

CHAPTER V

THE FOUNDING OF THE VILLAGE

1886-1890

On August 24, 1886 three men were making calls at all the homes located in what is today St. Louis Park. These men, Oliver K. Earle, Joseph Hamilton and George E. Goodrich, were taking a census of the residents. They asked the same questions everywhere, age, legal address, etc. That evening when they totaled the results they found that there were 350 persons living in the area.

A few days later they circulated a petition praying that the county commissioners allow the incorporation of a village, describing it as St. Louis Park, and comprising 6,746 acres. A short time later they had the names of thirty-one landholders who wished to have the village established but no record is given of those who refused to sign the petition. These men are the founders of the village and for that reason their names are given:

Joseph Hamilton

O. K. Earle

Sam Williams

George Goodrich

S. Quinn

George S. Woolsey

F. B. Knowles

William Falvey

Henry Meier

L. S. Newcomb

E. H. Weatherhead.

Charles Rye

Axel Forsberg

L. P. Forsberg

August Johnson

Charles H. Hanke

C. B. Waddell

J. J. Baston

Charles Moore

C. F. Baston

J. O. Olson

Edwin Goodrich

C. W. Swett

John J. Larkin

Charles R. Newcomb

Daniel J. Falvey

A. W. Swett

J. A. Patenard

S. E. Boyce

C. Hanke

Frank Mazosky

Armed with the petition the trio appeared before the county commissioners when they met Monday, October 4, 1886. With but little discussion the commissioners ordered through County Auditor F. S. McDonald that an election be held and that the bearers of the petition post it, and other exhibits plus a notice of election in five places in the area. Joseph Hamilton later deposed that he had posted the documents on October 15th in various places; near Grave's Corner, on a tree on the Lake Street extension near the A. W. Sweet residence, on a fence opposite the schoolhouse in District 18, on the door of the depot, and on a tree where the Minneapolis and Minnetonka Road intersected the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad.

On the day appointed for the election, November 16, 1886, a crowd of sixty-eight men, and probably some wives who did not have the right to vote, assembled at the Pratt School. Judges of election were Chesley Hamilton, O. K. Earle and George E. Goodrich. When the ballots were collected it was found that sixty-five persons had voted for incorporation and three had opposed it, and two had not voted. St. Louis Park now existed as a village with the exception of filing the returns and establishing a government. The list of electors for this election is given in Appendix A. With the exception of two names which appeared the original petition, all signers were electors.

The originator of the movement for incorporation of the village was an organization established earlier in the year, the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company. The corporation was established to deal in land, real estate, buildings, personal property, or mixed personal and real property, mortgages, etc. It was to begin life on April 7, 1886 and was to exist for thirty years. Established with a capital stock of 300,000, the articles of incorporation limited its indebtedness to \$50,000. The original incorporators, and apparently they were the only stockholders, were five men from Minneapolis: Calvin G. Goodrich, Thomas A. Orr, Chauncey Wheeler, Hiram C. Truesdale and C. Elwood Brown, plus Joseph Hamilton and Oliver K. Earle of the Township of Minneapolis.

[The writer is limiting biographical sketches to residents of St. Louis Park except in cases where non-residents played very conspicuous parts. Oliver Keese Earle, one of the founders of the village and prominent in many of its affairs, was born in Worcester, Mass., February 2, 1857 the son of a prosperous industrialist of Quaker convictions. He had begun his professional education at Massachusetts Institute and Harvard and planned to become an engineer but abandoned the calling to come west and visit a relative Henry F. Brown. Buying the nucleus of a herd from Brown he raised purebred cattle and sheep, and later sold dairy products. In 1879 he married Emma Tyler Laycock, daughter of pioneers. Always interested in land development, he was one of the founders of the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company. He served as the first postmaster, was a member of the school board, served on the village council, among many other things. He helped develop the Black Rock Mine at Butte and was interested in oil development in the south. His death occurred January 6, 1932.]

