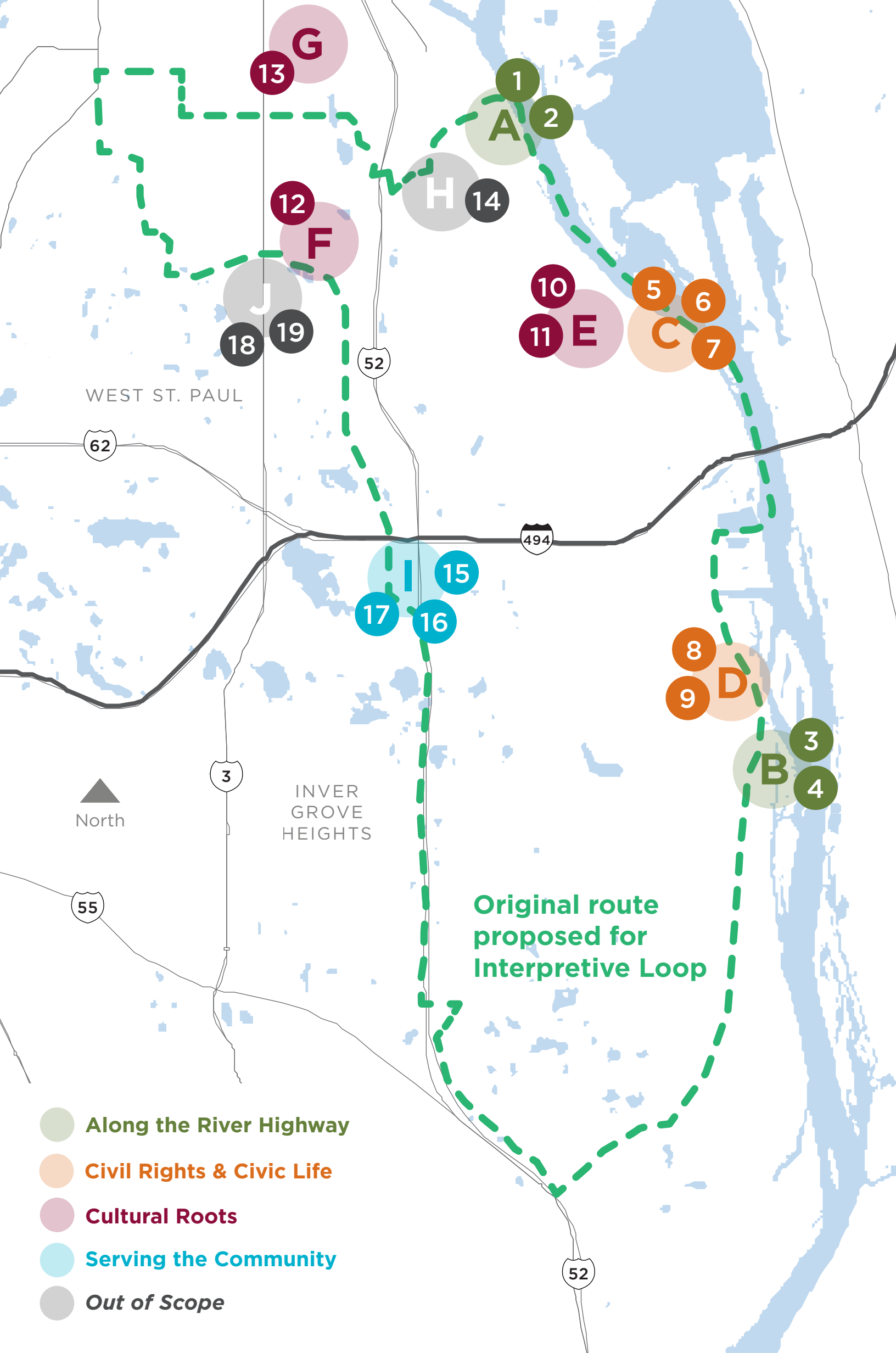
