

Minneapolis Bicycle Master Plan

Chapter 2 - History of Bicycling in Minneapolis

Chapter Overview

Looking Back—The City of Minneapolis has been at the forefront of bicycling since bicycles were introduced to the United States in the late 1800's. Many of the first streets to have been paved also became the city's first bicycle routes (many of these corridors are still bike routes). As bicycling became more popular during the turn of the century, cycle paths were added to roadway boulevards (where trees exist today). Bicycling in Minneapolis is not just a recreational activity or way to get around, it is what makes us Minnesotans. Bicycling has been and always will be part of the local culture.

Photos: Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



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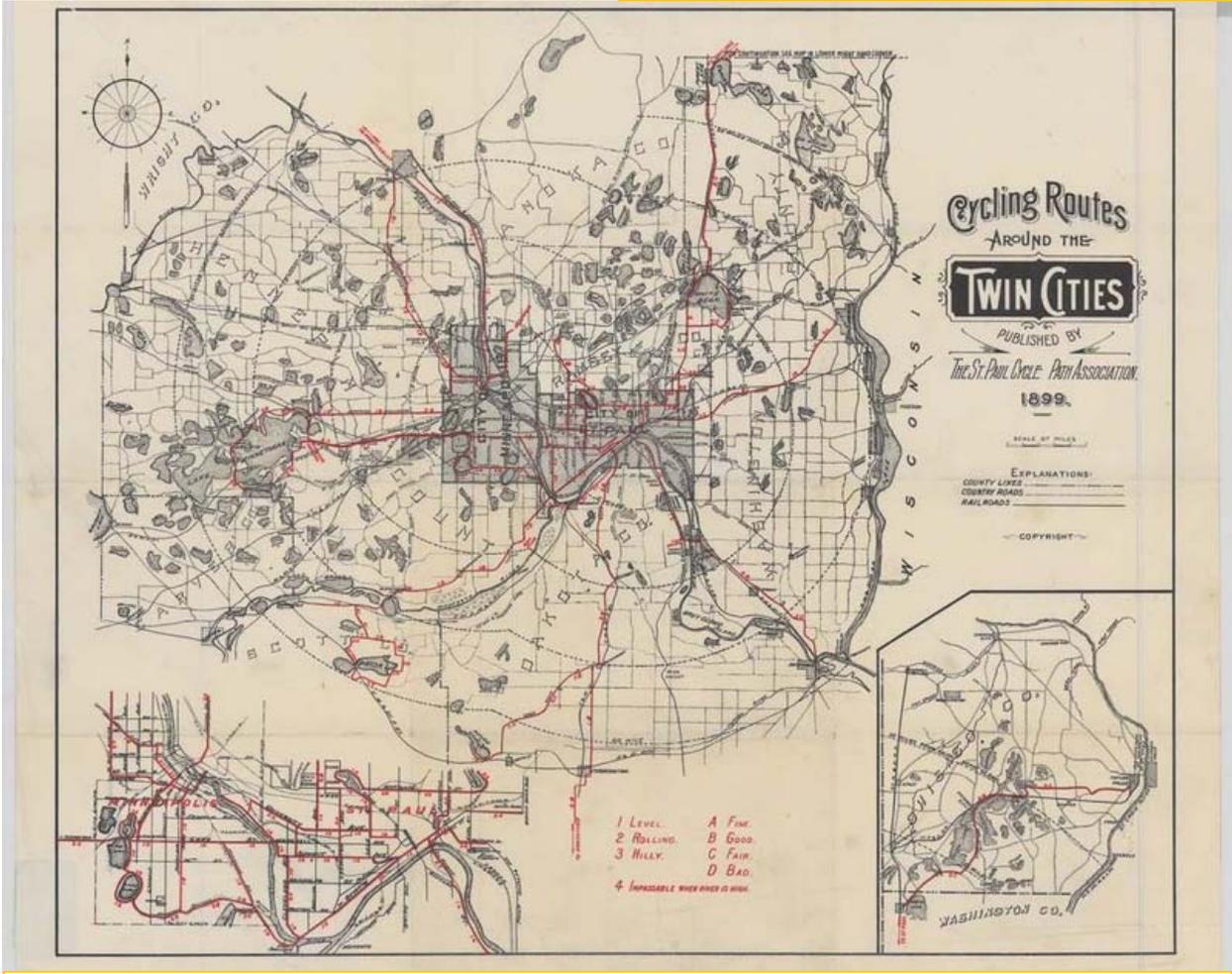
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Bicycling at the Turn of the Century

The First Paths—The first cycle paths were built by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board in 1895 along Kenwood Parkway and along Lake Harriet in 1896. A path was also constructed along Lake St between Minnehaha Ave and the Mississippi River in 1896. The Minnehaha Creek Trail was constructed in 1897 with numerous cycle paths to follow in 1898. Within 10 years the cycling craze was over, and many of the cycle tracks disappeared.



Above: This 1905 photo shows streetcars, bicycles, horses, wagons, automobiles, and pedestrians causing traffic congestion at the intersection of 6th Street South and Nicollet Avenue in Downtown Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Above: 1899 Twin Cities Cycling Map. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. In 1902 the City Engineer reported that there were a total of 202,718 residents in the City of Minneapolis. At that time there were 306.51 miles of graded streets, 103.11 miles of paved streets, and 43.54 miles of bicycle paths.

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Bicycling at the Turn of the Century

Bicycle Registration—Although bikes no longer need to be licensed, there was a time when the City of Minneapolis had a full-time bicycle inspector to enforce cycling laws and an ordinance requiring cyclists to buy annual tags for their bikes. By 1903, at the height of the cycling craze, 30,000 tags were sold in Minneapolis.

The bike tags cost 50 cents per year, and proceeds helped fund cycle path construction. In 1901, there were 40 miles of paths in the city. Today, Minneapolis has 127 miles of paths.

A headline in a 1900 *Minneapolis Journal* article read: “Bicycle Inspector Connors Has More Than He Can Handle” and went on to report that Full-time Bicycle Inspector E.M. Connors was in need of another officer to assist in the problem of “stolen wheels.”

