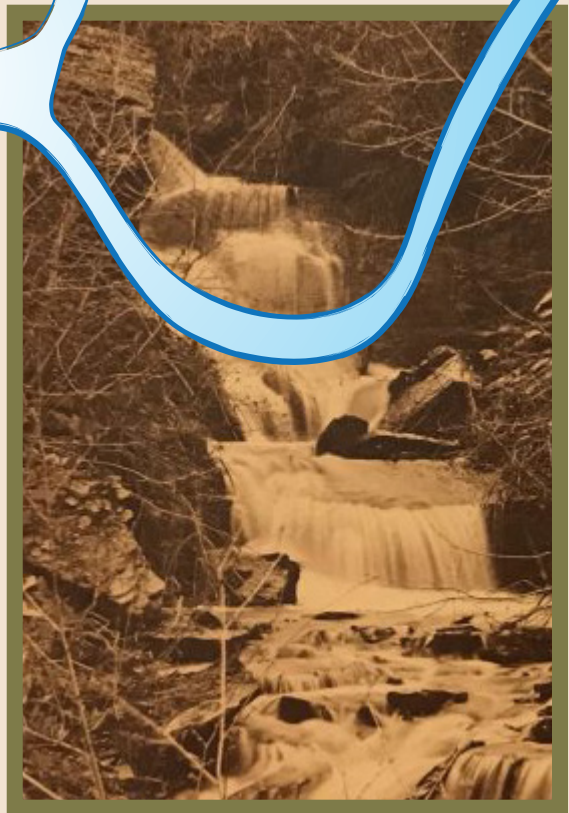


SAINT PAUL JOURNEYS

IMMIGRATION, KINSHIP,
AND SETTLEMENT AT

408 ERIE STREET

"WELCOME
THE
STRANGER."



KATHI C. WONG

Saint Paul Journeys

*Immigration, Kinship, and Settlement at 408 Erie Street,
Saint Paul, Minnesota*

by Kathi C. Wong

SAINT PAUL JOURNEYS

Website PDF version, updated September 2026

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SAINT PAUL JOURNEYS

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408 ERIE
Saint Paul, Minnesota
— 1888 —

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This PDF version of the book, *Saint Paul Journeys: Immigration, Kinship, and Settlement at 408 Erie Street, Saint Paul, Minnesota*, was updated before uploading to the Richmond Narratives website in September 2026. The author has corrected two major errors that unfortunately made it into the self-published version: on page 2, a sentence indicating that Pig's Eye was in the Figure 2 illustration has been deleted because it is not true; and a reference to Fort Road (also known as West Seventh Street) on page 4 as being to the "east" of the Mississippi River was changed to the "west," as is obvious in Saint Paul. Other insignificant typos were corrected as well but are not detailed here.

Introduction

For many in this story, Bohemia had been home. Situated in the heart of Central Europe, the kingdom stretched across lands that included Bohemia proper and neighboring regions. Prague had once stood at the center of Bohemia's imperial power, and its people carried a deep sense of history, language, and place. By the nineteenth century, however, political upheaval, population pressures, limited access to land, and economic instability made survival uncertain for many families. Those who had worked the same trades for generations found themselves with no clear future for providing for themselves or their children. People from Germany, Hungary, the Scandinavian countries and others, driven by many of the same pressures and uncertainties as those from Bohemia, set out as well to look for new opportunities.

After 1830, waves of European immigrants crossed the Atlantic, drawn by the promise of land ownership, employment, and personal freedom in the United States. The Homestead Act of 1862 proved especially influential, offering 160 acres of land at no cost to those willing to settle and improve it. This legislation was a powerful pull factor for people eager to escape overcrowding and land scarcity. Though immigration slowed during the American Civil War, as many young men feared conscription into a conflict they had had no role in creating, the pace surged again after the war's end.

The journey to America was long and grueling. Many immigrants first traveled by rail to ports such as Bremen or Hamburg, Germany, then boarded large passenger sailing barques or later, steamships, bound for New York, or sometimes Canada or even New Orleans. Most

Orleans. Most crossed in steerage enduring crowded conditions and weeks at sea. Yet the hardship was borne with hope: the chance to build a future which had become impossible in their old world.

By the 1860s and 1870s, Minnesota in particular was actively encouraging immigration and promoting its farmland, jobs, and better prospects. Newcomers found their way to Saint Paul, especially the neighborhoods along West Seventh Street, where work and community took shape side by side. Men labored in breweries, railroads, quarries, icehouses, and workshops, laying the physical and economic foundations of the city. Skilled artisans practiced trades such as shoemaking, tailoring, masonry, blacksmithing, and brewing. Lesser-skilled workmen did the backbreaking jobs that kept everything going. Women kept the home and reared the children. Churches and cultural and fraternal organizations offered a sense of belonging and mutual aid.

Immigration is not only a movement of people but a reshaping of place. The stories of the men and women who immigrated to Saint Paul began with departure from a home overseas, but it was ultimately a story of arrival. Unfamiliar streets became neighborhoods, though memory and tradition survived distance.

Editorial Notes

A geographical quirk of Saint Paul is its location on a bend of the Mississippi River. In the era of canoes and steamboats, travelers approaching from the south would pass the settlement, and then loop back in an almost perfect U-shape to the west toward what would become Saint Paul's twin city, Minneapolis. The practical consequence of this bend is that when journeying upriver from Saint Paul to Minneapolis, the traveler is, for a while, actually moving south. St Paul's earliest settlements reflect this peculiarity: the Upper Landing lies south of the Lower Landing. To avoid confusion, I avoid the terms "upriver" and "downriver," and rely instead on cardinal directions.

Since the mid 1800s, property lot lines in Saint Paul have been precisely delineated and recorded, but this same accuracy has not always been a feature of property titles. In the case of the latter, some records are missing or may have been misfiled. Some legal instruments can be found labeled as deeds, others as indentures. The terms "quitclaim" and "warranty deed" are not always correctly applied. Sometimes wives' names appears on documentation and sometimes not. Names of any of the interested parties might be rendered one way upon purchasing a parcel and another way upon selling. Legal procedures are not always followed in an expected chronological order. Archives did not always record encumbrances to sales, such as mortgages.

I have lightly edited quotations from documentary sources when archaic punctuation or grammar obscure their meaning. I have also chosen to use a single standardized spelling of last names, although alternate spellings found in the documentation are occasionally used for reasons which should be obvious. For each family, I list alternate spellings at the beginning of their section.

I use the street designations of “Fort Road” and “West Seventh Street” interchangeably.

Information gathered from genealogy sites is not cited because to do so would overwhelm not only the text of this history but also the footnotes. Examples of records I accessed on www.ancestry.com and www.familysearch.org are birth, marriage, and death registers; city directories; census records; some last wills and testaments and their probates; ship manifests and other immigration records; some military records; and yearbooks. I used these records not only for their specific details but also to construct familial relationships. If a reader seeks more specificity on a particular data point and cannot locate it, I invite them to contact me via www.RichmondNarratives.com, and I will gladly be of assistance. Information from published works, personal correspondence, online websites, and others is fully sourced.

The uneven level of detail in individual stories is a function of availability of pertinent documentation. Disparity is especially evident in the case of women, who as a matter of fact appear less frequently than men in historical records. For many decades, for example, city directories listed only men at residential addresses. Women were included later, but only if they were widows or wage earners.

I am from Richmond, Virginia, and am more accustomed to writing histories of old houses that carry the stigma of slavery. This story of the house at 408 Erie Street is different: it is one of immigration, the coming to America of the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses. Both stories – of slavery and of immigration – are coming under attack by those who would seek to erase them. I hope that the people I write about, not the movers and shakers, but rather the moved and shaken, illustrate that small steps toward a bigger purpose should not be forgotten. I agree with Henry Louis Gates: all elements of American society have contributed equally to its history.

Acknowledgments

Saint Paul has a number of historical institutions which were of great help in putting this narrative together. These include, but are not limited to, the Gale Library at the Minnesota History Center, Minnesota Historical Society, Ramsey County Historical Society, Hennepin County Library, and the University of Minnesota Libraries. Their online resources

were invaluable, but so were the email or in person conversations I carried on with individuals from them. The Saint Paul Property Office is not a historic institution *per se*, but they also provided very patient assistance in helping me find conveyance documents all the way back to 1878, that date in particular of importance because it provided the plat map of the planned housing addition which would include 408 Erie.

Few places in this world can be lucky enough to have such a thorough and complete record of its history as does the neighborhood around West Seventh with the *Origin Story of Fort Road / West Seventh Street* written by Joseph Thompson-Dvořák Moes-Landsberger. I ordered the revised, August 2025, edition of the 419-page self-published book and pretty much read the whole thing, including the captions of the hundreds of photographs, before even starting this narrative. It provided information I didn't know I needed to know and also pointed me to sources that could answer some of my very specific questions. The *Origin Story* is directly quoted in a few places in this history of 408 Erie but also, as importantly, lurks in the background of the whole narrative.

John Vanek, who is writing a history of Saint Paul pioneer family Benjamin and Genevieve Gervais, filled in a prominent gap in the story of the little house at 408 Erie that I knew was there but had no idea where to even start to find the answers I needed. He kindly answered more than one email to help me understand who, before there was legal documentation, may have laid claim to the land the house stands on; and then he provided me the first known legal documentation of its ownership, the 1849 land record.

A unique aspect of the neighborhood surrounding 408 Erie is the tunnel sewer system that serves it. The inimitable Greg Brick, a Minnesota hydrogeologist and explorer *extraordinaire*, knows more about these and the other labyrinthian underground tunnels lying beneath Saint Paul than any other person on, or even under, earth. His book, *Subterranean Twin Cities* (2009), is a highly-readable, derring-do account of his explorations that gives even the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* a run for its money. I couldn't put it down.

Finally, I was able to get in touch through www.ancestry.com with some folks whose ancestors are part of the story of 408 Erie. I thank them for their information, enlightenment, and fact-finding help: John Jacobson (Oper/Oupor family), Natalie Christiana Mészárosné Neumann (Stipkovics family), Father Bob Knippenberg and Amy Knippenberg (Knippenberg family). I hope there is something within these pages about your families you might not have known before.



Kathi C. Wong

“Welcome the stranger.”

- Hebrews 13:2

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Figure 1. Valley of the St. Peters, Seth Eastman, circa 1848. St. Peter's River was the former European name of the Minnesota River known earlier by the Dakota peoples as Mnísota. Eastman's scene depicts the area around Fort Snelling where the Mnísota meets the Ĥaháwakpa (Mississippi River), a sacred site to the Dakota known as Bdote. Eastman was an Army officer known for his realistic depictions of the everyday life of Dakota and Ojibwe people in the upper Mid-west. Credit: Collection of the Nicollet County Historical Society.

Part I

The Land, River, and First Peoples

Long before a house stood at 408 Erie Street, the landscape was shaped by water, weather, and the long presence of its first peoples who understood it through generations of stories passed to them from their ancestors. With the arrival of survey lines and deeds, the land along the bluffs became redefined in terms of ownership and boundary. Themes of encounter and displacement, competing claims, and shifting authority began to become part of its history. The story of 408 Erie emerges from this layered past, shaped by the many lives

– known and unknown – who passed across the land lying between today’s West Seventh and the Mississippi River.

Pre-History and European Encounter

For thousands of years, the Dakota walked the river bluffs of the *Ĥaháwakpa* (Mississippi River), moving between villages and kin networks in the area that would one day be known as the city of Saint Paul. They knew the river’s moods, the marshy ground near its edge, and the way waterfowl gathered and seasons changed. They fished in the surrounding lakes formed by the retreat of the glaciers and they hunted the plains. At the confluence of the *Mnísoṭa* and *Wakpá Tháŋk* rivers, the Dakota held sacred ceremonies at *Bdote*, the center of the world (Figure 1).

As early as 1679, the earliest Europeans came to the river bend wilderness, drawn by the fur trade. They first allied with native inhabitants from whom they could learn survival skills in the unfamiliar country, but as empires changed hands – French to British, British to American – politics and greed impeded old alliances.

In the 1820s, the U.S. Army began construction of Fort Snelling at *Bdote*. With its establishment, the Dakota faced increased pressure from the U.S. government in the beginning of decades-long conflicts where native peoples would face starvation and forced removal, many of them eventually fleeing to Canada though some descendants still live in Saint Paul today.¹

Early white pioneer families, who had illegally occupied land on the army reservation, were expelled in 1838 as the military took back the land for its own livestock, gardens, and timber. The early settlers moved farther north, establishing a new community that would eventually become Saint Paul.

Who claimed the land where the cottage at 408 Erie is today during the years of early white settlement is uncertain. Pierre “Pig’s Eye” Parrant, a French-Canadian who was perhaps the

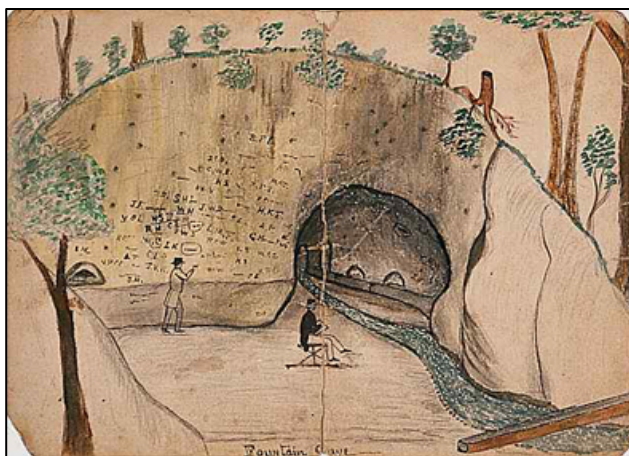


Figure 2. Fountain Cave, Saint Paul Minnesota, circa 1850. Unknown artist, pencil and watercolor. Credit: Collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹ A good place to start learning about the Dakota people in the area today known as Saint Paul is: <https://www.mnhs.org/fortsnelling/learn/native-americans/dakota-people>.

most notorious of those evicted from the fort, set up a saloon to sell his homemade distilled liquor at Fountain Cave, located on the river about six miles north of the military installation, a very short distance from today's 408 Erie (Figure 2). It was a good location for his line of work: the cave was a well-known geological feature on the banks, easy to find for those seeking a bit of social geniality and inebriation.

John Vanek, who has done extensive research on the Saint Paul pioneer family of Benjamin and Genevieve Gervais, believes that it is possible that the parcel of land at today's 408 Erie could have been part of Parrant's original claim if that claim extended due north up the bluff. He writes:

“[But] Parrant lived [at the cave] only briefly – a year or so. He lost his claim in early 1839 to pay a debt to a man named William Beaumette. Beaumette sold it to stonemason John Miller, who in turn sold it to voyageur Vetal Guerin. Before Guerin could take possession, he lost it to an unnamed claim jumper. The claim jumper may have been Red River refugee François Leblanc, who also lost land near the cave in the [later] 1840 eviction.”

There are two other possibilities, however.

Vanek continues:

“I suspect 408 Erie is close to where the family of Abraham and Marie Anne Perry settled after being kicked off Fort Snelling; they lived just west and up the hill from the Gervaises – less than half a mile – which would place them quite close to that Erie Street address. Alternatively, another man who was evicted, about whom I have been able to find very little, was named Peter Müller. He claimed land ‘in the immediate vicinity of Carver’s Cave,’ probably instead meaning Fountain Cave. If he was just east of the creek and his claim extended up the bluff, then it would have encompassed the Erie Street property.”²

In 1840, Father Lucien Galtier was sent by Catholic Church officials from Dubuque, Iowa, toward “the upper waters of the Mississippi” to establish a presence. He traveled by steamboat, first building a church at Mendota which he named St. Peter's after the nearby Pierre River – today's Minnesota River. Continuing upriver, he passed what is today downtown Saint Paul, noting that there was “but a single log house” at the location. He disembarked at what would later be called Saint Paul's Upper Landing, where the few houses constructed there were “surrounded by a complete wilderness.” By 1841, he had built a crude log structure just north of the Upper Landing to serve as a missionary church. He called it Saint Paul's, “as the name of Paul is generally connected with that of Peter,” and

² John Vanek, personal correspondence, October 18, 2025.

expressed his hope that the settlement would be known by the same name.³ Later civic leaders were pleased that “Saint Paul” caught on, because “Pig’s Eye” as the name had been gaining some traction.

In the absence of land surveys – this region was not yet even organized as a United States territory – settlers relied on informal agreements among themselves to establish claims. To their benefit, however, Congress legalized squatting on public land in 1841, allowing property to be legally held by homesteaders by following certain provisions over five years or by purchasing it outright at \$1.25 per acre after six months of residency. Over time, the chaos of squatting sorted itself out and became lines on maps.

Along the west bank of the river, the oxcart trail connecting Saint Paul to Fort Snelling expanded in the late 1840s. Known first as Fort Road and later as West Seventh Street, and then later again as the Fort Road for its historical significance, it was then, as now, one of the town’s major thoroughfares.⁴

First Recorded Land Acquisitions

In 1849, the Minnesota Territory was established, and Richard Freeborn legally acquired the parcel that included the bluff where the house at 408 Erie now stands. The purchase was recorded by the Federal Bureau of Land Management’s General Land Office in St. Croix and legally described as “the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 12, Township 28N 23W (Appendix 1).⁵

Somewhat surprisingly, but not inexplicably, the first detected private, extra-legal, sale of land around 408 Erie actually occurred a year earlier. In 1848, newspaper accounts indicate that Henry

Land! Land! Money!

A correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Token* who visited Saint Paul in fall 1852 wrote: “My ears, at every turn, are saluted with the everlasting din of land! land! money! speculation! sawmills! land warrants! town lots, &c, &c. I turn away sick and disgusted. Land at breakfast, land at dinner, land at supper, and until 11 o’clock, land; then land in bed, until their vocal organs are exhausted – then they dream and groan out land, land! Everything is artificial, floating – –the excitement of trade, speculation and expectation is ... running high.”

Source: “Land! Land! Money!” *Saint Paul Minnesotian*, November 20, 1852. Reprinted from the *Pittsburgh Token*. The same article also appeared in the *Weekly Gazette* (Davenport, Iowa), November 11, 1852, and the *Free Trader* (Ottawa, Illinois), November 13, 1852.

³ J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of Saint Paul and of the County of Ramsey* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1876), 112.

⁴ Susan Hodapp, *Saint Paul’s High Bridge, 1889–1985: A Photo-Essay of the History of a Saint Paul Landmark*, Oakdale, MN: Minnesota Department of Transportation, District Nine, 1985, accessed via Minnesota Legislature, <https://www.leg.mn.gov/docs/pre2003/other/851419.pdf>.

⁵ John Vanek, personal correspondence, October 18, 2025. Vanek provided the author with the copy of the Freeborn land grant purchase record reproduced in Appendix 1.