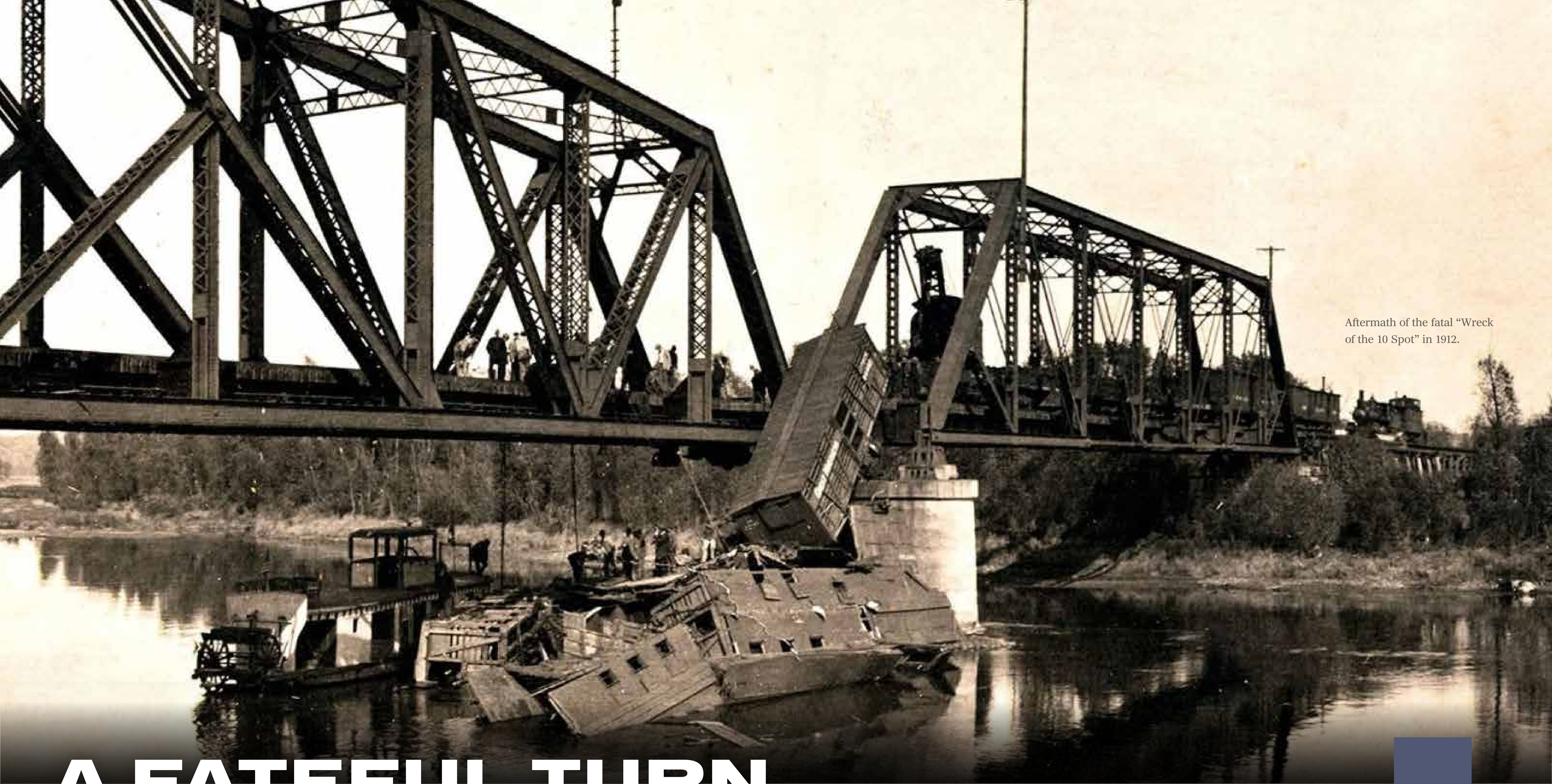






