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PEOPLE and PLACES in OLD ST. PAUL

Reminiscences of ALICE MONFORT DUNN

Arranged for publication by her son, JAMES TAYLOR DUNN

AS A CHILD and a young girl I lived much of the time with my aunt, Mrs. Frank Summers, in my father's hotel, the Windsor, located at Fifth and St. Peter streets, where the St. Paul Hotel now stands. In the 1880's, when I lived there, it was a spot of historic interest — in a sense the political center of Minnesota. Convention after convention was held there, with one wing given over to the Republicans and the other to the Democrats. Strange to say, harmony reigned over all. Once I heard a man trying to bribe a senator. In an apparent burst of indignation, Mr. Senator said in a stentorian voice, "Sir, how dare you insult me! I am an honest man," and then almost in a whisper, unaware of the little girl standing behind a pillar, he remarked, "My coat is hanging in the lobby; you can put the money in the pocket."

In the dining room a table in the corner was reserved for the bachelors — Stone Gorman, Dr. George Coon, Dr. Cornelius Williams, Judge Westcott Wilkin, Orland Cullen, my handsome Uncle George Monfort, and others. Celebrated authors frequently dined at the Windsor — Ignatius Donnelly, Hamlin Garland, Sir Gilbert Parker, who came to St. Paul to visit his brothers, and hosts of others. When he played in St. Paul, the actor Richard Mansfield always engaged the entire first floor wing on the St. Peter Street side of the Windsor. He was not very tall, quite Eng-

lish in appearance, and arrogant and dictatorial. But he could be very nice when he was pleased.

The hotel's main dining room was long and had plate-glass windows on one side. Each window had a border of stained glass, fruits, flowers, birds, etc. set in lead designs. A wide strip of crimson carpet ran the entire length of the room. A separate dining room had curtained booths lining the walls. All in all, the atmosphere was cheerful, cozy, and happy, conducive to good digestion. And such an enormous amount of food to choose from! The menu listed oysters and little neck clams in season, appetizers, three varieties of soup, fish, four or five entrees, and a similar variety of meats, salads, and desserts. In addition, a small decanter of wine was served to each individual. The price — seventy-five cents! I once heard a woman say to her son, "Peter, stop drinking water. I didn't pay all that money to have you fill up on liquids."

Each evening the city's hotels featured itinerant musicians, usually playing the harp, violin, cello, and flute. Italian songs and excerpts from operas were given, as well as such favorites as "Old Black Joe" and "Old Folks at Home." In addition, typical songs of the day, such as "Daisy Bell," "My Sweetheart's the Man in the Moon," "Where Did You Get That Hat?" and similar selections made up the repertoire of these traveling musicians.



THE *Windsor Hotel*

Chairs on the sidewalk in front of the Windsor were always occupied by men who did not sit up straight, but tipped back in them. I do not know how they managed to keep their equilibrium. Young girls who passed by found the experience very disagreeable; it was almost like running the gauntlet.

Two blocks south of the Windsor was Third Street, now Kellogg Boulevard. This was the city's fashionable promenade in the 1880's. About four in the afternoon the local boys and girls would gather to walk up and down, crossing from one side of the street to the other as they window shopped. Two jewelry shops were especially interesting—Myer's and Ed Brown's, just below Bridge Square at Third and Wabasha—for they displayed superb rings, necklaces, and brooches. Lanpher's hats, caps, and furs were to be seen on Third Street, and located there also were D. D. Merrill of the St. Paul Book and Stationery Company, Russ Munger's music store, and James Stevens' art shop.

