

CHAPTER X

THE SUBURBAN MOVEMENT

1920-1930

The most important factor which was to determine the characteristics of the village in the decade 1920 to 1930 was the tremendous growth of population. The two preceding decades had seen an increment of between four and five hundred persons each decade, rising from 1,325 in 1910 to 2,281 in 1920. This small rise did not put too much strain on the existing institutions, though some of them, like the schools, barely kept up with the rising needs. In the next decade the population was due to double, increasing from 2,281 to 4,710. This increment was bound to cause serious dislocations in that the village had enough services to serve 2,281 but not enough to satisfy 4,710. Then at the end of the decade a more serious problem was to be faced with a depression. This came at a time when the village could ill afford to build schools, expand churches, and provide greater governmental services like water, sewer, police and fire protection.

This phenomenon was not confined to St. Louis Park for it was common in all cities and villages which adjoined or were larger metropolitan areas. In the 1920's the growth of suburbs characterized the increased population of the nation; suburbs growing five times as fast as the rural population and three times faster than the rural non-farm. In general, this new increment was not an indigenous growth but was an immigration from the metropolis; people who wished to get away from the hurry and bustle of the city, who were largely middle class, native-born Americans and were most often of Protestant faith. Often the suburb became the refuge of the retired, and, was not a place of youth. The employed group commuted back and forth to the city either by their own cars or by public transportation, and thus the wage earner, who was most often the husband, was gone from his place of residence from early morning until evening when he returned home, tired. Economically, the mind of the suburbanite was in the city where his job was, while his heart was in the suburb where his family lived. In his residential area the suburbanite wanted quiet and surcease from the pressures of economic competition and if he asked for zoning in order to keep out commerce and industrial activity it was because he saw almost too much commerce where he worked. Therefore, he believed in zoning, and in general wished that the suburb would remain as it was when he came. With the exception of his generally high interest in quality schools, the suburbanite male tended to drag his feet in civic affairs. He often left many civic duties to the woman of the family and one saw the proliferation of women's clubs: drama, garden, church, research, and social. The suburbanite's home area was often the stronghold of conservatism and in general he voted the Republican ticket, looking with amazement upon anyone who could bring himself to vote for the New Deal. How far these characteristics fitted the area we are discussing is difficult to determine and the village needs a thorough study of its interests, abilities, structure, etc., along with a scale or measuring device which would allow city planners to proceed with some degree of assurance.

In the 1920's resident of The Park was able to get to the city of Minneapolis in thirty minutes by using the streetcar line, which extended to what was to be the center of town, or by a line which came near the southern boundary. Or he could take a train, two of which ran through the village. But more likely he drove his own car over one of the three highways which connected with Minnetonka Boulevard, Superior or Excelsior Roads. In addition, one could, find the bus lines operating in some areas, like Kenney Bus Company which traveled over Excelsior Avenue, and one other, which for a time were engaged in deadly competition with each other until the village council adjudicated the case. But the streets over which cars and buses traveled were mostly only graveled, and, it is during this period that one finds the beginning of construction of tarred roads, curbs, and gutters. Furthermore, it became more necessary now that many were driving to the city daily, to keep the roads free of snow. By 1927 the village was buying its first snowplow, a \$4,787 Caterpillar unit. With the increasing number of automobiles, which had become cheap enough so that a family with \$500 to spend could own one, the problem of speedy drivers became acute. As yet the village had no police patrol but an ingenious system of catching speeders was devised. A boy or man was placed at a given point with a flag which he dropped as a speeding car passed. Down the road a measured distance was a police officer with a stopwatch who could check the speed over the measured course, after he saw the flag drop. One traversing the distance too quickly received a traffic summons. The system was eliminated in the next decade, when the village appropriated money to provide police patrol cars. It is interesting to note that nearly every article about the village which appeared in Minneapolis papers tells about the highways that could be used to get to St. Louis Park, or the ease by which one could get there by streetcar. One would almost think that informants were encouraging the suburban movement.