Jackson purchased 48 acres from Freeborn for \$100. It seems likely that the later 1849 sale represented an effort to bring the paperwork into alignment with land Freeborn had been occupying and had already informally agreed to convey to Jackson.⁶ Jackson's 48 acres, described by early Saint Paul historian Henry S. Fairchild as "near what would become the Omaha shops," were eventually incorporated into the 320-acre Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey Addition established in 1854.⁷ The Addition includes the parcel that would become 408 Erie. A newspaper article in April 1854 described the Addition's precise location:

"Messrs. A. Vance Brown, Stinson and Ramsey are now laying out their grounds at the upper end of St. Paul, into town lots. Their addition adjoins Winslow's, and extends from the river, north to a point opposite Rice's brick house on the second bluff, embracing the Cascade water power, and from thence westward to the Cave property."⁸ [See Figure 5.]

By the mid-nineteenth century, new residents were streaming into Saint Paul, and growth was expanding in all four cardinal directions (Figure 3). In January 1849, the settlement contained about a dozen buildings and roughly 150 inhabitants; by the following July, it had 142 houses and 840 people. In April 1849, publisher James M. Goodhue of the *Minnesota Pioneer* warned newcomers to "bring along tents and bedding to provide for comfort until [you] can build houses as it is utterly impossible to [rent] a building in any part of the



Figure 3. Panorama of City of Saint Paul, circa 1858. Max Strobel, lithograph. Credit: Minnesota Historical Society collection.

village, [even though] builders are at work in every direction completing houses." Writing four years later, Goodhue observed that some once-hopeful residents had lacked the fortitude to make it when the weather turned cold: "a great many feeble, weak-hearted folks were frozen out and went back down the river, not being made of the right sort of stuff."⁹

⁶ John Vanek provided this author with the likely explanation of the earlier sale from Freeborn to Jackson. Personal correspondence, October 18, 2025.

⁷ Henry S. Fairchild, "Sketches of the Early History of Real Estate in Saint Paul," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* 10 (1905): 416–43; and "Local Affairs," *The Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, September 2, 1859.

⁸ "Facts and Fancies," *Saint Paul Weekly Minnesotian*, April 8, 1854.

⁹ "Saint Paul," *The Minnesota Pioneer*, April 28, 1849; Rod Squires, "The Urban Jigsaw: The Early History of Saint Paul, Minnesota," *Minnesota Surveyor*, Winter 2017; "The Pioneer," *The Minnesota Pioneer*, April 15, 1852.

By the mid-1850s, Saint Paul's Upper and Lower Landings operated as distinct and competing centers of commerce and residential life along the Mississippi River. (The Upper Landing is located southwest of the Lower Landing because of the bend in the river.) The two districts, roughly a half-mile apart, developed in noticeably different ways. Those living in the Lower Landing generally were residents who had already been living in Saint Paul for some time and had the luxury of focusing more on wealth accumulation. Upper Landing residents, composed of recent immigrants, were primarily concerned with establishing new lives and surviving from day to day.¹⁰ These later immigrant families settled in neighborhoods along the West Seventh corridor organized around shared language and ethnic ties. In the area south of Michigan Street, in particular, a sizable Bohemian community began to take shape.

West Seventh and Surrounding Neighborhoods

By 1858, when Saint Paul became Minnesota's capital, more than a thousand steamboats landed annually at the Lower Landing, making it one of the busiest ports in the country (Figure 4). Steam railroads followed soon after the Civil War, and their routes followed along the banks of the river, tracing the liquid highway.

Blocks and lots in Saint Paul generally were platted using the rectangular surveys, monuments, and lines as dictated by the Public Land Survey System (the blocks being the larger land measurement; lots were part of the blocks).¹¹ Speculators established additions and then surveyed subdivisions, blocks, and lots within them. The first known map showing the Stinson, Brown and Ramsey Addition is the 1869 *Counting House Map of the City of Saint Paul* which shows the Addition before it was divided into blocks or lots



Figure 4. Steamboats at the Lower Landing, circa 1859. Credit: Unknown photographer, collection of the Hennepin County Library.

¹⁰ The difference in development of the two areas is based on the ideas of Joseph Thompson-Dvořák Moes-Landsberger, in a comment posted to the online site *Goodreads*, November 20, 2025; www.goodreads.com/topic/show/23280503.

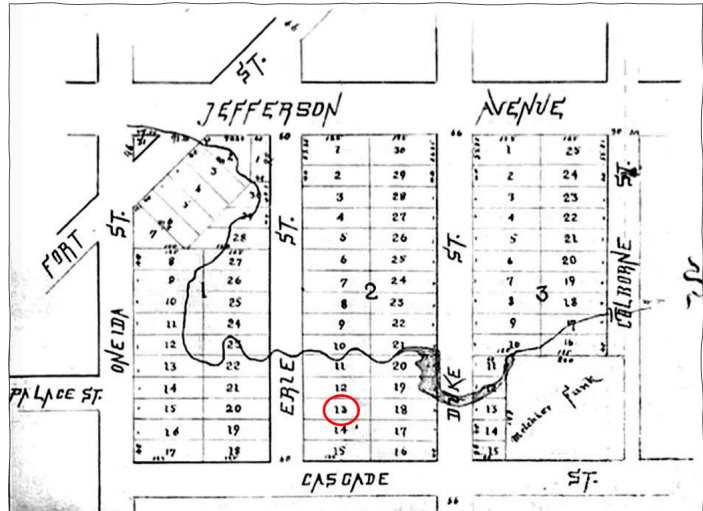
¹¹ Joseph Thompson-Dvořák Moes-Landsberger, *Origin Story: Fort Road/West Seventh Street* (Joe Landsberger, December 2024; revised August 2025), 53, 57.

(Figure 5).¹² The first map to depict the specific block that would become 408 Erie is a surveyor's plat dated April 26, 1878 (Figure 6). The parcel appears as it is described in all subsequent legal descriptions: "Lot 13 of Block 2, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition." In 1881, Lot 13, Block 2, was among a total of 71 in the Addition that appeared in the inventory of the will of Justus C. Ramsey. He left his considerable estate, of which these lots were only a part, to eight nieces

Figure 5 (top). This detail of the *Counting House Map of the City of Saint Paul, 1869*, shows the Brown, Stinson and Ramsey Addition (indicated as "BBB"). The red house icon was added by the author to mark the location of today's 408 Erie Street. The Winslow Addition is shown as "ZZ" at the middle top. Credit: Collection of the John R. Borchert Map Library, University of Minnesota Wilson Library (online).



Figure 6 (bottom). Stinson and Ramsey's Subdivision Plat taken from the April 26, 1878, survey report, surveyor name illegible. Lot 13, Block 2 (red circle added by the author) will receive the street address of 408 Erie. Cascade Street, part of today's Palace Avenue, can be seen at the bottom. Cascade Creek itself is shown as the wandering line that goes through the image, widening on Duke behind 408 Erie. Melchior Funk's brewery, one of 23 in the city, was located at the corner of Cascade and Claborne; today, a townhouse community. Source: Ramsey County Property Office.



¹² *Counting House Map of the City of Saint Paul, 1869*, collection of the John R. Borchert Map Library, University of Minnesota Wilson Library (online).

and nephews and two charitable organizations which were to share equally in the proceeds of their sale.¹³

Saint Paul continued to grow. The census of 1860 reported just over 10,000 residents; by 1870, that number had doubled to 20,000 souls; by 1880, it had doubled again to 41,000. By 1890, the city counted an astonishing 133,000 people.

¹³ Probate order of the Last Will and Testament of Justus C. Ramsey, November 26, 1881, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota; Quitclaim deed, indentures, and other deeds concerning the Ramsey estate, 1881–1882, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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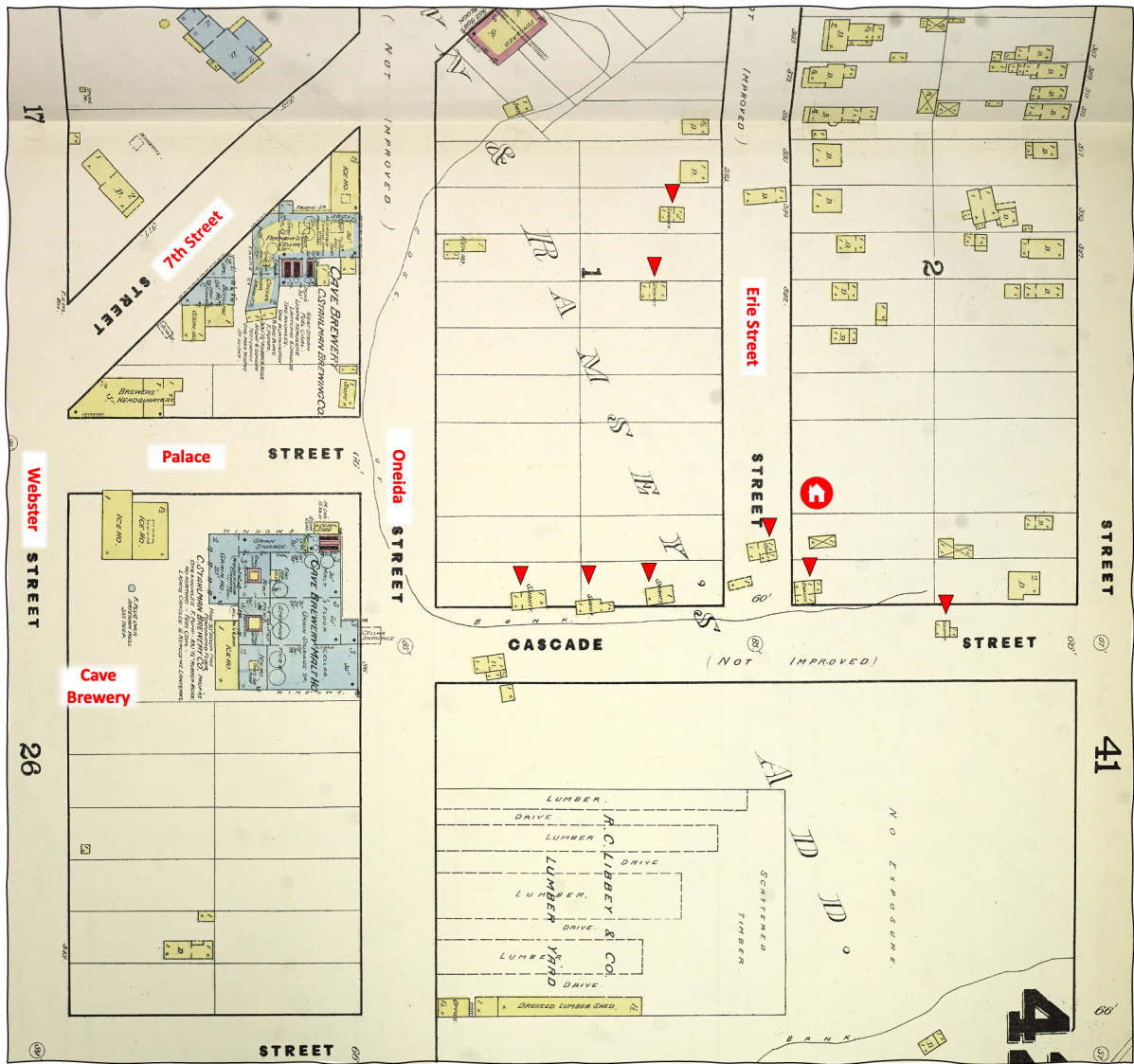


Figure 7. Detail of Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1885, Saint Paul, from Vol. 2, plate 42. Image turned 90° so that compass north is at the top. The red house icon marks the location of today's 408 Erie, but no structure is indicated there on the original map. The buildings under the added red triangle symbols have the word "shanty" written on them in the original map but which is too small to read here. Yellow-colored buildings are of frame construction; blue, of stone. Annotations in red added by author for clarity. Credit: Collection of the Library of Congress.

Part II

1885

By 1885, Saint Paul was in the midst of an era of rapid growth and development, emerging as a regional trade center even while much of the nation faced a broader national business depression. Construction activity was strong in the city with millions of dollars invested in new buildings and improvements. Business blocks, residences, and public structures were rising everywhere, but particularly in the central districts along Wabasha, Sibley, Third, and Seventh streets. Improvements in transportation reinforced Saint Paul's role as a major rail and river hub of the Upper Midwest. Investments in schools, parks, libraries, and other civic institutions reflected a community striving to support both its population and its status as a prosperous urban center.

Major public works projects reshaped the landscape. Installation of wooden sidewalks, extensive street grading, paving, bridge construction, and sewer projects were underway to facilitate the movement and comfort of city residents and the building of homes and businesses during this high-growth era. Individual landowners paid for these enhancements through special city tax assessments, the amount of which differed according to "benefits" a given property was judged to receive from a particular improvement. In 1887, for example, Joseph Oper, the uncle of Thomas Oper who bought 408 Erie in 1898, was assessed \$15.18 (about \$513 today) for wooden sidewalks installed in front of his home on Duke Street.¹ In August 1903, Thomas Oper, while living at 408 Erie, was assessed \$4 (about \$150 today) for

¹ "Assessment for Wooden Sidewalks," *Saint Paul Globe*, February 2, 1887.

the paving of Seventh Street even though the roadway was not adjacent to his property.² The method for paying for public works through this type of assessment was controversial for many reasons, including that the amount charged often seemed arbitrary.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps provide a detailed picture of the neighborhood around 408 Erie Street in 1885 (Figure 7). Erie Street, Cascade Street below Erie (today's Palace Avenue), and Oneida Street were still unimproved though a wood-frame dwelling sat in the middle of the road – or more likely, wide trail – in front of the house at 304 Erie. A few dwellings had begun to appear in the lots on Erie starting near Jefferson Street and extending southward. At Erie and Cascade, a small cluster of buildings the map labeled as shanties stood with no relationship to the surveyed lots and at odd angles to one another. A few, like the dwelling marked near 304 Erie, were located in the middle of the roadway.

The parcel that would later become 408 Erie is shown on the 1885 Sanborn map as larger than it is in later maps and property descriptions for reasons that are unknown. Both it and the one just to the north (corresponding to today's 404 Erie), were vacant of any kind of structure. On the west side of Erie between Jefferson and Cascade, only two modest wood-frame dwellings had been built at 381 and 383 Erie. Along the unimproved Oneida Street to the west of Cave Brewery (also known as Stahlman's and later as Schmidt's) there were no structures at all with the exception of a surprisingly large, lone henhouse, located across from the brewery.

South of Cascade Street, on the several-acre tract where a large, empty warehouse stands today, stood the R. C. Libbey Lumber Yard. It covered more than half the double-sized block on the west side. The shanties may have provided temporary housing for laborers – in today's words, unskilled workers – connected to the yard.

Ramsey, Stinson, and Brown

Justus C. Ramsey (1823–1881), brother of Alexander Ramsey and namesake of Ramsey County, became wealthy through land speculation after arriving in Saint Paul in the late 1840s. He died in 1881 as a result of suicide at age 58, unmarried and in poor health. His estate, valued at about \$200,000 (roughly \$6.5 million today), included 71 lots in the Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey Addition, including what would become 408 Erie.

William Stinson, an early settler who arrived in 1838, and A. Vance Brown, a real estate speculator, were also key figures in Saint Paul's early land speculation.

Source: Value and composition of estate: documents dated November 25 and 26, 1881, and February 1882, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

The lumber yard property presented geological challenges for real estate development. By 1890, rock stood “up to ten to twenty feet above the streets” on a portion of it, the result of several years' worth of grading of adjacent streets, according to an advertisement placed by

² “Confirmation of Assessment for Paving West Seventh Street,” *Saint Paul Globe*, August 12, 1903.

an agent trying to sell the property.³ The agent found positives in the negative, suggesting that this odd circumstance would facilitate its quarrying and the construction of a homesite on the property: “No derricks are needed to raise the rock; no hole [will be] left.” The buyer would be left with a building site still above grade that would not require the installation of drainage. “A clean cellar in the white sandstone” could be excavated, forming a dwelling’s foundation. Extra stone could be sold as profit to pay for the house.

In the same advertisement, the agent handily catalogued neighborhood amenities located near the property (and 408 Erie). Employment opportunities were myriad, the ad claimed, with the Omaha railroad shops located only a block away and Stahlmann’s only two blocks. Surrounding streets were graded and wooden sidewalks constructed. Schools and churches were nearby. New electric streetcar lines planned for West Seventh would make the old horse cars, a mode of transportation that was “pretty awful,” obsolete.⁴ One convenience the agent did not mention was the presence under a half-mile away of the City and County Hospital on Jefferson and Colborne streets (today the administrative offices of Saint Paul Public Schools and Bridge View School).

The Fort Road Corridor

Much of Fort Road still consisted of empty lots and scattered wood-frame houses, and there was ample opportunity for homeowners or entrepreneurs to build. One notable landmark already there was the substantial Platteville limestone residence at number 855 built in 1874 by brewer Christopher Stahlmann. It stood on the triangular block bounded by Fort Road and Jefferson and Webster streets with a windmill and a few outbuildings including a smokehouse. Nearby, on the next block to the southeast, stood a “summer garden,” a likely seasonal leisure venue that included a bowling alley housed in a frame structure, reflecting an era when the sport was transitioning from an outdoor pastime to a more socially-acceptable indoor activity.

As the quarry seller noted in his advertisement, religious institutions were also beginning to appear in the area. Saint Francis de Sales Catholic Church, founded by German settlers, had been built in 1883 stood just off West Seventh at the corner of James and Daly streets. The original building has since disappeared, although another has risen nearby. The liveliest stretch along the road in the direction of Fort Snelling, however, was a few blocks farther west, where a long row of stores was located including a bakery with a large, outdoor brick oven.

³ “The Best Quarry Property” advertisement,” *Saint Paul Globe*, April 20, 1890.

⁴ “Pretty awful”: John W. Diers, “The Force That Shaped Neighborhoods, 1890-1953: Sixty-three Years of Streetcars in Saint Paul and Millions of Dollars in Investments,” *Ramsey County History*, Vol. 40, No. 1, Spring 2005.

In the other direction, a pedestrian walking north from 408 Erie to West Seventh and then turning upward toward Seven Corners, would first encounter one nearly empty block containing only a small carpenter's shop near the location of today's McDonald's. Farther along the street toward downtown, more shops appeared: drugstores, tin shops, and other small businesses, although there were still many vacant lots waiting for homes or new businesses.

