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St. Paul, MN 55102

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

**Special Issue:
The Como Shops —
Transformed Into
Bandana Square**



Volume 19
Number 1

This special issue of *Ramsey County History* is published with the assistance of the AHW Corporation.

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ON THE COVER: This is the earliest known view of the Como Shops, an illustration that appeared in Northwest Magazine in 1886.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Photographs on page 6 (of the office-storehouse) and on page 7 are from the files of the Ramsey County Historical Society. Those on pages 11 and 12 are by Nancy Tracy. All other photographs and illustrations, including the original architectural drawings, are from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Dr. G. M. Stern and his family at their residence at 1265 W. Como Lake Drive. Cary Warren resided in this same house from 1887 to 1897, Dr. Stern from 1904 to 1933.

Swamps, Farms, Boom or Bust — Como Neighborhood's Colorful History

By Patricia Murphy and Gary Phelps

As the Northern Pacific Railway's historic Como Shops are brought to life again by the AHW Corporation as Bandana Square, part of St. Paul's new Energy Park located south of Como Park between Lexington and Snelling Avenues, they may well play as important a role in the life and economy of the surrounding neighborhoods as they did from the mid-1880s until their final close-down in 1982.

Before construction of the shops, the Como neighborhood was an undeveloped area of

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timberland, swamps, a few farms, and a few institutions, charitable and otherwise. It was traversed by the Red River Oxcart Trail which roughly followed what is now St. Anthony Avenue, north of Interstate 94, and the Military Road between Point Douglas and Fort Ripley. Completed as far west as St. Anthony in 1854, the road ran about half a mile north of the oxcart trail.

The 1867 Bennett map of Ramsey County shows few buildings near the site of the future Como Shops, a handful of small farms interspersed with platted but undeveloped areas, and sizeable areas of uncleared land. Edward Duffield Neill's *History of Ramsey County* (1881) notes that several "Frenchmen" were living in cabins along the wooded shores of Lake Como "at an early day." One of the first known settlers was Charles L. Perry who during the 1840s grew potatoes along the shores of what he probably named Lake Como after his birthplace in the Swiss-Italian Alps.

Gradually a number of speculators became interested in the Lake Como area. As Neill explained it:

The speculation in town lots and out-lots was indulged in by the early settlers, who thought they saw in the future growth of the city of St. Paul a fortune in the sale of small tracts of land to those who would wish to find homes out from the bustle and confusion of city life.¹

One of the most ambitious, if not the most colorful, of the real estate speculators was Henry "Broad Acres" McKenty, also known as "Mac," who came to St. Paul from Pennsylvania in 1851, quickly acquired much of the land around Lake Como, and platted several areas on the east side of the lake. T.M. Newson reported in *Pen Pictures of St. Paul* (1886) that:

He came to St. Paul just at a time when his genius as a real estate man had ample opportunity for free scope, and he led off in his special department as the great warrior of his profession. He was pre-eminently king!

McKenty's major contribution to the eventual settlement of the Como area was to build the first road to the lake:

... without bothering about formalities, McKenty, at his own expense, hired contractor John Bell to build a road. The road started at Rondo and Rice and followed a slightly zigzag course in a northwesterly direction, crossing approximately what is now Thomas and Western, and about 100 feet north of Dale and Minnehaha; continuing to about a line with St. Albans, then turning almost due north on a line close to the present east boundary of Calvary Cemetery, circling east and north of Weber's Pond (a mud hole ... between Como and Front, about a block west of Dale) and then to the east end of the lake. The alley behind the houses from 730 Como to 800 Como, and the short stub of Como Place north of the N.P. tracks are still remnants of the old Como Road. It was finished in September, 1857 ... McKenty provided some boats, including two which were classed as "yachts," and stocked the lake with fish. Believe it or not, there is a record of a 20 lb. pickerel being caught at Como on September 23, 1866.²

McKenty spent \$6,000 in gold to construct

Aldrich's Hotel on the shores of Lake Como around 1870.





Real estate entrepreneur Cary Warren's residence at 1265 W. Como Lake Drive.

the road, according to Newson. *The Weekly Minnesotan* reported on March 27, 1857, that it required "two bridges each over 100 feet long across two wet sloughs" and that McKenty "is pressing forward his improvements at a rapid rate, despite the 'hard times,' and has constructed excellent avenues all around the lake; about 75 men are at work for him constantly."