These men composed the directorate which consisted of all the stockholders. The stockholders were to meet annually the first Tuesday in May at the office of the company in Minneapolis. Goodrich and Brown were to be the president and vice president, respectively, while H.C. Truesdale served as both secretary and treasurer. Six thousand shares were to be issued at \$50 each, but it might be presumed that it was Goodrich, Earle and Hamilton who had the land and the others were to provide the finances for subdivision, etc.

Shortly after incorporation this group began the platting of the townsite. Three separate areas were surveyed and the streets laid out. West of what is today the high school a small square was laid out consisting of four complete blocks with several partial blocks, the roads separating the blocks being named Hamilton Place, Chestley Place and

St. Louis Avenue, while the north-south streets were named Grandview and Mound. Another area lay east of the road which today is called Wooddale and was divided by the tracks of the Hastings and Dakota Railroad, and the M&StL. Here was about twenty-five blocks, with the same east-west street names as the smaller platted area to the west. The third area lay south of the tracks, comprising a tier of blocks north of Goodrich with two more tiers in addition, south of Goodrich. The east-west names of streets were Goodrich, Oak, and Calhoun, while the north-south street names were Mound, Lake, Park, Maine, Jackson, Earle, Chestnut and Harriet. Rufus Cook surveyed the plats, certifying on September 25 that he had faithfully surveyed and described the area.

While Cook was busy laying out the plat of St. Louis Park, C. G. Goodrich and his wife Cora were platting St. Louis Park Suburbs, an area which lay south of the original St. Louis Park. It extended all of the way south to Excelsior Road and was surveyed by Charles F. Chapman. The plat was filed with the Register of Deeds on December 17, 1886. Two months earlier St. Louis Park North was platted by Asa Y. and Lizzie Felton and surveyed by A. C. Libby. It consisted of a small area of about four blocks. Thus the area was platted all around what would be considered the center, in which today would be located the high school [Central], city hall, depots, etc.

However, the Center was at that time under the eye of the transitman and rodman. C.G. Goodrich and Hiram C. Truesdale had surveyor Charles Chapman working in that area who surveyed and platted the interstices which were labeled St. Louis Park Center. Among the persons who gave certain roads, parks, etc. were William H. Truesdale, C. G. and Cora Goodrich, Annie Truesdale, and Hiram Truesdale and his wife. It appears that this land did not pass through the hands of the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company. Two months later the surveying of Pratt's Addition to St. Louis Park was finished by Rufus Cook. This addition, which was the property of Martin and Harriet Pratt, lay south of the Minneapolis and Glencoe Road (Excelsior) and was filed with the Register of Deeds on August 19, 1887.

Two years later, the Home Addition was platted by Howard A. Turner and his wife Adah D. and a bachelor named Charles L. Hastings. It was located north of the Great Northern tracks and was rather distant from the other centers of activity.

The Park, it has been noted, was in part platted by the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company, of which Hiram C. Truesdale was secretary. In other plattings Hiram C. was associated with the Goodrichs and with William Haynes Truesdale. The latter was at that time an official of the M&StL Railroad having successively held the position of assistant to the president, vice president and later president, after which he was receiver of the railroad. Between H.C. Truesdale of the development company and William Haynes Truesdale of the railroad, (it is likely that they were brothers) a deal was made by which the Park could be boomed. The railroad president was to have a depot built at the site if the embryonic village would be named St. Louis Park in honor of the railroad. One rumor has it that the first name proposed was St. Louis but the postal officials objected because it had the same name as the Missouri city. This story is of doubtful authenticity because the post office already had another name. Nevertheless, the

M&StL built a depot sometime before 1886. That the deal was made before 1886 is indicated by the fact that the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company was organized in April 1886 and thus promoters knew that the area would bear that name.

In order to secure residents for the thousands of vacant lots, the promoters had inserted an advertisement in the Minneapolis Evening Journal on Tuesday, November 9, 1886 which gave notice to the advantages of living in The Park. They claimed that St. Louis Park was a place where one could enjoy society and yet save expenses and that one could get here from Minneapolis in half the time it would take to get to Lowry Hill within the city. Two railroads served the area, said the ad, and the depot is finished for one of them. Four lakes were nearby which would add to the amenities of life. The promoters promised an abstract with every lot and the buyers could have five years in which to build. Only seven per cent interest would be charged on notes. Furthermore, a buyer could receive a handsome discount if he would build in 1887. It all sounded very attractive.