The Minneapolis-based Minnesota Cycle Pump Company opened for business in 1900 and installed 500 pump machines on street corners in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. For a penny, cyclists could get 40 cranks to fill up flats.

Century Rides—Women were at the forefront of the turn-of-the-century cycling craze. Female racers used to ride 100 mile, non-stop “centuries.” Here are two reports from the Sports section of the *Minneapolis Journal* in two 1900 articles:

“Miss Blanche Boucher finished a 200-mile ride last evening in 17 hours and 30 minutes. She started from Monk’s place at Lake Calhoun, at 3 o’clock yesterday morning and was paced by tandem teams throughout the day. She stood the strain well and looked fit for another century at the finish.”

“Mrs. James McIlrath Jr. started last Friday morning at 9 o’clock over the St Paul – Minnetonka century course, and, before stopping, rolled up five consecutive centuries, finishing at 8 o’clock Sunday evening, one hour within the limit of 60 hours. So far as known this is the longest ride ever made by a lady.”



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The Development of the Minneapolis Parks System

Park History—Minneapolis has one of the best park systems in the US because of the planning that was done over 100 years ago. The Minneapolis Board of Park Commissioners was established in 1883 and was tasked by the legislature to develop a park system.

Envisioned by Horace Cleveland and under the direction of Captain William Morse Berry, the Board of Park Commissioners began acquiring property in 1884 for the park system. Between 1884 and 1905 the Board of Park Commissioners acquired property and established parks at the Chain of Lakes, Minnehaha Falls, Saratoga-Springs-Glenwood, Powderhorn Lake, Minnehaha Parkway, East River Road, Columbia Pkwy, and the Parade.

Theodore Wirth became parks superintendent in 1906 and served until 1935. Wirth is credited for advancing the Minneapolis Grand Rounds system and completing numerous park projects. Numerous pathways were created during his tenure including trails along the Chain of Lakes and along the Parade corridor.

Under the direction of Superintendent Christian Bossen, park and trail investment continued during the Great Depression utilizing federal funding, keeping hundreds of local workers employed during this period.

The original Minneapolis Park system laid the foundation for today’s trail system. Without the investment and foresight of past commissioners and superintendents, the park and trail system would not be as vast as it is today.

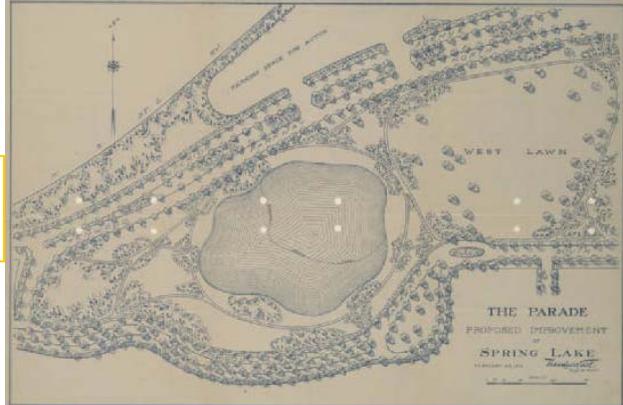
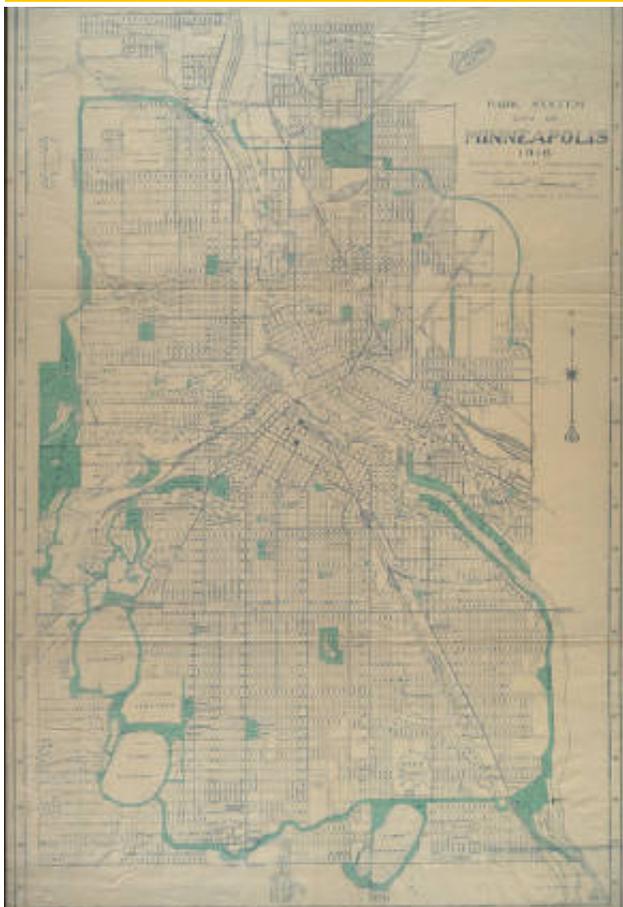


Photo: The 1913 map above shows an early plan for the Parade, which connected Kenwood Parkway to Loring Park. Much of the land in this area was donated by Thomas Lowry and William Dunwoody. For much of the 20th Century the Parade fields were filled with people playing football, baseball, softball, and tennis. After Parade Stadium was built in 1951, the site hosted many professional football games and softball championships. Plan courtesy of the MPRB.