McKenty's empire began to fall apart during the Depression of 1857. Some years later, on August 10, 1869, he killed himself. The tragedy did not end there, however. Soon afterwards his youngest daughter and his wife also committed suicide, even though the St. Paul City Council had belatedly voted \$5,000 in bonds for his wife as repayment of McKenty's expenses in constructing the Como Road.

Soon after the road was completed, at least three large hotels were built on the lake. One, the Aldrich, stood near the site of the present park pavilion. Its owner, W.B. Aldrich, equipped it with a lookout tower, bowling alley, merry-go-round, and other attractions to lure city residents. By 1863 James C. Burbank was operating an omnibus line along the Como Road to bring city residents to the lake on summer evenings.

THE FIRST RAILROAD line in Minnesota was laid through the area south of the site of the future Como Shops. Completed in 1862, the St. Paul and Pacific line (later known as the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba, and finally as the Great Northern) connected St. Paul with the small community of St. Anthony, now east Minneapolis. However, the railroad apparently did little to attract settlers to the area in the 1860s and 1870s. Plat books for the period show little

settlement in the neighborhood. Minnesota's first train crossing fatality occurred on these tracks where they intersected with McKenty's Como Road. On July 3, 1863, a Captain Bennet drove his wagon onto the newly completed tracks only to be struck and killed by the train — an ironical ending for an opponent of those who had wanted to construct a bridge at this point. The bridge was finally built about 1868.³

By the 1870s the city of St. Paul was beginning to take a more active interest in improving the Como area. Streets were cut through west of Rice Street, and the area immediately north of what is now University Avenue gradually was settled. McKenty's Como Road eventually deteriorated to the point that the Chamber of Commerce termed it the "Swamp Route" and on February 21, 1878, the City Council approved the construction of a new road from Rice Street to the lake to replace it.⁴ That road is now Como Avenue.

The city also took major strides toward establishing Como Park in the 1870s. In 1872 nationally-known Chicago landscape architect Horace W.S. Cleveland was invited by the City Council to design a system of parks and parkways for the city. The following year five park commissioners were appointed, among them James C. Burbank, and the city issued bonds to buy the park land. Much of the land was purchased from hotel and farm owner W.B. Aldrich, and from former Minnesota governor William R. Marshall, who was one of the prime movers behind the settlement of the nearby St. Anthony Park area.

THE PARK PROJECT soon became



Streetcar on the Como-Harriet Interurban Line near the entrance of Como Park. The bridge still stands just east of Lexington, as does the Como Park streetcar station at right, now park headquarters for the Parks and Recreation Department of St. Paul.

controversial. On July 2, 1873, the *St. Paul Dispatch* reported the proceedings of the City Council meeting at which Alderman J.W. Fisher recommended reconsideration of the resolution which had led to the purchase of the park land. He "... concluded with an appeal to the Council not to make laws in favor of the rich who could 'ride in chaises,' and against the poor who could not afford to indulge in such articles."⁵

Nearly a year later the *Dispatch* printed a petition to the City Council bearing the names of 148 of the city's most prominent citizens requesting that Como Park be sold and stating that:

*What we most need is sewerage, elevators, free bridges and good roads. We ask you as taxpayers that you so regulate the burden of taxation for the purpose of promoting the future prosperity of St. Paul and not for the advancement of wild real estate speculators.*⁶

One prominent citizen reportedly went so far as to say that St. Paul would not need any parks until fifty years had passed — that is, until 1924.⁷ The dissidents did not prevail, and by the 1890s Superintendent of Parks Frederick Nussbaumer had begun the work of dredging the lake, landscaping, and otherwise improving the park.

