

CHAPTER XIV

ST. LOUIS PARK GOES TO SCHOOL

Among the first institutions which settlers establish in the new land is the school. And true to this usual pattern, the settlers in the south part of the area which was to become St. Louis Park established a school at a very early date. Perhaps the school could have waited for a few years but there seems to have been strong desires for it among those residents who had come from New England or bore English names, and among such people the desire for education was strong and enduring.

In the fall of 1859, School District. No. 18 was formed which was some seven square miles in area. A school building was constructed at the corner of Excelsior and Pleasant Avenue which was in those days but two prairie roads. The first Board of Education was composed of John Ludlum, Job Pratt and George Drew and they hired George Craft to teach the first term of school. Among the other early teachers were Miss Ellen Courliard and Winslow Paige Northway who later became prominent as a flour miller in Minneapolis.

In 1866, the school was burned to the ground by fire and in the following year it was rebuilt. The new building was a rectangular structure with a porch and entry which would remind one in some ways of a church. The building stood on this site until 1892 when the Board of Education of the Independent District moved it to the Oak Hill area where it was used as a school until the brick building was built.

It is usual during those early years to have two terms of school annually, one in the winter operating from about November to March and another during the summer months, which was in session from about mid-April to mid-June or sometimes in mid-July. Oftentimes the same teacher taught both sessions but in other years a different person taught the shorter summer term.

Another peculiarity of the school was that many boys went to school until they were almost adults. In many cases the older boys were almost as big, if not as old as the teacher. These older boys often were impetuous, and by harrying the teacher caused him to resign. Thus "putting the teacher out" became quite a sport among the youth. Consequently, the school board tended to hire men for teachers though some summer sessions were taught by women.

Among the teachers of Pratt School were several men who rose to distinction after their careers as teachers. Charles W. Mounton, who taught for \$50 monthly during the years 1879-1880, graduated four years later from the University of Minnesota and went on to become a professor of chemistry at Vassar. Myron D. Taylor taught the school in 1876-77, having graduated from Minnesota University in 1876. His career in law led him to a chair on the Supreme Court of Minnesota. C.J. Gunderson, who had forty scholars in the 1877-78 term, later became a judge at Morris, Minnesota, while Joseph W. Reynold, who followed Gunderson, became a judge at Alexandria. Other names associate with the

school as teachers were Charles Rixon, Herbert H. Goodrich, who was the son of pioneer George Goodrich, and Judson D. Irwin. Among the women teachers was Emily Patch, niece of pioneer Minneapolis R.P. Russel; Mrs. Jennie M. Dadnum, a sister of Margaret Scott and Joseph Hamilton; and Cora Garvey who taught in the summer of 1884 and who was a sister of Mrs. Albert H. Baston.

Students came to Pratt School from the area which would today comprise Edina and St. Louis Park. About 1872 the district was divided and another school was established in Edina. In the 1880's another district, #20 was organized in the northern part of the area. With the organization of the Village of St. Louis Park in 1886, it was expected that the center of population would shift northward, and it was conceivable that within the near future a high school would be needed.

In February of 1888 there appeared in various places in St. Louis Park documents which read: "NOTICE: The legal voters of the Village of St. Louis Park are requested to meet at the school house in ... said village on Saturday the 3rd day of March 1888 at 4 P.M. for the purpose of organizing an Independent School District to be composed of all the territory in said village. Dated the 18th day of February, A.D. 1888." The notices were signed by Joseph Hamilton, O.K. Earle, James Hannan, Jeremiah Quinn, D.J. Falvey, Peter Doyle, B.X. Bonney, William Fairley, N.H. Pierce and M.V. Pratt. The meeting was held as scheduled and twelve voters appeared of which seven favored the creation of the new district while three opposed it, two other votes being declared illegal. The meeting to elect the new school board was held on the 19th and D.J. Falvey, Joseph Hamilton, Charles Rixon, O.K. Earle, and D.D. Sullivan were chosen. Five days later at the first meeting of the Board of Education, Hamilton was chosen president, Earle became clerk and D.D. Sullivan was to be treasurer. The report from the school at the end of the year showed that there were thirty-one pupils and one teacher who received \$50 per month. All the usual subjects were taught and the teacher certified that "systematic and regular instruction" was given in "temperance hygiene."