Along with the provision of transportation routes for suburbanites was the platting of more lots on which to build. Minneapolis had platted almost to the city limits and the next prospective area on the west for residences was St. Louis Park. Tingdale Brothers, the platters of other areas in earlier periods, presented the drawings of High Holborn Addition in 1920, while Mr. Kavli platted Cedardale in 1923. In 1925, Minnikahda Vista was platted and in the following year, Blakeman had an area under the transit. In 1929, Sunset Gables was platted and there were many others platted in the period which would be too numerous to mention. Tied closely to the subdivision movement was house numbering, proposed in 1926 which was later put into law. In order to protect the homeowners from invasion by industry and business the people began to demand zoning regulations. Heretofore, the council had no power to zone an area for use, but in 1929 a special election was held in which the council was allowed to zone the city. The vote was almost three to one for zoning - totals being: 362 for the law and 117 against it. Only in district two was there any significant opposition to zoning. A breakdown of the votes shows that the four districts voted as follows: district one, 88 to 24 for zoning; district two, 93 to 88; district three, 146 to 5; and district four 35 to 7. After this vote a committee made studies of areas of land use, and commercial and industrial zones were established mainly along railroads and highways, and residential zones farther away from main transportation routes.

Another movement which was designed to keep the community clean and desirable was the attack on the illegal liquor peddlers. In 1916, the village had voted to dispense with saloons by the close vote of 197 to 192. The following year the vote was closer, the anti-liquor faction winning by one vote, 213 to 212, while in 1918, the last vote before the federal prohibition law went into effect, the vote was 199 to 196 against saloons. To many, the passage of the federal law gave hope that the days of trouble over licenses, drunkards, etc., were over, but they were mistaken. The era after the war was one of flappers, Fords, and frivolity and the reader will recall that to supply liquor to many who still wanted it the gangsters began organized bootlegging. Along the edges of many cities was a twilight zone where law did not reach to suppress the bootleggers. In addition, there were cars which could carry people to the drinking places. Along Excelsior Boulevard, and along other roads leading from the city, were established "chicken shacks" where fried chicken and chicken sandwiches were ostensibly sold - but in reality, the places were sometimes bootleg joints. Numerous protests came to the village council about the activities of these places and the council reactivated an old ordinance of 1902 to regulate the sale of liquor and repassed it in 1921. The next year an ordinance was placed on the books to regulate the "chicken shacks." But despite good intentions, the bootlegger still peddled his "hooch," but did not maintain a place of business. For a certain sum a purchaser would be sent to a culvert, a cornfield, a tree or other places where he could find the bottle of "Old Popskull" for which he paid. It was an age of "Al Capone and Alcohol" and though the government frowned upon and tried to repress the traffic it persisted until legalized again in the 1930's.

The personnel of the top levels of local government was composed largely of nine men who served as trustees while the presidency of the council (mayor's office) was filled for eight times by J.A. Werner. Verner Lindahl filled the position of recorder for several of the y years and the name which appeared in the treasurer's position for so many years, George W. Gibson, continued to appear. In 1925, S. Earl Ainsworth won the position of assessor which he was to fill for 19 years.

While taxes ran around ninety-nine mills, somewhat higher than that of Minneapolis, the assessed-valuations were low. The schools absorbed the greater share of the revenue. Twenty-six mills were levied for village purposes in 1926 though the schools took nearly twice that rate. The cost. of village government was somewhere around thirty thousand dollars yearly, exclusive of special assessments for roads and other purposes. One might think that taxes should have been higher considering that new problems were bound to arise with the burgeoning population but in general the government was trying to reflect public opinion which demanded an economical government.

There was, of course, some talk about a reform of governmental system in the village because it was operating under laws which were passed in the 1880' s and under a charter of 1886. Some talk about a new charter was heard but no leadership appeared to lead the reform.

Some of the problems which the council attempted to solve will indicate the tenor, of public opinion - especially when aroused. In 1929, the Browndale Park Association brought a petition to the council requesting the dismissal of Marshall Ear A. Sewall, accusing him of incompetence, of retaining fines, and of protecting lawbreakers. The council called for a hearing but only nine persons appeared. After reviewing the case, the council stated that it saw no dishonesty but thought that much of the trouble was due to a lack of cooperation between the marshal and the justices of peace.