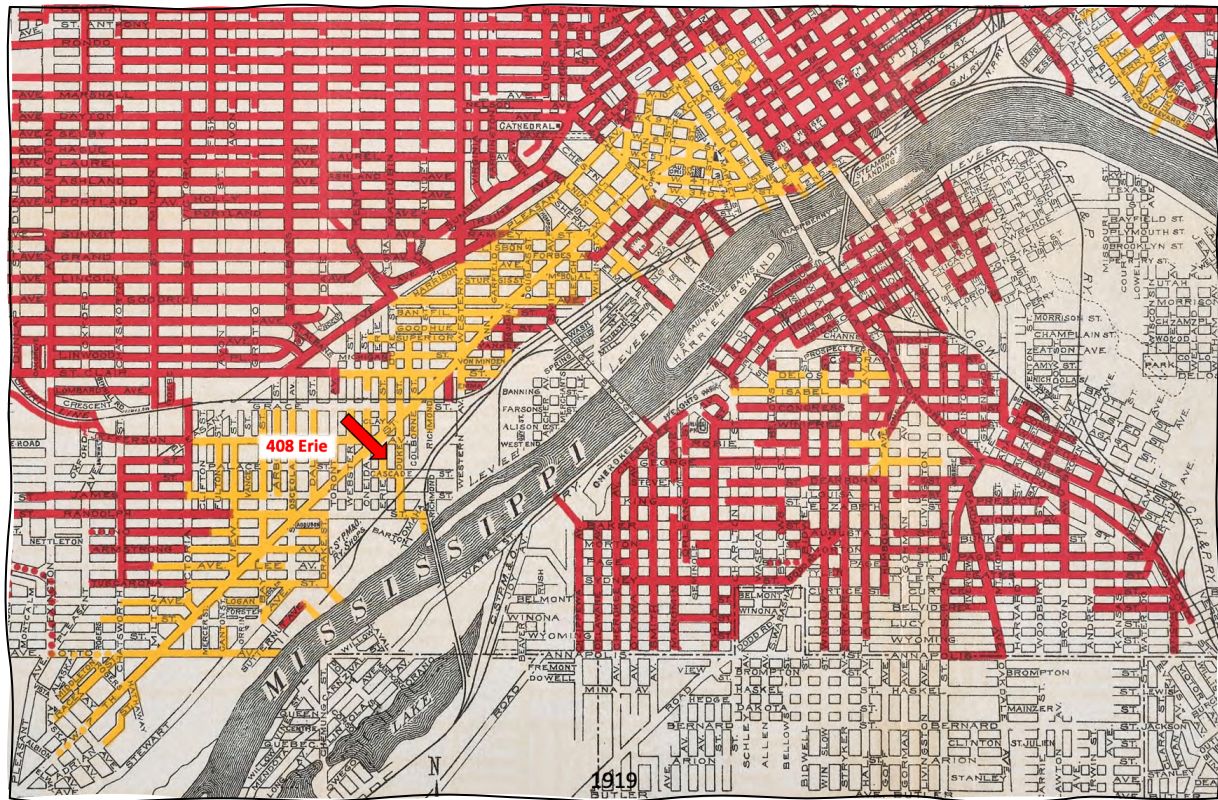


Figure 8. Detail of *Map of St Paul*, 1919, Saint Paul Department of Public Works, showing the sandstone tunnel sewers (in yellow) built through 1918. The red lines mark open cut sewers built through the same year. The location of 408 Erie is marked by the red notations added by the author. Credit: Collection of the John R. Borchert Map Library, University of Minnesota Wilson Library (online).

Part III

Subterranean Saint Paul

Beneath the streets of Saint Paul, particularly along the old Fort Road corridor, workers carved an unseen grid of tunnels into the sandstone bedrock to support the rapidly growing city above (Figure 8). This extensive network of early sewer tunnels, many of them dating to 1880, were dug with by hand with picks directly into the region's soft Saint Peter sandstone. The cottage at 408 Erie Street is among the homes and businesses they served and still serve today.

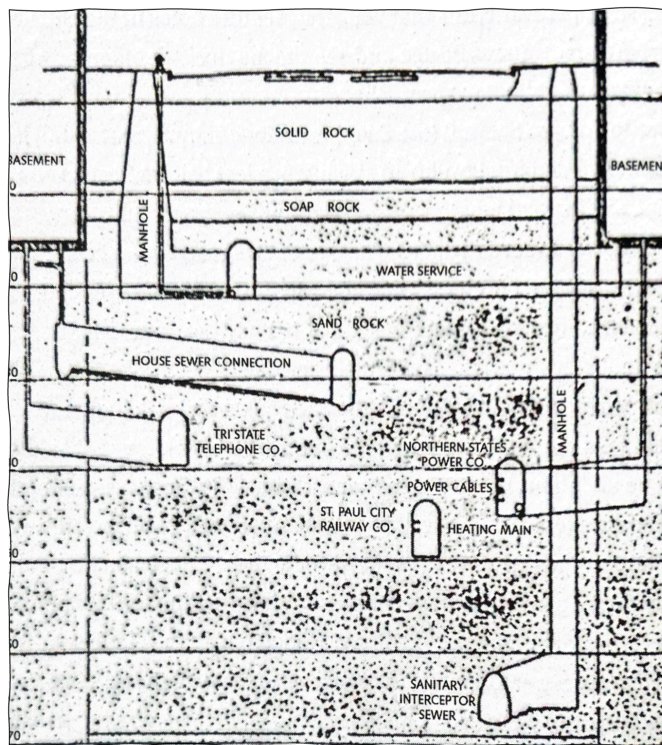


Figure 9. Typical cross-section of underground utilities in Saint Paul – between Fourth and Fifth streets under Wabasha – in 1937. Source: George M. Shepard diagram as published in Greg Brick, *Subterranean Twin Cities*, p. 180.

The sewer tunnels typically lie about thirty feet below the surface, protected above by a thick layer of limestone. Tunnel floors were often paved with brick, and the surrounding sandstone walls formed naturally curved passages. In recent years, modern liners were added to many of the original sandstone sewers to reinforce them. State hydrogeologist Greg Brick, who has extensively explored and studied the system, estimates that the combined length of these tunnels is roughly thirty miles. Despite their scale and their importance to the city's daily functioning, the network of sandstone sewers remains largely unknown to the public.

The underground spaces of Saint Paul carry more than just wastewater (Figure 9). Improvements to the water supply system made in the late 1880s extended water mains under many miles of streets. In 1893

the city passed an ordinance banning electrical poles in the downtown district after severe winter storms caused wires and poles to sag or snap under heavy ice; electrical lines were afterward routed underground. Other systems soon followed: district steam networks delivered heat from central boilers to entire blocks of downtown buildings, and tunnels for telephone lines, gas lines, and street railway cables spread beneath streets, homes, and businesses. By the early twentieth century, Saint Paul's underground had become a layered world of hidden infrastructure.¹

¹ The information about underground Saint Paul is heavily borrowed from Greg Brick, *Subterranean Twin Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). Both illustrations are also found in his book. Brick is unquestionably the leading authority on the tunnels underneath Saint Paul.

Part IV

The First Homeowners at 408 Erie

By 1887, Saint Paul was no longer a frontier settlement, and houses had begun to rise in places that only a few years earlier had been open grass and marshy footpaths. Adolph Krtecious was the first to buy the lot at 408 Erie, and though he likely built no permanent structure there, it was an early step in building his life in a new world. The Stipkovits family were next, and they saw the place as a more permanent stop in their lives. The two families together reflect the early immigrant experience along the West Seventh corridor: one brief and speculative and the other rooted in settlement and endurance.

Adolph Krtecious

May 1887 – August 1887

Alternate spellings: Kretecious, Kartezius, Kretezins, Krtezius, Kartak, Keticins, Krtecins, Krteticius, Ketecius

Adolph Krtecious purchased the lot that would be assigned the address of 408 Erie Street.¹ On May 25, 1887, he paid \$500 for the parcel, acquiring it from the beneficiaries of Alexander Ramsey's estate. The deed did not indicate whether or not there was a structure of some kind of the property, but later documentation shows that in all likelihood there was not.

¹ Indenture for Lot 13, Block 2, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, May 25, 1887, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Adolph had come to the United States less than a decade earlier.² In 1878, at just seventeen years old, he left Sadská, Bohemia, about ten miles east of Prague, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Krtecus was Czech, a term applied collectively to Bohemians, Moravians, and Silesians, and he departed amid a large wave of Czech migration to the United States which occurred after 1870. For many who left in this period, the decision was driven by poverty and high taxes; for Adolph, it may also have been shaped by the looming requirement that young Czech men serve three years in the Austrian army. Whatever combination of forces pushed him, the decision meant leaving home while still barely grown.

He crossed the Atlantic on an unidentified vessel with twenty-one others from Bohemia, nearly all of them young men traveling alone. Most listed themselves as farmers or laborers; Adolph described himself as a musician. Three years later, his older brother Johann followed him to America, and the brothers reunited in Chicago. In 1882, Adolph married Franciska Koldinowa when they were both just twenty-one. Franciska, also from Bohemia, had immigrated to the United States in 1877. Two years after their marriage, they welcomed a daughter. And then, at some point, Adolph went to Saint Paul alone, leaving his young family and his brother behind.

What drew Adolph to Saint Paul? The answer is unknown, but the 1887 Saint Paul city directory places him at 408 Erie Street. Perhaps while still in Chicago, he had read the news reports that Saint Paul was a place where a land investment could be turned into a quick cash profit and he believed he could make a brief sacrifice for long-term security. Or perhaps he simply went where work or chance led him, hoping to send something back to his family in Illinois.

Like so many early residents of the city, Adolph may have first established quarters in a tent or in a rough shanty, little more than boards and tar paper, similar to those at Erie and Cascade streets on the 1885 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Cascade Creek ran nearby and though its access to water may have made the property more comfortable than some, life on

Locating 408 Erie

The earliest that 408 Erie is known to appear as an address is in its publication in the 1887 Saint Paul city directory. Street numbers had already started to be applied to other houses in that block of Erie but had only reached number 392 by 1885 (Figure 7). The first time 408 Erie is known to have appeared on a map is in the 1891 Rascher Insurance Atlas (see Figure 12). It appears as an address in the first county permit record that was taken out by the Stipkovits family in 1888. In county property records, it is always referenced by its longer legal description: Lot 13, Block 2, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition. Present day identifiers on Saint Paul's permits web site show latitude/longitude as 44.92906074/-93.12176361; and PIN number 122823230032.

² See the paragraph in the introduction which provides information on sourcing of details accessible on genealogy sites.

the little plot of land initially was likely exposed and primitive. He appears to not have been entirely alone. The city directory reported that three boarders shared the address with him: Joseph Kastanek and Albert Kubka, unskilled workers, and Josephine Kolindiski, a cigar maker. Adolph himself worked as a cigar maker for Kuhles and Stock, a prominent Saint Paul cigar manufactory. How these four came together –whether through shared language, work, or necessity – can only be guessed. Their stay was apparently short. It may have been a summer arrangement, a tolerable place to live while the weather held.

If Adolph's purpose in buying 408 Erie was to improve his family's future through a quick money-making scheme, he may have succeeded. He sold the property to Ferdinandus and Teresia Stipkovits on August 11, 1887, for \$940, a profit of \$440 in a matter of four months.³ The sale came with the stipulation that Stipkovits would pay \$600 at the time of the conveyance as well as pay all pending city assessments for the grading of Erie Street in front of number 408. The Stipkovitses received a final deed of sale on September 8, 1887.

Cigar Making

The large wave of Czech immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth century included not only farmers but many skilled tradesmen. Cigarmaking was a particularly common trade. In the town of Sedlec, perhaps not coincidentally about twenty miles from the Krtecus family's home village of Sadská, the government operated a cigar factory as part of a state monopoly. By 1873 in New York, as many as 95 percent of recent Czech immigrants were employed in cigarmaking. As they moved westward across the United States, many continued in the trade. In Saint Paul, the several cigar companies employed both men and women. Cigars were rolled by hand in these factories by workers from home. Hand rolling remained common until mechanized production largely replaced it in the 1930s.

Source: Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr., "Czech American Tradesmen: Master of Their Profession," Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, online, accessed October 22, 2025.

The Stipkovits Family

August 1887 – December 1898

Alternate spellings: Stipkovits, Stipkovitz, Stipkovics, Stepkovich, Stepkovitz, Stipkovita, Styskovits, Slipkovitz, Stepwith

When Ferdinandus Stipkovits and his family left Europe in 1880, they left behind family rooted for centuries in what was then the Kingdom of Hungary. Like Bohemia, the Kingdom was part of the vast and shifting Austro-Hungarian Empire. Languages, customs, and loyalties overlapped even within the Stipkovits home village Horvátkimle, a small, ancient hamlet nestled inside a bend of the Mosoni-Duna River. Most inhabitants thought of themselves as ethnic Croats. Just across the river, however, stood a larger, mostly German village with only a minority of Croat residents. As a reflection of the complicated and

³ Indenture for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, September 8, 1887, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

changing geo-politics of the empire, Stipkovits family members in America affirmed their nativity in different ways throughout their lifetimes, variously declaring themselves in different documentation as being from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria-Germany, Austria, Germany, or Bohemia. According to the 1920 U.S. census, they considered German their native language.⁴

The Mosoni-Duna River was responsible for the famously fertile Little Hungarian Plain which for generations had fed families like Ferdinandus's with proceeds from grain farming. But a catastrophic harvest in autumn 1879 led to failed crops and food shortages. Food grew scarce. The spring that followed was cold and wet, and offered little hope of recovery.

Discussions in the family home about what they should do were likely intense. Should they go to America or not? Would they immigrate, or would they plan to go, find work, save money, and then return? Should Ferdinandus go only with his teen-aged son Leopold, or should they go all of them together? They ultimately decided to travel as a family rather than gamble on separation and reunion later. In 1880, they numbered five: Ferdinandus, 43; Teresia, 48; their son Leopold, 19; and daughters Theresa, 12; and Mary, 8. Another daughter, Antonia, had died in infancy and was buried in the home village.

They likely entered the United States through New York, passing through Castle Garden, the predecessor to Ellis Island. From 1880 until 1887, the location of the family is unknown. But by 1887, Ferdinandus, then aged 50 and using the name Frederick, was in Saint Paul with his son Leopold. They lived at the rear of a modest house on Colborne Street, very near Erie. Frederick's wife and daughter were almost certainly also living there, but city directories rarely listed women residents unless they were employed or were widows. The area where they lived – just east of West Seventh – had already evolved into a working-class neighborhood. A diverse mix of German, Czech, Polish, and Italian immigrants were putting down roots and forming unions, schools, churches, and social clubs.

When Frederick and Teresia finalized the purchase of the property at today's 408 Erie Street on September 8, 1887, she was listed on the deed, though wives usually were not. The inclusion of Adolph's wife Frantiska on the documentation may have inspired the appearance of Teresia on the deed as well.

⁴ Ancestral family being from Croatia: Natalie Christiana Mészárosné Neumann, personal correspondence, October 23, 2025. Neumann is the administrator of Stipkovits family trees on www.ancestry.com. Family speaking German: *U.S. Census*, 1920, City of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Leo Stepwith (head of household); and *U.S. Census*, 1920, Saginaw County, Michigan, Mary Kast, listed as wife of Benedict Kast (head of household).

How the family sheltered during the winter that followed, one of the harshest Saint Paul would ever know, is unknown. The *Saint Paul Dispatch* documented the cold, reporting on November 28, 1887, that the temperature had plunged to -22°F by 8 a.m., and that “only those who are fortunate enough to possess fur overcoats” were able to venture outside. In the weeks that followed, the paper continued to report exceptionally low temperatures, brisk winds, and heavy snowfall. In January 1888, Fort Snelling recorded a reading of -39°F. The winter culminated in the Blizzard of 1888, which claimed the lives of an estimated 500 people across the Northern Plains.⁵

By May, Saint Paul’s weather had begun its annual shift toward milder spring conditions, with temperatures slightly above average. Building permits had been instituted in Saint Paul in 1883, and on May 9, 1888, Frederick applied for a permit to construct a 14-by-16-foot structure at 408 Erie, described as a “stone foundation and kitchen to dwelling.” The permit specified an 18-inch-thick foundation, five feet deep.⁶ This is the earliest known building permit for the lot. The 224-square-foot structure almost certainly formed the original core of the workman’s cottage at 408

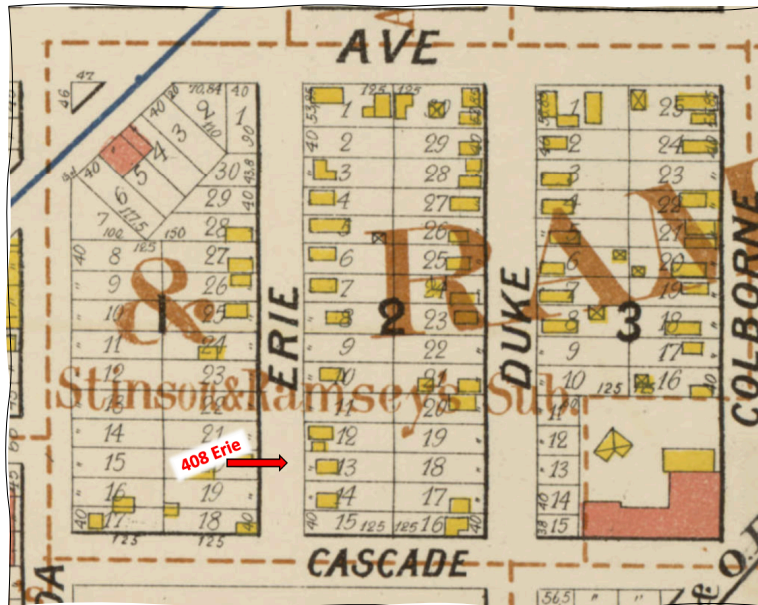


Figure 10. Curtice’s *Standard Atlas of the City of Saint Paul*, 1887, detail of plate 17. The atlas shows a structure at 408 Erie. A majority of the other lots along Erie, Duke, and Colborne also had structures on them. No key explains the markings on the map; but the cartographer appears to follow the custom set by the Sanborn map company with respect to colors: yellow indicates a wood-frame building and red, brick. A question is raised why there is a structure at 408 Erie on this 1887 map before the issuance of the 1888 permit and an answer can only be speculated: the publication date of the atlas is unknown, and it could be that updates were made to the drawings through early 1888. It is known that cartographers of the era consulted building permits in the course of their work and perhaps they account for later additions. It is also possible that the surveyor talked personally to Stipkovits who told him about his plans. Annotations in red added by the author for clarity. Credit: UMedia Libraries of the University of Minnesota (online).

⁵ “With a Bang, Not a Whimper: The Winter of 1887-1888 (Revised),” Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/natural_resource/climate/summaries-and_publication/mn_inter_1887-1888_revised.pdf. Newspaper quotes are taken from the DNR article.

⁶ “Detailed Statement of Application for Additions, Alterations, and Repairs to Frame or Brick Dwellings,” Permit No. 14979, Saint Paul, Minnesota, for east side of Erie Street between Cascade and Jefferson Streets, lot 13, block 2, Stinson and Ramsey’s [Subdivision], issued to F. Stipkovits, May 9, 1888. From the collection of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

Erie which would expand through later additions to its present size of 823 square feet (see Figure 10).

The basement at 408 Erie, which also serves as the house's foundation, today measures approximately 14 by 20 feet, larger than the dimensions described in Frederick's permit, yet there is no evidence that it was later enlarged. It is possible that Frederick found excavation easier than anticipated and expanded the basement during construction without going to the trouble of amending his original permit. The basement is also deeper than specified in the permit, with walls approximately 7½ feet high. Its stone foundation is composed of brick-like blocks, somewhat irregular in size but averaging about 18 inches in length – significantly longer than a standard modular clay brick which measures roughly 7½ inches. At some point in their history, they were painted white, making it difficult to determine what they are made of.