In addition to the hotels, scattered farmhouses and a handful of ice houses on Lake Como, several charitable facilities were erected near the Como Shops site in the 1860s and 1870s. The Ramsey County Poor Farm was established in the 1860s at what is now Como and Snelling Avenues, the present site of the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. The Poor Farm's 200 acres included a dwelling or alms house, barns, and a "pest house" for isolating inmates with communicable dis-

eases. Neill reported in his *History of Ramsey County* that:

There are over forty inmates, the most of them aged and decrepit or weak minded. One of the inmates, Joseph Del Mont, was born in Toronto Canada in 1782; he is quite smart for one so old.*

Nearby, also, was the Minnesota State Reform School, established in 1867 along the St. Paul and St. Anthony road south of the Como Shops site, on what is now the campus of Concordia College. The 30-acre complex included a stone house and barn, a school and dining hall, and, after 1877, running water.

The House of the Good Shepherd moved its home for dependent and neglected girls to the Como area in 1883. It was located on a 27½-acre site on a rise of land called Mount Eudes, near the intersection of Blair and Chatsworth — the site today of the Wilder Foundation complex.

ANOTHER EARLY institution in the neighborhood was the St. Paul Workhouse, on a 40-acre tract of land southwest of Lake Como and north of the Como Shops site. The workhouse is listed in St. Paul city directories from 1881 to 1960, and its facilities included a broom factory. In the 1890s workhouse inmates, most of whom were convicted of drunkenness, were reportedly recruited to help Superintendent Nussbaumer landscape Como Park, build walkways, playgrounds, stables, even a superintendent's

**In other words, he was 99 years old.*

residence. Workhouse directors reputedly cut down twenty acres of trees near the workhouse to plant a potato patch.

In September, 1885, the Minnesota State Agricultural Society sponsored the first state fair to be held on the new fairgrounds, the fair's permanent home which was established on the site of the old Ramsey County Poor Farm, northwest of the Como Shops. Ramsey County had donated the site to the society in order to attract the fair to St. Paul, rather than to its arch rival, Minneapolis.

One of the oldest institutions still in existence in the Como Shops area is Hamline University which was established in Red Wing in 1854 but closed following the financial crisis of 1873 and reopened in 1880 in St. Paul, south of the future shops. Initially the area surrounding Hamline was essentially undeveloped. The school had no dormitories. Students lived in one of several new boarding houses or commuted to the Hewitt Station stop at Hamline Avenue on the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad. By 1881 Hamline University's board had plans:

... to erect during the coming season, a building to be known as the Ladies' Home of Hamline University, for the convenience of young ladies who desire to secure boarding near the university. It will be large enough to accommodate thirty or forty pupils, and will be placed under the care of a judicious matron. The object of this institution is to give to the young ladies placed in it a degree of privacy and security which will make their parents feel that they are as safe at school as if under their own supervision.⁷

Shortly after Hamline opened its doors in St. Paul, the Northern Pacific Railway acquired its site near Lake Como and began plans to construct the shop complex. Evidently, in 1882 the railroad had conducted a survey of the area which was cloaked in secrecy in order to avoid land speculation — something which quickly became inevitable. In March, 1884, the Northern Pacific's superintendent of machinery, motive power and rolling stock wrote to the company's general manager about the site for the shops:

I have selected what appears most favorable for shops as regards character of grounds and fortunately it is so in other aspects. On the north joining this property is Como Park and the several Park Villages now developing rapidly in this direction. On this account it will be a favorable locality for the workmen

and suitable for a suburban station being about midway in the proposed line between two great cities. The character of the grounds is desirable for residence and evidently as healthy as any within reach... at Como we can at reasonable cost cover all desired facilities and not excite the displeasure of either city... a desirable suburb can be established affording business to the line while at the same time there need be no special discomfort in building these shops or in their operation as regards locality.⁸

On October 14, 1884, the *St. Paul Dispatch* reported in detail on plans for the shops and concurred with the railroad about the many amenities available to those who might settle in nearby areas:

The location selected for the erection of these shops, as viewed from a business standpoint, is considered one of the most advantageous on account of its proximity to St. Paul, Minneapolis and the transfer ground; on the other hand, its surrounds are conceded to be desirable; there is Como park on the north, the State Agricultural College on the northwest, Hamline university on the south east, and in addition to these surroundings, though of a different character, are the following: the city work house on the north east, the county poor house and farm on the north, and the state reform school on the south. It is not believed, however, that any of the last named institutions will be required by the workmen or their families, because, under the rules and regulations of Hamline university, no liquor can be sold within a mile of that institution.*

It is estimated that by the 1880s one-fourth of the city's labor force was employed by the railroads and their supporting industries.⁹ The first phase of construction at the shops was completed in 1886 and by 1888 200 people were employed in the Como Shops.¹⁰ Many other workers were employed by other railroad construction and maintenance facilities in St. Paul, such as the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Shops near Jackson Street, and the Chicago, St. Paul and Omaha Shops near Randolph and Toronto Streets. By attracting workers as well as related industries to St. Paul, the Northern Pacific and other railways made a major contribution to

*The Minnesota Transfer Railway.

the city's tremendous population growth — from 41,473 in 1880 to 214,744 in 1910.