Aftermath of the fatal “Wreck of the 10 Spot” in 1912.

A FATEFUL TURN

A dense fog blanketed the Mississippi River on October 15, 1912. Around sunrise, the pilot of the steamer Hiawatha blew a warning whistle as it drove under the swing bridge that had opened to allow its passage. But was this standard signal heard or muddled by the thick clouds? Moments later, Engine No. 10—packed with pigs and sheep on its way to the South Saint

Paul stockyards—failed to stop before it reached the open bridge. Eight cars tumbled into the river, killing engineer Charles Cramer and injuring others. The ninth car jammed, sparing the rest of the train’s crew from spilling into the river.





A view of Concord Street bustling with recent arrivals, 1890.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

In the late 19th century, the Upper Mississippi River was transformed through a network of dams built to accommodate increasing boat traffic. Alpheus Beede Stickney bought riverfront land in 1885 to create the South St. Paul Stockyards, a place to feed livestock before shipment to nearby meatpacking plants.

Soon, Dakota County opened to markets—and laborers—from around the world. In the early 1900s, carloads of immigrants from eastern and central Europe landed daily at Concord Street Depot.



Early workers at the Stockyard Exchange Building, 1898.



Rock Island Swing Bridge
The bridge nearing completion. 1895.



TAKING A TOLL

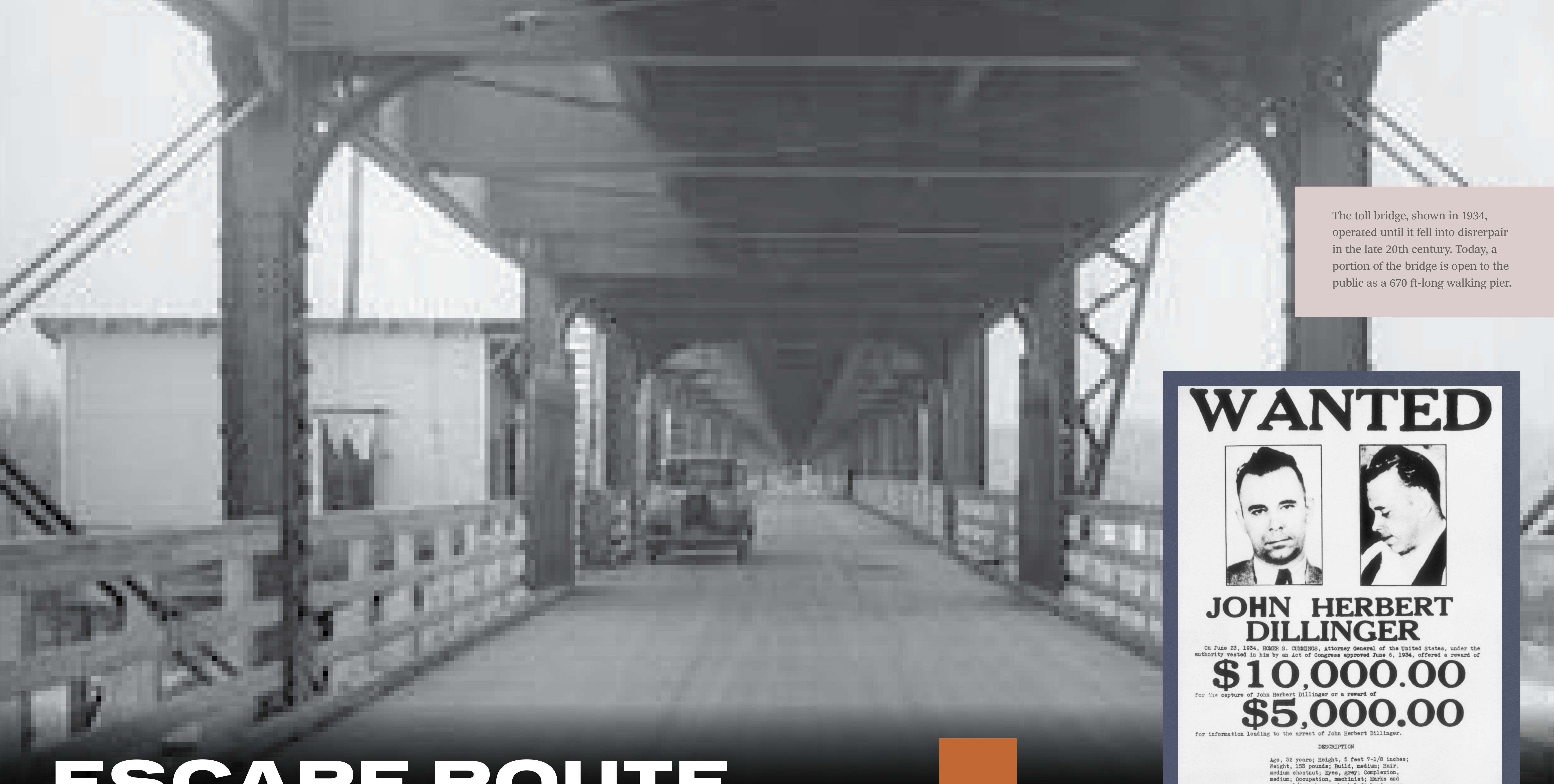
Passengers emptied their pockets to cross the Rock Island Swing Bridge. H.B. Cummings, the bridge's first toll collector, was stationed at the split level, 1,661-foot-long span. Before 1935, it cost 10 cents for a horse and wagon to cross. Walkers paid 3 cents, while farmers hoofed up two pennies for their livestock to cross. Trains rumbled above for 20-25 cents round trip.