A chimney located along one side near the center of the basement, apparently constructed of the same material as the foundation walls, supports the interpretation that the room above functioned at least in part as a kitchen. The chimney would have vented a stove in the “kitchen” space, almost certainly coal-fired, which the family would have used both for cooking and for heating the house. Someone over the years took the time to playfully paint the bricks of the basement part chimney in alternate primary colors (Figure 11).



Figure 11. The basement in 2026 at 408 Erie. The thickness of the walls can be seen on the left and the painted bricks of the fireplace on the right. Credit: Photo by Mattie Wong.

While the family lived on Erie Street, Frederick was employed as a laborer. In 1892, the city directory helpfully adds the detail that he worked for Lauer Brothers, a construction firm. The Lauer brothers were immigrants from Europe's Alsace region, and like Frederick, spoke German as their first language. The Lauer Brothers Company appears frequently in contemporary newspaper accounts, most often for securing contracts for major public works projects with occasional legal news notices indicating that they also built private homes and commercial buildings. By the 1880s the company was quarrying Platteville limestone in Saint Paul, including at a facility at West Seventh and St. Clair, very near 408 Erie. They also undertook

excavation and stone and brick work for public and private construction works.⁷ It seems reasonable to assume that through his employment with Lauer Brothers, Fred acquired the skills necessary to build his own basement/foundation and may even have been able to purchase materials at a discount from his employer.

On October 15, 1888, Frederick's son Leopold, 27, married the former Rosa Farkas, 20, who had just immigrated to the United States that same year, likely from the same area in the Austro-Hungarian empire that the Stipkovits family had originated. Rosa, it may be noted, shared the same maiden name as her mother-in-law Teresia, and so they may have been related. The couple moved to 733 Butternut Avenue, about a mile nearly due south of 408 Erie. There Leopold worked for a nearby vinegar maker.

Teresia died in November 1893.

Daughter Mary stayed on at 408 Erie with her father, working first as a domestic helper and later as a dressmaker. In 1896, she married Benedict Kast, and they lived with Frederick in the family home. In June 1897, Benedict, annoyed at neighborhood boys who had been throwing rocks in the yard, picked up a rock and threw it back. It hit a seven-year-old youngster named Bernard Wagner, gravely injuring him. The incident shook the family and the neighbors on the street alike and generated quite a bit of press coverage. Benedict spent nearly a month in jail as the boy struggled to survive a serious brain injury. In the end, the boy lived and Benedict was released from custody, the boy's family declining to prosecute.⁸

Later that year, Frederick did something he had been putting off for a long time: he was naturalized as a U.S. citizen.

In December 1898, Frederick, Leopold, and Rosa – the last members of the family to retain a claim to the property at 408 Erie following the delayed settlement of Teresia's probate – let go of the house that had tied the Stipkovits family to Saint Paul for eleven years. On December 15, 1898, they sold the property to Thomas Oper of Saint Paul for \$425. The final quitclaim, however, was not executed until December 27, when they received the remaining \$25, Oper having apparently paid \$400 at the original date of sale.⁹ Even before the sale was completed, Frederick and his family had moved, perhaps because of lingering

⁷ Information on the Lauer brothers is mostly taken from Joseph Thompson-Dvořák Moes-Landsberger, *Origin Story: Fort Road/West Seventh Street* (Joe Landsberger, December 2024; revised August 2025), 109.

⁸ "Hopes for His Life," *Saint Paul Globe*, June 10, 1897; "Saint Paul: Local News Notes," *Saint Paul Globe*, June 12, 1897; "Wagner Boy Gets Well," *Saint Paul Globe*, June 14, 1897; "Young Wagner Improves," *Saint Paul Globe*, June 17, 1897; "Kast's Die Not Cast," *Saint Paul Globe*, Jun 18, 1897; "Kast Discharged," *Saint Paul Globe*, July 6, 1897.

⁹ Indenture for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, December 15, 1898, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota; Quitclaim for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, December 27, 1898, Ramsey County Property Office, St Paul, Minnesota.

tensions in the neighborhood after the rock-throwing incident, to what the 1898 city directory described as “rear Warsaw 3, south of Palace.” The same directory lists the residents of 408 Erie in 1898 as Margaret Kennig, “widow of Frank,” and Louis Jobst, a cigarmaker employed by F. W. Tuchelt’s Sons. Kennig and Jobst were likely renters, and no further identifying documentation for either could be located.

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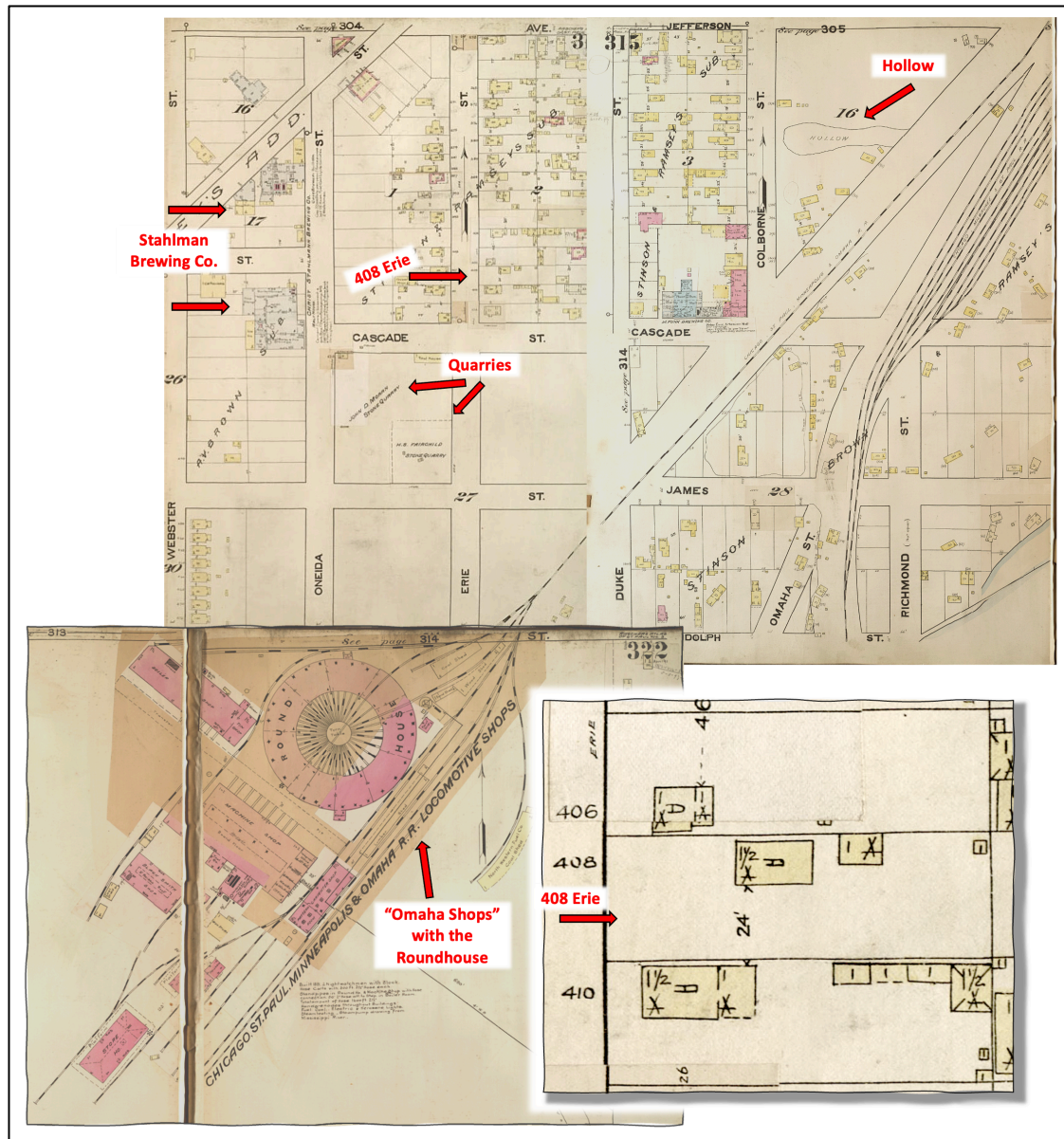


Figure 12. *Rascher Atlas of Saint Paul, Minnesota, 1891*. Top and bottom left images are map details stitched together from Vol. 3, plates 314, 315, 321, and 322; inset at bottom right is an enlargement from plate 314. Seen on these plates are 408 Erie, Stahlman Brewing Company (today's Schmidt's Artists' Lofts) in its 2- to 3-block area, the "hollow" mentioned in the writings of Greg Brick, the quarries belonging to John D. Moran (left) and H. S. Fairchild on Cascade and Oneida, and the "Omaha Shops" and roundhouse. The inset shows 408 Erie and its two neighbors. The original map notations on the inset indicate the structure at 408 Erie is a dwelling ("D"), is 1½ stories (the ½-story referring to attic space), and has an asphalt roof (the "X" with the bottom line across it). An apparent shed, one story, also with asphalt roof, stands behind it. The small yellow square in the back is undoubtedly an outhouse; many other neighborhood houses are shown to have one in the back yard. Annotations in red added by author for clarity. Credit: Minnesota Digital Library (online).

Part V

1891

The *Rascher Atlas of Saint Paul* (Figure 12) shows the growth of the neighborhood around 408 Erie as of 1891 just two years after the purchase of the property by the Stipkovits family. It is notable that nearly every lot on the east side of Erie shows a house having been built on it compared to the 1885 Sanborn map just six years earlier.

The 1891 map shows the original part of the house behind what is today's living room, the dwelling that Stipkovits built for his family as he described for the 1888 building permit. The 1891 map notes the house as 1½ stories, the ½ story being a reference to an attic. Though the building permit did not describe the house as 1½ stories, it did explain on the form that that house would have "cellar, basement, and attic." The attic would have provided room for insulation, which at the time would have been composed of nearly anything the homeowner might be able to access: sawdust, wood shavings mixed with borax, straw, rags, newspaper, horsehair, or wool offcuts.

The Quarry

The 1891 map also shows us that the April 1890 attempt at selling the property south of Cascade Street as a quarry had only been partially successful. Only the upper left block was identified as quarry sites in 1890, owned by J. D. Moran and "Leonard"; the other three blocks were unoccupied. The seller of the property tried again to sell the rest of the property

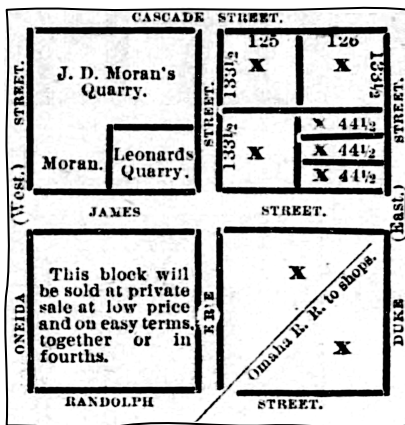


Figure 13. The image accompanying the November 1890 advertisement offering the land in the city blocks south of 408 Erie. Source: “Popular Wants,” *Saint Paul Globe*, November 5, 1890.

in November 1890, adding a little map of his own to the advertisement to show how he envisioned sales and future lot divisions (Figure 13). The northeast city block of the section had rock and could still be quarried, according to the ad, but the two southern blocks, without rock, were more suitable as lumber yards, wood and coal yards, or for manufacturing. The seller claimed that little property was left of this size in this part of the town for businesses that had a need for more land.¹

What became of these properties south of Cascade Street over the next few years is unknown. Today, however, the entire area is flat – the rock that was there was indeed quarried away. A large warehouse, vacant in 2026 but a hydroponics growing center from 2015-2019, occupies the bulk of the property of the two northern blocks and bears the address of 543 James Avenue. Saint Paul planning documents identify the land there as being part of the historic Jacob Schmidt

Brewing Company campus.² A fencing company occupies at least part of the two southern blocks.

Cascade Creek

Greg Brick writes that the “hollow” shown in the 1891 atlas, to the east of Colborne Street and north of what was then Cascade Street (today’s Palace Avenue), may mark the site of a former waterfall (Figure 14). The 1854 mention of “the Cascade water power” seems to confirm the idea (see page 5). Cascade Creek once flowed openly through the West Seventh neighborhood, shaping the landscape long before the area was fully developed. It appears as early as 1867 on the *Ramsey and Manomin Counties and Hennepin East* map by L. G. Bennett (Figure 15), as well as on the 1878 real estate plat (see Figure 6) of Stinson and Ramsey’s Subdivision. The 1878 plat shows the creek winding around the Melchior Funk Brewery

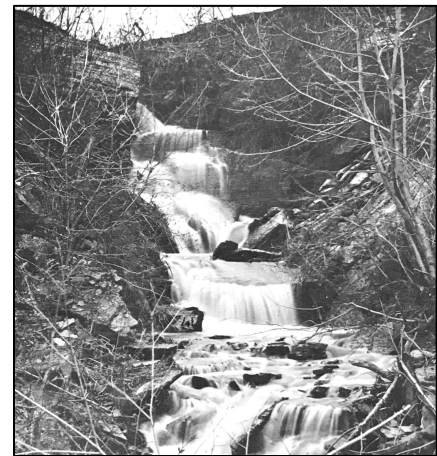


Figure 14. Fountain Cascade, near Saint Paul, one-half of a stereographic view by W. H. Illingworth, circa 1875. Credit: Collection of the Minnesota Historical Society (online).

¹ “Popular Wants,” *Saint Paul Globe*, November 5, 1890.

² Bill Dermody, “Zoning Committee Staff Report,” Premier Storage, file number 14-319-416, August 21, 2014. Accessed at www.stpaul.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7/14-319-416%20Premier%20Storage_201408220838283737.pdf.

near Cascade and Colborne streets before passing through lot lines just two lots north of what would later become 408 Erie Street. From there, it continued eastward, the breadth widening across the lots behind and just north of 408 Erie before crossing Colborne and eventually flowing toward the Mississippi River. Brick says the waters of nearby Fountain Creek, known for feeding the Fountain Cave of Pig's Eye fame, may at times have mingled with those of Cascade Creek as both streams cut through the sandstone landscape. Brick adds that the east-west “Cascade Street” first appeared on a real estate plat in 1854, and likely was named for the small waterfall or cascade the creek formed as it dropped through the ravine – the 1891 hollow – toward the river.

Brick notes that as the neighborhood around the cascade and 408 Erie developed in the late nineteenth century, streets were graded and drainage was redirected into catch basins and tunnels, gradually pushing Cascade Creek underground. Today, he says, its waters still flow unseen beneath the streets.

Brick believes Elizabeth Ellet was describing the cascade when she traveled to the area in 1852:

“A miniature waterfall flashes through the depths of a narrow dell, making thirteen successive shoots in a winding course, each falling into a lovely basin several feet in depth, which serves for a bathing place, curtained by a drapery of woods. This little cascade is closely embowered in foliage of vivid green, and its picturesque beauty makes up for the want of grandeur. It is a lovely spot to spend a summer morning or afternoon.”³

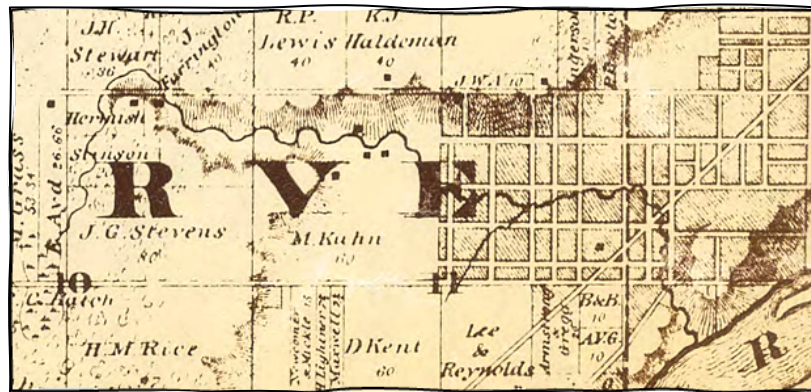


Figure 15. Detail of Ramsey and Manomin Counties and Hennepin East, 1867, L. G. Bennet. The meandering line is Cascade Creek though parts are Fountain Creek. The “RVE” of this detail is the last three letters of “RESERVE” printed on the map, indicating the Fort Snelling Reserve. Credit: Collection of the University of Minnesota Libraries, John R. Borchert Map Library (online).

³ Greg Brick, “‘An Eruption of Springs’: The Diverting Story of Cascade Creek, *street.mn*, September 7, 2022, <https://streets.mn/2022/09/07/an-eruption-of-springs-the-diverting-story-of-cascade-creek/>; Elizabeth Ellet, *Summer Rambles in the West*, (New York: J. C. Riker, 1853).

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Part VI

Toward the Twentieth Century

The story of 408 Erie Street in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the narrative of working-class Saint Paul. The families who lived there came from different places and circumstances: Some arrived directly from Europe; others were already one or two generations removed. Some owned the house; others rented. All were bound by the effort to make a life in Saint Paul for themselves and their children.

The Oper Family

December 1898 – April 1920

Alternate spellings: Oper, Oupor, Ober, Ouper.

The story of Thomas Oper's American experience begins not with Thomas, but with his uncle, Joseph.

Joseph Oper was born in 1847 in Bohemia. The name of his village is unknown, but later census records show that he spoke Czech. In June 1865, at just nineteen years old, Joseph arrived at the port of New York – only three months after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, a timing that likely was not coincidental.

Joseph likely first stayed in the established Czech community in New York's Lower East Side, finding lodging and work through ethnic networks while acquiring rudimentary English. When he was ready, those same networks would help guide him inland.

From New York, Joseph would have traveled by rail across Pennsylvania, then by steamboat down the Ohio River to St. Louis, and from there by another steamboat up the Mississippi to Saint Paul. When he arrived, the city was still a growing frontier town with comparatively few Czechs. Though Czech immigrants had come to Minnesota Territory as early as the 1850s, most of those early families had settled in rural areas.

Joseph chose to stay in the city, however, and wasted little time establishing himself; he became a U.S. citizen on November 1, 1869 (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Signature of Joseph Oper (Josef Ouper) on his 1869 naturalization record. Credit www.ancestry.com.

What work Joseph did back in Bohemia is unknown. Years later, he would leave Saint Paul and become a Minnesota farmer, suggesting he may have had agricultural experience in the old country. In Saint Paul, he settled among the other immigrant communities along the West Seventh Street corridor near Michigan Street, already a working-class district where tradesmen made shoes and boots, rolled cigars, tailored clothing, butchered meat, forged iron, and laid brick and stone. Many Bohemian immigrants, however, worked as general laborers in breweries, railroads, and quarries, performing physically demanding work for modest wages; Joseph likely among them.

It's easy to imagine Joseph missing home and writing letters back to Bohemia. He may have described the growing Czech community in Saint Paul and the founding of the Czech Slovak Protective Society (CSPS) in 1872 – he became a member of its insurance group Guide Council in 1876.¹ He may have mentioned when horse-drawn streetcar tracks were laid along Fort Road, an exciting accomplishment which modernized city transportation. Joseph certainly would have written home about his marriage to Mary Trestik on December 26, 1874. Mary, born in 1846 in Czechia, immigrated to the United States in 1872.