Farther east on Third Street was Louis B. Smith's candy and fruit store—an after-school meeting place for the young. Another favorite spot was the confectionary shop on Robert Street owned by J. George Smith. Huge baskets of luscious fruits—pineapples, pomegranates, bananas, oranges, Malaga grapes, and other exotic eatables—were displayed on a sloping stand in a large window. All the baskets

were different. Some had high twisted handles tied with enormous wired bows and bright red, purple, or yellow tulle; some were fishermen's baskets with open lids; others were shaped like trunks and were covered with steamship labels or European hotel stickers. Above the entrance of Smith's shop, extending from the second story, Cupid sat in a pink shell driving six pure white doves. He sported a blue girdle, and the reins he held were all colors of the rainbow. Inside the shop, the counters were piled high with candies, mixtures of a thousand colors, and with candied fruits in round boxes edged with frilled paper. The fruit came from the French Riviera, for California was not yet in the business. To the rear of the shop there were small marble-topped tables, each with a glass candlestick, in which one day all the candles would be red, another, yellow or lavender. To top it all, J. George Smith served wonderful rich homemade ice cream. My favorite was peach, with great chunks of delicious fresh fruit all through it.

On Seventh Street, which was called Fort Street above Seven Corners, were located the city's dime museums—amusement places which provided great thrills for boys and girls. There were to be seen the freaks of the day—Jo-Jo the dog-faced boy, sword swallows, ossified and tattooed men, and numerous malformed creatures who held a great fascination for the youngsters. There, too, one could see a

series of fast-moving photographs by looking through a small aperture and turning a crank after inserting a nickel in a slot. These pictures were most amusing. They depicted young women jumping up on chairs to escape tiny mice, ladies lifting their skirts above their ankles as they crossed muddy streets, little girls playing with dogs, and similar simple situations. I suppose these pictures were the forerunners of the movies.

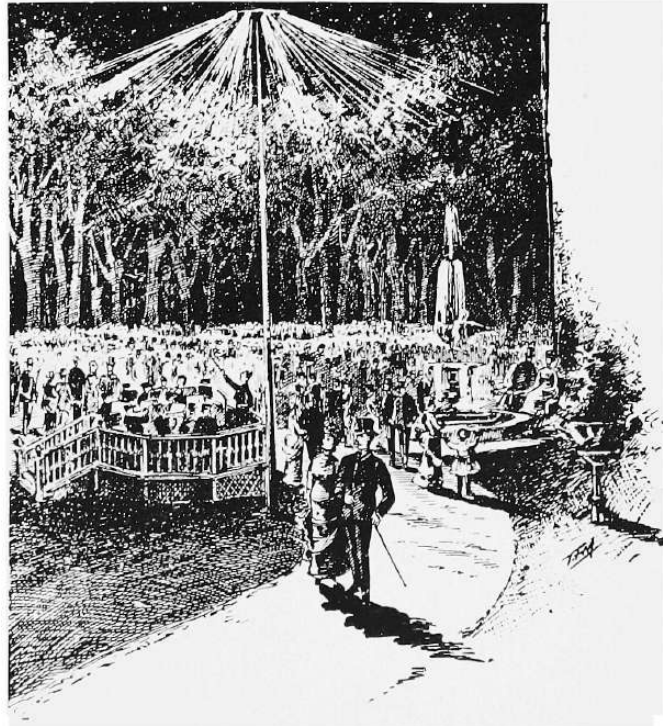
Within easy reach of the Windsor Hotel was Rice Park, the square which the St. Paul Public Library now faces. It was very pretty in the 1880's. Centering from a large fountain of cast iron representing a boy clutching a goose by the neck, gravel paths and beds of colorful flowers spread out through the park. Band concerts were given there each Friday night in the summer, and people in every imaginable kind of equipage would draw up alongside the square or drive slowly past as they listened to the music. There were phaetons with fringed canopy tops, buggies with horses wearing elaborate fly nets and cute little caps on their ears, elegant landaus with uniformed coachmen on high seats in front and sometimes footmen at the back, dog-carts, tandems drawn by two and sometimes three horses hitched one in front of the other, commercial hired hacks in which the driver operated from a high seat in front and the riders occupied two seats facing each other below. One hack driver was Jock, who drove for J. B. Cook and Son from the Union Depot, near its present site, to the Windsor Hotel. Since he knew my father well, he would sometimes call out to me, "Little girl, don't you want a ride?" And proud as Punch, I would ride in state two or three times around Rice Park.