With the building of the depot, which apparently was only a flag stop, the government established a post office for the distribution of mail. Oliver Keese Earle was appointed postmaster, but apparently because of the scarcity of population, had but very slight duties. It might be presumed that he did the work only as a convenience because small post offices paid salaries commensurate with postal revenues which was, no doubt, very, very small. The first post office was named Elmwood, but by whom is undiscoverable. The first mail was dropped at the station on October 20, 1887. (Residents, however, had to call for their letters at the post office, there being no rural-delivery until years later and no parcel post service.) [The certificate of appointment of O.K. Earle as postmaster is in the Hennepin County Historical Society files.]

Another evidence of the high hopes that existed for the area was the building of a store, in the heart of the platted area, by Joseph Hamilton. A general store, it carried food, goods and miscellaneous merchandise, mostly in bulk in barrel lots, from which the customer was served. With the establishment of this first place of business, the post office was moved to his store where it remained until he sold his store and Davis and Williams began merchandising. James T. Davis, one of the partners in the store, became postmaster.

The problem of the establishment of the government of St. Louis Park was one which was early attacked. In December following the incorporation of the village, a special election was held in Pratt School for the objective of electing village officers to hold office till the March 8th election should give a permanent directorate. About thirty-eight voters appeared to elect the first officials of the government. Joseph Hamilton, who was a candidate for president of the council, ran unopposed, and got thirty-six votes. Charles H. Hanke, only candidate for recorder, got thirty-seven while J.J. Baston was elected treasurer with thirty-eight votes. For village trustees, O.K. Earle, H.E. Butler, and George E. Goodrich got thirty-six, thirty-four and thirty-three votes respectively. Receiving thirty-eight votes each C. R. Newcomb and Peter Schussler were declared

elected justices of the peace and G. W. Bushaw defeated P. Larkin, thirty-five to three, for the office of constable, the latter being the only candidate to lose.

When the new council and officials met the next month [January 1887] they framed the first ordinance for the village. What the reason for this curious law could have been, is hard to determine, for no outbreak could have occasioned the placing on the books of an ordinance defining misdemeanors, breaches of the peace and disorderly conduct. The second ordinance placed on the books is just as much of a mystery. It defines and prohibits disorderly houses, houses of ill fame, and common prostitutes. One could almost hazard a guess that the pioneer councilmen were legislating against possible evils rather than against existing ones.

In the first regular election for officials which was held December 16, 1887, much the same slate were reelected for the coming year. Joseph Hamilton was to retain the position of president-of the council until 1894 when he was displaced for one year by C. B. Waddell. The most consistent winners of offices were Christopher and C.H. Hanke, O. K. Earle, J. J. Baston plus Joseph Hamilton and his son Chesley. The complete list of candidates, winners and the vote, when available is given in Appendix B.

Besides the routine business of paying certain bills the council put seven more ordinances upon the books before 1890 had passed. These concerned gaming houses, punishing of vagrants, contracts and contractors, nuisances, sidewalks and alleys and infectious diseases. Several plats additions to the village were reviewed and accepted, Douglas Park being a notable example, having been accepted in November of 1887.

The main problem of the infant village was the inducing of people to move out and build homes. At the annual meeting, held at the South School on March 3, 1889, besides electing officers, the electorate moved that the council should build a city hall which might also be used as a school. They suggested that \$4,000 be spent in erecting a suitable structure. Furthermore, the electorate asked that the council make efforts to encourage manufacturing plants to locate in The Park. To encourage such an activity it was moved that a bonus should be given incorporating a schedule which provided that a factory hiring twenty-five men should receive \$2,000, those hiring fifty to seventy-five should get \$3,000 a hundred employees would earn a \$4,000 bonus; two hundred employees would get \$5,000 and if a plant hiring one thousand should locate in The Park it would receive a \$10,000 bonus. The council was authorized to issue bonds for ten years at four per cent rate of interest to finance such an immigration. As far as is known no plant was given a bonus probably because within a few years another development corporation was to take over and encourage the migration of industry to The Park and though it did offer a bonus, it was of a different kind. At the same meeting it was voted to tax the property holders at the rate of one-half mill to be used for village purposes. A resolution introduced and passed at this same meeting was sent to the representatives and senators of Minnesota asking them to have the post office name changed from Elmwood to St. Louis Park. This was done shortly afterward though the writer has seen letters addressed to Elmwood which were dated as late as 1893.

