avenue was emerging as a location for retailers and automobile dealerships; and the Midway and Highland Park were new places for manufacturing and distribution.

Like the Plan of St. Paul, the successful bond issue of 1928 highlighted the impact of the city's new generation of business and government leaders. Their success set the stage for the massive public and private investment of the 1930s. While the planning document was the inspiration, an expanding city population, crumbling nineteenth-century infrastructure, and the popularity of the automobile all made it a necessity. Funding came

from the sources mentioned earlier, and New Deal programs in the 1930s.

Virtually every part of the city's public realm was affected in one way or another, as outmoded streets and bridges were replaced and upgraded and new projects undertaken in sparsely settled parts of the city to cope with increased numbers of residents, cars, and trucks. By the end of 1929, the Public Works Department had spent \$27 million during the decade (an astounding \$369 million in 2014 dollars)—three times the amount spent during the previous ten years. By the end of 1936, the city would spend tens of millions more.²⁶

The highest profile projects were done on the downtown riverfront. The massive new Union Depot on ten blocks east of Sibley and south of Fourth was the first such project. The \$15 million expenditure between 1917 and 1923 (\$200 million in 2014 dollars) was funded by the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and other rail lines that would use the station. In his history of the St. Paul Union Depot, John W. Diers described what he called the "largest construction project in downtown St. Paul in the twentieth century." It was nearing completion when money from the 1928 bond issue became available for an equally ambitious second project—a complete makeover of Third Street to the bluff between Sibley Street and Seven Corners.²⁷

Third Street Esplanade

Creating a grand vista downtown along Third Street was an idea first suggested as early as 1852 by James N. Goodhue, editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer*. While there were conversations over the years and some sketchy planning, nothing was done until after World War I. By then, conditions along the street had deteriorated to the point where city leaders agreed that something had to be done. Seedy-looking rundown buildings from the 1870s, '80s, and '90s lined the once-fashionable narrow street, creating a blighted look that was "creeping toward Fourth Street" and the heart of the downtown retail and office district.²⁸

This situation drew the attention of new planning director George Herrold. He considered improving Third Street "a necessity from a transportation and economic stand-point." His research noted that property values on Third Street were \$250 to \$350 per front foot at best, while values a block north on Fourth Street were "\$1,000 to \$1,500 per front foot." These numbers underscored the fact that the central business district was shifting away from the river toward Sixth and Seventh Streets.²⁹

The Plan of St. Paul described Third Street as follows:

A rare opportunity is offered in the improvement of Third Street both as a traffic route and as a street of rare architectural value and picturesque qualities. . . . The street should be widened to at least 90 feet between Jackson and Cedar Streets. It is proposed to remove all buildings between Third Street and the railroad so as to maintain an open view of the river from Cedar Street to St. Peter Street. At Wabasha Street an ample plaza would be formed at the bridge approach. . . . By this plan the obstructions are removed where the view is finest. . . . Like other important buildings, the State Capitol, the Union Depot, and the Cathedral, the City Hall would . . . stand in conspicuous view from points along the Mississippi River.³⁰

These ideals were rooted in the City Beautiful movement. Herrold added his own thoughts in an article for a national planning publication of the time: "It was early determined [by city officials and business leaders] that the state buildings should form one group and the city,

county, and Federal buildings another; and that the last-mentioned buildings were best arranged along our river front."³¹

When the Third Street improvement project was written into the 1922 Plan, its scope was relatively modest. It called for the removal of buildings between Third and the bluff and related street and park work—but for only *two blocks*, between Cedar and St. Peter. However, when ultimately finished *more than 50 years later*, the project had been completely re-engineered. By the 1980s, the street extended *two miles*, from Interstate 94 west of downtown to the same highway at Dayton's Bluff. Only the stretch from about Robert to Wabasha retained the park-like quality that was contemplated in the 1922 Plan. Old Third Street had changed beyond recognition.³²



George M. Shepard (1888–1974) served St. Paul as its Chief City Engineer from 1922–1927 and 1932–1965. He often collaborated with planning director George Herrold on many public works projects in the 1920s and '30s. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Work on this ambitious makeover was done in four phases. The first phase from Sibley to St. Peter was done from 1928 to 1933 and was financed from the 1928 bond issue. The second phase was a new bridge over the railroad corridor from east of Sibley to Mounds Boulevard and was partly paid for by the railroads from



