

CHAPTER IV

FARMS, GARDENS AND MILK

1872-1886

Like a worm in a cocoon, which waits through the long winter months before it breaks out into a colorful and beautiful butterfly, western Minneapolis Township waited through the period 1872 to 1886 before leaving its shell and becoming a village. The people who were to live in the area for a generation had come and settled down in the period 1860 to 1872, were now owners of their farms and were laying a sound institutional basis for their lives. In the latter period there were a few land sales and farms tended to become smaller under the impact of a changing farm economics. Life was more placid and most of the happenings of the world, Minnesota and the nation rolled over the people like a great wave breaking over a boulder near a beach - inundating the rock but doing little to change its form and appearance. Most events were merely items of conversation and not happenings which effected the lives of the residents to any great degree.

In the fall of 1872 - September 20th to be exact - there came to the United States a force which was to seriously hurt the people of the eastern part of the nation - the Panic of 1875. Though the people of the St. Louis Park area were largely farming on a subsistence level of operations and were therefore little touched by the upheaval, the events happening in the financial centers of the nation gave them pause to wonder if the panic would eventually reach them and bring back a revival of the hard times of 1857 with the consequent poverty, inability to pay taxes, buy groceries, and loss of land. The Panic started in Europe when certain banks in financial centers closed their doors because of financial maladjustment due to the Franco-Prussian War. Like a chain reaction it reached the United States on September 19, when uneasiness existed in the New York financial district. The culminating blow came the next day when the banking house of Jay Cooke and Company, financial promoters of the Northern Pacific Railroad, closed its doors. Cooke's partners had demanded the action after discovering that Cooke had pledged most of the company's credit to build the railroad, not being able to secure European financial aid. The remote causes of the Panic were found not only to be the European situation but also in the inflation consequent to the Civil War. Furthermore, the railroad building mania had returned and the overexpansion had seriously weakened the financial structure of the country. Within twenty-four hours after the Cooke failure, thirty New York banks closed their doors and the failure of these banks caused others in the hinterland to become bankrupt. But the waves of Panic did not reach Minnesota in a catastrophic degree, this area being too far from the financial centers of the country, financially speaking. There was a slight stringency in the money market, said one historian, and a dullness in real estate. There was not a failure of any mercantile or banking house - nor did any manufacturing establishment close its doors. However, certain saw mills closed temporarily and a Minneapolis bank experienced a "run" which it overcame. The December price of wheat did drop to eighty-two cents in 1874 but rose to \$1.15 two years before it slumped again to a low of seventy-eight cents. The six year depression had little effect in The Park, except to change the name of one of the railroads.

This era was a time of amoral laxity during which promoters tended to take advantage of every circumstances which would enrich them. In 1874 the notorious Boss Tweed, ruler of Tammany, was indicted for mulcting the city government of millions. Jim Fiske was wrecking railroads to add to his fortune, and tobacco chewing Daniel Drew was victimizing investors in railroad stocks while piously writing pledges to build a theological seminary. In St. Louis, a group was cheating the government out of whisky taxes while the nation was increasing its consumption of liquor from twenty-nine million dollars worth in 1860 to almost seven times that amount in 1880. It was considered ethical to make a "racket" out of distribution of Indian annuities and railroad stock - watering was considered standard practice until the depression took the investor out of the market. In Minnesota in 1873, the legislature impeached Seeger, the state treasurer, for misuse of state funds and in the following year the Auditor McIlrath was investigated for irregularities. By way of contrast, genuinely God-fearing people in St. Louis Park were considering organizing her first church.

As though there was not enough to think about in this period especially in the line of national and state morality, nature provided a subject which no doubt became the material for stories told by grandfathers to their grandchildren – the great storm of 1873. That year, on January 8, the day opened clear and delightful and many went their ways to get food for selves and feed for cattle while children traveled to school. By four o'clock in the afternoon the wind had risen, snow began to fall, thermometer stood at fourteen below and the blizzard was on. Fifty-two hours later the state began to assess the damage, seventy people dead and vast numbers of livestock. Here and there, one heard of people with frozen feet and with stiffened fingers who had found shelter too late. So grave were the consequences of the storm that ninety-four families in thirty-four counties were given relief by the state legislature. Some person in Iowa coined a new word for the storm - blizzard - and all snow bearing winds since then have carried the appellation. In St. Louis Park area no one was maimed, probably because the farms were rather small as compared to those on the prairies and thus closer together. Though no one was hurt the incident provided a topic of conversation for more than a generation.