Below: 1916 Theodore Wirth Map of Minneapolis Parkways: Courtesy of the MPRB

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Bicycling in the 20th Century

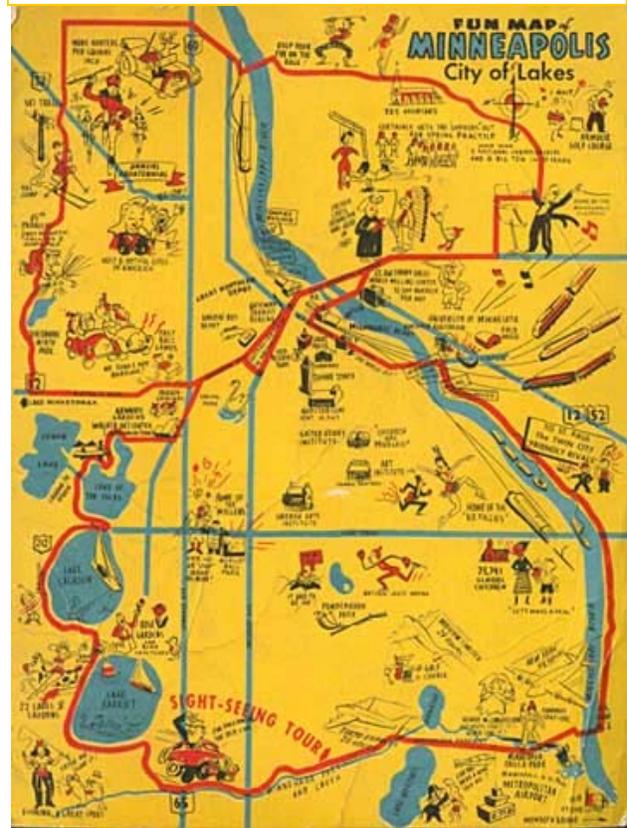
1920 to 1970—The 1920’s saw a tremendous boom in the development of roadways throughout the country. With more people driving automobiles, bicycles were now seen as children’s toys. Bicycle technology improved greatly during the 1930’s and 1940’s with the introduction of quick release hubs, the cable shifted derailleur, and better tires. The development of the interstate system in the 1950’s and 1960’s allowed people to live further from the cities and most of these new suburbs did not design with bicycles in mind.

1970 to 1990—Increased environmental awareness and fuel shortages in the 1970’s led to more people using bicycles as a mode of transportation. The City of Minneapolis and its agency partners have been working for years to develop a system of designated bikeways throughout the city. In the 1970’s the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) improved most of the Grand Rounds trail system, creating a paved trail loop around the perimeter of the city. Although this trail system is one of the best bikeway systems in the nation, its primary purpose was to serve recreational riders. Recognizing the need to serve utilitarian and commuter bicyclists, the city added a network of bicycle route signs near the University of Minnesota Campus in the 1970’s. Many of these bike routes still exist today.

1990’s—In 1991 Congress passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act, (ISTEA), which provided a dedicated funding source for bicycle projects. Utilizing this program, MnDOT refurbished the Stone Arch Bridge in 1994 and the City of Minneapolis and MPRB constructed the Cedar Lake Trail in 1995. The Kenilworth Trail was built in 1999.



Photo: This photo from around 1940 shows a walking path around Lake of the Isles. A bridle path was located where the bicycle trail is located today. Photos Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



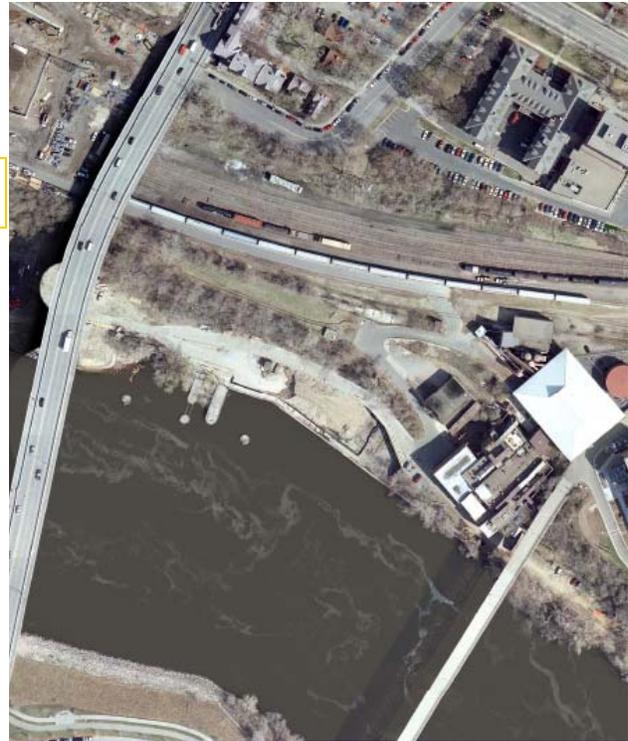
Above: This “fun map” from 1940 shows the Minneapolis Grand Rounds route. Often called the “Emerald Necklace” the Minneapolis Grand Rounds is a 50 mile National Scenic Byway. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