St. Paul's Clarence W. Wigington (1883–1967) was the nation's first African-American municipal architect between 1917 and 1948. He played a key role in the planning for the Third Street Esplanade and also designed many buildings in St. Paul that are now on the National Register of Historic Places. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

a contested condemnation award in favor of the city. The third phase from St. Peter to Seven Corners was done from 1933 to 1937 and was financed from reallocated bond issue money and the first use in the nation of New Deal highway programs. A fourth phase, never originally envisioned, went from Seven Corners to John Ireland Boulevard near the Cathedral and was funded and completed as part of Interstate 35E south of the State Capitol Approach in the 1980s.³³

Because of the narrow right-of-way along parts of the street, a landscaped median would only fit between Robert and Wabasha for the first phase of the roadway and its third phase west of Market. Site conditions along most of the third phase dictated the construction of a long reinforced-concrete elevated platform over the uneven terrain below. A ramp was built from the roadway at Washington Street down to Exchange Street and the Upper Landing area in order to bypass congested Seven Corners.

Major St. Paul Bridge Projects 1920–1939³⁹

<i>Bridge</i>	<i>Opened</i>	<i>Length</i>
Robert Street Bridge	1926	1,530 linear feet
InterCity (Ford Parkway) Bridge	1927	2,270 LF
Third Street Viaduct to Mounds Boulevard	1930	2,100 LF
Elevated First Phase of Third Street	1932	250 LF
Elevated Third Phase of Third Street	1936	600 LF
Minnesota Transfer Railroad East Bridge	1936	175 LF
Minnesota Transfer Railroad West Bridge	1936	175 LF
Lambert's Landing Retaining Wall Structures	1937	1,000 LF

Funding for the new down ramp generated a stir before it was approved because the money would come from the 1928 bond issue, which had not been previously authorized, and from a new federal public works program, which was highly controversial in conservative St. Paul in those early days of the Franklin Roosevelt administration.³⁴

City Engineer George M. Shepard stated in his 1933 annual report that St. Paul was the first city in the nation to use this new federal program for street and bridge improvements. It paid thirty percent of the cost of qualifying projects. In a later report, he wrote that from 1933 to 1935 virtually all street work in the city was funded from this program along with more traditional measures like assessment bonds. Shepard would prove to be particularly resourceful during his long tenure.³⁵

Bridge Expertise

The elevated portions of the new Third Street roadway were not the only major bridge projects going on. In fact, the Twin Cities were the scene of “feverish” bridge building during the 1880s and the twenty years after about 1916. Bridges were obviously particularly important in river cities like St. Paul and Minneapolis. The work in both periods was dominated by a small group of bridge engineers born in Norway, including Martin S. Grytbak and Andreas W. Munster of St. Paul and Kristoffer Oustad and F.W. Cappelen of Minneapolis. Grytbak was Shepard’s bridge expert at St. Paul Public Works and was responsible for major efforts like the 1926 Robert Street Bridge, the 1927

Intercity Bridge, the 1930 Third Street Viaduct, and the elevated portions of the Third Street roadway.³⁶

The Mississippi offered a “beautiful setting” for arch bridges, according to Shepard, and the 1920s and ’30s saw the construction of eight major bridge projects spanning the river. The first was the 1,530 foot Robert Street Bridge, considered a “masterpiece of urban architecture” by bridge historian John A. Weeks III because of its “rainbow arch.”³⁷

The second was the 2,320 foot InterCity Bridge (including approaches) in Highland Park at the widest and deepest point on the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities. This bridge took three 300-foot-long reinforced-concrete arches to link up with the abutments on either side of the channel and today remains one of the longest bridges of its kind ever built in the United States. Grytbak and his small staff often had outside assistance on these projects from the St. Paul engineering firm of Toltz King & Day. City Engineer Shepard was justifiably proud of these accomplishments.³⁸

Completion of Kellogg Boulevard and Dedication

The landscaped mall pictured in was completed in 1932. It was a vast improvement for the downtown riverfront and a testament to the tenacity of Herrold, Shepard, Grytbak, and many others who pushed forward during the Depression to complete this massive project. On December 19, 1932, the day the new City Hall and Courthouse was dedicated, former St. Paulite U.S. Attorney General

William D. Mitchell announced the re-naming of the new roadway and park for another former St. Paulite, Frank B. Kellogg, former U.S. Senator, Secretary of State, and 1929 Nobel Peace Prize recipient. When the third phase of the roadway was completed in 1936, Kellogg himself was present for the dedication.