One of the reasons for the organization of the Independent District was to provide more schools, and particularly a school nearer the center of the population which was expected to develop in the newly platted village. The village trustees were likewise in need of some type of a village hall, and cooperated with the Board of Education. When the proposition was given to the electorate in May of 1889, to build one building for both purposes there were thirty-seven votes in favor of it, nine against. The St. Louis Park Land and Development Company offered to donate three lots to the school district and upon these lots and \$8,500 school was built, named Lincoln, which was opened on January 6, 1890 with James T. Davis as principal, and Mary Bates as a teacher. Davis received \$50 monthly for salary and Miss Bates received \$40.

The number of pupils increased greatly after the industries moved into the village; in 1892 there were 144 which increased to 239 in the next year. It is interesting to note that only 143 of the 239 pupils attended school for sixty days or more in 1893.

The personnel of the Board of Education changed as time went along, Hamilton being succeeded by his son, Chesley; O.K. Earle was replaced by H.C. Parlin, and James Hannan later became a member. Likewise, the teaching personnel changed. C.O. Dick was appointed principal and was in turn followed by F. G. Bennett a couple of years later. Some of the names of teachers who taught in this district before 1900 were Mrs. Gertrude M. Jones, Miss J.J. Cransie, Julia A. Hynes, Mary C. Bates, M.E. Waddell, Mildred F. Rosger, Mary Evans, Anna M. Farquahar, elle Prescott, Clara Bennett and Emma Schussler. To be certain that teachers were competent, a board of teacher examiners was established which at various times was composed of D.J. Falvey, Charles Rixon, E.J. Parlin, J.T. Davis, Mrs. C.J. Welch, Reverend S. F. Kerfoot, Sarah M. Jerman and J.S. Hunter.

Finances for the schools were of course critical at times and the village trustees periodically made loans to the school district which were repaid when taxes were collected. At other times the district borrowed from individuals, C.F. Baston at one time lending \$900 and another time Louise Hanke lent \$300. By 11894 it was costing about \$8,000 to operate the schools for a year.

In 1880, there had been two school buildings in use, but by 1894 the board was trying to lease a room from the Presbyterian Church of Oak Hill which it could use for school purposes, but they found that it could not be rented for less than ten dollars monthly and it was not used. Pratt School on Excelsior Road was closed in 1892 and moved to the Oak Hill area. The schools were crude compared to present day standard, being heated by wood stoves. For one item allowed by the school board, James Hannan was paid for dollars per cord for thirty cords of oak wood.

By 1895, the principal was L.H. Abbott while the school board was composed of D.J. Falvey, D.K. Yorgay, C.F. Baston, W.S. Shaft, and O.S. Bakke.

About this time there was a new development in the Manhattan Park area and more people there were in need of schools. The existing schools were thought to be too distant for children to walk to them. Thus a group here built a schoolhouse and requested the Board of Education to provide a teacher, which was done and one of the first being Miss Bertha Bates. Thus the district was operating three schools and employing nine teachers.

R.L. Davison, who has been principal following S.M. Abbott, resigned in 1901 and Herbert Carleton was chosen to fill the position. [*Herbert Carleton, who was to play a significant part in civic affairs, was born in Hartford, Conn., January 1, 1869. He graduated from Carleton College at Northfield in 1891, and entered Hartford Theological Seminary where he studied three years. He taught in Kentucky and in New Ulm and Delano, Minnesota before coming to the Park. After 1904 he engaged in real estate business and was village recorder in the 1930's. He died April 5, 1943.] During his administration the district voted \$12,000 in bonds, by a margin of 38 to 2, to enlarge Lincoln School which was becoming too small now that a high school course was being offered. It was during the same administration that the first high school class was

graduated. In 1908, Alice Rixon and Hilda Edman were graduated at ceremonies held in the Odd Fellows Hall. For a time the pressure upon school, which is normal in a growing community, was somewhat less and it seemed that the building program was adequate.