Little is known about the Oper family back home in Bohemia. Joseph's father was also named Joseph, but the number of siblings in the family is unclear. At least one brother – Franz, older by nine years – followed him to America. For Franz, the decision to leave was more difficult: he was married with three children. Nevertheless, in 1875, Franz, his wife Anna, and their children immigrated to Saint Paul. Their journey was probably somewhat easier than Joseph's, the American portion likely accomplished entirely by passenger rail. Anna was either pregnant on the trip or became pregnant shortly afterward.

¹Joseph Thompson-Dvořák Moes-Landsberger, *Origin Story: Fort Road/West Seventh Street* (Joe Landsberger, December 2024; revised August 2025), 173.

When Franz arrived, the two brothers appeared in the 1875 Saint Paul city directory living on Palace between View and Buffalo on the west side of Fort Road about half a mile from what would later become 408 Erie. Both were employed as unskilled workers. Joseph was twenty-eight; Franz was thirty-seven. Their wives and children would have been living with them.

Tragedy followed quickly. On October 20, 1875, Franz and Anna's infant son Frank died at just eight days old. Less than a year later, on May 31, 1876, Franz himself died at age thirty-eight. No epidemic was reported at the time, but tuberculosis, diphtheria, accidents, and the effects of poor sanitation and nutrition were common causes of death. On October 3, 1876, Anna gave birth to another child, Anna Agnes. Widowed with five children – Ferdinand, thirteen; Thomas, eleven; John, seven; Mary, about eighteen months; and newborn Anna Agnes (Figure 17) – matriarch Anna faced the daunting task of supporting her family alone in a country very new to her.



Figure 17. Anna Agnes Oper as a young woman. Though she did not live at 408 Erie, she most likely visited her brother and his family there. Credit: Undated image uploaded to www.ancestry.com by user "Harry Karr."

For a time, Anna remained near West Seventh Street. The 1878 directory lists her at "rear Michigan near Western Avenue" near Joseph's family. But life there was unsustainable. By the 1880 census, Anna and her children were living in the largely Polish settlement on the river flats near today's High Bridge – an impoverished area without formal street addresses cut through by railroad tracks (Figure 18).²

An 1886 *Pioneer Press* article described the settlement vividly: marshy approaches, foul-smelling streams, and shanties built of scrap lumber and driftwood. Families scavenged for food and fuel, chickens scratched in tiny yards, gardens were squeezed into whatever space that was possible. Health notices warning of scarlet fever hung on some doors. Conditions were cramped and dangerous.³

² Susan Hodapp, *Saint Paul's High Bridge, 1889–1985: A Photo-Essay of the History of a Saint Paul Landmark*, Oakdale, MN: Minnesota Department of Transportation, District Nine, 1985, accessed via Minnesota Legislature, <https://www.leg.mn.gov/docs/pre2003/other/851419.pdf>. This Polish settlement, which later became known as Little Italy, is sometimes referred to in documentation – including the 1880 Census – as the Bohemian Settlement, a term which causes it to be confused with the Bohemian Flats in Minneapolis and the Bohemian community along West Seventh Avenue.

³ "Bohemia and Her People," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, May 23, 1886. The article contains a number of ugly, stereotypical descriptions of the occupants of the area. It refers to the inhabitants as "Bohemians," but the word likely was used as a negative stereotype rather than being an accurate description of the totality of the ethnicity of those who lived there.

In 1880, only sixteen-year-old Ferdinand (later known as Frederick) was listed as employed, in an unskilled job. The younger children, aged fourteen, nine, six, and three, almost certainly contributed to the household through scavenging, collecting firewood, or other tasks. Many of the residents were squatters in the flats and were forcibly moved out that year.⁴ Whether Anna's family was among them is unclear, but by 1882 they had returned to the West Seventh neighborhood, living at 426 Superior near Saint Stanislaus Church, the Catholic Church's fourth parish in Saint Paul founded by Czech immigrants in 1872. Eighteen-year-old Frederick worked as a laborer. By 1884, Thomas, nineteen, joined him in supporting the family, working for brewer Arnold Wurm (Figure 19). It may have been the only income the family had.

As Anna's children grew into adulthood, they stayed close to home, sometimes living in the same house with her or sometimes renting nearby, but always very close to the West Seventh neighborhood around the church. After 1893, all three brothers worked at the Chicago, Saint Paul,



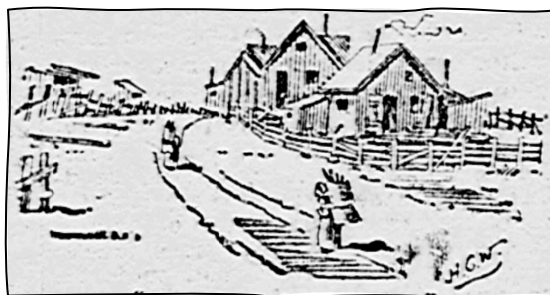
Figure 19. Photo believed to be Thomas Oper, date unknown. Credit: Image uploaded to www.ancestry.com by user DarleneJ73.

Minneapolis and Omaha Railway shops at Randolph and Toronto. By 1897, Frederick was listed in the city directory as a railroad fireman, stoking engine fireboxes; Thomas was a "helper," likely in the blacksmith shop; and John was a blacksmith. It was grueling work, but it offered comparatively good wages and stability. The sisters, Mary and Annie, worked as packers at the Minnesota Soap Company.

Thomas married Mary Petrasek in 1894, a woman he had known since their days in the Polish settlement, her father a stonemason from Bohemia. The Petraseks, like the Oper, had immigrated in 1867. Mary's father, Dominick, 33 at the time, had immigrated with her mother Marketa, then 27, and their first daughter, Veronica, 3. By the time the family was living in the Polish Settlement in 1880, they had



Figure 18. Small drawings accompanied the newspaper story about the Polish settlement, which it called the Bohemian Settlement. Top is of a store offering groceries. Bottom is entitled "The River Boulevard" and shows women carrying gathered wood along the plank road. Source: "H.G.W.," "Bohemia and Her People," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, May 23, 1886.



⁴ "City Globules," *Saint Paul Globe*, March 26, 1880; "City Globules," *Saint Paul Globe*, April 27, 1880; "City Globules," *Saint Paul Globe*, April 28, 1880.

added three more children: John, who was 10; Mary, 7, and Vansel James, 3. As a testament to their probable poverty of the time, Veronica, then 14, was employed as a servant girl. Two more daughters were added to the family by 1882. Neither Dominick nor Marketa could speak English at the time of the 1880 census.

In 1891, Thomas received mention in the newspaper for finding the body of a man in the river. Working as a watchman on the Omaha railroad bridge, he saw the body floating beneath the trestle. Police were called, the coroner pronounced an unknown cause of death, and the man was buried without identification.⁵

Thomas Oper became a U.S. citizen in October 1897.

Though Thomas's work at the railroad yards would not have been terribly lucrative, he managed to save enough money to purchase the house at 408 Erie (Figure 20). At the end of 1898 or early 1899, Thomas and Mary moved there with their nearly one-year-old daughter. That winter proved another harsh one in Saint Paul, marked by intense cold and violent storms. In March, a *Pioneer Press* writer described how "the northwest wind rips open your overcoat, knocks off your hat, throws broken ice in your eyes, and hustles you into the [street] gutter."⁶ Fourteen inches of snow fell in a single night, and the Mississippi River froze so solid that ice floes

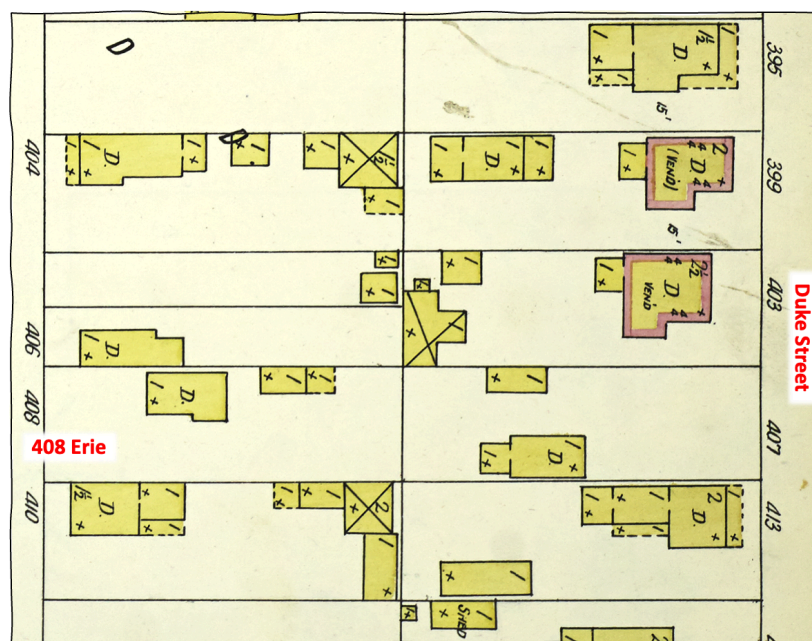


Figure 20. Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1903, detail from Vol. 1, plate 78; image turned 90° so that compass north is at the top. The area which is today's 408 Erie kitchen appears to have been bumped out since 1891 (see Figure 12). A one-story extension has been added to the structure behind the house: the hypenated line indicates it was a porch or shed, probably a shed or perhaps even an animal stall. The outhouse present in 1891 is no longer there. The neighboring house at 406 appears to have an extension added to the rear of the house since 1891. Annotations in red added by the author for clarity. Credit: Collection of the Library of Congress.

⁵ "The Unknown Dead," *Saint Paul Globe*, June 18, 1891.

⁶ "Not a Blizzard, but a Norther," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, March 12, 1899. The headline reflects the exasperation felt by the writer who felt the federal bureaucratic nomenclature of the weather event did not accurately describe its impact.

drifted as far as the Gulf of Mexico. Spring brought only partial relief; brief thaws gave way to long stretches of damp, gloomy weather.

In June 1899, a tornado, which would be classified today as an EF5, devastated New Richmond, Wisconsin, about thirty miles east of Saint Paul. One hundred seventeen people were killed, many of them drawn there by a weekend circus festival. Three hundred buildings were destroyed, and damages were estimated at \$600,000 – roughly \$24 million today. It remains Wisconsin's deadliest tornado and the ninth deadliest in U.S. history. Though they had endured a punishing winter themselves, Thomas and his brother John contributed to a *Pioneer Press* relief fund for the victims, donating fifty and twenty-five cents, respectively.⁷

Beyond these events, details of the family's daily life are scarce although they almost certainly participated in CSPA activities where they could socialize in their native language, browse the library, attend Sokol exercise classes, and enjoy polka dances, plays, and concerts. In 1898, Mary's brother James (also known as Vansel) won first prize for the fanciest men's costume at the society's February masquerade ball.⁸

The Oper family may have worshiped at Saint Stanislaus Catholic Church.⁹ Thomas worked days as a boilermaker for the railroad, while Mary managed the household and, in 1900, prepared for the birth of their second daughter, Anna Helen. Mary would have cooked, cleaned, and perhaps tended a small garden.

Life had its ups and downs. In October 1906, Thomas became involved in a saloon fight at West Seventh and Tuscarora and was sued for the astonishing sum of \$5,500 by John Schramm, who claimed Thomas had "severely kicked and beaten [Schramm] about the head and body." Thomas argued self-defense, saying Schramm had provoked him with an "opprobrious name." The jury ruled against Thomas but reduced the award to \$250 (about \$10,000 today).¹⁰ Six months later, Thomas declared bankruptcy.¹¹

Trouble followed again in October 1907, when he fought with a brother-in-law, but this time Thomas himself was hospitalized with a broken collarbone and scalp wounds above both eyebrows.¹²

⁷ "Relief for New Richmond," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, June 21, 1899.

⁸ "Sokol's Prize Masques," *Saint Paul Globe*, February 6, 1898.

⁹ Thomas's brother Frederick was married in a Catholic Church in Wisconsin in 1892.

¹⁰ "Suit Follows Fight," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 30, 1906; "Court Matters," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 31, 1906.

¹¹ Legal Notice, *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, February 25, 1907.

¹² "Terse Tales of the Town," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 15, 1907.

Despite the turmoil, in March 1909, Thomas applied for a building permit for a one-story frame addition and repairs to 408 Erie. Contractor Anton M. Decker completed the work in May.¹³ The work likely corresponds to the front living room area of the house today (Figure 21).

Before 1910, Thomas may have been skipping around jobs for several years. Since 1901, his occupation was listed in the city directory simply as “helper” or “laborer,”

although in 1909 he was shown specifically employed by Schmidt Brewing Company. By 1910, the census showed Thomas was hiring himself out as a teamster, likely operating his own cart for deliveries, perhaps for one of the breweries. In 1913, he supported skilled crews at Consumers Power Company, a job that involved preparing sites, digging holes, setting poles, and handling materials. In 1914, sixteen-year-old daughter Mary began working as a machine operator, a signal that perhaps family finances were not as healthy as they would have liked them to be.

Thomas’s life had often been marked by hardship. He had lost his father as a young boy, had grown up in poverty, and had struggled as an adult to secure financial stability. In inevitable comparison, his brothers had fared better, working in steady, skilled railroad jobs for many years. His sisters left Saint Paul for California in 1900, taking his mother with them; his uncle and cousins relocated to Oregon in 1910. He may have had anger issues or suffered from alcoholism. The cumulative strain took its toll. On April 22, 1917, at age fifty-one, Thomas ended his life.

Thomas’s wife Mary, now a widow, and the rest of the family stayed on at 408 Erie. Later that year, her daughter Mary married Alfred Bonn, who became the household’s primary provider. The younger Mary left the workforce as she prepared for motherhood; her

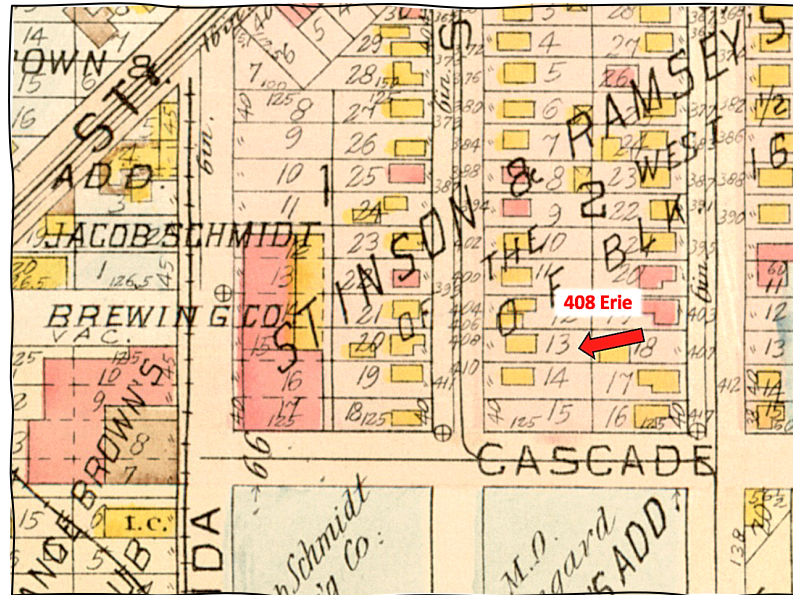


Figure 21. Plat Book of the City of Saint Paul, Minnesota, 1916, detail of Plate 32. Collection of the John R. Borchert Map Library, University of Minnesota Wilson Library (online).

¹³ “Application for Permit for Minor Additions, Alterations, and Repairs,” Permit No. 51468, Saint Paul, Minnesota, for 408 Erie Street, issued to Tom Oper, March 11, 1909. From the collection of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

first child was born in 1918. Thomas's other daughter Anna Helen began working at Brown & Bigelow that same year, earning modest wages at a printing company producing patriotic ephemera for the World War I war effort.

Life on Erie Street continued.

Alfred Bonn

Alternate spellings: Bonn, Bohn

Alfred Bonn was born in Saint Paul in 1887, the son of Victor and Teresa Bonn, who had come to the United States from Germany in 1880. At the time, Alfred's father was working at Saint Paul's Frederick Emmert Brewing Company. By 1895, Victor had moved on to the prestigious Theo Hamm Brewing Company as a maltster, a skilled position that required a combination of technical, scientific, and sensory abilities. But what would have felt like a secure family life did not last long.

In 1896, Victor died, leaving Theresa a widow with four children under the age of twelve, one a new-born infant. At the family home at 866 Beech in Dayton's Bluff, Theresa faced the reality of raising her children alone, not too unlike the experience of Thomas Oper's mother twenty years before. There were other Bonn families in Saint Paul who may have been relatives, and it is possible Theresa received some help from them, but day-to-day survival likely depended mostly on her.

After Victor's death, Theresa focused on keeping her family together and the children housed. She had been left some money when Victor died, and by the middle of the year 1900, she moved the family to 844 Palace, near Erie Street, into a house she had managed to purchase.

Later that year Theresa answered an advertisement placed in the local newspaper by "Zoe Zoe," a self-proclaimed clairvoyant (Figure 22). Zoe Zoe had recently settled in Saint Paul to test his prospects after a diligent police force ran him out of Terre Haute, Indiana. Perhaps having seen the same ad, Saint Paul officers placed Zoe Zoe under surveillance, and one day, they raided the house. Inside, they found Zoe Zoe sick in bed, attended by a loving Theresa.

Theresa insisted to the police that Zoe Zoe was "on the square": he had proposed marriage and had spoken of a shared future. She had given him \$500



Figure 22. The advertisement Theresa saw which described Zoe Zoe's amazing powers. Source: Advertisement, "Clairvoyants," *Saint Paul Globe*, December 24, 1900.

(\$20,000 today), so they could “start in business and make a nice little living.” The skeptical constables, however, warned her that Zoe Zoe likely instead intended to abscond with her funds as soon as he was well enough to do so.

What became of Theresa’s money or even to Zoe Zoe over the next several days is unknown. Perhaps the police intervention had been enough to alter the proximate course of events. Whatever the immediate result, by the following May, Zoe Zoe was in Detroit, Michigan, advertising himself as a “palmist and clairvoyant supreme,” while Theresa remained in Saint Paul with her family.¹⁴

Suggesting that perhaps Theresa had not been able to recoup all her money, by 1902, at 39 years old and with four children between the ages of five and sixteen, Theresa went to work as a charwoman, physically demanding labor that would hardly be enough to support them all. The next year, fifteen-year-old Alfred left school and went to work as a clerk for the Great Northern Railway. As the girls grew older, they too took jobs to help sustain the family. Their combined wages appear to have been enough. Theresa left her job and never worked outside the home again.

The house at 844 Palace remained the family’s home base until at least sometime after about 1913. The children she had struggled to raise were adults and had moved on. Theresa’s fate is unknown: she had either died or moved in with one of them. Alfred’s adult life was marked by moving from one semi-skilled trade to another. In 1917, he was thirty when he married Mary Oper, nineteen, and was working as a packer for G. Sommer and Company, a general merchandise wholesaler. That same year, already living in the house on Erie Street, he registered for the World War I draft and was described as medium height, slender, blue eyes, and red hair.