Third Street’s makeover capped years of city-wide public investment that included 28 school buildings, 300 acres of new parks, imposing bridges, miles of roads and parkways, improved river shipping, a new regional sanitation facility, and Holman Field airport upgrades.⁴⁰

Downtown Development

St. Paul’s massive public works program of the 1920s and ’30s, together with the impact of an expanding population and the new automotive age, spurred the city’s business community to undertake its own unprecedented building



Constructed in 1931, the First National Bank Building is still an imposing structure in St. Paul. Designed by an architectural firm in Chicago, construction of the bank took a year and at 402 feet in height with another one hundred feet for the lighted 1st sign on the roof, it was the tallest building in the city until 1985 when the Jackson Tower at Galtier Plaza was completed. Photo by Kenneth M. Wright. Photo courtesy of Jay Pfaender.

boom, despite the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed. This private sector growth produced major commercial development throughout the city and created new office, retail, and manufacturing facilities and a more attractive and modern cityscape. It was driven by people living and working within the city who were emotionally committed to its future. In their minds, St. Paul stood tall among American cities of a certain size, including its twin to the west.

Few people today seem to be aware of the scale of construction that took place. The city's present built environment largely went up all at once, from the mid-20s to the mid-30s. Almost all of the new buildings downtown from this period survived in 2014, some of them architectural landmarks, while the largest of the structures of that era in Dayton's Bluff, the Midway, and Highland sadly are gone. Development would collapse abruptly by the mid-1930s, of course, and would not resume in St. Paul or most other American cities until the mid-1950s. While the boom lasted, it was an extraordinary scene to behold and should be celebrated as the most productive period in city history.

More building construction took place in the downtown St. Paul area in the thirteen years beginning about 1923 than during any comparable period, before or since. This activity outpaced most other cities of similar size and reflected the remarkable but now forgotten local business vitality of that time, beginning with the new Union Depot. Other new projects followed in rapid succession.⁴¹

Dayton's Bluff Development

The private commercial building boom of the 1920s and '30s was particularly robust in Dayton's Bluff where Minnesota Mining, Hamm's Brewery, and Seeger's were located.

The rapidly expanding automobile industry had an enormous impact on real estate development in St. Paul. It also had a multiplier effect on other local businesses.

The massive new Ford Assembly Plant produced scores of small car and truck sales and service establishments

all over town and led to the construction of thousands of homes in Highland Park for workers at the new plant. In turn, Minnesota Mining created an entire product line to serve the automobile industry that accounted for much of the company's growth in the 1920s. This expansion created hundreds of manufacturing jobs, which attracted thousands of people to new homes on the East Side. Even an established firm like Seeger's benefited indirectly from the production

of cars and trucks because the buyers of all those new homes in Highland, Como Park, and the East Side needed refrigerators for their homes, not to mention the other consumer goods available from Montgomery Ward at its huge new store on University Avenue in the Midway.

It also seemed that everyone wanted a new car. Clusters of dealerships popped up north of Seven Corners, on East Seventh Street near Minnesota Mining and Hamm's, on a three-block stretch

Downtown Buildings List: 1920–1939

<i>Original Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Status</i>
Minnesota Hotel	1922	Razed
U.S. Commercial Post Office	1922	Razed
St. Paul Terminal Warehouse	1923	Extant
St. Paul Union Depot	1923	Extant
Island Station Power Plant	1923	Razed
High Bridge Power Plant	1923	Razed
Builders Exchange Building	1924	Razed
Labor Temple Building	1924	Razed
St. Paul Gas Light Building	1925	Extant
Lowry Hotel	1927	Extant
Municipal Grain Terminal	1927	Partially Extant
Minnesota Building	1929	Extant
Public Safety Building	1930	Partially Extant
First National Bank Building	1931	Extant
Auditorium Addition	1931	Extant
Women's City Club	1931	Extant
Cardozo Furniture Building	1931	Razed
Salvation Army Women's Home	1931	Razed
Bethesda Hospital	1932	Extant
City Hall and Courthouse	1932	Extant
Lowry Medical Arts Building	1932	Extant
State Office Building	1932	Extant
Northern States Power Building	1934	Extant
U.S. Post Office & Custom House	1934	Extant
Tri-State Telephone Building	1936	Extant
West Publishing Addition	1936	Extant
Mickey's Diner	1937	Extant
Holman Field Administration Building	1939	Extant