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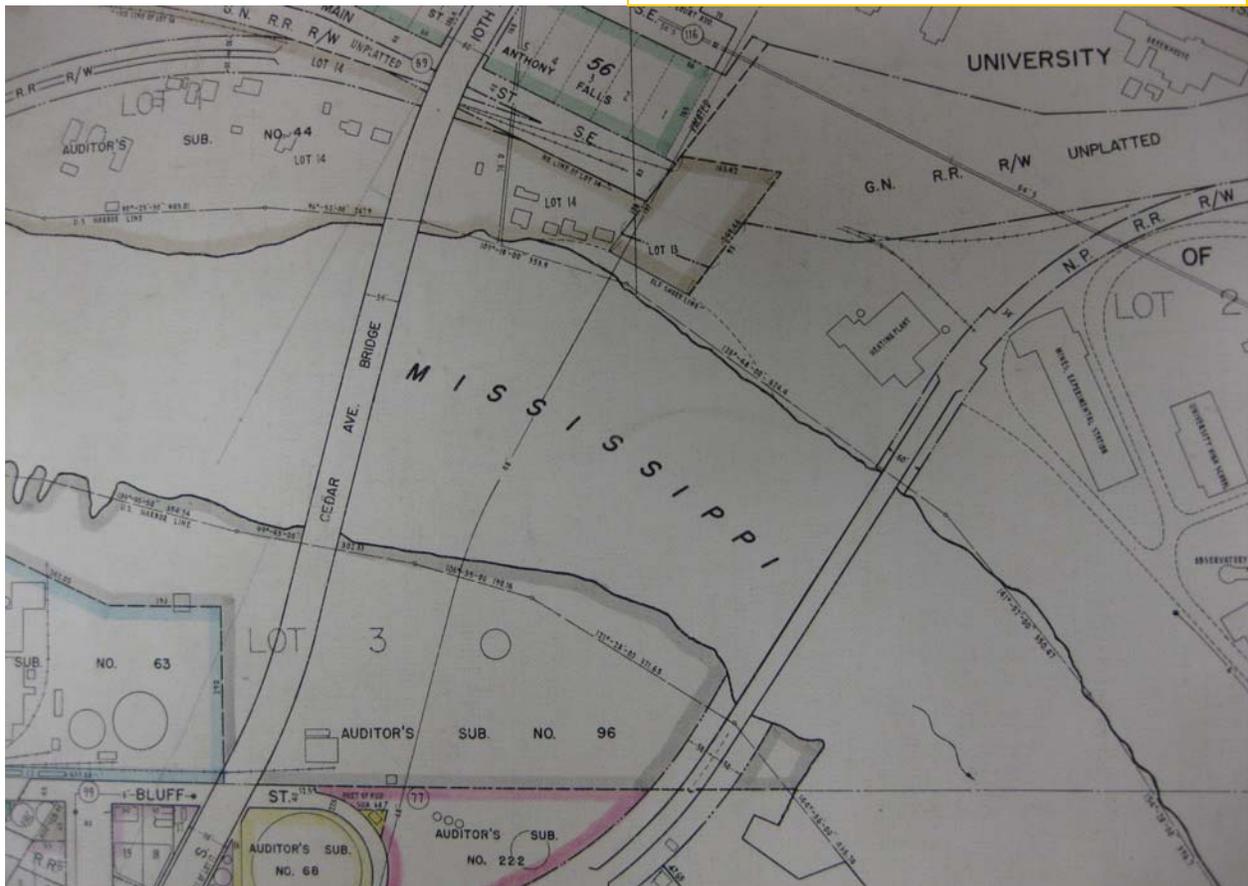
Then and Now

10th Avenue Bridge—The 10th Avenue Bridge was constructed between 1926 and 1929 and was originally the Cedar Avenue Bridge. The bridge currently carries traffic and accommodates both bicycles and pedestrians.

Bridge #9—Bridge #9 is a deck truss bridge over the Mississippi River that was originally constructed by the Northern Pacific Railway in 1924 to replace a railroad corridor that ran parallel to Washington Avenue through the University of Minnesota campus. Bridge #9 was purchased by the city in 1986 for \$1 after rail service ended in 1981. The bridge was turned into a bicycle/pedestrian bridge in 1999.



Above: 10th Ave Bridge and Bridge #9 today.

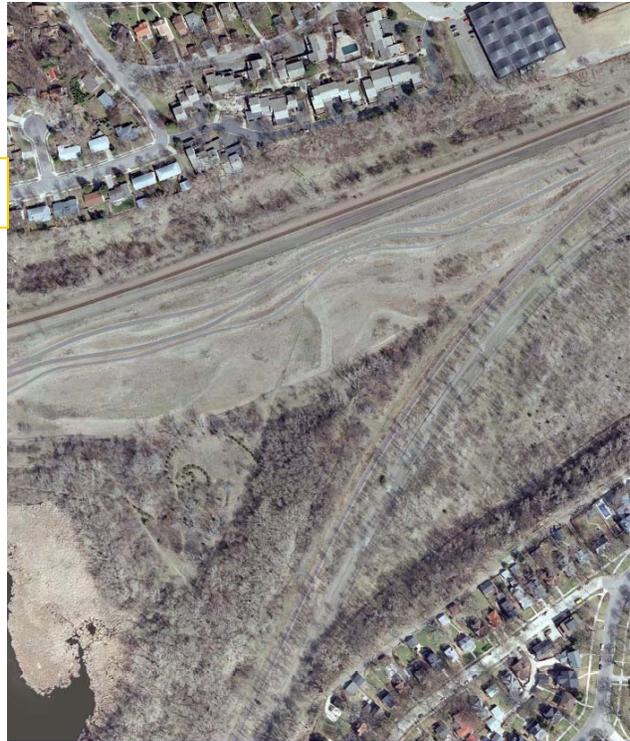


Above: The map above is from the 1940 City of Minneapolis Atlas.

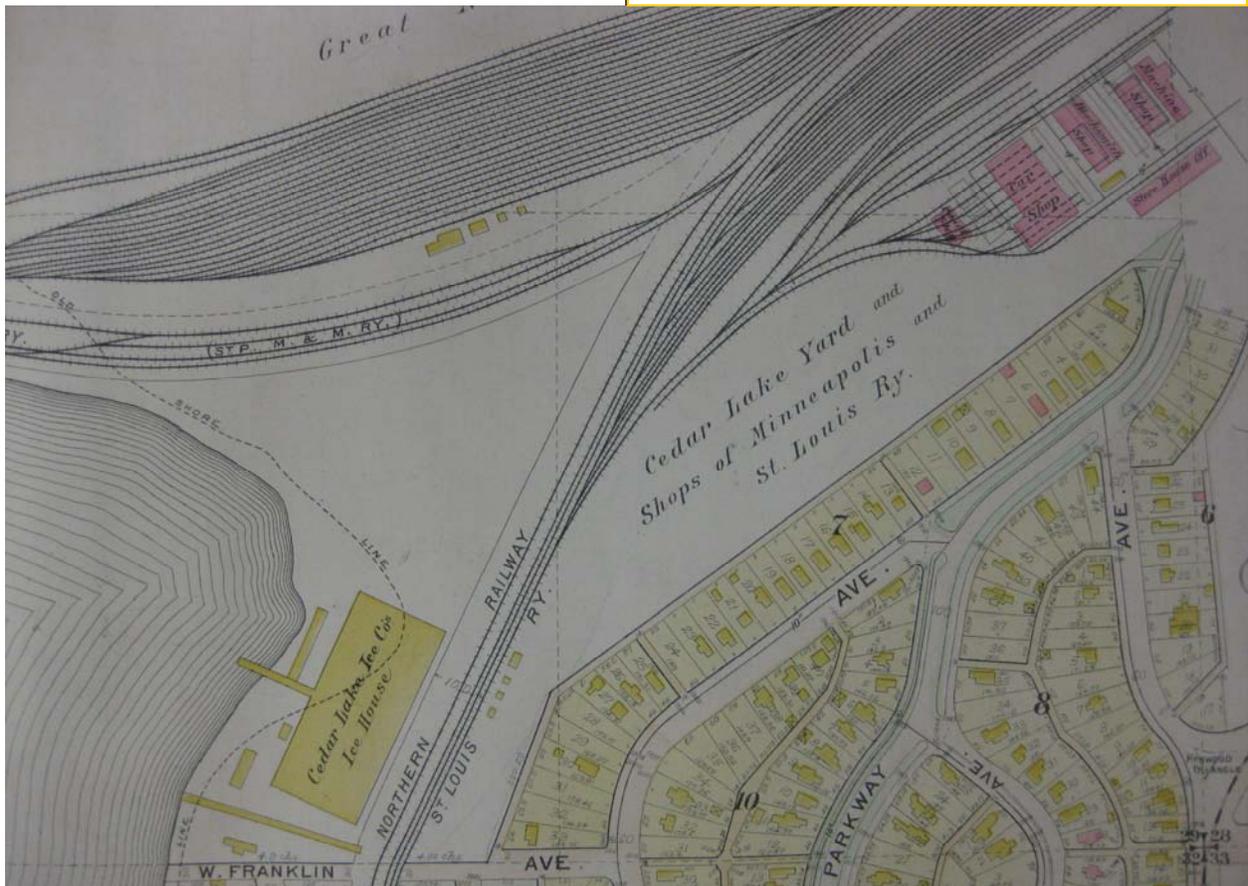
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Then and Now

