



Historic Resources

Where We Have Been

In August, 1886, 31 people signed a petition asking the Hennepin County Commissioners to incorporate the Village of St. Louis Park. The city derived its name from the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad. The word “Park” was added to eliminate any confusion with St. Louis, Missouri. The community was linked to the railroad because the community leaders believed the railroad would help transform the village into a center of trade and industry.

A considerable amount of industry did develop, but the predominant development in the city was residential use. The extension of the street car lines made it convenient for St. Louis Park residents to reach the large number of jobs created in a booming Minneapolis in the early 1900s. The street car may also be indirectly responsible for the lack of a “downtown” ever being fully developed in St. Louis Park. Travel to Minneapolis for shopping opportunities was also convenient by street car.

By 1940, the population of the Park had grown to 7,737 people. By 1955, the population had exploded to more than 40,000 people.

In 1954, the citizens of St. Louis Park proposed organizing as a charter city, which was accomplished in January, 1955. Since that time, the community has fully matured. Most of the vacant parcels have been developed and the city has begun to redevelop. As the city redevelops, it is important to take stock of past development and preserve the significant buildings in the physical and social development of the city.

Where We Are Today

St. Louis Park Historical Society

St. Louis Park is fortunate to have a Historical Society, founded in 1971, that is independently funded and managed by a Board of Directors. The Society’s website states: “The mission of the Society is the collection, preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the history of St. Louis Park, Minnesota.” One noted achievement of the founder, Marie Hartmann, was the saving of the historic Milwaukee Road Depot from demolition.

The objectives of the Historical Society are (summarized) as follows:

1. To locate and collect any material which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the City of St. Louis Park.
2. To disseminate historical information to any interested persons, groups, and institutions and to arouse interest in the history of the City of St. Louis Park.
3. To make this material available for study and research by individuals and scholars.
4. To accomplish these goals through the establishment of clearly defined collection, preservation, and dissemination policies and procedures.
5. To provide that all programs, functions and events of the Society, including membership, shall be made available to anyone regardless of race, color, age, national origin, marital status, disability, religious or political affiliation, gender, or sexual orientation.
6. And that this organization shall have the power to own property, apply for and receive grants, accept bequests, and establish and maintain an endowment fund for carrying out the above stated purposes.

The Historical Society hosts a wide variety of historical information and photographs, and is an invaluable asset for the community and for those wanting to understand its history. It has done extensive research documenting development, civic decisions, notable people and events in the city's history. The Society also organizes periodic presentations and publishes a newsletter to share interesting stories about the history of the city. The organization's goal is to find a more permanent home to better display artifacts, provide space to expand the collection to allow for more interactions with the public, and ensure the preservation and dissemination of knowledge in perpetuity.

Historic Structures

The City of St. Louis Park currently has two structures on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The two structures are the NordicWare tower near the intersection of Hwy. 7 and Hwy. 100 and the restored Railroad Depot located in Jorvig Park next to the railroad tracks in the historic railroad corridor. These two structures demonstrate the city's industrial and railroad history. The Depot is technically owned by the city, which provides maintenance and upkeep to preserve the building. The building is managed by the Historical Society to educate people and serve as a storage area for city artifacts.

Lilac Park in the southeast corner of the intersection of TH100 and Highway 7 and its beehive structures date to the 1930s when TH100, originally called Lilac Way, was developed by the Works Progress Administration to provide immediate employment to thousands of construction and landscaping laborers during the depression. It was the state's first "beltway" which completely surrounded the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area.

Special attention was given to roadside parks and plantings. The landscape plan, designed by landscape architect Arthur R. Nichols, gave Lilac Way its distinctive quality, and remains largely intact. The plan included a significant number of lilacs and elm trees as well as native limestone park structures, including the "beehives" for picnicking and enjoyment within wayside rest areas.

Lilac Park was one of five parks originally built along the highway. Most of these parks along with the stone structures have been destroyed by highway construction. In an effort to save and restore some remaining historic stone structures the "beehive" and other stone structures were moved to a new location in Lilac Park in 2008. The beehive, hand-made stone picnic tables and a fire circle, all built in 1939, were restored and are now located in the park, which is dedicated to the rest stops and their history.



Where We Are Headed

Historic Resources Goals & Strategies

1. Inventory the city's historic assets.



Strategies

- A. Create a plan to inventory key historic or architecturally significant buildings and features including: churches and synagogues, schools, residences of prominent citizens, distinctive residences by prominent architects or builders, distinctive commercial buildings, notable parks and public works elements and features.
- B. Conduct historical research and documentation on significant buildings and sites as they are being modified or demolished to keep as detailed of a historical record as possible.

2. Utilize opportunities to educate students and other residents about the historical assets of the city.



Strategies

- A. Educate the community on the importance of preservation, in general, and also about the individual designated buildings and districts. Work with the school district to develop classroom curriculum about St. Louis Park history.
- B. Utilize available historical photographs, maps and artifacts to focus attention upon the city's history and historical assets.