Dayton's Bluff Buildings List: 1920–1939

<i>Original Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Status</i>
Minnesota Mining–Building 4	1924	Razed
Minnesota Mining–Building 14	1929	Razed
Hamm's Brewery–Brew House	1934	Extant
Hamm's Brewery–Garage	1937	Extant
Hamm's Brewery–Headquarters	1937	Extant
Minnesota Mining–Building 20	1937	Razed
Wolff Chrysler–Plymouth	1938	Extant
Kemper Chevrolet	1938	Extant
Minnesota Mining–Building 21	1939	Extant

Midway/Highland Buildings List: 1920–1939

<i>Original Name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Status</i>
Montgomery Ward	1921	Razed
Midway Office Building	1922	Razed
St. Paul Casket Company	1922	Extant
Brown & Bigelow	1925	Razed
Griggs Cooper Sanitary Foods	1925	Extant
Ford Assembly Plant	1925	Razed
Mack Truck Sales & Service	1926	Extant
Krank Manufacturing	1926	Extant
GM Trucks Sales & Service	1928	Extant
Brown-Jasper Store Fixtures	1930	Extant
Red Wing Stoneware	1930	Extant
Borchert-Ingersoll	1931	Extant
Twin Cities Wholesale Grocery	1931	Extant
Quality Park Investment Co.	1934	Extant
Hudson Commercial Block	1937	Extant

of Grand Avenue, and along University Avenue west of Lexington. Dealers like Kline, Midway, Saxon, Whitaker, and others sold cars with familiar names like Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Ford, Plymouth, and Pontiac.⁴²

Other dealerships sold more exotic brands like Auburn, Chandler, Erskine, Essex, Graham, Hudson, Hupmobile, LaSalle, Marquette, Oakland, Packard, Pierce-Arrow, REO, Studebaker, Whippet, and Willys-Knight. These dealers included Warren-Given Inc. (Marquette) at the northeast corner of Grand and Milton; Northern Motors (Hupmobile) on Univer-

sity Avenue; and Joy Brothers (Packard), Cleland-Hughes Motors (Oakland), Fredericksen Motors (Willys-Knight and Whippet), and Odell Motors (Pierce Arrow) north of Seven Corners. By 1930, the *City Directory* had nearly 80 automobile-related addresses on University Avenue alone!⁴³

Most of the dealers in the exotic brands were long gone and forgotten by World War II. By 2014, it was difficult to find any car or truck dealerships left within the St. Paul city limits. Almost all of them had either gone out of business or had moved to the suburbs.



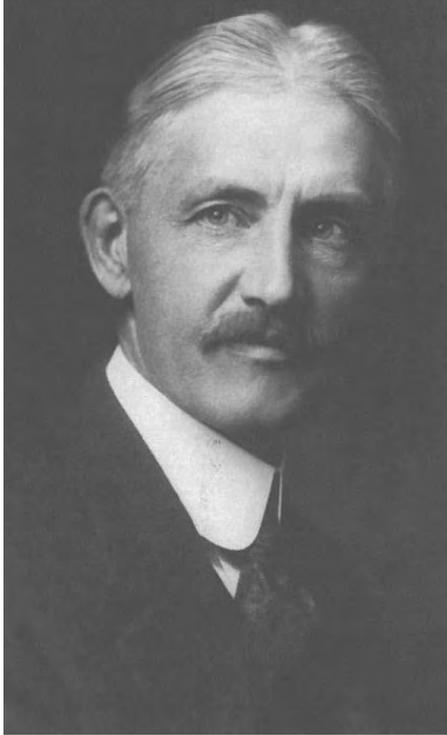
Thomas F. Ellerbe (1892–1987) inherited the Ellerbe architectural firm from his father and won the competition for the design of the interior of the new St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. Photo courtesy of Bonnie Richter.

Midway Development

The Midway District benefitted from the new automotive age just as it had from the extension of the streetcar line along University Avenue in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The district's main appeal was the Minnesota Transfer Railroad (MTR), founded in 1883 by James J. Hill. MTR attracted many of the city's wholesalers from their historic base in cramped Lowertown to larger sites on western University Avenue.