Another crying need for the village government was for a village building of some type. Most village business was carried on in the private offices of the officials while council meetings and hearings were held in a room in the high school building. There was no place for proper storage of records. In July the council voted to hold a bond election to build a tool house, fire hall, jail and council rooms. But to secure the needed revenue a public election had to be held which was scheduled to be held on the last day of July. In the four election districts there were 528 votes cast of which 522 voted No on the bond proposal with only 206 in favor of it. Thus the council had to postpone building plans until later, but when the structure was built the government had again expanded.

The only park in St. Louis Park at this time was a small one which was located south of the tracks and which provided a site for the bandshell. Until the 1920's, the Park Board was but a quasi-governmental body which could not draw on tax revenues but did receive an occasional donation from the village. In 1925 the legislature allowed villages to appoint a park board of three members who were empowered to draw up a comprehensive plan for parks in their towns. Six years after this enabling legislation was passed, the village council appointed the first park board consisting of J. A. Edeby, H. V. Shuster and H.R. Bates. Within a year the board had secured 1,200 George Washington trees which they planned on planting along thoroughfares. John Edeby was promoting garden and yard clubs while other members were considering building playgrounds and skating rinks. Recreation could be found at two golf courses nearby, Meadowbrook and Minneapolis, while one could skate in winter at Meadowbrook Lake. The village had a baseball team and the high school was beginning to provide a regular coach for the football team. Neither organization was supported from tax revenue although the village periodically made contributions.

During the early part of the 1920's another problem which the council faced was that of secession by two different areas in the village. In 1924, a group in Oak Hill led by one of the industrial men attempted to leave the village and projected incorporating an area which extended westward toward Hopkins. About the same time a small group in Brookside district led by an attorney tried to leave. The reasons for the movements are obscure; taxes were not high because of low valuations though rates were slightly above average but there were some who thought they were never given anything by the village council. The council sent their attorney to the district court to fight the move and he was successful. The secessionist move failed largely because of apathy among the residents in those areas. Likewise, some people in the Morningside area attempted secession and talked of introducing a bill into the legislature but this move also failed for lack of

interest. The move by Minneapolis to annex an area in Richfield caused the council to be on guard so that The Park would not be annexed without a vote.

The school situation, under the pressure of increasing population, never became too critical. Though the North Side School burned in April of 1926 there were still five elementary schools operating, their locations being Oak Hill, Fern Hill, Highcroft, Lincoln and Brookside. The high school likewise was in operation and annually was graduating about twice as many pupils in 1930 as in 1920.

Another institution which was under pressure because of the greater number of people was that of the church. The Roman Catholic denomination which had had neither a church, nor parish, up to this time was finishing a new church building in 1926 which was named The Holy Family Church. Hereafter Catholics would not have to go to Minneapolis or Hopkins to attend mass. At the same time there were operating Lutheran, Congregationalist and Methodist churches, besides a community house of worship.

With the increase of population there was a corresponding increase in the business houses of the village. Though Walker had planned that most businesses would locate in the zone he laid out near to the present high school, few businesses located there. In general, stores followed the centers of population and today one finds that the pattern established in the 1920's is still used. Why the stores did not locate in the Walker business area is hard to determine but it is probably related to two factors: first, that the population was too scattered and the proposed zone was not central to population, and secondly, it is said that the Walker Interests held the prices of business sites too high. Whatever the reason, St. Louis Park does not have one central shopping district but has several lesser shopping districts.

Four factories remained in operation in St. Louis Park during the 1920's but only one of them, Monitor, could date its origin in the era of the great boom of 1890-1895. Only two of the four remained after 1930 and they continue to this day.

Monitor had continued its profitable operation as a branch of the Moline Plow Company which had purchased it in the first decade of the twentieth century. The plant had been modernized and electrified when it was purchased and was efficient. During the war, Monitor had taken no war contracts but continued to make agricultural machinery. The parent company, however, had financial difficulties after the war because of the agricultural depression. Furthermore, a revolution was taking place on the American farm as tractors began to replace horses. Machinery manufacturers found that they had to have a full line of implements to compete with larger manufacturers. The Moline Company was one which lacked manufacturing facilities to make tractors, threshers and other implements. Likewise, two Minneapolis firms did not have a complete line: Minneapolis Steel and Machinery of Minneapolis, and Minneapolis Threshing Machine of Hopkins. Both of these firms made tractors and threshers but did not have tillage or harvesting equipment, which Moline had. Under the leadership of the Minneapolis Steel and Machinery executives headed by W. C. MacFarlane, a merger of the firms was made in 1929 which resulted in the thirty-eight million dollar Minneapolis-Moline Company.