Cedar Lake Trail—Where the Kenilworth Trail and Cedar Lake Trail intersect, a large rail switching yard used to exist. In 1989 a group of residents formed the Cedar Lake Park Association to raise money to purchase 28 acres from the railroad. By 1991 the group had raised \$1.7 million in private and state funding and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board acquired the property. This purchase facilitated the construction of the Cedar Lake Trail in 1995 and the Kenilworth Trail in 1999. The parcel has since been added to the regional park system and has been restored to a native setting with prairie grasses and wildflowers.



Above: Cedar Lake Regional Park today.



Above: The map above is from the 1914 City of Minneapolis Atlas.

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Then and Now

Hennepin Avenue Bridge—The crossing of the Mississippi River at Hennepin Avenue looked much different 100 years ago when a steel arch bridge was in place. The steel arch bridge was completed in 1891 and lasted until 1990 when the existing bridge was completed by Hennepin County. Before the steel arch bridge there were two previous bridges. The first bridge was opened in 1855 as a toll bridge and the second bridge was finished in 1876. The existing bridge is wide enough to facilitate bike lanes in both directions in addition to wide sidewalks on both sides of the bridge for bicycles and pedestrians to share. There are trail connections on both sides of the bridge.



Photo: The Hennepin Avenue Bridge.



Photo: The map above is from the 1914 City of Minneapolis Atlas.

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Then and Now

Lake Harriet Trails—The land surrounding Lake Harriet was acquired by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board in 1885 and a parkway was completed the following year. In 1896 a separated bicycle trail was constructed around the lake located between the walking paths and the parkway. In 1914 the bicycle path was replaced by a bridle (horse) path. The current trail is one of the busiest in the state with one-way clockwise travel around the lake.

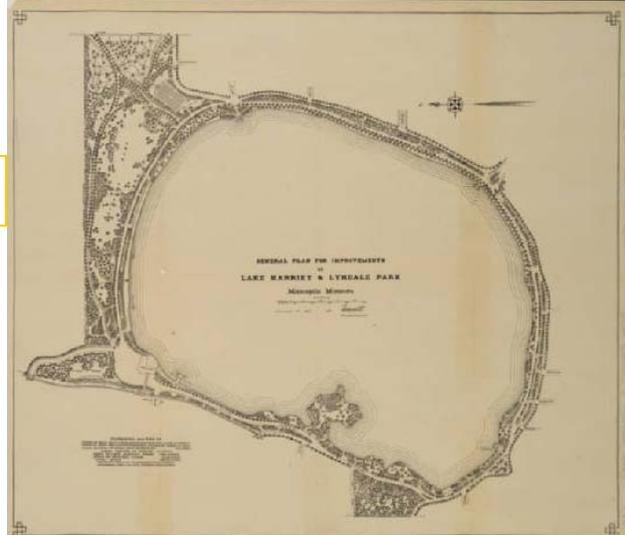


Photo: The 1907 park plan above is courtesy of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. This map is oriented looking east (north is pointing left)



Photo: Lake Harriet path today.

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Then and Now

Lake Nokomis Trails—Property around Lake Nokomis was acquired in 1908, however it would be several years before trails would be constructed around the lake. Between 1914 and 1917 the lake was dredged and the sediment used to create a more defined shore.

Lake Nokomis has become a popular swimming and sail boating destination. The lake also draws hundreds of people to baseball/softball games and is very popular with bicyclists. The trails around Lake Nokomis were constructed in 1975 and in 1976 and were widened and resurfaced in 2003



Photo: The 1913 park plan above is courtesy of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. Lake Nokomis was originally called Lake Amelia until 1910.