Lower Town, just beyond Smith Park, now in the heart of the St. Paul wholesale district, was a fashionable residential section in the 1880's. My dear friend Alice Pope and her sisters, Gussie and Elsie, lived in that neighborhood with their

mother and grandfather. They were granddaughters of the famous Henry H. Sibley, who had been a general in the Civil War, commanded the military forces sent to quell the Indians in the Sioux Outbreak of 1862, and served as the first governor of Minnesota after it became a state in 1858. Loads of boys used to call on Alice at the Sibley mansion on Woodward Avenue. At nine o'clock Grandpa Sibley would shake the coal stove furiously. At ten he noisily wound the tall grandfather clock. After that hour, poor Alice was on pins and needles for fear Grandpa would appear at the top of the stairs in his long white night-shirt and stocking cap to demand in a loud voice, "Young woman, do you and your guests realize how late the hour is?"

Many of my friends and relatives lived in the neighborhood of Irvine Park, just west of Seven Corners and two blocks south of Fort Street. Though it was so close to the St. Paul business district, the park was as secluded as a suburb. No road passed through it, and the families who lived there made their own laws socially speaking, and established their own social customs. It was well understood that within the park precincts, no lady need put on

EVENING band concert in Rice Park



her bonnet to make a friendly call. She might, if she chose, even wear her sewing apron. Without fear of censure or disapproving glances, she could tie up her head in a kerchief when she sat in the park or visited across the nearest back fence. The park and many of its stately houses remain, though most of the families who lived there in the 1880's have removed to other parts of the city.

Many brilliant and distinguished people lived on Irvine Park and the adjacent streets. Captain Henry Carver and his daughter Helen, a Vassar graduate, always most punctilious in speech and manner, lived on Walnut Street. Across the street from them was the home of Joseph L. Forepaugh, set in a beautiful garden, the pride and joy of the entire neighborhood.

Among those who lived on Exchange Street were Judge and Mrs. James Gilfillan. After the evening meal they always retired to the library, where they read aloud from the classics. General John Averill, who lived on the opposite side of the street, had two exceedingly pretty daughters, Mrs. William H. Stowell and Mrs. Edwin Jaggard, the wife of Judge Jaggard. Frequently I heard Judge Jaggard, an extremely brilliant and witty man, make presentation addresses when trophies were awarded at the White Bear and St. Paul Yacht clubs on Raspberry Island.

General John H. Hammond and his family lived farther down the street. Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Moss, a "great pair" known by everyone as Uncle and Auntie Moss, lived in a delightful little house just below the Horace Bigelow mansion on Exchange Street. Auntie Moss was crippled with rheumatism. As a bride, I am told, she was extremely pretty and had an exquisite complexion which she kept until she was quite old. Uncle Moss, short and fat, was as jovial a soul as ever lived. He was a good talker, and when somewhat animated rolled his eyes in a very peculiar manner.

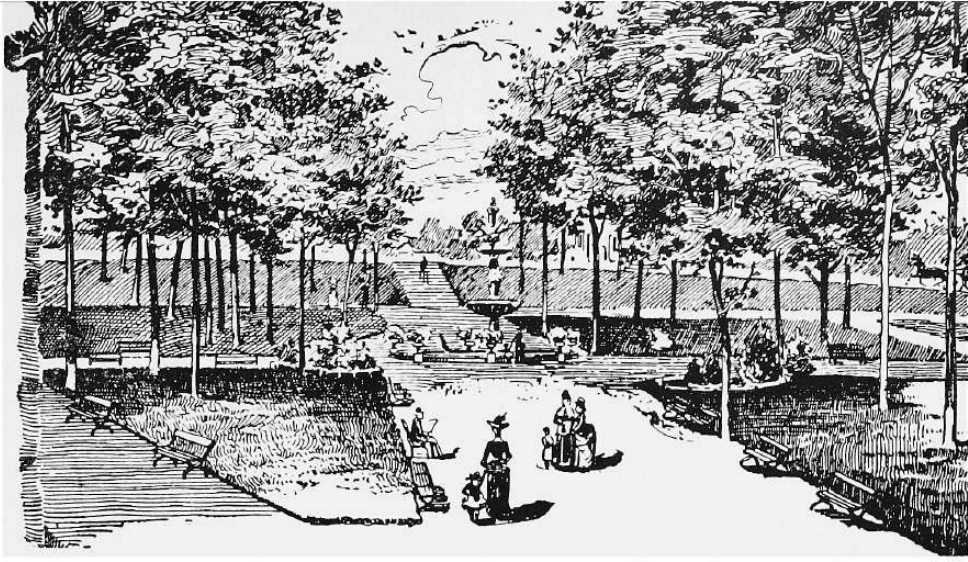
The William L. Bannings had an enormous house on Wilkin, a short distance