BY THE TIME the Como Shops were completed in 1886, numerous residential developments were underway nearby. Such developments, it was hoped, would appeal to both railroad workers and to others who could commute to downtown St. Paul or Minneapolis by train. Among the first to settle near the shops may well have been some of the many Northern Pacific employees who were transferred from the Northern Pacific freight car shops in Brainerd to the Como Shops.¹¹ The Northern Pacific Railway Cooperative Building and Loan Society was organized for those workers who wished to build houses near the shops. The *Pioneer Press* reported on March 8, 1885 that the society:

... is an institution mostly composed of railroad employees, and will be the means of erecting a large number of dwellings in the vicinity of Como park and the new Northern Pacific shops. Over \$1,500 has been paid in, and building will commence at once.

Advertisements for lots in the Como Park Village plat, located between the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba tracks and the Northern Pacific tracks east of Snelling, proclaimed that:

... you have the quiet and comfort of a country home and all the privileges of city life, without city taxation. That the value of lots in Como Park Village will increase as rapidly as in any suburban plat about the city, and in all probability will double within twelve months and quadruple as soon as Como Park is improved and opened as pleasure grounds. Don't fail to secure enough ground in Como Park Village for a home before all the lots are sold which will probably be within six months, and certainly within twelve months.¹²

Those who were enticed by such a sales pitch must have been disappointed that soon they had to pay taxes. The area was annexed by the city of St. Paul between 1885 and 1887.

A "Short Line" service between St. Paul and Minneapolis began operating on the Northern Pacific tracks in the late summer of 1886. Depots were built at Warrendale, Snelling, and St. Anthony Park, making it easier for railroad workers who did not live within walking distance of the shops to commute. However, this line seemed plagued with prob-

lems from the beginning and by 1892 it ceased operations.

Warrendale, one of the areas served by the "Short Line," was a 52-acre residential development on the southwest shore of Lake Como, partially on the site of one of the old resort hotels. It was named for one of its promoters, Cary I. Warren. Prospective Warrendale homeowners could:

... look over numerous plans and select the one which pleases them in its external appearance, and is adapted internally to the wants of their family. In three months time the house is ready for occupancy, complete in every particular, and furnished with all modern conveniences.¹³

Prospective buyers were assured, too, that:

In order to keep out undesirable persons, secure good social conditions and realize the idea of a model suburban village, a condition will be attached to the sale of lots, requiring buildings, and at a cost of not less than \$2,000. This will effectually keep out the shanty population that drifts to the outskirts of great cities, and assure the purchasers of lots desirable neighbors.¹⁴

Among the amenities available to Warrendale residents were Lake Como, the Northern Pacific Warrendale depot, a Presbyterian church designed by local resident Charles Wallingford, and a large greenhouse. One of Warrendale's most prominent residents was St. Paul architect Augustus F. Gauger who was hired by the Warrendale Improvement Company to design many of the most imposing and ornate Victorian houses in Warrendale. He lived in a house of his own design at 1183 W. Como Lake Boulevard from its construction in 1886 until his death in 1929. The area attracted several employees from the nearby Como Shops, among them a carpenter, Kestel Osel, who lived in the Queen Anne style house which still stands at 1093 N. Oxford Street. Cary Warren also lived in Warrendale, on W. Como Boulevard.