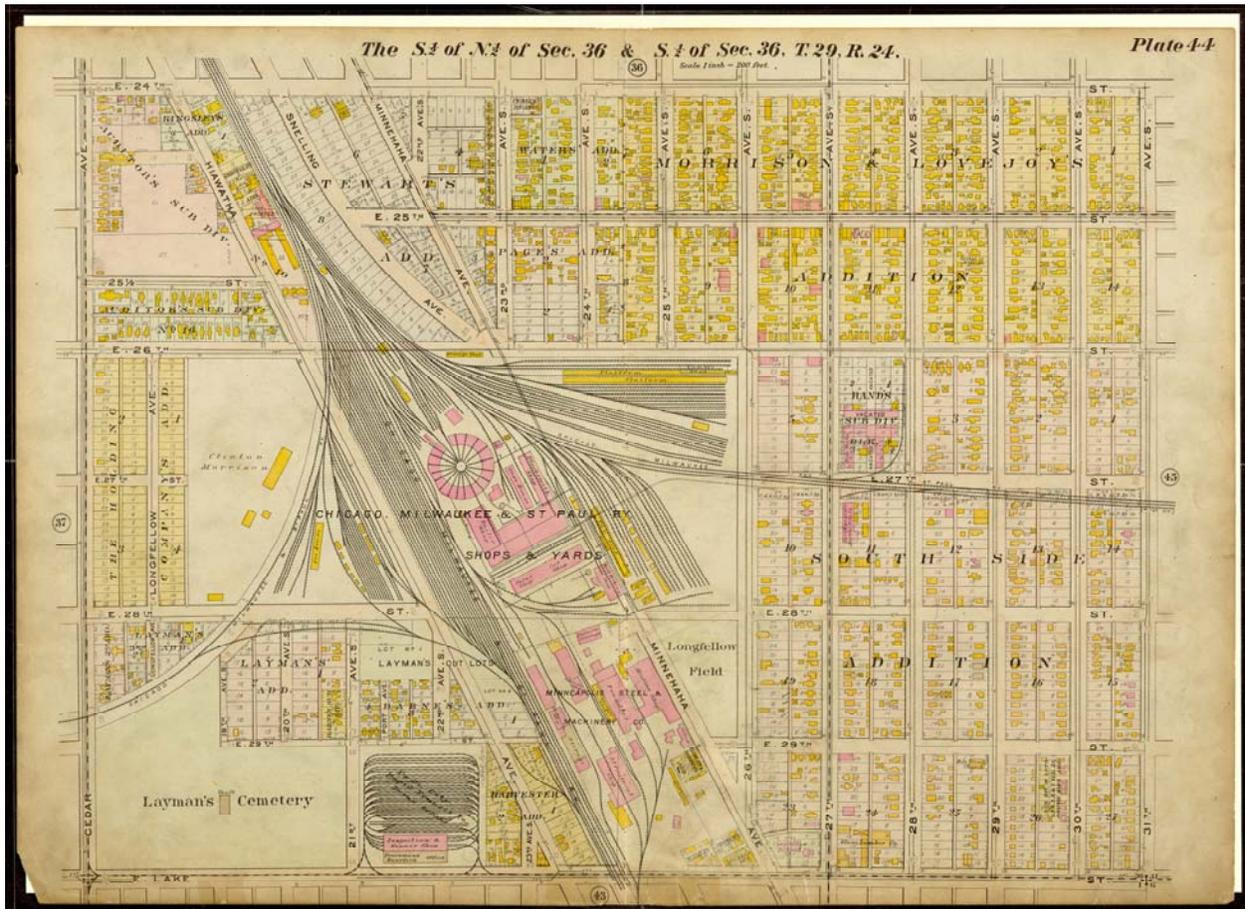
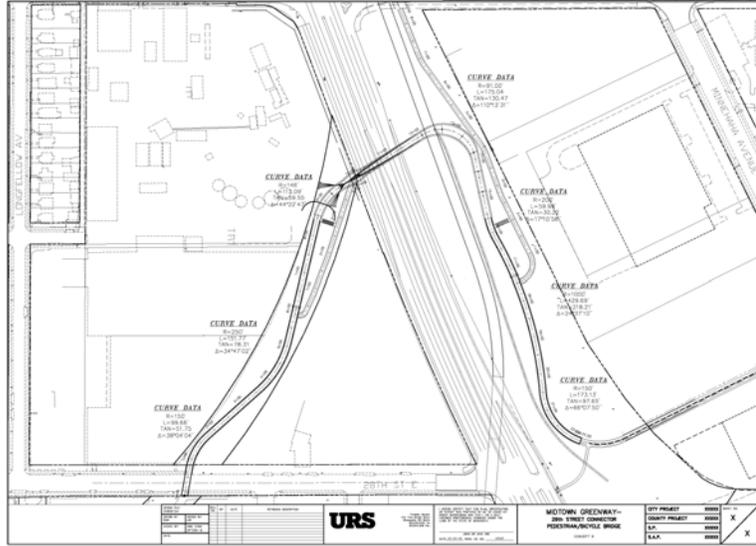
Photo: Lake Nokomis today.

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Then and Now

Martin Olav Sabo Bridge—The location of the existing Martin Sabo Bridge near the intersection of 28th Street and Hiawatha Avenue was once a large rail yard with a roundhouse and several maintenance facilities. The 1914 plat map below also shows a streetcar yard, the Layman’s Cemetery (Pioneer Cemetery), and the Minneapolis Steel and Machinery Company plant. The 1914 plat is courtesy of the Minneapolis Public Library Special Collection.



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Then and Now

Midtown Greenway—The Midtown Greenway trails were built in three phases. The first phase was completed in 2000, the second phase in 2004, and the third phase in 2006. Although it was constructed in a period of only a few years, it took decades of planning and a considerable amount of resources from Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis and the Federal Government. The Hennepin County Regional Railroad acquired property from Canadian Pacific Railway, purchased a grain elevator, and remediated contaminated soils to allow for trail construction. The City of Minneapolis operates/maintains the trail.



Above: CEPRO grain elevator before it was demolished. The county purchase of the grain elevator eliminated the need for rail service and allowed for Phase 2 of the trail to be constructed.



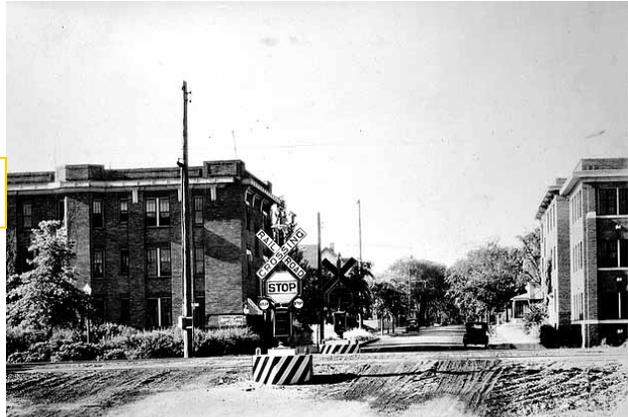
Photo: The photo above shows CPERO Park today along the Midtown Greenway at 11th Avenue. In the background is the Midtown Exchange, which is a renovated Sears and Roebuck store and warehouse.