A movement which affected the region but which caused no great changes in The Park was the organization of the Patrons of Husbandry or the Grange. Organized by Oliver H. Kelley, a former resident of Elk River, and at the time a minor clerk in the Bureau of Agriculture, it espoused the causes of farmers who were protesting abused by the railroads, in addition to giving a fraternal tinge to farmer groups. In the 70's it made an attack upon the railroads by using legislation in several states, Minnesota among them, but no record seems to exist showing that any Park resident belonged or was active in the Grange despite the fact that in 1874 there were 53 Granges in the state. It is likely that few local residents espoused the Grange program because there were no grain elevators in the Park and farmers who at that time were raising less grain could deliver it directly to the mills and warehouses in Minneapolis, thus having no great criticism of the railroads.

While the western and northern parts of Minnesota were absorbing vast numbers of settlers who were making use of the Homestead Law which was put on the books in

1862 and which provided for almost costless land for claimants if they would but live on it five years, the population of the state grew steadily. The State Census of 1875 showed that there were almost 600,000 residents in the state with 34,000 more males than females and roughly one-third of the settlers being foreign born. New York, Wisconsin and New England provided the bulk of the native born immigrants, while Scandinavia, Germany and the English speaking lands contributed the bulk of the foreign born. It is during this period that the Scandinavians began to buy land in The Park and to make their distinctive contributions to life there. In the northern part of section 6 one begins to see names on the land like Johnson, Lindblom, Berg, Anderson, Jackson and Naven, and the plots on which they live as small as five and ten acres. The ethnic complexion of the area was beginning to change.

While the world went by The Park was fortunate in another respect. The rest of the nation experienced disaster and devastation, but like a charmed land, The Park escaped. In '76 a contingent of the 6th Cavalry under General Custer was killed at the Little Big Horn, Molly Maquires were hanged in Pennsylvania and the southwestern part of Minnesota was visited by grasshoppers which devoured every living plant, but The Park had no devastations. Grasshoppers had been known to have devastated areas in the territory as early as 1856 and '57 after which there was a decade of quietude. In 1868 they returned to Jackson County and continued ravaging the western part of the state for another decade. In 1876 swarms were seen to pass over Elk River, Belle Plaine, Shakopee and in September various spots in western Hennepin County were attacked. Various expedients were tried to halt the invasion, tarred pans to collect the vermin, burning fields, digging ditches, paying bounties for eggs and bushels of grown locusts, and various other things. The legislature appropriated funds to aid with subsistence for the settlers and seed for the coming year. In '77 the weather was unfavorable and a parasite appeared which inhibited the hatching of eggs and development of the adults. Furthermore, instead of devastating the land, the adult insects which did hatch took wings and migrated. The Park escaped as if by miracle and since then has had neither threats nor invasions.

About the same time there occurred a renewal of railroad building and activity in the state. The Hastings and Dakota – a line which connected part of western Minnesota with the lines east of Minneapolis sought an outlet directly into Minneapolis from the west instead of going south of the city, entering St. Paul from the south and then coming west into the flour milling city. In 1876 or '78 it made a contract with M&SL to use its lines from Hopkins into Minneapolis and began to run trains through The Park.

By 1880 the Panic of 1875 was in its last stages and the Hastings and Dakota planned to complete its line into Dakota Territory. The company had been organized in 1857 as the Hastings, Minnesota River and Red River of the North Company but had changed its name to Hastings and Dakota Railway Company in March of 1867. By 1872 it had built the line from Hastings to Glencoe which it sold to the Minneapolis and St. Paul Railway Company in June of 1872. After it had built the western end of the line to Ortonville, the railway decided to build its own tracks through St. Louis Park and not make use of the M&StL tracks as it had done for three or four years. It made a contract

with the M&StL to buy a certain amount of the right-of-way on which to lay its own rails and then bought other land for spurs and sidetracks. Martin Van Buren Pratt deeded a strip to the Hastings and Dakota Railway on August 2, 1880. In January of the same year the Hastings and Dakota sold and deeded the whole of its Dakota lines to the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Company, thus becoming only a division of a larger railroad system. The Park gained little at this point from the railroads, for none of them maintained a depot for an elevator or even a flag stop but all of them blew the whistle as it passed through the area with their freight loads of grain from the empire of wheat enroute to the great mills of Minneapolis which were becoming the greatest producers of flour in the world.

In the other end of the area which was to become St. Louis Park the Great Northern was relocating most of its track. It will be remembered that the road was originally built by the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad's First Division in the 1860's. In the Panic of 1875 this line had gotten into financial difficulties because of its connections with Jay Cooke and Company and had gone into the hands of a receiver, one Jesse Parley, who represented Dutch bankers. Six years later James Hill formed a syndicate of St. Paul and Canadians who bought out the bond and stockholders and formed the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Company (it was later named the Great Northern). The old line ran around the south side of Cedar Lake then slightly northwest when it again turned southwest. The new syndicate planned that the relocated road should pass the Lake on the north side and take an almost straight course toward the southwest. The land for the new line was purchased from Cornell, McNair, Austin, Cleater, Suchaneck, McCabe, Grover, Falvey, Hannan, Jones and Haley, little of the old right-of-way being usable for the new route. After the rails were laid and the trains began using the new line, most of the old rails were removed and some of the land was returned to farms.