Located on a vast site north of the avenue between Prior and Cleveland, MTR provided transfer and terminal services to nine major railroads that owned the company as well as customers along the miles of side tracks weaving through the industrial blocks in the area. Beginning as the first site of the St. Paul Union Stockyards that eventually relocated to South St. Paul, MTR over time expanded the Midway into the state's primary industrial, commercial, and freight hauling center from about 1910 to 1940.⁴⁴

At its peak, MTR funneled up to 3,500 railcars a day through its yards and originated and delivered up to 400 railcar loads of freight to and from the industries along its lines. According to economist Ronald Shuman, MTR transformed St. Paul into a "gateway" city for the sale and



Clarence H. Johnston (1859–1936) was a prolific architect in St. Paul in the early twentieth century. He, along with Thomas Ellerbe and Clarence Wigington, designed many of the architecturally significant buildings in the city between the 1920s and the 1950s. Photo courtesy of Paul Clifford Larson.

distribution of consumer goods, second only to the Minneapolis grain business as a major driver of the region's economy. Its prominence attracted the new trucking industry in the 1920s, which by 1940 had grown to twenty separate motor freight operations and more than fifty businesses relating to trucking in one way or another. Geography thus made the Midway a compelling location as the two central cities coalesced over time into a single growing market.⁴⁵ The list on the previous page identifies the major buildings constructed in the Midway and Highland areas in the 1920s and '30s. As was the case in the downtown, this flurry of construction projects is indicative of strong and sustained private investment in St. Paul.⁴⁶

In 1920, Montgomery Ward bought 20 acres at the southeast corner of University and Pascal in the Midway from Twin City Rapid Transit Company, which operated the region's streetcar system. The catalog retailer then built a three-story retail and an eight-story distribution center for a combined 1.2 million square feet, the largest structure built in the Twin Cities until the 1960s. It was replaced by a shopping center in the 1980s, which included a pale imitation of the Ward's tower.

By 2014, the Midway was moving away from its industrial past. The west end of University Avenue in particular was transitioning to other land uses, anchored by a new light rail line. Buildings formerly used for automotive, distribution, and industrial purposes were being converted to offices, retail, and housing for a diverse group of residents. By the end of the 1930s, St. Paul had undergone a remarkable transformation. Downtown's three Art Deco masterworks were completed within three years of each other. They were the city's skyline for the next fifty years, presenting a powerful and photogenic image to residents and visitors alike.

James A. Stolpestad is the founder and a principal of the Exeter Group, which specializes in the development of commercial properties. This firm is currently restoring the Custom House, the former U.S. Post Office and Custom House on East Kellogg Boulevard. This article is a composite of some material found in Mr. Stolpestad's new book, Custom House: Restoring a St. Paul Landmark in Lower-town, which the Ramsey County Historical Society is publishing this month.



Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (3M) expanded its presence on St. Paul's East Side in the 1920s. Today the only 3M building that remains on this site as seen in this aerial photo from 1924 is the handsome, white, low-rise headquarters building in the right center. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Endnotes