Moving On

By 1920, 408 Erie was home to three generations of family under one roof. The matriarch, Mary, at forty-seven, worked as a washerwoman, a job that would have helped family finances, but it would not have kept the family afloat without more money coming in. She still owned the house, but the census noted she carried a mortgage either necessitated by the addition Thomas had added to the house ten years earlier or just from money the family may have borrowed later to keep them afloat. Living with her were daughter Mary, her son-in-law Alfred, and their young daughter Mamie. Alfred, who had advanced into skilled jobs as an electrician and carpenter, was the main breadwinner. Anna Helen also remained at home, working as a clerk, probably still for Brown and Bigelow.

¹⁴ “Zoe Zoe,” classified ad, *Saint Paul Globe*, December 23, 1900; “Zoe Zoe Under Inquiry,” *Saint Paul Globe*, December 31, 1900; “The Great Zoe Zoe,” classified ad, *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1901.

In April 1920, after Thomas Oper's estate was settled, the heirs sold the house to William J. Farber for \$1,900, under the terms of a private mortgage: \$200 was paid up front, with the remaining \$1,700 to be paid in monthly installments of \$20 at six percent annual interest. The sale was finalized in March 1923 when Farber paid off the mortgage.¹⁵

William Farber

April 1920 – January 1938

Alternate spellings of the family name: Farber, Färber

By the time William Farber purchased the house at 408 Erie, his American roots reached back farther than most of the immigrant families who lived there. On his mother's side, William's grandparents were John B. Vetter and Walburga C. (Stoeckle) Vetter. They were originally from the area southeast of Stuttgart, Germany, likely near Esslingen. By 1856 they had settled in Buffalo, New York, where they began raising their family. Family records suggest Walburga, and likely John as well, had immigrated to the United States by about 1852. Their youngest child, Mary, who would become William's mother, was born in 1860. Later in life, Mary sometimes listed Canada as her birthplace, likely reflecting fluid national borders.

In 1877, the Vetter family moved west to Detroit Township in Becker County, Minnesota. By 1880, John was farming there while nineteen-year-old Mary was working outside the home as a domestic, living with another nearby family.

On his father's side, William's grandparents, Wilhelm L. Farber and his wife Auguste and their son Hermann, were among the earliest members of William's extended family to settle in Saint Paul, arriving during the Civil War era. Their small family had left Hamburg in May 1861 when Hermann was seven, sailing aboard the barque *Sir Isaac Newton* (Figure 23). After a voyage of



Figure 23. The sailing barque Isaac Newton that brought William Farber's grandparents to the Americas. Credit: www.manitouislandarchives.org.

¹⁵ Agreement providing for the establishment of a private mortgage for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, April 3, 1920, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota. The Oper family did not finalize Thomas' probate, which would have included the house, until 1923 (Probate Order, Thomas Oper, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul Minnesota). Oper family members then filed an indenture in 1923 when they, as beneficiaries of the property, officially conveyed it to William J. Farber for "\$1 and other valuable considerations," a reference, no doubt to the mortgage they were had extended to Farber (source: Indenture for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, April 3, 1920, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota). It is noted that at least some of the paperwork for these transactions and its timing is irregular.

about seven weeks, they reached Quebec in June only to be held at Grosse Île under a fifteen-day quarantine because measles and smallpox were present aboard the ship.

By 1863, Wilhelm, thirty-five, was in Saint Paul working as an unskilled laborer. As he was required to do, he registered for the Union's Civil War draft. Though Minnesota would be the first state to offer troops for the Union effort in the Civil War, Wilhelm was not among them. Ability to speak the language, family obligations, and his age may have kept him out of uniform.

Hermann Farber, who would become William's father, grew up as an only child in Saint Paul, a city that was still very much forming around him. By his late teens he was already working to help support the family. In 1872, at age eighteen, while charging a soda dispenser in the basement of Rose's Drug Store near the waterfront, the device exploded, leaving him with a compound fracture of the leg. Carried several blocks to his home, he was tended by a team of three physicians. Newspapers reported the subsequent operation was "successful" and that he was recovering "as well as could be expected."¹⁶

Hermann appeared in the newspapers again later in 1879, this time connected to a lawsuit involving the removal and relocation of a house from one lot to another – an episode that ended with a significant financial judgment against him and others.¹⁷ Not long afterward, he left Saint Paul for Detroit, Minnesota (now Detroit Lakes), where by 1880 he was operating a drug store, possibly building on skills he had learned at the old Rose Drug Store in Saint Paul.

It was in Detroit in July 1881 that Hermann married Mary Vetter (Figure 24). The wedding was described as small and quiet, attended mainly by family, and the couple set up housekeeping above Hermann's drug store.¹⁸ The following year, in 1882, their first child, William, the future owner of 408 Erie, was born.



Figure 24. Photo believed to be Mary Vetter, date unknown. Credit: Image uploaded to www.ancestry.com by user Paul Overbeck.

Whatever stability the young family had was short-lived. In 1883 Hermann declared bankruptcy,¹⁹ and the family moved back to Saint Paul, living near Wilhelm's home on Robert Street. That same year they lost other property they owned in Saint Paul through foreclosure.²⁰ By 1885, Hermann was managing another drug store, this one connected to his parents' business interests and named after his mother, but control of the business eventually

¹⁶ Untitled, *Saint Paul Daily Press*, July 9, 1872.

¹⁷ "All About Town," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, December 14, 1879.

¹⁸ Untitled, *The Detroit (Minnesota) Record*, July 23, 1881.

¹⁹ "Assignee's Notice," *Saint Paul Globe*, March 21, 1883.

²⁰ "Legal Notice," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, December 31, 1883.

passed out of the family's hands. Over the next several years he worked as a travel agent and a traveling salesman. Two more children were added to the family.

In 1898, when William was sixteen, Hermann left for Portland, Oregon, intending, at least in theory, to establish a new home and send for the family, including a daughter born shortly after he left. Instead, letters came, and financial support did not.²¹ The absent Hermann had abandoned not only his wife and children but also his aging parents. The grandparents, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren that had remained in Saint Paul lived together on Robert Street. William took work as a messenger, and his two-year younger sister found work as a clerk. Mary worked for a time as a custodian. Through astute real estate dealings, she managed to build financial security for the family.²²

In 1905, Mary divorced Hermann on grounds of desertion, a developing scandal that the local papers painstakingly covered. By 1910, William had begun working as a traveling salesman, as had his erstwhile father before him. Hermann returned to Saint Paul in 1913.

Mary died in 1914, at age fifty-three. Her gravestone bears only her maiden name, Vetter, a testament to her independence and a nod to the central role she played in sustaining the family.

Hermann died the following year.

William and Freda Kuechler were married in November 1917.

Farber-Kuechler

Freda's family had immigrated from Saxony, in today's Germany, and were settled in rural Minnesota by the early 1860s. By 1883, her father, Fred Kuechler, had established a successful harness and leather business on South Wabasha Street in Saint Paul, where the family also made their home. Freda's mother, Clara Luedemann, was born in Bremen, Germany, in 1869, the circumstances of her immigration unknown. Fred and Clara were married in Saint Paul in 1892.

Freda, born in 1894, showed musical talent as a teenager, studying piano and voice and appeared in recitals at the Saint Paul Music Academy that were favorably reviewed in the local press.

²¹ "Says Husband Deserted Her," *Saint Paul Globe*, April 25, 1905; "Hot Air Doesn't Count," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 18, 1905.

²² *E.g.*, "Saint Paul Real Estate," *Saint Paul Globe*, July 28, 1891; "Assessment District Number Six, City of Saint Paul," *Saint Paul Globe*, February 11, 1895; "Legal Notice," *Saint Paul Globe*, August 25, 1902.

At William and Frida's simple wedding in 1917, Freda wore pink satin trimmed with seed pearls and carried roses and maidenhair ferns. The wedding cake was patterned after the one served at her parents' wedding, a nostalgic nod to family tradition. Her brother, Fred, was unable to attend having just been drafted to serve in World War I.²³

During their marriage, William was a traveling salesman, first for the Red Wing Shoe Company and later for a paint manufacturer. Freda's daily life likely echoed that of her mother-in-law in some respects, keeping house and raising children while her husband traveled, but with the difference that William appears to have come home regularly. The young couple first lived on Annapolis Street, where their first daughter, Audrey, was born in November 1918. Later that year, their second daughter, Eleanor, was born while the family lived at 408 Erie.

The life William and Frida established for themselves seemed almost deliberately designed to be idyllic to contrast to the less settled family life that William had experienced. In 1921, Freda hosted friends for supper, the evening enlivened with music and singing.²⁴ The girls, Audrey and Eleanor, were active in music and dance as they grew up, mentioned in many newspaper articles as performing in recitals.

Items no longer needed in the home were sold in a series of classified advertisements and appeared to reflect a peaceful domesticity: used baby furniture, a washing machine and wringer, a Stewart combination range, a gas heater, even an eight-month-old male Airedale

The Traveling Salesman

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the "traveling salesman" was a common occupation for men, closely tied to the expansion of retail and manufacturing in cities like Saint Paul. Positioned as a key transportation hub, with steamboats on the Mississippi and an extensive rail network, the city served as a gateway for goods moving across the Upper Midwest. Traveling salesmen were essential to that system, carrying samples and securing orders from merchants and farmers. Shoes manufactured in Red Wing, for example, were described as "especially fitted for use of the farmer." The shoe salesman would carry a suitcase of samples for the right foot only to lighten his load. By the late 1920s, automobiles had begun to replace rail travel, reshaping the nature of the work.



Source: "Red Wing Products Are War-Time Necessities," Minneapolis Star Tribune, April 30, 1918. Image credit: www.MessyNessyChic.com.

²³ "Farber-Kuechler Wedding," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, November 4, 1917; "Saint Paul Men who will Answer First Call," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, July 21, 1917.

²⁴ Untitled, *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, March 12, 1921.

dog. They offered up for sale as well a “costly” violin with a chin rest, two bows, and a case but were willing to trade them for a radio or shotgun instead. Over time, they also sold a REO touring car and a REO truck, mid- to high-range vehicles manufactured in Michigan but considered superior to Fords.²⁵

Still, one lingering mystery in the records is the appearance in the 1930 census of a twelve-year-old boy, Oscar J. Farber, listed in the household but not found in any other documentation before or since, not even as a distant relative.

By the late 1920s, family finances had improved enough that the family could afford to move to a larger home on Wesley Avenue, keeping 408 Erie as a rental property. Their first tenants were the family of Charles and Grace Koeth.

Tenants: The Koeths ...
Alternate spellings: Koeth, Kōthe, Koethe.

By 1927, when the Koeths rented the house at 408 Erie, they already knew what it meant to start over. They had started out as farmers in southwestern Wisconsin, then made a go in the Dakotas, and later moved on to rural Polk County, Wisconsin, a little further north from where they had been before. When Charles Koeth, forty-four years old, and his wife Grace, thirty-eight, finally settled their family into the little house on Erie, they had abandoned agriculture and were starting the next chapter in their already long story of trying to make things work. Even so, they would move on again just a couple of years later.

While at 408 Erie, Charles and Grace shared the little cottage with six children: sons Charles Jr., who in 1927 was seventeen and nearly grown; Eugene, twelve; John, ten; Lloyd, eight; Donald, four; and an infant daughter, Doris. It was a lot of people to coexist together in a house that was under 800 square feet. One can imagine constant overlapping voices, a pile of muddy boots by the door, and growing boys seemingly taking over the space meant to hold them all.

Charles was born in 1882 in La Crosse, Wisconsin. His father, Günther, was from Kyffhäuserkreis, Thuringia, Germany (Saxony); his mother, Magdalena Schott, also known as Emma, was from Hessen, Germany. His parents did not immigrate to the United States together – Günther’s immigration date is not known; Emma came in 1855. Günther was twenty-two and may have been still unmarried in 1862 when as a strapping young man, five feet and eleven inches tall, he enlisted in the Union Army. He served as a private in the Second Wisconsin Cavalry and was discharged after being wounded in 1864 at Vicksburg, Mississippi. It may have been when he returned home to La Crosse that he married Emma –

²⁵ E.g., classified ads, *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, May 21, 1922; December 30, 1923; October 5, 1925; September 18, 1927.

at any rate, their first son was born in November 1866, one of five older siblings that Charles would grow up with.



Figure 25. Women on the railroad tracks in Winona, Minnesota, after the blizzard of 1881. An original source for this photo, which is widely reproduced on the internet, could not be located.

Grace Morrison Koeth was born in 1889 and brought up in Trempealeau, Wisconsin. Her father, Joel C. Morrison, was a New York native with Irish roots, and her mother, Sina Thompson Morrison, was of Norwegian ancestry. In 1881, nearly a decade before Grace's birth, her parents endured almost unimaginable tragedy: four of her brothers that she would never get to know – ages ten, six, four, and one – died from the effects of the snow and extreme cold brought about by the blizzard of 1880-1881 (Figure 25). Grace's family was living in Winona County, Minnesota, Joel employed as a stagecoach driver between Winona and Rochester, when the storm hit. Snow drifted to heights of 20 feet deep, blocking overland travel and the re-supply of food and other supplies. The Mississippi iced over, cutting off hope for help via the waterways.

Communication lines were severed. Considered the single most dangerous storm in the history of the United States,

it was immortalized by Laura Ingalls Wilder in her book, *The Long Winter*, which told of her family's experience with the storm from their perspective in South Dakota.

Even so, Grace grew up in a large family: she was the youngest of eight siblings in their blended family brought about by a previous marriage of her father, some of them already adults by the time she was born.

Charles and Grace had both come from people who had faced enormous personal challenges, and they had seemingly been unable to find security in their own family life by the time they pivoted from rural to urban living at 408 Erie. It was tough going: their farming experience had not provided them with the experience they needed to earn substantial wages. Charles crossed the city as a messenger for Montgomery Ward, delivering parcels and paperwork, and Grace cleaned rooms as a maid at the Ryan Hotel (Figure 26).

By 1930, the family moved on to a rented house at 630 James Street, paying twenty dollars a month. Perhaps the new place offered a bit more room, or perhaps the change reflected a small improvement in their financial

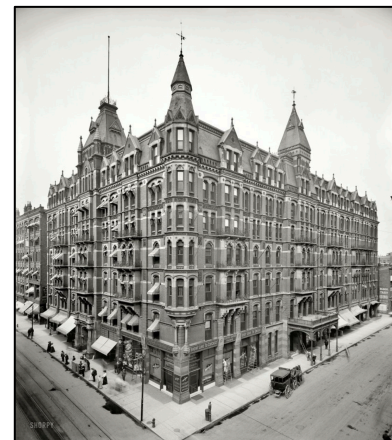


Figure 26. The Ryan Hotel in 1905 at Sixth and Robert. The Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission considers the loss of Ryan Hotel a significant loss to Saint Paul's architectural history. Credit: An original source for this photo, which is widely reproduced on the internet, could not be located.

circumstances as Charles had become a clerk at Montgomery Ward. His eldest son was also bringing in income having taken over his father's old job of messenger at the department store.

... and the Knippenbergs

No alternate spellings of the family name were found.

Edward Carl and Katherine Knippenberg were the next tenants of 408 Erie, moving in temporarily about 1930 or 1931 and staying about eight years, but the story here will be interrupted by going on to Stanley and Katherine Mirovsky, who bought the cottage from the Farbers in January 1938 with their daughter Anna and her husband John George Schneider in mind.²⁶ The Knippenbergs would move back to the property in 1939.

²⁶ Indenture for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, January 8, 1938, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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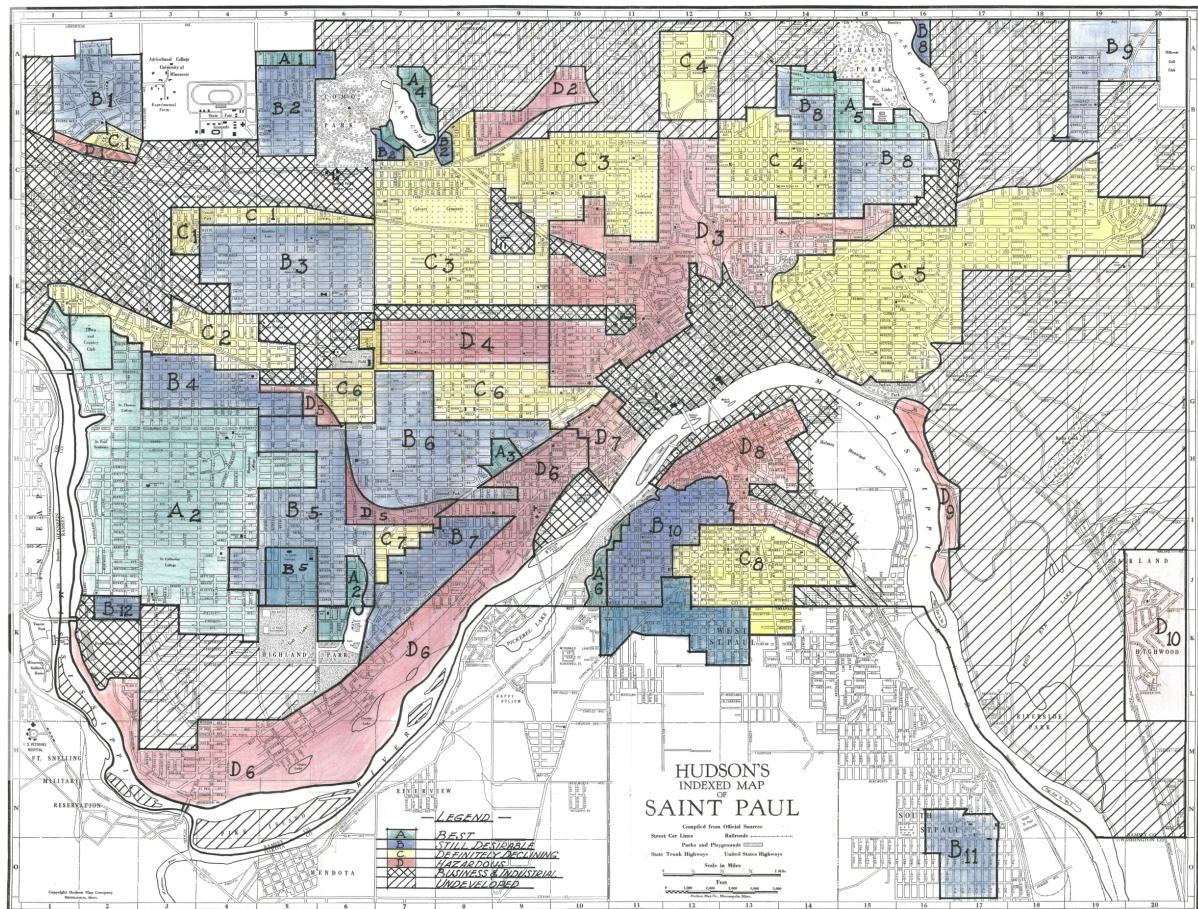


Figure 27. The property at 408 Eric was included in the D₆ red-lined area of the 1934 Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) map of Saint Paul. The letter "D" indicated "hazardous" for lending; the small red numbers designated general districts and were not part of the so-called desirability rating. The map used to overlay the grading lines is the 1926 Hudson's Indexed Map of Saint Paul. Credit: Mapping Inequality, University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia (online).