By 1892, when the streetcar lines were extended to the area and water connections made to the city's main line, the Warrendale Improvement Company seemed to be on the verge of prosperity. Yet by that time only thirty houses had been built in the entire 218 lot addition. The company was devastated by the Panic of 1893, which left it with lots it could not sell and huge mortgage payments owed to creditors. In 1896 Cary Warren



Interior of the St. Paul Foundry Company at 500 W. Como Avenue, around 1920. It was one of the neighborhood's earliest industries.

moved to Louisville, Kentucky, and the following year the company defaulted on a \$30,000 mortgage. Scores of Warrendale lots were sold at a sheriff's sale on May 22, 1897.¹⁵

SURPRISINGLY LITTLE residential development occurred in the neighborhoods adjacent to the shops until well after the turn-of-the-century. Several possible explanations can be made for this. The Northern Pacific's commuter service in the district was inadequate and was discontinued in 1892. The financial crisis of 1893 put an end to many developers' plans in the area. Many St. Paulites preferred to move to new residential areas closer to downtown St. Paul. One impetus to settlement in the neighborhood was the construction of the streetcar lines in the 1890s. In 1891 tracks were laid on Lexington to Minnehaha, on Minnehaha to Snelling, Snelling to Como, and Como to Langford in St. Anthony Park.

The following year the tracks at the intersection of Dale and Front were extended to Como Park. In 1898 access to the park was improved with the completion of the Twin Cities' second interurban line (the first line was on University Avenue), known as the Como Interurban or Como-Harriet line. The present park headquarters building at Lexington and Horton long served as the streetcar station for park visitors.

Though little settlement occurred north and east of the Como Shops until well into the 20th century, sizeable residential developments began to appear in the neighborhoods south and east of the shops in the 1880s and 1890s. This was due in part to the proximity of the shops to a number of supporting

industries, such as iron foundries and lumber mills which were established along the railroad track beds, and to manufacturing concerns which were dependent on rail transportation for receiving raw materials and shipping their products.

Typical of such concerns was the St. Paul Foundry Company which was established in 1877 by John L. Merriam, W.R. Merriam, Amherst H. Wilder, and others. The foundry is listed at its present site (at what is now 500 W. Como Avenue) in the 1887 *Curtice Atlas of the City of St. Paul*. By 1897 the company had several buildings on its eight-acre site on Como Avenue at its intersection with the Great Northern tracks, and employed 150 to 200 workers. Among its products were bridge and railroad iron work, steel and iron beams and girders, and architectural iron work including cast iron storefronts, many of which still adorn some Victorian commercial structures in St. Paul. The foundry, now the Maxson Corporation, still stands on W. Como.

ALSO LOCATED NEAR the Great Northern tracks and Como Avenue was the John Martin Lumber Company, incorporated in 1885 and a major employer for workers living in that part of St. Paul. North of these industries on a 10½-acre site at the intersection of Front and Mackubin Streets was the Crex Carpet Company, established in 1897 on the site of the Northwestern Cordage Company. Crex manufactured rugs made from Minnesota and Wisconsin grasses, and

eventually it became the largest manufacturer of such rugs in the world.¹⁶ By 1915 the company was also manufacturing "grass furniture used for porches and camping."¹⁷ The company went bankrupt during the Depression of the 1930s.

By the late 1880s, following a United States Supreme Court decision, Northern Pacific officials were beginning to worry that they would be forced to pay property taxes on the portion of the Como Shops site which was not actually occupied by shop buildings. Representatives of the Minnesota Lawn Tennis Club approached railroad officials about building a lawn tennis grounds on a three-acre site along Snelling Avenue, near the Northern Pacific depot. The shops' comptroller and land commissioner A.G. Postlethwaite, wrote to the company's vice president in New York on March 26, 1886, and stated:

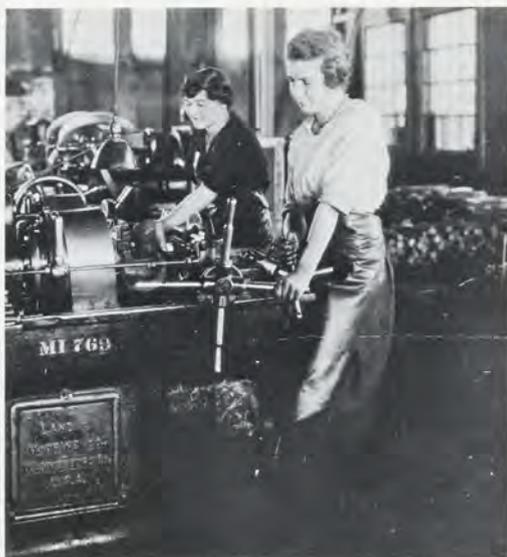
The proposed location of the club grounds will bring considerable business to the new line, but even if it did not, I do not believe we should charge more than a nominal rent. I doubt whether it would be policy to charge anything, because if we do it might make us liable for taxes on the frontage on Snelling Avenue, which would amount to more than any rental we should get. I think we should say that they can have the use of the ground until the company requires it, providing they will pay any taxes or assessments that may be levied on the property.¹⁸