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2. Cronon, 341–3; Smith, *ibid.*; Wilson, *ibid.*
3. David L. A. Gordon, “The Other Author of the 1908 Plan of Chicago: Edward H. Bennett—Urban Designer, Planner and Architect,” *Planning Perspectives*, 25:2 (April 2010): 229–30; Smith, 19–20.
4. Smith, 86–91.
5. Alexander Garvin, *The American City, What Works, What Doesn't* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 512–15.
6. Joan E. Draper, *Edward H. Bennett, Architect and City Planner, 1874–1954* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1982), 6–16.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Garvin, *Ibid.*
9. George H. Herrold, *The Story of Planning St. Paul from the Beginnings to 1953*, unpublished typed manuscript, Minnesota Historical Society, 5 (hereinafter cited as Herrold, *Story*); Gary Phelps, *A History of the Minnesota State Capitol Area* (St. Paul: Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board, 1983), D7.
10. Herrold, *Story*, 14–16; Phelps, D7, E2, E5.
11. Herrold, *Story*, *Ibid.*; Phelps, E1.
12. Herrold, *Story*, 107–8.
13. Herrold, *Story*, 107–8; Garvin, 428, 432; *Village of Euclid v. Amber Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365 (1926)
14. Herrold, *Story*, 56, 61–5.
15. Herrold, *Story*, 64–5; James B. Bell, *From Arcade Street to Main Street: A History of the Seeger Refrigerator Company, 1902-1984* (St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society), xiii. In 1955 Seeger Refrigerator Company merged with Whirlpool Corporation, which closed the St. Paul plant in 1957 and terminated 2,600 workers.
16. Jeffrey A. Hess and Paul Clifford Larson, *St. Paul's Architecture: A History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 200–1; Alan A. Altshuler, *The City Planning Process: A Political Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 40–2, 58, 80–1. Journalist Hodgson was a key city insider for sixteen years, first as secretary to Mayors Winn Power and V.R. Irvin for four years (1914–1918); then as mayor for eight years (1918–1922, 1926–1930); then as city finance commissioner for two years (1924–1925); and finally as Ramsey County commissioner for four years (1922–1926). See www.stpaul.gov/listofmayors.
17. Herrold, *Story* (including attached opposition letters from W.W. Price on behalf of St. Paul Real Estate Board), 60–8, 109, 113a–g.
18. Plan of St. Paul, 7–8, 15–21.
19. *Ibid.*, 22–29, 42–44; Herrold, *Story*, 109, 112–13. Edward H. Bennett likely produced the first draft of the zoning code with help from City Attorney Carlton F. McNally (later a Ramsey County District Court Judge).
20. Herrold, *Story*, 87–90.
21. Herrold, *Story*, *Ibid.*
22. St. Paul Association Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, August 8 and September 7, 1928;
23. St. Paul Association Weekly News Bulletins on September 12, October 10, 17, 24, and 31, 1928; Herrold, *Story*, 90; George H. Herrold, “City Planning in Saint Paul,” *City Planning*, VII:4 (October, 1931): 221(hereinafter cited as Herrold, *Planning*); William N. Carey, “Five-Year Construction Program Adopted,” *Civil Engineering*, I:15 (December 1931): 1331–2; Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 257–8.
24. Herrold *Planning*, *Ibid.*; Wingerd, *Ibid.*
25. St. Paul Association Weekly News Bulletin, November 7, 1928, including statement of thanks by Mayor Laurence C. Hodgson.
26. *1930 St. Paul Public Works Report*, 2.
27. John W. Diers, *St. Paul Union Depot* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 6.
28. Plan of St. Paul, 54.
29. *Ibid.*, 53.
30. *Ibid.*, 27.
31. George H. Herrold, “The Necessity for Coordinated Planning,” *Civil Engineering*, I:15 (December 1931): 1327–31.
32. Plan of St. Paul, 47.
33. *1933-34-35 SP Public Works Report*, 3, 26, 35-6; *1936-37 SP Public Works Report*, 3, 5.
34. *1933-34-35 SP Public Works Report*, 3, 6, 26.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Kenneth Bjork, *Saga in Steel and Concrete: Norwegian Engineers in America* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Society, 1947), 139–154.
37. *Ibid.*, including the George Shepard remark quoted at 140, note 40; Hess and Larson, 151-3; John A. Weeks III, *Bridges And Structures Of The Mississippi River*; second edition, August 2007, www.johnweeks.com/river_mississippi/ (hereinafter cited as Weeks) (reference Saint Paul Area, Robert Street Bridge).
38. Bjork; Hess and Larson, 151–3; John O. Anfinson, *The River We Have Wrought: A History of the Upper Mississippi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 160. Hennepin County constructed the 4,119-foot Mendota Bridge over the Minnesota River in 1926, which was the longest concrete arch bridge in the world at the time. For a description of the twin Minnesota Transfer Railroad bridges, see 106 Group, Central Corridor report, 147–154.
39. *1933-34-35 SP Public Works Report*, 4; *1935-37 SP Public Works Report*, 5.
40. *1922-29 SP Parks, Playgrounds, and Public Buildings Report*, 7, 11-29, 44-8; *1926 SP Public Works Report*, 42-3; *1928 SP Public Works Report*, 24.
41. Diers, 89–93, 98–106, 109–130.
42. *1929 St. Paul City Directory*, 22-30, 684, 706, 1817–18; Billie Young and David Lanegran, *The Renaissance of an Urban Street* (St. Cloud: North Star Press of St. Cloud, Inc., 1996), 32; Millet *AIA Guide to the Twin Cities: The Essential Source on the Architecture of Minneapolis and St. Paul* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007), 458–9
43. *Ibid.*
44. 106 Group Ltd., *Phase II Architectural History Investigation for the Proposed Central Transit Corridor, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, Minnesota*, September 2004, 36–9, 42.
45. *Ibid.*, 147–154.
46. The buildings list was researched and produced by White Pine Press LLC and Storied Creative LLC using data from the 106 Group Study.
47. *St. Paul Daily News*, editorial, August 15, 1931.

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This 1939 postcard shows the skyline of St. Paul from the Mississippi River following the completion of a period of major public and private construction in the city during the 1930s. For more on how St. Paul changed during the Great Depression, see page 16. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.