Part VII

Redlining

In 1934, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) redlined the area east of West Seventh Street, including 408 Erie, as part of a federal initiative to grade neighborhood mortgage risks (Figure 27). So-called “residential security” maps, drawn for hundreds of cities across the country, divided areas likely to yield large returns from areas where bank money would not be lent. Least desirable neighborhoods were designated with the letter “D,” for “hazardous,” and were rendered red in the maps.

In the Southern United States, the policy, instituted to “recover” the housing market during the Great Depression, had the effect of segregating neighborhoods into black and white; in Saint Paul, where African Americans numbered below 1% of the total population, the HOLC maps separated poorer immigrant neighborhoods from wealthier neighborhoods.

The systemic denial of capital instituted by HOLC caused an immediate and severe decline in property values in red-lined neighborhoods. It drove wealth gaps and long-term health inequities which are still felt today.

REAL ESTATE TRANSFERS	
Clinton W. Redlund to Molly Wenzel et ux—Pt Gov. Lt 5, S. 36, T. 30, R. 23.....	\$1
Annie Horels to City of St. Paul—Pt Lt 19, Blk 5, Clarke's Add.	60
Annie Horels to City of St. Paul—Pt Lt 18, Blk 5, Clarke's Add.	65
Walter Fralish to Frank L. Kruszewski—Lt 34, Cottage Homes ..	1
William J. Farber et ux to Stanley Mirovsky Sr. et al—Lt 13, Blk 2, Stinson & Ramsey's Sbd.	1
Leonard Hartman et ux to Henry J. Mayer—Lt 20, Blk 1, Stinson & Ramsey's Sbd.	1
Irene A. Beltz to Elwyn. Beltz et ux—Lt 16, Blk 4, Arlington Hills Add.	1
G. A. Hawkins et ux to City of St. Paul—Pt Lt 16, Blk 9, Hersey & Woolsey Add.	7.50
H. Stanley Johnson et ux to Bridget A. Donaher—Lt 17, Blk 19, Sbd. Blk 19 & 21 & Pt Blk 20, Woodland Park	1
Adelaide K. Fontaine et al to Hilma S. Anderson—Lt 11, Blk 10, Chelsea Heights	1
J. E. Cable to Frank P. Vogel et al—Lt 18, Blk 4, Northome Add.	1
George J. Bossard et ux to Lawrence R. Watson—Lt 5, Blk 12, Eastville Heights	1
Arthur H. Adams et ux to Carl A. Quist et ux—Lt 5, Paust's Rear.	1

Figure 28. The Farber-Mirovsky sale for \$1. Source: “Real Estate Transfers,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, January 12, 1938.

Unfortunately, the price that the Mirovskys paid for the property at 408 Erie cannot be determined. The legal documentation only shows it was sold for \$1, a method sometimes used by homeowners to either transfer property between relatives or to conceal the real price, both means to avoid paying taxes. It could also mean a foreclosure had occurred. The Mirovsky sale was reported in a January 1938 article in the *Pioneer Press*, interesting because it shows all transfers reported that day were for \$1 with the only exceptions being those that were sold to the City of Saint Paul (Figure 28). There is no indication that the Farbers and the Mirovskys were related, so a familial transfer seems unlikely. Whatever the cost of the transaction, however, it is almost certain that the Mirovskys got a good deal on the property happening as it did in the depths of the Depression and in the shadow of redlining.

Part VIII

Mid Century

By the late 1930s, the stories of the families who lived at 408 Erie Street remained tied to immigrant roots, but their lives unfolded in a larger and more diverse Saint Paul. The brief presence of the John and Anna Schneider family reflected the instability that still defined working-class life. Their story, rooted in German and Bohemian ancestry, carries forward familiar themes: limited education, demanding labor, and the financial pressure of raising a large family with modest means. When Edward and Katherine Knippenberg returned to 408 Erie, however, what had long been a place of transition became a lasting home. Their lives reflected permanence: steady work, incremental improvements, and the raising of a large family through the Depression, World War II, and the postwar years.

The Mirovskys and the Schneiders

January 1938 – August 1939

No alternate spellings found.

Though Stanley and Katherine Mirovsky bought the house in 1938, they never lived in it. Instead, their daughter Anna, and her husband John Schneider, ages twenty-seven and thirty, moved in with their four children. Vivian was ten; John George Jr., nine; Richard, six; and Eugene, five. Like the Koeths, they were a large family in a modest space. Also like the Koeths, their stay at 408 Erie would be relatively brief. Both John and Anna had only completed an eighth-grade education, a circumstance that would have constrained their

earning potential. While Anna stayed at home and cared for the children, John worked 45 hours a week as a conveyor operator at a baking company.

John's father, Franz Xavier Schneider, had immigrated in 1880 from Urloffen in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, just west of today's Strasbourg. His mother, Mary Elizabeth Florian, arrived in the Americas at an unknown date from Suchdol nad Lužnicí, about 50 miles south of Prague in what is today the Czech Republic. By 1899, John's parents were in Saint Paul where John was born in 1906.

Anna's father, Stanley, was a Bohemian immigrant who became a naturalized American citizen in 1900. By most accounts, he was a colorful character, and his behavior no doubt contributed to unstable childhood for Anna and her two brothers. In 1904 he was sued for fathering a child out of wedlock and ordered to pay \$200 (roughly \$7,500 today) in support. He was also brought up on charges more than once for serving liquor on Sundays at the saloon he owned at 437 Michigan Street.¹

Anna's mother, the former Katherine Pavek, was born and reared in Rice, Minnesota, a community founded by Czech immigrant farmers.

When the property was sold to Edward and Katherine Knippenberg in 1939, the sellers were listed as Stanley Mirovsky, Sr., and Katherine Mirovsky, and John Scheider and Anna Schneider.²

The 1930s in Saint Paul

Life in Saint Paul during the 1930s was shaped by the hardships of the Great Depression and the lingering effects of Prohibition. The Prohibition Act, ironically introduced in Congress by Minnesota congressman Andrew Volstead, banned the production and sale of alcohol from 1919 to 1933, a significant distraction in a state with deep brewing traditions.

Prohibition fostered organized crime, and Saint Paul subsequently gained a reputation as a refuge for gangsters with the help of corrupt city officials. Figures such as John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson, Machine Gun Kelly, and the Barker-Karpis Gang all passed through or operated from the city. Reform efforts effected by the City in the 1930s, aided by FBI agents under J. Edgar Hoover, helped bring Saint Paul's gangster era to an end.

¹ "Official Proceedings," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, March 10, 1904; "Michigan Street Saloon Tilted Lid Police Charge," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, January 7, 1918; "Injunction Issued Banning 'Setups' at Victoria Cafe," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, February 19, 1928.

² Warranty deed for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, August 10, 1939, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

The Knippenbergs

August 1939 – August 1990

No alternate spellings found.

Although the Knippenbergs had moved out of 408 Erie in 1938 when the Schneiders briefly took up residence, something about the place pulled Edward and Katherine back. In August 1939, they bought the house from the Mirovskys in what would become an almost sixty-year relationship with it, interrupted only by the short interval when the Schneiders were living there. Like the Mirovskys, Edward and Katherine paid \$1 – on paper – for the property, and, like the Mirovskys, there does not appear to be any kinship between the families. But ownership now made it possible for the Knippenbergs to make the house their own, no longer just a temporary place to stay.

When the Knippenbergs first rented the cottage in 1930, Edward was twenty-four and Katherine twenty-one. Married three years at the time, they had a three-month-old son, Robert. Edward worked as a car repairer at the Omaha Railroad shops. Money was tight – tight enough that the little family did not own a radio, a small detail recorded in the census that reflected both finances and connection to the wider world.

Edward's father, Emil, had immigrated from Germany as a child in 1880, arriving in New York aboard the iron screw passenger liner *General Werder* before settling in Prescott, Wisconsin, at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Crois rivers. Emil became a steamboat river pilot. Edward's mother, the former Estella Palmer, was descended from New England families with American roots stretching back to the 1600s including Puritan settlers and very early Irish immigrants. Edward had been born in Prescott in 1905. Katherine's family also had connections to Ireland, but they were somewhat more recent: her father, born in Nova Scotia in 1870, and her U.S.-born mother were both of Irish descent. Katherine herself was a Saint Paul native, born there in 1908.

The 1940s

In the early 1940s, some Americans were still struggling to recover from the lingering effects of the Great Depression, while others were beginning to prepare for, and eventually prosper from, the nation's entry into World War II.

Popular culture offered markers for the era. Nylon stockings became a fashion sensation for women. Men wore black fedoras, a style considered stylish, or the "pure quill." Bing Crosby released his hit song *Only Forever*, and in Hollywood, Hattie McDaniel became the first African American actor to win an Academy Award.

Source: Linton Weeks, "The 1940 Census: 72-Year-Old Secrets Revealed," NPR.org (online), April 2, 2012.

By the time the Edward and Katherine bought the house at 408 Erie and returned in 1939, their family had grown. Robert was joined by Barbara, born in 1932, and Louis, born in 1938. They also were also grieving the recent loss of an infant daughter.

In 1940, thirty-four-year-old Edward registered for the military draft. He was described as five feet seven inches tall, 135 pounds, with brown hair and brown eyes, light complected. He was never called up, likely exempted for service because of family responsibilities. He continued to work at the Omaha Railroad yards, by then as a freight inspector, an essential transportation role on the homefront. Though railroad employment offered stability, his annual income of \$665 a year fell well below the national median income for men, which stood at \$956.

Two more sons, Thomas and Roger, were born in 1940 and 1943.

In 1943, the family had repairs made to the house, including work on the roof and siding.³ With five children at the time – ages thirteen, eleven, five, two, and a newborn – it may have during this time that the back porch was built, and the small front portico added. In warmer months, Edward and Katherine slept on the back porch to gain a little privacy for themselves and to create space for their children inside.⁴

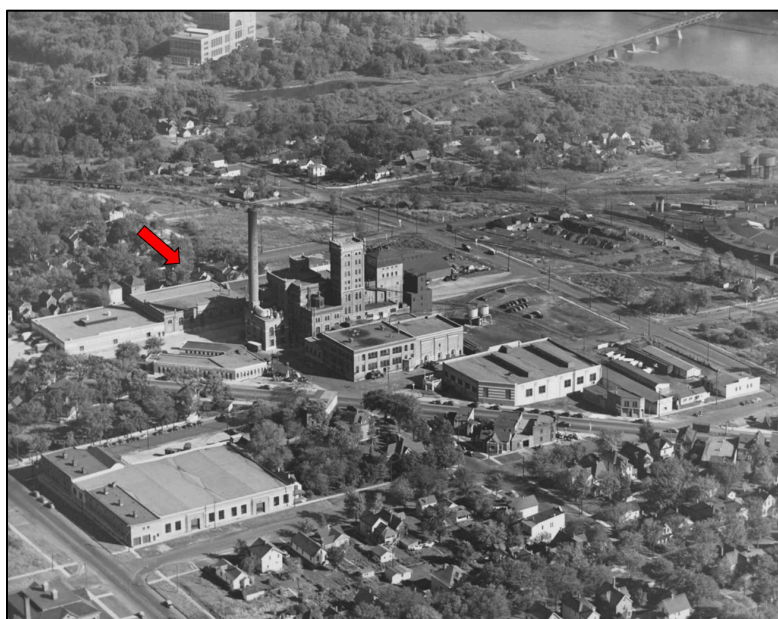


Figure 29. Aerial photograph of Schmidt Brewery, 1948. Red arrow added by author shows approximate location of 408 Erie Street. Credit: Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The Schmidt Brewery, founded by Christopher Stahlmann in 1855 only a block west of 408 Erie as the crow flies, had always been a major economic driver for the immigrant neighborhoods on West Seventh surrounding it. In 1948, an aerial photograph showed the

³ “Application for Permit,” City of Saint Paul, No. 107606, for 408 Erie Street, issued to Edward C. Knippenberg, owner, and U.S. Roofing and Siding Company, contractor, September 3, 1943. From the collection of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

⁴ Fr. Bob Knippenberg, personal correspondence, January 23, 2026. Fr. Knippenberg is the son of “Knip” Knippenberg.

vicinity around the brewery and the tree-lined streets where the Knippenberg children would ride their bikes to friend's houses or down to the river to fish or where Edward would walk to work at the railroad yards. (Figure 29).⁵

Robert began his freshman year at Monroe High School in 1945. Located at 810 Palace Avenue, it was just a short walk from Erie Street. The school, known today as Global Arts Plus,

graduated about 200 students that year, a few of the young men already dressed in Army or Navy uniforms for their senior pictures.⁶ Monroe offered a range of extra-curricular activities to its students: art club, stamp collecting, traffic squad, library work, and Latin. A rifle club reflected war-time patriotism. Boys' sports included golf, tennis, gymnastics, wrestling, baseball, swimming, and hockey. Girls could choose from table tennis, tennis, cheerleading, archery, and badminton.

Life on West Seventh in the 1950s

Life near West Seventh Street had the feel of a small town, where families relied on nearby businesses and neighborhood institutions. Teenagers attended events at Monroe High School, and daily errands kept residents moving up and down the street's busy commercial strip.

Local grocers supplied everyday necessities. Families might stop at Rohland's at 461 West Seventh or Mrs. Esboldt's at 479 for a quart of milk, or the kids themselves might be sent to run down to pick up a last-minute ingredient needed for Mom to make dinner. Personal services were just as close by. Katherine and her daughter could have their hair styled at Virginia Mottaz's salon at 434, while the boys might have visited Andrew Lavrinet's barbershop at 475.

Neighborhood businesses would meet nearly every need. Cars could be serviced at Slaby's garage at 453, shoes repaired at McNeely's shop at 477, and fish bait purchased at 608. A doctor, dentist, and drugstore were conveniently located at 499. For special occasions, Edward might buy a gift of blooms at Roger's Flowers at 321 before taking Katherine to dinner at Larry's Diner at 603.

For a special outing, residents could take streetcars to downtown department stores such as the Golden Rule, Schuneman's, and the Emporium, although after about 1955, they would take the bus instead.

Source: City Directory, Saint Paul, Minnesota, 1950.

By his senior year (Figure 30), Robert had acquired the nickname "Knip." He played football and hockey, wrestled, and belonged to the "M" Club. Though the war had ended in

⁵ Much has been written on the brewery. A recommended reading is Paul Clifford Larson, *Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company Historic District*, Saint Paul Heritage Preservation Commission, Minnesota Historical Society, May 25, 2011 (PDF available online at stpaul.gov).

⁶ Information about the Knippenbergs' teenage lives comes from the Monroe High School yearbook accessed at www.ancestry.com.

August 1945, patriotism lingered. Knip listed his ambition in the yearbook as becoming a fireman, but immediately after graduation in June 1948 he signed up with the U.S. Navy and was sent to the Great Lakes Training Center in Illinois.

Back home at 408 Erie, in 1950, Edward, now forty-eight, was still working as a railroad car inspector. Katherine, forty-one, had gone to work as a cook in a restaurant. Barbara, at sixteen, was the oldest child at home, and she and Louis, twelve, Thomas, nine, and Roger, seven, were all in school.

In her senior year at Monroe High School, Barbara – called Barbie – was a member of the Girls' Athletic Association which offered not only swimming, ice skating, volleyball, and basketball but also social activities (Figure 30). She likely attended the GAA house party that year, the Halloween dance, and their sleigh ride. Barbie sang in the “A” choir and was in a musical entitled *The Mockingbird*. Her yearbook offered glimpses of her personality: she liked “going downtown with Rosina to buy new clothes,” and her favorite phrase was “Oh, honestly!”

In 1956, Louis – “Louie” – was a Monroe senior (Figure 30). He ran varsity track, disliked speech class, hoped to join the Navy, and enjoyed camping and hunting.

Two years later, Thomas reached his senior year (Figure 30). He played football, joined the “M” Club, and studied metalworking. The yearbook staff noted that he would be remembered as an all-around good guy. He may have been the sibling who, as a University of Minnesota student, converted the basement coal room of 408 Erie into a study, after the house had transitioned away from coal heat.⁷

Roger, the youngest, graduated in 1961 (Figure 30). Though his senior portrait listed no activities, he appears elsewhere in the yearbook on the track team, grinning broadly as he feigns close attention to a coach's instructions.



Figure 30. The Knippenberg children's senior photos. From left: Robert, 1948; Barbara, 1953; Louis, 1956, Thomas, 1958; Roger, 1961. Monroe High School yearbook, www.ancestry.com.

⁷ Fr. Bob Knippenberg, personal correspondence, January 23, 2026.

As the children grew up and established lives of their own – through college, military service, and marriage – the small house at 408 Erie must have begun to feel cavernous to Edward and Katherine. The kids had children of their own, but occasional visits would fill the cottage again with the five siblings swapping stories of their childhoods and their own children, perhaps, running to West Seventh to spend a few pennies for an ice cream cone.

Edward Knippenberg died on March 27, 1986. Four years later, on August 8, 1990, Katherine sold the house to its next owner.⁸

⁸ Warranty deed for Block 2, Lot 13, of the West Half of Block 16 of Stinson & Ramsey's Subdivision of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition, August 8, 1990, Ramsey County Property Office, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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Final Notes

from the author

As with other social house histories I have written, this narrative basically concludes in the mid-twentieth century. This decision reflects a respect for privacy of living descendants who may not welcome public discussion of more recent or sensitive matters. However, the history of the house obviously does not end here. An epilogue section follows these “final” notes which provides some information to wrap up the stories of the families who lived at 408 Erie after they left the home. Also, in a bit of a cheat, I have included information about the last sales-to-date of the house at the end of Appendix 3.

The property at 408 Erie Street became part of the National Park Service’s National River and Recreation Area, Minnesota, established in 1988. For more information about the 72-mile corridor of this park, see: <https://www.nps.gov/miss/index.htm>.

The kind of immigration that is characterized in the old Saint Paul of this narrative was rooted in Central Europe. Immigration patterns across the country, including in Saint Paul, have gone through many changes since the 1950s. While many in the Twin Cities region still trace their origins to Europe, the population has become much more diverse. Wikipedia provides a highly informative graphic that I reproduce below showing ethnic origins in St. Paul as of 2021, but I highly recommend the reader also take a look at the wiki’s very good discussion of Saint Paul’s ethnic history which can be found here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Paul,_Minnesota.

Epilogue

Krtecius

By 1888, Adolph Krtecius had settled in Faribault, Minnesota, with Franciska and their children. Their oldest daughter, Mary, the one born in Chicago, is absent from the record, her fate unknown. But the household in 1900 included daughters Fanny and Annie and sons Joseph, Frank, and Henry. Adolph was still making cigars to support his growing family. No additional information identifying Adolph as a musician could be located other than his immigration records.