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Then and Now

Midtown Greenway—By 1910 the east/west at-grade rail corridor located next to 29th Street was presenting safety and congestion challenges. To address these problems, it was decided to grade separate the entire corridor from Hennepin Ave. to Cedar Ave.



Above: Midtown Greenway at Humboldt Ave (1927)



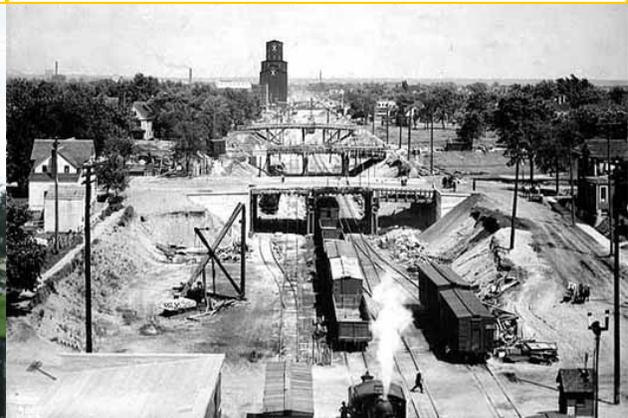
Above: Midtown Greenway at Humboldt Ave today.



Above: Midtown Greenway at Humboldt Ave (1927)



Above: Midtown Greenway bridges today.



Above: Bridge construction at Portland Avenue (1915).



Above: 4th Avenue bridge today.



Above: Midtown Greenway at 4th Avenue (1915)

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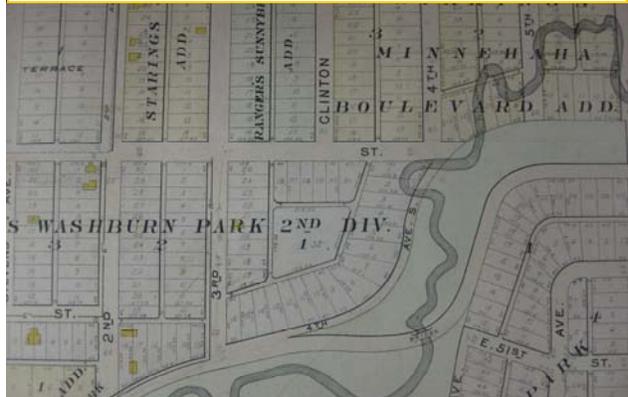
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Then and Now

Minnehaha Creek Trails—Minnehaha Parkway is part of the Minneapolis Grand Rounds and connects Lake Harriet to Minnehaha Park. The property along the river was acquired in phases between 1887 and 1892. The parkway between Lake Harriet and Lyndale Avenue was constructed in 1889 and the remainder of the parkway to the east was finished by 1899. The trails along Minnehaha Creek Parkway were originally installed in 1897 but were converted to bridle (horse) paths in 1907 after interest in bicycling declined. Paved trails were constructed between 1972 and 1975. In 2000 and 2001 the MPRB reconstructed the paths and created separated bicycle and pedestrian trails. In 2000 a bridge with a trail was also constructed over Hiawatha Avenue.



Above: Minnehaha Creek Trails today.



Above: 1914 City of Minneapolis Atlas.



Above: Minnehaha Parkway and Trail in the Fall of 1909: Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

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Then and Now

Minnehaha Park Trails—Minnehaha Falls was one of the first natural features that early settlers wrote about. Minnehaha Park was to be the first Minnesota State Park, but the land was turned over to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board in 1889 instead. The park once had a zoo, a busy Victorian train station, and a camp grounds. Today the park has an extensive trail system, large picnic areas, and several historical monuments. It is estimated that over 850,000 people visit each year.



MINNEHARA FALLS.

Above: A painting of Minnehaha Falls by Currier and Ives completed in 1870. Minnehaha Falls drops 53 feet. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Photo: The map above is from the 1914 City of Minneapolis Atlas showing the Minnehaha Train Depot.

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Then and Now

North Mississippi Regional Trails—The expansion of Camden Park to the river was originally proposed by Theodore Wirth in 1917, however it wasn't until the 1950's that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board acquired much of the land that is now called North Mississippi Regional Park. A deal between the City of Minneapolis and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) in 1974 allowed for I-94 to be built on the western edge of the park land in exchange for a longer and larger park parcel along the river. Several other acquisitions in the late 1980's occurred along the riverfront extending the park to the north. In 1997 the North Mississippi Regional Trails were constructed with connections to Brooklyn Center, to the Shingle Creek Trail, and to Camden Bridge. Three Rivers Park District currently operates the visitor's center and maintains the trails with regional trail funding.



Photo: The 1918 map above shows the proposed eastern portion of Camden Park. Courtesy of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

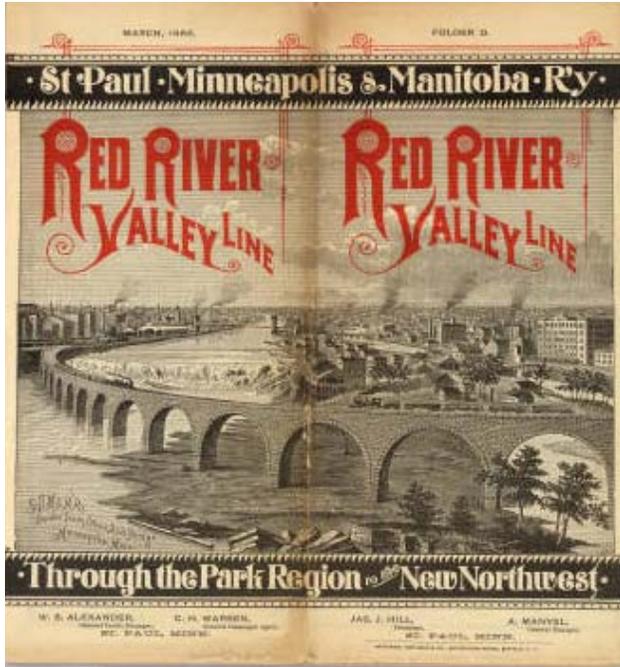


Photo: The North Mississippi Trails today.