from Irvine Park. Ellen, my mother's intimate friend, became the second wife of Frederick Ayer of Boston. Mrs. Henry M. Knox, on Exchange Street, had a beautiful soprano voice and sang in the House of Hope choir with my mother. Everyone knew handsome Charley Wright by sight. The Wrights lived directly across the street from, as they called him then, "Lawyer Horn" — Henry J. Horn. The Horn's home was a treat to be in. How strange it is always to associate food with places and people! Whenever I think of the Horn family I can almost taste the delicious waffles served with sugar and cinnamon that Mrs. Horn served when I took lunch with her daughter Lenore.

When I was a wee mite I often pressed my face against the high iron fence around Governor Alexander Ramsey's Exchange Street house, where a grand queen lived, his daughter Mrs. Charles E. Furness. I always expected to see her appear with a crown on her head. Her daughters still reside in the great gray stone mansion on the edge of Irvine Park. Many other interesting people whom I did not know lived on or near Irvine Park, and others with whom I had a slight acquaintance: the Bigelows, D. R. Breed, Miss Annie Semple, and Mrs. Samuel Robbins.

On Exchange Street near the park, there were also the Nathaniel Pitt Langfords, my great-aunt and uncle. I liked Uncle Tan in spite of his long whiskers and beard. His life out West as a vigilante and in Yellowstone Park in 1870 had been a most adventurous one. When he was collector of internal revenue in Montana he had to transport gold from one city to another. Bandits were everywhere. His descriptions of holdups and his stories of foiling villains were far more fascinating than any movie thriller. Aunt Clara gave many afternoon parties for people of all ages. We would sit in circles and have tests of knowledge, charades, riddles, and we would all sing songs holding hands. When it came to spelling bees I would

IRVINE Park
in the 1880's



suddenly disappear and spend three-quarters of an hour upstairs while the Wood sisters, Jane and Nancy (Mrs. Earl Lee and Mrs. Alex Janes), won all honors. Aunt Clara and Uncle Tan played bridge whist and backgammon every night for twenty or thirty years and kept all the scores on file.

The Charles L. Willis' home, a darling frame bungalow filled with beautiful old-fashioned furniture, was a bright, cheery place. My Sunday school teacher at Christ Church, Sue Willis, her mother and brother John, afterward a celebrated judge, lived there. I attended Sunday school very regularly because Miss Sue always gave each child who knew the Collect a sweet little card with birds and flowers on it. After we could recite the Ten Commandments, Duty to our Neighbor, and the Apostles' Creed, we received a large highly embossed card as a reward.

Directly opposite Lawyer Horn's house on Irvine Park, my beloved great-aunt, Mrs. William A. Spencer, lived. In her pantry there was always an enormous pitcher of lemonade to pass around to the neighborhood children along with sandwiches, cookies, and cake. On a hot summer's day a long hill back of the house was a thrilling place to roll down. Aunt Nettie, with her hair always in a smooth water wave, not a strand out of place, was so placid, calm, and serene; I wonder if she could have kept that serenity in this day

of rush and hurry. During any illness, neighbors took turns tending the sick. Aunt Nettie was invariably the first to appear. When people entertained, all the neighbors pitched in and helped prepare the refreshments. Aunt Nettie Spencer was noted for her light, flaky, delicious cakes, and her chicken salad in which only white meat was mixed with hearts of celery, a few hard-boiled eggs, and mayonnaise made with oil beaten drop by drop with a silver fork.