Monitor thus changed owners, the second since S. E. Davis had established it in the 1890's. In order to integrate operations the Minneapolis-Moline firm ceased operations at the St. Louis Park factory in the fall of 1929 and workmen were transferred to the Hopkins plant. The buildings were used as a warehouse thereafter until February 14, 1930 when an accidental fire started by a watchman's stove burned some of the buildings doing \$290,000 damage which was covered by insurance. The factory and firm which had employed men in St. Louis Park for thirty-eight years ceased to exist as a patron of the village.

Prest-O-Lite continued to manufacture gas but with the electrification of automobiles they shifted their production to provide for industrial and commercial uses of gas. The Martin Manufacturing Company continued to manufacture the grinder which was widely retailed. In addition, the sons of the founder were interested in journalism and published the Hennepin County Rural Messenger plus doing job printing. In 1927 the company amended its articles of incorporation and moved the plant to Anoka where it continues to this day. The main business today is the manufacturing, or selling parts for the grinder, with publishing running very close, if not first, in importance. Republic Creosote Company also continued to treat posts, ties and other timbers and employed at various times fifty or more men.

In value of product handled, the three great grain warehouses probably exceeded any other business. Commander Larrabee elevators had burned about 1910 and a new cement structure replaced the old wooden one. The new capacity was two and three quarter million bushels. With the building of the new structure there was sent to operate the business a new manager, Daniel K. Whalen, who came here from North Dakota. He played a significant role in the development of the village, serving on the board of education for seventeen years, was a member of the charter commission, had helped in promoting the building of the first Catholic Church and was one of the strongest members of the Knights of Columbus. Interior Elevator also continued business with its tremendous capacity of one and one-half million bushels. The Great Western Grain Company elevator was bought in 1913 by Hales-Hunter and handled millions of bushels of barley annually. In 1918 it had been sold to Union Elevator Company but Hales-Hunter repurchased the warehouses in 1926. Its capacity was about one and one-half million bushels. Altogether the capacity of the grain warehouses was about five and three quarter million bushels and provided work for some twenty-five to fifty men.

In the earlier period the village had been provided with public utilities of electricity and telephone but until the decade after World War I was without gas. It had always been hoped that gas mains would be installed in The Park, and the Minneapolis Land and Investment Company had secured rights to construct mains. In one of the first ordinances concerning this firm it had been specified that the land company should construct one mile of gas mains within five years of the passing of the ordinance on July 5, 1891. But it is doubtful whether any mains were built. Furthermore, the ordinance provided that the village could buy the gas system from the Minneapolis Land Company. The Minneapolis Land and Investment Company had been chartered for thirty years and the corporate life of the firm expired in 1920 but no request was made to extend the

privileges granted to it by the council. Thus, it might be assumed that the semi-contractual arrangements were abrogated. In 1927, Mr. H. J. Dakin of the Minneapolis Gas Company appeared before the council to ask for an ordinance permitting it to manufacture and sell gas in the village. A twenty year arrangement was made and within a short time pipe laying crews were laying the first mains. Thereafter, with increasing rapidity the lines were extended to other parts of the city. It was with a certain amount of reluctance in 1947 that the council voted for a renewal of the franchise with the gas company. Now, with the gas mains being installed, the village was being provided with the necessities for amenable living although it still lacked the water and sewage facilities.