Like the other railroads the M&StL had experienced changes during the Panic of 1873. In April of 1881 it had been merged with three other short lines but two months later had gone into the hands of the receiver. R. R. Cable, president of the road, in getting the road on the way to solvency secured the services of a young man from the Omaha line, W. H. Truesdale. Coming to the railroad as assistant to the president he was vice president within six months and though he carried most of the duties of president he was finally elevated to that office in 1887. It was this same William Truesdale who was to make an imprint on the area which was to become St. Louis Park.

It is during the period of 1872 to 1885 that the first tentacles of metropolitanism reach out to touch St. Louis Park area. It is the needs of the Twin Cities which set the tenor or her ways for almost a score of years. The cause of this Phenomenon was the growing population of Minneapolis and St. Paul. In 1872 the two cities were almost the same size, there being only a difference of about 450 people in their populations, both having about 33,000. Within eight years Minneapolis had outdistanced St. Paul, the former having about 46,000 people while the latter had 41,000. Thus within twenty-five miles of The Park there were about 90,000 people, all of whom had to eat, and milk and garden truck were two of the things which they needed and which could not be imported from greater distances.

These two items came in part from the St. Louis Park area. The Grimes family had been in the area since 1855 and had always produced certain vegetables and operated the Lake Calhoun Nursery. J. F. Held who was born in Prussia in 1844 bought a 145 acre tract in section 50 in 1871 and began truck gardening and viniculture. The Hankes produced many hundred pounds of butter which they sold in Minneapolis. Likewise the Bastons, Tillyen and others, principally located in the easternmost tier of sections, produced garden produce such as onions, potatoes, cabbage, turnips, carrots and many other vegetables.

The maps of 1874 show several small tracts in this eastern area some as small as five acres which might be presumed to have been used for raising produce. Among the small tractholders were Charles, Andrew and Lars Berg, A. Jackson, M. Perry, J. B. Locke, Otto F. Lindblon and August Johnson, the latter of which held the largest tract, twenty acres. Here was the beginning of market gardening which was to become a major source of income for the residents of The Park in the next generation.

In the northern part of the area which was to become St. Louis Park the land was somewhat less adapted to the raising of garden produce but beef and milk production was profitable, because the land was suitable for pasturage. Furthermore, alfalfa which had been improved by Wendelin Grimm, another Minnesotan, was providing an artificial pasture. Anderson, Johnson, Earle and Hanke were raising cattle on the rich grasses and sold the meat or distributed the milk, cream and butter in the growing city of Minneapolis. It seems that the cattlemen and dairymen were largely of Scandinavian extraction while the gardeners were native born.

The only manufacturing activity in the area during the period was done by two mills, one within the area which later comprised St. Louis Park, and the other south of it a short distance. The former was known as the Globe Mill and was located on Minnehaha Creek in section 20. It had been built by William P. Day and his son Horatio N. who had come to Minnesota in 1849. The dam and mill were built in 1874. Four runs of stone burrs were installed in the mill which had a capacity of 125 barrels of flour daily. The builders found the mill unprofitable and sold it, by 1881 it was owned by the First National Bank. Though it was later a steam driven mill it was not able to compete with the great mills of Minneapolis. Though it was operating, in 1891, doing commercial work only, it ceased shortly afterward.

A mill had operated since early days on the south side but outside the present limits of St. Louis Park. Located on Minnehaha Creek, also, was the Waterville Mill, built in 1857 by five pioneers of Richfield Township. In 1869, Andrew Craik, a native of Scotland, who had learned milling in Canada, bought the mill and renamed it Edina Mills in honor of his home near Edinburgh. With his sons, Craik operated the mill being the first in Minnesota to manufacture oatmeal (as befits a Scot) and pearl barley. Edina Mills became the nucleus around which the village of Edina was formed.

These two mills were, no doubt, the places where early settlers took their grain for grinding until it became common to sell more grain and buy flour in stores. Another aspect of the grain business was the building of the Commander Elevator along the M&StL Railroad in 1880. The capacity of the wooden structure was about a quarter of a million bushels. The grain was hauled by rail from country elevators and was stored for the great mills which had developed in Minneapolis.

The story of the period is not one of high and spectacular activity and one seeks in vain for events which touched settlers to any great degree. Instead, one might call the period the era of somnolence, a waiting period, although there are beginnings of the gardening and milk producing activities which were to be more important during the next twenty years. The area had a solid economic base, had three railroads traversing it, and the neighboring city of Minneapolis was growing due to the rise of the flour milling industry, all of which promised that within a short time the placidity of the countryside would be a thing of the past. The area had shifted from subsistence farming to that of commercial agriculture and had become a part of the metropolitan complex, something which foretold a different type of life in the days to come.