Critics of taste and discrimination declared that her apple pies had a special charm of their own. She was also celebrated for her brandy peaches. A temperance worker once dined with her just before giving a lecture. When she asked him if he would have some more peaches, he said, "No thank you, Madam, but I will take a little more of the juice, if you please." Governor Ramsey introduced this speaker at the lecture by saying, "Mr. So-and-So is an old friend of mine. Many is the drink we have had together." The speaker, quite perturbed, stirred uneasily, until the governor added, "I drink the whisky and my friend drinks the water."

Aunt Nettie was the heroine of another story. At times the peaceful Irvine Park neighborhood would have its intruders. Far below, under the bluff, lived the O'Rourkes and O'Hoolahans. Occasionally the small members of these families climbed by roundabout paths from their

dusty, hot shacks to the cool shade of the park. But they knew they were tolerated only as long as they were on their good behavior, and that no bird-nesting or stone-throwing would be permitted.

One day a new tribe of small Berserkers appeared, and in open defiance of the unwritten laws, sent one of their number up a tree after a robin's nest. Promptly Aunt Nettie appeared in front of her house. The boy was bidden to come down and cease operations forthwith. It was evident they were newcomers for they mocked at my aunt, laughing at her as the boy climbed higher and higher. A moment's pause and she turned and disappeared within the house. An instant later down her front walk Aunt Nettie marched with stately tread, her shoulders squared, her head high as one who goes forth to war. In her hands was a large, long-handled axe, the edge of which she was trying in a bloodcurdling fashion, glancing from time to time toward the boys.

As this awesome figure appeared, a hush stole over the group. The boy above stopped climbing, and those below looked at one another in dismay. She didn't speak a word, but marched steadily forward until, as she reached the park, wild panic fell upon the culprits. The climber slid down in hot haste regardless of trousers, and with yells of fear they rushed headlong from the park. The next morning Aunt Nettie was seen passing lemonade and gingerbread over her back gate to those same boys, binding them by vows (which were well kept) to let the birds nest in peace.

Great-grandmother Langford divided her time between two of her daughters, Mrs. Spencer and Mrs. Governor William Marshall. Even as a child of three I can recall the awe and admiration that filled me when I was in her presence. She was the sweetest, most attractive old lady I have ever known; her snow-white hair was dressed with three curls on each side of her face, and she wore an enormous cap of

thin material, stiffly starched, and with two streamers that hung down to her shoulders. Her complexion, even when she was well over ninety, was free from wrinkles, fresh pink and white — not from a box either. Her maiden name was Chloe Sweeting, and the Sweeting apples were named for her. The apples are pink and white too. She raised thirteen children and never lost her keen sense of humor and her gift for making friends.

On her birthday it was customary for all the old settlers to pay their respects, bringing gifts. On that day her rooms were filled with flowers. Papa always gave her a bottle of whisky and when no one was looking she would call him over to her. As he leaned down she would whisper, "Charles, your present was the very best one I had. Of course I only take a little drink once in a while for my stomach's sake." The way she said it, with a sly wink, was charming.

In the early days, many in number and various in nationality were the men who were gardeners and did odd jobs for the neighborhood. One of these was an Irishman whose numerous family was clothed in cast-off garments, so that the Irvine Park fathers, hailing what they supposed to be their offspring, found them to be small O'Rourkes. Another was a Bohemian whose greatest happiness resulted from well-kept lawns.

Yes, my mind often reverts to Irvine Park. I can never catch a glimpse of butterflies fluttering over red butterfly-weed without remembering a bunch of it which grew on the north side of the old park. The common wild columbine, too, I always associate with the wooded slope.

As the years have brought an increasing knowledge of life in a large city, I have a feeling of thankfulness that my early days were spent in a real neighborhood, a kindly little community where large yards, vacant lots, and parks gave breathing space — where there were friendliness and kindness and the good life.



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