Considering the village from a social standpoint one could find several communities within the corporate limits. The news, most of which was carried by Hopkins newspapers, was written around several area groups. Brookside, Fern Hill, Northside, Center, Oak Hill areas usually were treated as separate social groups. Even to use the geographical names seems to indicate that people were identifying themselves with named areas. It is interesting to note that the news of social events usually listed the guests who most often resided in the same neighborhood. The old dual grouping of industrial society and the gardener, society was tending to break down and new groups were being found. With the decline of industry and the platting of the old gardening area there was less economic motive for social activity and new nuclei were needed to form the core of social action. One curious but small social action group which appeared in the mid 1920's was the K.K.K. which burned a cross or two near Catholic residences. The movement, however, seems to have had but little vigor and died before any social gains were made, if it had any aims.

Politically, the village tended to vote Republican on most state and national issues. The Democrats were almost completely eclipsed by the third party movements which characterized Minnesota in the period. The three Republican presidents of the period were well supported in The Park: Harding in 1920 received 550 votes to 204 for the Democratic candidate, Cox. In 1924 Calvin Coolidge received 805 votes while the Democrat, Davis, got only sixty-five. It is surprising that LaFollette of the Progressive Party received 499 in 1924. The state, however, gave its electoral votes to Davis. By 1928, the third parties were weaker and the Democrats made some gains. However, Hoover received 1,344 votes from the village while Smith got 539. St. Louis Park was voting for the presidential winner in every election. In only one case did a third or even second party come within hoping range of winning.

Gubernatorially, the village made but one scurry from the sheltering wing of the Republican Party. In 1920 it gave J. A. O. Preus 493 votes while giving the Independent candidate, Hendrik Shipstead, 358, while the Democrats were able to get but sixty-three votes for their candidate. Preus received the votes again in 1922 when he defeated Farmer-Laborite Magnus Johnson 386 to 507 for governor, though it might have voted for Shipstead if he had run for governor because it gave him the nod for the senatorship over F. B. Kellogg. Two years later the village supported Theodore Christianson over Floyd B. Olson, Farmer-Labor candidate, by a vote of 725 to 571, while the Democratic candidate got but 39. Governor Christianson was reelected in 1926 with the aid of 675

votes from the village while the Farmer-Labor candidate, Magnus Johnson, got slightly more than half that number of votes. Again in 1928, Christianson was favored over Lundeen 1,221 to 440 with the Democrats getting but 308 votes. But under the impact of depression problems, the village turned from the Republican Party and favored Floyd B. Olson, Farmer-Laborite with 885 votes, to 602 for R. P. Chase. The Democrats made a bad showing with twenty-eight votes. The normal political complexion of St. Louis Park seems to have been Republican as it had been since election statistics were available.

There were people in the village who had aspirations for higher office but some were successful and others never arrived. C. B. Waddell, who had served as county commissioner for many years was always given support from his home area. In 1922, when he was reelected for the last time, he defeated J. W. Mooney 540 to 287 in his home village but in 1924 was defeated in the district, though The Park supported him 732 to 487 over J. W. Broderick. D.C. Martin was an aspiring politician but his attempt to win the office of state representative for the 36th district (south) in 1920 found him running third in the race. In 1926, he tried again for the same office. George A. Turnham defeated him in the district though each candidate got 421 votes in St. Louis Park.

The Great Depression which broke upon this country in 1929, and which was destined to remain until 1938, had serious consequences for The Park, though when it began people thought it would be of short duration. As early as 1926, there were indications in the national economy that such a disaster was coming and more people were apprehensive when in 1928 the stock market showed unprecedented trading and upward movement of prices. Its causes are difficult to determine but it seems that part of the cause was a financial crisis caused by the overexpansion of roads and the sale of automobiles in the 1920's. The great panic began in October when on the 24th financiers began to "unload" their shares on the stock market. That day almost fourteen million shares changed hands but the crisis came when four days later more than sixteen million shares were frantically sold. During the month the value of stocks declined thirty-seven per cent, from eighty-five to fifty-five billion dollars. This deflation continued until in 1933; the value of listed stocks was about nineteen billion dollars. For a time after October 1929, industry continued to produce, and men continued to be employed, but as surplus funds were exhausted men were told not to return to work, and factories cut back on their production. Within a matter of a short time poverty became a lurking spectre and there were ensaddening appeals for aid. The long road of prosperity which had led through such an alluring forest of plenty in the 1920's now became a quagmire on which the economic engine was stalled for eight years.