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Then and Now

Stone Arch Bridge—The Stone Arch Bridge was built by the Great Northern Railway in 1883 and is one of the historical icons of the Twin Cities region. In 1963 one column of the bridge was altered to construct a new lock that allowed barge shipping to the north. Once serving passenger rail trains, the bridge was converted to a bicycle and pedestrian trail in 1994 and was the first project in the state to use federal Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds. The bridge is a major bicycle commuter route with over 1,300 bicyclists per day in the spring/summer/fall. The bridge offers the best view of St. Anthony Falls, which is the only falls along the Mississippi River.



Above: 1886 Poster showing the Stone Arch Bridge, which was built by railroad owner James J. Hill in 1883: Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

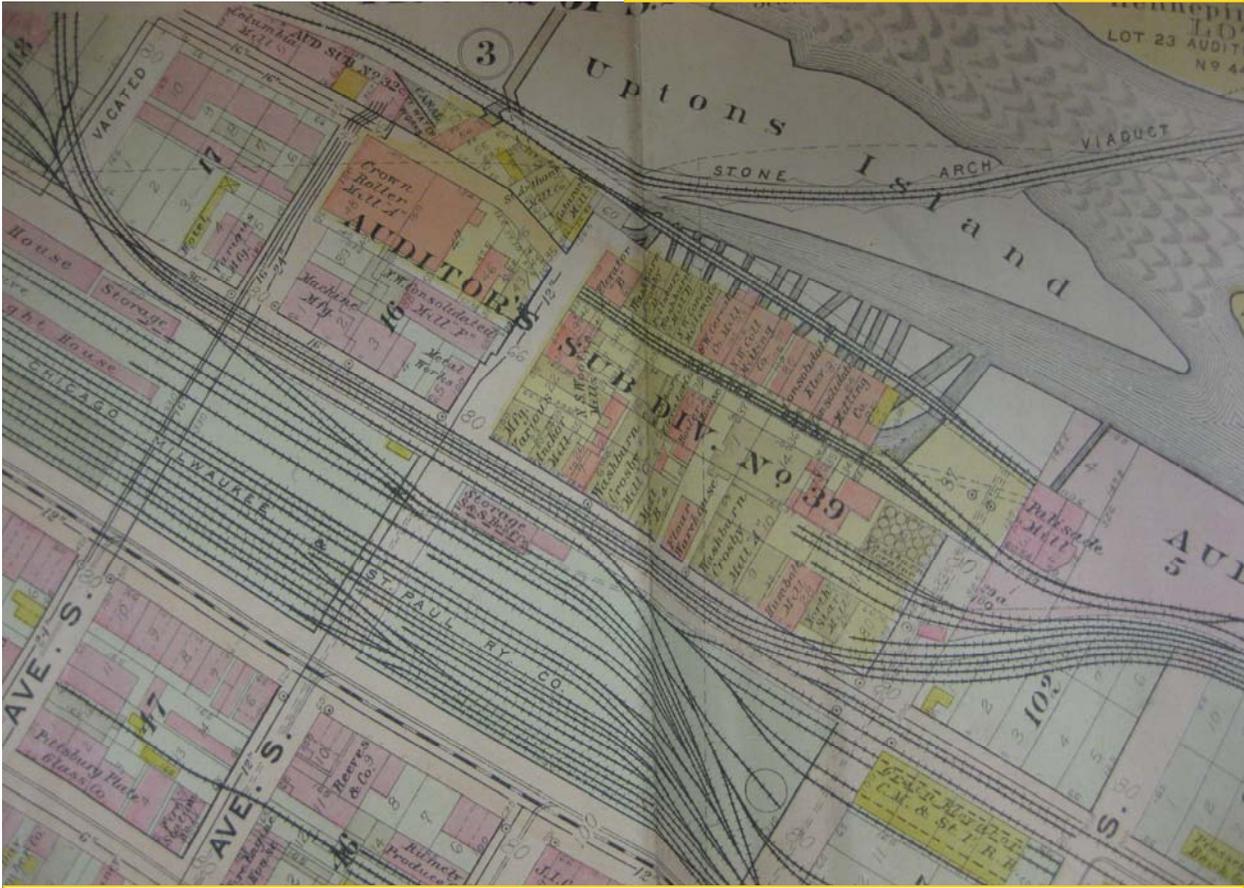


Photo: The map above is from the 1914 City of Minneapolis Atlas.

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Then and Now

Stone Arch Bridge—The photos on this page show modern and historical photos of the Stone Arch Bridge.



Above: Photo of the Stone Arch Bridge in 1890. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Above: A photo of the Stone Arch Bridge today from the Guthrie Theatre cantilevered observation deck. The bridge was lit in 2005 and is now visible at night.



Above: 1918 Photo showing original 10th Avenue Bridge, Stone Arch Bridge and new 3rd Avenue Bridge. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Above: A modern photo showing the deck of the Stone Arch Bridge with two bike lanes and pedestrian walkways on each side. One of the city's best skyline views.



Above: The bridge had two sets of tracks and served passenger trains until 1978. 1965 photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. Photo by Alan Ominski.



Above: A photo showing Mill Ruins Park today. A row of buildings used to exist in the grassy area above. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Above: A 1885 photo showing the mill district after the 1878 Washburn A Mill explosion. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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Then and Now

Upper River Trails—In 1999 the City of Minneapolis completed the Above the Falls: Upper River Master Plan. Within this plan is a proposal to complete the trails along both sides of the Mississippi River from Downtown Minneapolis to the Camden Bridge. Although this plan is ambitious, it recognizes that there are several land uses that will likely be in place for a long time and the completion of the proposed trails will take many years. The first segment of this trail gap to be completed were the trails along West River Road from Plymouth Avenue to Olson Park in 2007.



Above: View of BNSF Bridge today.



Photo: The map above is from the 1914 City of Minneapolis Atlas.