In 1905, E.S. Hatch was hired to become superintendent of schools, coming from teaching and administrative positions in Howard and Dell Rapids, South Dakota. He modernized old Lincoln School and installed plumbing in the building, but by 1912 it became evident that a new building would be needed. In March of 1913 the electorate went to the polls to pass upon a \$60,000 bond issue to build a new high school. The vote was 327 for and 70 against. T.B. Walker had already presented the school district with two and one-half acres of land on which to build the school. By January of 1914, the new building was ready for occupancy and Superintendent Hatch had each student carry over various small pieces of equipment including the bell from Lincoln School. In the first week of January a two day ceremony was arranged to dedicate the new structure, and various speakers included: President of the University of Minnesota, George E. Vincent, various deans and officials, Governor Eberhart and T.B. Walker gave addresses. Besides the regular courses of instruction, new studies were added which would include agriculture, manual training and domestic science. One finds the beginnings of the athletic program in this era when T.B. Walker gave about six acres of land, at the request of County Commissioner C.B. Waddell and T.M. Colwell, to be used for athletics and the other newly established courses. Three high school boys requested \$15 from the school board to buy basketballs and equipment. It was during this period that the school paper was founded, the first issue of *The Echo* being published in October 1916, Winifred Fox, first editor. Hatch resigned in 1920 to take a position with the Veterans Administration and Robert Scott was elected superintendent of the schools. [*E.S. Hatch remained with the Veterans Administration until 1927 when he became a Professor Psychology at Dickinson State Teachers College in North Dakota. For eleven years he was a professor and for part of the time Dean of Men. In 1938-39 he was acting president. He has retired and lives in St. Louis Park. Robert Scott is today County Superintendent of Schools.]

During the next ten years the population of the village doubled and the schools felt the pressures of expansion. Brookside School was built about 1921, and additions were made to Fern Hill, Oak Hill, and Brookside before 1926. Old Northside School burned April 2, 1925 and had to be rebuilt. The new name given was Eliot. Lenox School was erected in 1928. The demand for elementary schools presaged a need for an expanded high school and there were some who advocated spending one and a quarter million dollars for the building which would provide a school and also relieve unemployment which had become acute in 1930. It was pointed out that the older Lincoln School which was serving as the high school was now being used by about four hundred and fifty pupils while it was designed to serve but two hundred fifty. The bond election to provide but \$250,000, which was held June 23, 1930 came at an inauspicious time for the depression had already begun. Taxpayer and improvement groups objected to the construction of the gymnasium and auditorium. The bond issue was rejected 680 to 502, and was rejected the second time in September 784 to 675. The building of the new structure had to wait until some federal aid was available.

The number of students who graduated from high school increased during the decade, rose from less than twenty to around sixty in 1929. During this period the student council was formed and the first school yearbooks were published. There were athletic teams but the coaches were faculty members who did the athletic work only as an extra curricular activity.

In the early 1930's Superintendent Scott resigned and was replaced by Norreys H. McKay. In 1937 a bond issue of \$130,000 was voted and with certain federal aid the high school building was expanded. The number of high school students increased to almost seventy and Edina students were taken on a tuition basis. By 1941, the total enrollment of the school system was 1,966 and there were sixty-four teachers. The kindergarten was reported to be the largest in the state. There were eight buildings: six elementary, one junior high school and one senior high school. Superintendent McKay resigned when the war broke out and joined the Red Cross. He was succeeded by L. Evans who remained in the system a couple of years before resigning in the fall of 1944 to enter business in Boone, Iowa. In the meantime, the number of students had grown to 2,400.