The club accepted the railroad's offer to use the land for five years, after Postlethwaite had a "conversation" with them about using the Northern Pacific train to reach the lawn tennis grounds. As Postlethwaite explained it to the company's vice president in a letter dated April 1, 1886:

... they said that their object in locating on Snelling Avenue was to get as near to the trains of our new line as possible. Our station will be the most convenient to the grounds so long as the Manitoba Company's station is permitted to remain in its present location, and even if that company should move its station to Snelling Avenue, our line will always be the most popular to that point as the scenery along it is much more pleasing to the traveler than that upon the Manitoba road.¹⁹*

Northern Pacific officials also made several attempts to attract industries to the Como

*Near Hamline Avenue.



Women operating a lathe at the Como Shops. The date of this photo is uncertain; it may have been taken during the first World War when women in the industrial workplace were more common.

Shops site in order to avoid assessments on the land. In 1887 the Northern Pacific began negotiations to sell a ten to 12-acre site on the west end of the shops property to the Peteler Portable Railway Company of Minneapolis. However, the sale never materialized.²⁰ The company also tried to sell a 30-acre site near the shops to the newly-organized Walter A. Wood Harvester Company for \$1,500 per acre.²¹ The Wood Company decided, instead, to move to the former site of the St. Paul Harvester Plant near the intersection of Case Avenue and Hazel Street — the present site of the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Plant on St. Paul's East Side.

ONE OF THE LARGEST industries built near the shops after the turn-of-the-century was the Koppers Coke Plant at 1000 N. Hamline Avenue, directly south of the shops. Construction of the \$2,000,000 plant began in 1916. The plant, which employed hundreds of workers, produced coke, gas, ammonia, tar, and benzol. Much of the gas was sold locally for home and industrial use. As early as 1918, area residents complained about odors from the plant. The *St. Paul Dispatch* reported on April 25, 1918, that members of the Hamline Civic Association were furious, "... that protests against the fume nuisance in the neighborhood of the new Minnesota By-Products Company's plant might be attributed to enemy propaganda, because the plant is engaged in the manufacture of war products." The secretary of the association stated in the

same article that, "If the investigating committee* believes it is a desirable place in which to live, they can buy real estate in the neighborhood mighty cheap right now."

In the 1920s Como Zoo was expanded with the addition of the animals from the Harriet Island menagerie which had closed, primarily due to flooding and pollution from the Mississippi River.

As recently as the 1940s and 1950s the Como Shops were fully utilized. The work force at the shops increased from 370 in 1940 to 446 in 1950. The residential areas north and northeast of the shops were built up after World War II as returning servicemen created a demand for housing.

In April, 1946, St. Paul's citizens voted on a referendum to allow main line natural gas service to the residents and industries of St. Paul. The most outspoken opponent of the plan was the Koppers Coke Company which held a virtual monopoly on the county's bottled gas market — manufacturing it at its Como plant. Proponents of the referendum included 3M and other large St. Paul industries gearing up for post-war production. The referendum passed by an 8 to 1 margin, and soon St. Paul had natural gas service. The Koppers Coke Plant survived until 1979 when it was shut down rather than pay progressive fines for violating federal air quality standards.

A SAD EPISODE in the history of the Como Shops occurred in 1948 in the boiler house complex. One of the shop's engineers shot to death four other workers, including the shop superintendent, before killing himself.²²

Perhaps the most short-lived landmark in the area near the Como Shops was Midway Stadium. In 1953 St. Paul voters approved a \$2,000,000 bond issue to finance its construction, hoping to lure a major league baseball team to the Midway area. However, Minneapolis won the battle when it built Met Stadium in Bloomington and persuaded the Washington Senators to become the Minnesota Twins. Midway Stadium opened in 1957 and housed the St. Paul Saints until they moved to Omaha after the 1960 season. Midway Stadium was thus little more than a white elephant for the remaining twenty-one years of its existence. Its demolition was one of the first phases of the construction of Energy Park.