Stipkovits

The spelling of the last name of members of the Stipkovits family went through a number of variations over the years including a legal change made in court. Other last names associated with members of the family also went through a number of spelling transformations, making the genealogical research even more challenging. Mary's married last name was variously spelled Kast or Cast. Leopold's wife's maiden name is seen as Farkas, Farkos, Vargas, and Varga, and on her Social Security records she used the English translation "wolf" of the Hungarian word "farkas" which she spelled "Wolff." Following Rosa in the records is also complicated by the presence of another Rosa Wolf in Saint Paul who was born at about the same time as Leopold's Rosa, but who died much earlier. First names also underwent changes. Frederick was also known as Ference, Ferdinandus, Fred, and Ferdinand. His wife Teresia's name is seen in documentation as Theresa, Theresia, and Teresa. Leopold was sometimes seen as Leobolt.

The Stipkovits family members who had lived at 408 Erie gradually dispersed. Daughter Theresa, known as Tekla or Dekla and even Maggie, married Mathias Mickolai, in 1887, in Ramsey County, Minnesota. He was also known as Matthew Miculai or Nickulai and is shown in online family history documentation as being from Hungary or Slovakia. Mathias's and Tekla's family settled in Portland, Oregon, by 1898. By 1900, he was working as an unskilled laborer in Portland, and the couple had three children.

Opers

By 1900, Thomas' uncle Joseph moved with his family to a farm they bought in Minnesota's Renville County, and by 1910, moved again to a farm in Scio, Oregon. By 1900, Thomas's mother Mary had been living with Thomas's married sister Mary Materna and her family in Saint Paul, but by 1905, they had all moved to Los Angeles, California. Thomas's sister Anna Agnes married Peter Steffen in 1898, and by 1906, they also moved to California, living within a mile of the Maternas family.

William and Freda Farber

Freda's brother, Fred, followed in his father's footsteps as a leather tradesman. In World War I, he was a saddler with Company C, 313 Engineers, 88 Division. Little is known about his service except that he was overseas and he survived the war. He died in 1965 and is buried at Fort Snelling National Cemetery.¹ William finally gave up his job as a traveling salesman sometime in the mid-1930s, perhaps as a result of the Depression. William and Freda then tried some creative ways to cover financial expenses. At some point, they bought a large house at 899 Grand Avenue in Saint Paul and opened a restaurant they called the "Colonial Tea Room" where among other things, they offered tea leaf and palm readings. The 1940 census listed William as chef and proprietor of the restaurant, Freda was the "proprietor partner," and daughter Eleanor was a server. They also rented out rooms in the big house and offered parking at one of five garages at a lot they owned apparently nearby – a perk for lodgers with automobiles. They continued to accept boarders as late as 1950. The house no longer exists; it is a parking lot today. William died in 1966 and Freda died in 1968.

¹ "Saint Paul Men who will Answer First Call," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, July 21, 1917; Graveside information at Fort Snelling National Cemetery, accessed online at <https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/FREDKUECHLER/E6DC8FF>

Koeth

In 1940, Charles, at age fifty-seven, was shown on the census as living at 965 Tuscarora Avenue and employed as a linoleum cutter for a “mail order house,” perhaps still Montgomery Ward. Grace was not shown in the same census for some reason, but three of the Koeth’s young-adult sons were living in the home. Charles Koeth died on August 12, 1962, and Grace died on November 6, 1966. Both are buried in a joint grave in East Lincoln Cemetery in Amery, Polk County, Wisconsin.

Schneider

After moving out of 408 Erie, the Schneider family rented a unit at 161 Leech Street, closer to downtown. In 1940, the census showed that John worked 45 hours a week as a conveyor operator at Purity Baking Company. Anna stayed home with the children. By 1974 John and Anna had moved to Victorville, California. John died there in 1981, and Anna died there in 2003.

Knippenberg

Son Bob Knippenberg was married in 1954 to Betty Gamble of Saint Paul. Though Bob served in the Navy, he also found time in his young adult life to play center for the University of Minnesota Golden Gopher football team. His career path led him to work in sales management with the Hormel Meat Company in Kansas and Texas for many years. He died in August 2021 in Victoria, Texas, and an obituary noted he enjoyed growing tomatoes, hunting, fish, and cheering on Texas sports teams.

Barbie married Harold T. Danley of Saint Paul, also in 1954. She died in November 2020, at age 87 in Hennepin County. An online memorial says she loved cooking, gardening, and traveling.

Louis joined the Navy as he had indicated in his yearbook was his wish. In 1967, he married Wanda L. Sanft of Saint Paul. He died at age 64 in Columbus, Ohio. An obituary notes he was a member of the Civil Air Patrol; this fact, along with the photo posted by family members on www.ancestry.com in front of a small private plane suggests he may have been a Navy pilot. He was a retired vice president of the State Bond Mortgage Co., at the time of his death.

Thomas married Mary Lee Garrison of Texas in 1969 in Dallas. He was working in 1971 as a customer service representative for the Alcoa Company. His online *Linked In* page shows him as having attended the University of Minnesota and

also as having worked for Honeywell in Mount Vernon, Texas, likely his last job before retirement.

Roger married Beverly Grasz of Saint Paul. In 2020, he was still living in West Saint Paul at 304 Morton Street.

Katherine Knippenberg, died at age 90, in 1998 in Saint Paul.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The Freeborn land grant (credit: John Vanek).

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Presumption
CERTIFICATE
No. 3.

Copied Oct. 5, '88

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting:

WHEREAS *Richard Freeborn, of 1st Lewis County, Wisconsin,*

has deposited in the GENERAL LAND OFFICE of the United States, a Certificate of the REGISTER OF THE LAND OFFICE at *the Falls of St. Louis,* whereby it appears that full payment has been made by the said *Richard Freeborn,*

according to the provisions of the

Act of Congress of the 24th of April, 1820, entitled "An act making further provision for the sale of the Public Lands," for

the west half of the North West quarter, and the North East quarter of the North West fractional quarter, and Lot number three, of Section twelve, in Township twenty eight North, Range twenty three West, in the District of Kansas subject to sale at the Falls of St. Louis, Wisconsin, containing one hundred and sixty six acres and fifty five hundredths of an acre,

according to the official plat of the survey of the said Lands, returned to the General Land Office by the SURVEYOR GENERAL, which said tract has been purchased by the said *Richard Freeborn,*

NOW KNOW YE, That the

United States of America, in consideration of the Premises, and in conformity with the several acts of Congress, in such case made and provided, HAVE GIVEN AND GRANTED, and by these presents DO GIVE AND GRANT, unto the said *Richard Freeborn,*

and to his heirs, the said tract above described: TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same, together with all the rights, privileges, immunities, and appurtenances of whatsoever nature, thereunto belonging, unto the said *Richard Freeborn,*

and to his heirs and assigns forever

In Testimony Whereof, I, Zachary Taylor

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, have caused these Letters to be made PATENT, and the SEAL of the GENERAL LAND OFFICE to be hereunto affixed.

Second.
Given under my hand, at the CITY OF WASHINGTON, the *fourth* day of *April* in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *forty seven* and of the Independence of the United States the Seventy *third*

BY THE PRESIDENT: *Z Taylor*

By *Thos. Ewing Jr* Sec'y.
RECORDER of the General Land Office.

J. M. Sampson

Appendix 2. Immigration history of the owners/residents, 408 Erie.

Name	Arrival date in US and age	Arrival date in Minn	Country of Origin	Details, including immigrant history
Adolph Krtecus Bought the property in May 1887				
Adolph Krtecus	1878 age 17	circa May 1887	Bohemia	Adolph’s older brother Johann followed Adolph to America three years later. They were initially in Chicago, and Adolph went to Saint Paul sometime before May 1887.
Frederick and Teresia Stipkovits Bought the property in August 1887				
Frederick Stipkovits	1880 age 43	Between 1880- 1887	Hungary, Austro- Hungarian empire	Frederick and Teresia immigrated with their three children aged 19, 12, and 8; Frederick and son Leopold were in Saint Paul by 1887.
Teresia Farkas Stipkovits	1880 age 48	Between 1880- 1887	Hungary, Austro- Hungarian empire	
Thomas and Mary Oper Bought the property in December 1898				
Thomas Oper	1875 age 10	circa 1875	Bohemia	Thomas immigrated with his parents and three siblings.
Mary Petrasek Oper				Mary was born in Minnesota. Her parents and a sister immigrated from Bohemia in 1867.
William and Freda Farber Bought the property in April 1920				
William Farber				William was born in 1882 in Saint Paul. His fraternal grandparents left Hamburg, Germany, in 1861 and were in Saint Paul by 1863. His maternal grandparents came

				from Stuttgart, Germany, and immigrated to New York by the mid-1850s.
Freda Kuechler Farber				Freda was born in Saint Paul in 1894. Her paternal grandparents immigrated from Saxony and settled in rural Minnesota by the early 1860s. Her mother was born in Bremen, German, in 1869. The circumstances of her mother's immigration are unknown.
Charles and Grace Koeth Rented the property from 1927 – c. 1930				
Charles Koeth		probably 1927		Charles was born in 1882 in La Crosse, Wisconsin. His parents immigrated from Germany; his father's immigration date is unknown, his mother came in 1855.
Grace Morrison Koeth		probably 1927		
Edward and Katherine Knippenberg (see the entry below on the Knippenbergs)				
Stanley and Katherine Mirovsky Bought the property in January 1938, but did not live there				
Stanley Mirovsky	1899 age 20	before 1905	Bohemia	Stanley was born in 1879 in Bohemia. Circumstances of his immigration are unknown.
Katherine Pavek Mirovsky				Katherine was born in Rice, Minnesota. Her father immigrated from Pavedrozek, Bohemia, in 1844. Her mother was born in South Bohemia in 1846; circumstances of her immigration are unknown.

John and Anna Schneider Anna is the daughter of Stanley and Katherine Mirovsky; the Schneiders lived in the house from January 1938 – August 1939				
John Schneider		by 1899		John was born in 1906 in Saint Paul. His father, Franz Xavier Schneider, immigrated from Germany in 1880. His mother immigrated from today's Czech Republic on an unknown date.
Anna Mirovsky Schneider				Anna was born on April 29, 1910 in Saint Paul. (See the entry above on the Mirovskys for immigration information.)
Edward and Katherine Knippenberg Rented the house from c. 1930- 1939; bought the house in August 1939				
Edward Knippenberg				Edward was born in 1905 in Prescott, Wisconsin. His father was born in 1871 in Momenheim, Germany, and immigrated to the U.S. in 1881. His mother was born in 1870 in Ramsey County, Minnesota, with American roots that appear to go back to the late 1600s in Massachusetts.
Katherine Tynan Knippenberg				Katherine was born in 1908 in Saint Paul. Her father, born in Nova Scotia in 1870, and her American-born mother were both of Irish descent.

Appendix 3. Summary timeline of the conveyances of the property at 408 Erie. It is noted that documentation was not always generated in the order or timely fashion that we would expect today. Some documents may be missing or may have been misfiled. Names of people provided here are as spelled on the legal documents being described. The legal description of the property was first used in 1881, and the property has been referred to by that description in all subsequent legal documentation. These documents are in the possession of the author and may be obtained by contacting her at www.RichmondNarratives.com.

Year-Date	Record, and Summary
<i>See also the discussion of who may have squatted the land around today's 408 Erie before the era of legal land grants on pages 2-5 of the narrative.</i>	
1849-0402	Land grant record of the purchase by Richard Freeborn of the parcel of land on the bluff above the Mississippi River which included the property where the house at 408 Erie Street now stands. (See Appendix 1.) <i>Source:</i> Federal Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office in St. Croix, provided to author by John Vanek.
1854-0408	Newspaper article about the establishment of the Stinson, Brown and Ramsey addition. <i>Source:</i> "Facts and Fancies," <i>Saint Paul Weekly Minnesotian</i> , April 8, 1854.
1869	Counting House Map of the City of Saint Paul shows the location of the Stinson, Brown and Ramsey Addition before it was divided into blocks or lots. <i>Source:</i> "Counting House Map of the City of Saint Paul," 1869, collection of the John R. Borchert Map Library, University of Minnesota Wilson Library (online).
1878-0426	Plat of the part of Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's Addition to Saint Paul which includes 408 Erie (Lot 13, Block 2). <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1881-1125 1881-1125 1881-1126 1882-0216	Indentures for the estate of Justus C. Ramsey; two are dated November 25, 1881; a third is dated November 26, 1881, and a fourth is dated February 16, 1882. The documents describe Ramsey's estate and divides the proceeds of the future sale of 71 lots, including what would become 408 Erie, in the Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey Addition. Heirs, to receive equal parts, were eight of Ramsey's nieces and nephews as well as two charitable organizations, the Catholic Orphan Asylum Association and the Protestant Orphan Asylum, both of Saint Paul. Legal description of 408 Erie was "Lot 13 Bock 2 of Stinson and Ramsey's subdivision of the west half of block 16, Stinson, Brown, and Ramsey's addition." <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1887-0525	Indenture. Beneficiaries of Ramsey's last will and testament convey lot 13, block 2, to Adolph Krtecius for \$500. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.

1887-0811	[Notice of Sale.] Adolph and Frantiska Krtecus convey lot 13, block 2, to Fred Slipkovitz, for \$940. Slipkovitz paid \$600 at the time of the sale and agreed to pay all city assessments for grading Erie Street in front of the lot. The Krtecuses agreed to furnish the Slipkovitzes with a warranty deed “free and clear of all encumbrances on or before September 1, 1887.” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1887-0908	Indenture. The final conveyance of the property from Adolph Krtecus and Frantiska Krtecus to Fred and Terecia Stipkovits after they had met all the terms specified in the August 11, 1887, agreement. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1888-0509	Building Permit. Provides for the construction of a building on the land owned by T. [sic] Stipkovits. The text explains the scope of the permit: Size of building: no. of feet front 14. No. of feet rear ___, no. of feet deep 16. No. of stories in height 1 cellar, basement and attic. What will building cost, exclusive of lot? \$400. What will be the depth of foundation walls, from curb level or surface of the ground, and thickness? 18”, 5 feet. For what purpose is building constructed? Stone foundation & kitchen to dwelling. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Historical Society, Saint Paul Permit Collection.
1898-1215	Indenture [Quit Claim]. Mathias Mickulai and Dekla Mickulai of Portland, Oregon, to Frederick Stipkovitz of Saint Paul. \$1. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office. <i>Author’s Note:</i> This document is part of the resolution of the estate of Terecia Stipkovits who had died in 1893. Dekla was a daughter of Frederick and Terecia. This entry, as well as the entries for December 27, 1898, and December 30, 1898, are all related to the December 15, 1898, sale of the property to Thomas Oper.
1898-1215	Indenture. Frederick Stipkovitz, widowed, and Leopold Stipkovitz and Rosa, his wife, of Ohio, convey the property to Thomas Oper of St Paul, for \$425. Leopold was Frederick’s son. [See the 1898-1230 probate order below and accompanying author’s note.] <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1898-1227	Indenture [Quit Claim]. Benedict Kast and Mary Kast to Frederick Stipkovitz. \$1. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office. <i>Author’s Note:</i> This document is part of the resolution of the estate of Terecia Stipkovits who had died in 1893. Mary was a daughter of Frederick and Terecia. This entry, as well as the first entry above for December 15, 1898, and the one for December 30, 1898, are all related to the December 15, 1898, sale of the property to Thomas Oper.

1898-1230	[Probate Order.] Estate of Teresia Skipkovits, deceased, who died without a will. Heirs were husband and children Mary Kast, Dekla Mickulai, and Leopold Skipkovits. The premises were assigned under the probate order to Frederick Stipovits “for and during the term of his natural life” with remainder to Mary Kast, Dekla Mickulai, and Leopold Stipkovits of an “equal, undivided 1/3 thereof.” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office. <i>Author’s note:</i> The division of the “remainder” in thirds to the children was a formality, since according to the probate order, Teresia died with no other real or personal property.
1909-0311	Building Permit. Provides for the construction of “an addition costing \$700 to be made to the 1 story fr dwg [frame dwelling] building at lot 13 block 2.” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Historical Society, Saint Paul Permit Collection.
1920-0403	Agreement. Provides for the establishment of a private mortgage that William J. Farber was taking out from the heirs of Thomas Oper to purchase the property after Oper’s death on April 22, 1917. The grantor was the estate of Thomas Oper which included Mrs. Mary Oper, Miss Helen Oper, and Mrs. Alfred F. Bonn. According to the document, the terms of sale were “\$1,900 of which \$200 has been paid and the balance of \$1,700 will be paid to said heirs of Thomas Oper in month installments of \$20 each payable on the 3rd of each month until the \$1,900 has been paid in full with interest rate of 6% per annum. Purchaser to pay taxes and assessments and agrees to keep said property insured against fire to the amount of \$1,500.” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1923-0307	Probate Order. Provides for the estate of Thomas Oper: “Decedent left surviving his widow, Mary Oper, and two daughter, Mary Oper Bonn, and Helen Oper, his only children and heirs. All of the real estate ...is “hereby assigned to and vested in the said Mary Oper, for life and the remainder in fee in the said Mary Oper Bonn and Helen Oper, to each one-half thereof, without prejudice, however, to any lawful conveyance of said real estate or any part thereof by said persons or any of them.” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1923-0320	Indenture. Provides for the conveyance of the property from Mary Oper, Mary Oper Bonn and Alfred F. Bonn, her husband, and Helen Oper, unmarried, to William J. Farber for \$1 and “other valuable considerations.” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office. <i>Author’s note:</i> Farber had apparently satisfied the conditions of the April 3, 1920, private mortgage with the Oper family.

1931-1029	Indenture. William J. Farber’s and wife Freda Farber quit-claimed the property to Walter F. Farber for \$1. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office. <i>Author’s note:</i> Walter F. Farber was William Farber’s younger brother. It is unknown why William and Freda quit-claimed the property to him, although the year of the action may give a clue: it was in the midst of the Great Depression, and William Farber may have been protecting assets. Since William and Freda were the sellers of the property in 1938, either this quit claim was conveniently ignored or a document is missing.
1938-0108	Indenture. William J. Farber and Freda Farber convey the property to Stanley Mirovsky Sr. and Katherine Mirovsky for \$1 and “other valuable consideration.” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1939-0810	Indenture. Stanley Mirovsky Sr. and Katherine Mirovsky and John Schneider and Anna Schneider conveyed the property to Edward Knippenberg and Katherine Knippenberg, for \$1 “and other valuable consideration” <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office. <i>Author’s note:</i> Who owned the property at this point is unclear since both the Mirovskys and Schneiders are recorded as having conveyed the property to the Knippenbergs. There does not appear to be any family relationship between the Knippenbergs and the Mirovsky/Schneiders and so another mystery is why the contract used the “\$1” legal amount.
1986-0418	Affidavit of Survivorship. Katherine Knippenberg is named the survivor of the joint tenancy of the property. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.
1990-0808	Warranty Deed. Katherine Knippenberg conveyed the property to Jerome A. Westberg. <i>Source:</i> Ramsey County Property Office.

This social history of the house ends with the death of Edward Knippenberg on March 27, 1986. But, briefly, the house was sold to Jerome A. Westberg in 1990; to Stephen and Ashley Kaufman in 2008; to Kristine Kautzman in 2011; and to Mattie Wong in 2025.