Otto E. Domian became superintendent in 1944, coming to the system from Waseca. By the next year the school enrollment had climbed to 2,585 and it seemed necessary to expand the physical facilities. As might be suspected, the costs of school operations grew with the increasing school enrollment. In 1943 the budget was set at \$230,083 and in the following year at \$288,299. At the end of the war, when materials were again available, it became imperative to build more schools or at least expand older buildings. During the war it became necessary for the students who had insufficient facilities in one area to be transported to another to continue in school without resorting to two shift teaching schedules. In 1945, the voters approved a \$950,000 bond issue to expand the system. But hardly had the building program begun when the great post-war influx of people into the village began and more funds were needed for expansion. In May of 1948 another bond issue was approved 725 to 184 and the building program continued.

Harold Enestvedt replaced Domian as superintendent in the meantime, the latter having taken a position in the research bureau of the College of Education of the University of Minnesota. Fern Hill School was built, that name being transferred from another neighboring school which was renamed. Brookside, Eliot, Oak Hill and Lenox were expanded. By 1952, Park Knoll was built at a cost of \$800,000 thus making the seventh elementary school in the village. The teaching staff also increased with the new growth in school population. By 1950 ten kindergarten teachers were required, and ninety-one teachers were needed in the elementary grades, an increase of fifteen over the previous year. The number on the high school staff remained at less than sixty. At the opening of the 1952 term there were needed 125 elementary teachers out of a total of over two hundred. The high school had 212 scholars one year when the Edina students were taught in St. Louis Park but the number declined to 153 in 1951 but is expected to reach almost 200 in 1952. The last school census showed 10,632 children under twenty

years of age with 4,508 in the age bracket six to sixteen. The census now being taken may reveal that there are more than 12,000 school age children in the village.

Costs have grown proportionately to the population during the decade. Total receipts in 1952 were \$1,359,680 which was secured from taxes, state aid, etc. Part of the revenue is used to retire bonds which total almost four million dollars.

The problems of the school are largely those created by the increasing population, most of whom are young and have families. Indeed, it takes a courageous Board of Education to attempt to solve problems so suddenly thrust upon a community.

There is within the school district in St. Louis Park two parochial schools operated by the Catholic parishes. Another parochial school is located outside the village limits, in Interlachen Park, which also serves Catholics in the southwestern part of the village. The oldest of the three schools is that of The Most Holy Trinity which is located near the intersection of Excelsior Boulevard and Highway 100. It began in 1945 in the partially completed building which serves as a church and school. The Sisters of St. Benedict of St. Joseph, Minnesota began in that year to give full time instruction. Two lay persons and four sisters began instruction in the first six grades and kindergarten. The next year the hot lunch program began. In 1947, the seventh grade was added but it was necessary to discontinue the kindergarten temporarily because of the great enrollment in the grades, which was about two hundred fifty and which required six teachers and one music teacher. In 1948, the eighth grade was added. By February of 1952, permission was received from the government to buy steel and the superstructure of the building was under construction in the summer of 1952. The fall enrollment showed 269 attending this parochial school.

Holy Family School was built in the summer of 1951 at a cost of \$330,000 and began instructional activities on September 4, 1951. Located at the corner of Lake and Zarthan, it opened with about two hundred students and four teachers, the four instructors being Servite Sisters of Ladysmith, Wisconsin. By 1952, the seventh grade was added and the school enrollment totaled 247. It is planned to add an eighth grade in 1953.

The school system of the village seems to be of high quality and with the generous support given it by the populace will probably remain at a high level. Its main problems have been to expand fast enough to meet the needs of a growing community but these difficulties have been overcome by vigorous action on the part of the people who have chosen high caliber men to serve upon the Board of Education.