**A committee of the St. Paul Association of Commerce, who had referred the case to the United States department of justice.*

By the time the Saints moved to Omaha, the work force at the Como Shops had declined to 291. Five years later it was down to 280. By 1967 the shops had the smallest work force of the five remaining Northern Pacific Railroad shops which, beside the Como Shops, included those at Brainerd, Minnesota; South Tacoma, Washington; Laurel, Montana; and Livingston, Montana. In that year the railroad's industrial engineering department issued a report which suggested that the Como Shops be gradually phased out of operation to make way for industrial development of the property. By this time there were only about 200 remaining Northern Pacific passenger cars requiring service at the shops, contrasted with 1,161 in 1912.²³ After the merger of the Northern Pacific, Great Northern and Burlington lines in 1970, passenger cars could be serviced at shops owned by the other lines. The Como Shops finally closed in 1982.

THE AREA HAS UNDERGONE a radical transformation in the past five years with the closing of the shops and the Koppers Coke Plant, the demolition of Midway Stadium, and the construction of Energy Park. The St. Paul Port Authority and the city's department of planning and economic development had recognized the potential of the area for residential, commercial and industrial use, however, and had begun the planning for the redevelopment of the shops and the surrounding area well before the shops actually ceased operations.

The master plan for the 218-acre Energy Park was approved by the St. Paul City Council in September, 1981. Now nearing completion, Energy Park has attracted national attention as the first development in the country where industrial, business and residential facilities are located around a central energy system.

It also may be the only industrial park in the country which has as its center a cluster of historic, renovated railroad shop buildings — a complex which is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a National Historic District. The Como Shops themselves — newly renovated — have become Bandana Square, a shopping complex at the center of the Amherst H. Wilder Corporation's residential development which blends with the historic shop buildings.

Energy Park, whose site plan was developed by St. Paul architects Hammel, Green, and Abrahamson, is equipped with a central energy plant which will provide heating and cooling for all the Energy Park buildings at



an anticipated savings of 20 to 25 percent over conventional heating and cooling systems. Other facilities at Energy Park will include Control Data Corporation's \$17.5 million Energy Technology Center, the Marfield Corporation's \$5.5 million Energy Park Business Center, and the GNB Batteries (Gould, Inc.) manufacturing plant which is being renovated at a cost of \$8.1 million. In addition to providing a boost to the economy of St. Paul, Energy Park will bring new life to the historic neighborhoods surrounding the Como Shops.

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Ramsey County History
published semi-annually by
the Ramsey County Historical Society
Landmark Center
Room 323
75 West Fifth Street
St. Paul, Minn. 55102

THE GIBBS HOUSE

at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County Historical Society as a restored farm house of the mid-nineteenth century period.

The Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. Its chief function is to collect and preserve the history of the city and the county and share that history with the people who live here. The Society is the county's historian. It preserves those things from the past that are the community's treasures — its written records through the Society's library; its historic sites through establishment of the Irvine Park Historic District and its successful efforts to help prevent destruction of the Old Federal Courts Building, now Landmark Center. It shares these records through the publishing of its magazine, brochures, pamphlets, and prints; through conducting historic sites tours of the city, teaching classes, producing exhibits on the history of the city, and maintaining its museum on rural county history. The Gibbs Farm Museum, the oldest remaining farm home in Ramsey County, was acquired by the Society in 1949 and opened to the public in 1954 as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler. In 1966 the Society moved onto the property a one-room rural country schoolhouse dating from the 1870s. Now restored to the period of the late 1890s, the school is used for classes, meetings, and as the center for a summer schoolhouse program for children.

Society headquarters are located in Landmark Center, an historic Richardsonian Romanesque structure in downtown St. Paul, where it maintains the center's only permanent exhibit, a history of the building during the seventy-five years it was the federal government's headquarters in St. Paul.



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