The council called a special meeting of its members for June 1, 1889, to consider a problem of the school-city hall building. Six offers were made of a site for the building; certain owners offered seven lots in block 22 which were north of the railroad tracks and east of Wooddale. The St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company offered nine lots in blocks forty-three and forty-seven which were east of Wooddale and south of the tracks. O.K. Earle offered three lots in block one, while Turner and Hastings offered two acres near Cedar Lake Road. Joseph Hamilton would give the village one acre on the west side of Pleasant Avenue while C.F. Baston offered one acre anywhere on his place. A week later, the council announced that they would accept the offer of the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company but a few days later refused all offers. Half a decade the school was built.

If one says that it was during the five years preceding 1890 that the village of St. Louis Park was established one is right but the reader should not conclude that in those five years a full blown city was established. Comparing the infant village with a modern village one would be impressed with what it lacked. There were virtually no roads, the principal ones being Excelsior Road running east and west on the south, Cedar Lake Road on the north. Lake Street had been extended into the area. As for crossroads between blocks they were virtually non-existent, but grading had been done in some places. Modern travelers would be appalled to think that not one graveled road existed, and tarred or concrete highways were unheard of. Most roads were but tracks over which carriages and wagons passed. No car blew its horn, no stop signs adorned the corners, and no streets were numbered. Furthermore, there was no water system, nor gas mains, nor electricity, nor telephone. One carried water from the backyard pump, considered gas a luxury, read at night by kerosene lamp or went to bed early, and read about the marvels of telephone in newspapers. In the heating and cooking stove the residents burned oak and elm wood purchased at three to five dollars a cord. One store served their needs, and one went to the post office to ask for mail. Most houses had stables in the rear where the driving horse was kept. Going to Minneapolis one could take the M&StL from the depot, which cost ten cents, and in town the traveler could reach other places by taking a streetcar which only recently was built and electrified. Only in Minneapolis could one see a theatre, cafe, hotel or saloon.

There was no doctor in The Park until later and birth and death records show that a Hopkins doctor signed the certificates. Periodically a family would be stricken with typhoid and several members would die, and diphtheria was not an uncommon disease. Consumption was listed as a cause of death in many cases while a few babies died of cholera infantum. The birth and death records which are kept in the Village Hall reveal an amazing number of deaths from causes which could have been averted by the use of modern drugs and antibiotics. One of the most persistent protests by the village council to the city officials of Minneapolis was about the "pest house" which had been located about where Lynn Avenue crosses Highway 7 today. Smallpox, and other, victims were buried on the grounds. The problem of removal was finally solved when the place burned in 1917 and again in the 1930's and the building of Highway 7 later necessitated the removal of the bodies. Though disease hazards lurked everywhere, residents probably

thought they were as well off as any group in the world, a fallacy which the later generations also share.

What had the results of the first five years of activity brought? To be sure, there were many lots, but no great increase in the number of houses. [The era of 1885 to 1890 saw a number of other areas or villages west of Minneapolis incorporated. Golden Valley was incorporated in December 1886 and two years later Edina was incorporated in December. Wayzata had been platted in 1854 but was incorporated thirty years later. The incorporation of Golden Valley and St. Louis Park used up all that remained of Minneapolis Township.] The informal census of 1886 had shown 350 residents which in four years had grown to 499. Certainly one could not infer that the boom had enriched anyone, nor populated the village. The obvious need of the area was for some activity by which a family could earn a living. The next decade would see the provision of such needs.

If no one had gotten rich, nor had the village grown appreciably, at least events were exciting. The previous era had watched the world go by, but this one found residents interested in building a village and the world could come and watch them.