Though the tax helped pay off the bridge bonds, locals held a grudge. In 1937, a petition with 800 signatures challenged what was by then Minnesota's last toll bridge. Upon the bill's passage, hundreds attended "toll funerals" to celebrate the end of the bridge's tolls.



Workers remove a toll sign in 1938. The bridge reinstated tolls in the 1980s—then up to 60 cents per car—before its eventual closure from disrepair.





The toll bridge, shown in 1934, operated until it fell into disrepair in the late 20th century. Today, a portion of the bridge is open to the public as a 670 ft-long walking pier.

ESCAPE ROUTE

John Dillinger, a notorious bank robber during the Great Depression era, had a stroke of luck on April 23, 1934. Fleeing a gun battle 250 miles north in Wisconsin, Dillinger drove to the Rock Island Swing Bridge to cross state lines. The catch? The bridge’s 400-foot section occasionally swung open to allow barges to pass—up to 18 to 20 per day.

No record exists to confirm if Dillinger’s crew was stopped at the bridge by a passing barge—but they did pay the 20-cent automobile toll. The bridge toll collector later noted the broken back window of the escape car.



WANTED



JOHN HERBERT DILLINGER

On June 23, 1934, HOMER S. CUMINGS, Attorney General of the United States, under the authority vested in him by an Act of Congress approved June 6, 1934, offered a reward of

\$10,000.00

for the capture of John Herbert Dillinger or a reward of

\$5,000.00

for information leading to the arrest of John Herbert Dillinger.

DESCRIPTION

Age, 32 years; Height, 5 feet 7-1/8 inches; Weight, 153 pounds; Build, medium; Hair, medium chestnut; Eyes, grey; Complexion, medium; Occupation, machinist; Marks and scars, 1/2 inch scar back left hand, scar middle upper lip, brown mole between eyebrows.

All claims to any of the aforesaid rewards and all questions and disputes that may arise as among claimants to the foregoing rewards shall be passed upon by the Attorney General and his decisions shall be final and conclusive. The right is reserved to divide and allocate portions of any of said rewards as between several claimants. No part of the aforesaid rewards shall be paid to any official or employee of the Department of Justice.

If you are in possession of any information concerning the whereabouts of John Herbert Dillinger, communicate immediately by telephone or telegraph collect to the nearest office of the Division of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, the local addresses of which are set forth on the reverse side of this notice.

JOHN EDGAR HOOVER, DIRECTOR,
DIVISION OF INVESTIGATION,
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

June 25, 1934

A \$5,000 reward for Dillinger, posted shortly after his death in 1934



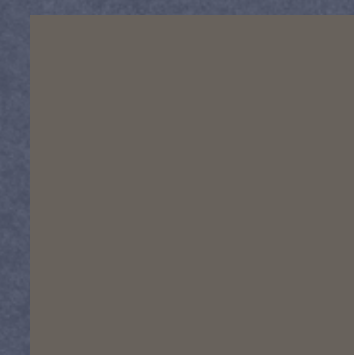
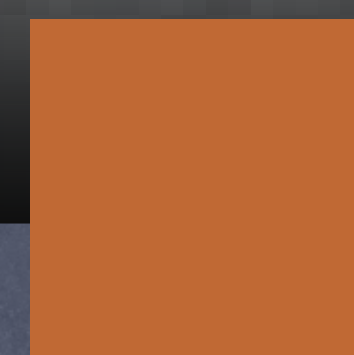
TO SERVE AND PROTECT

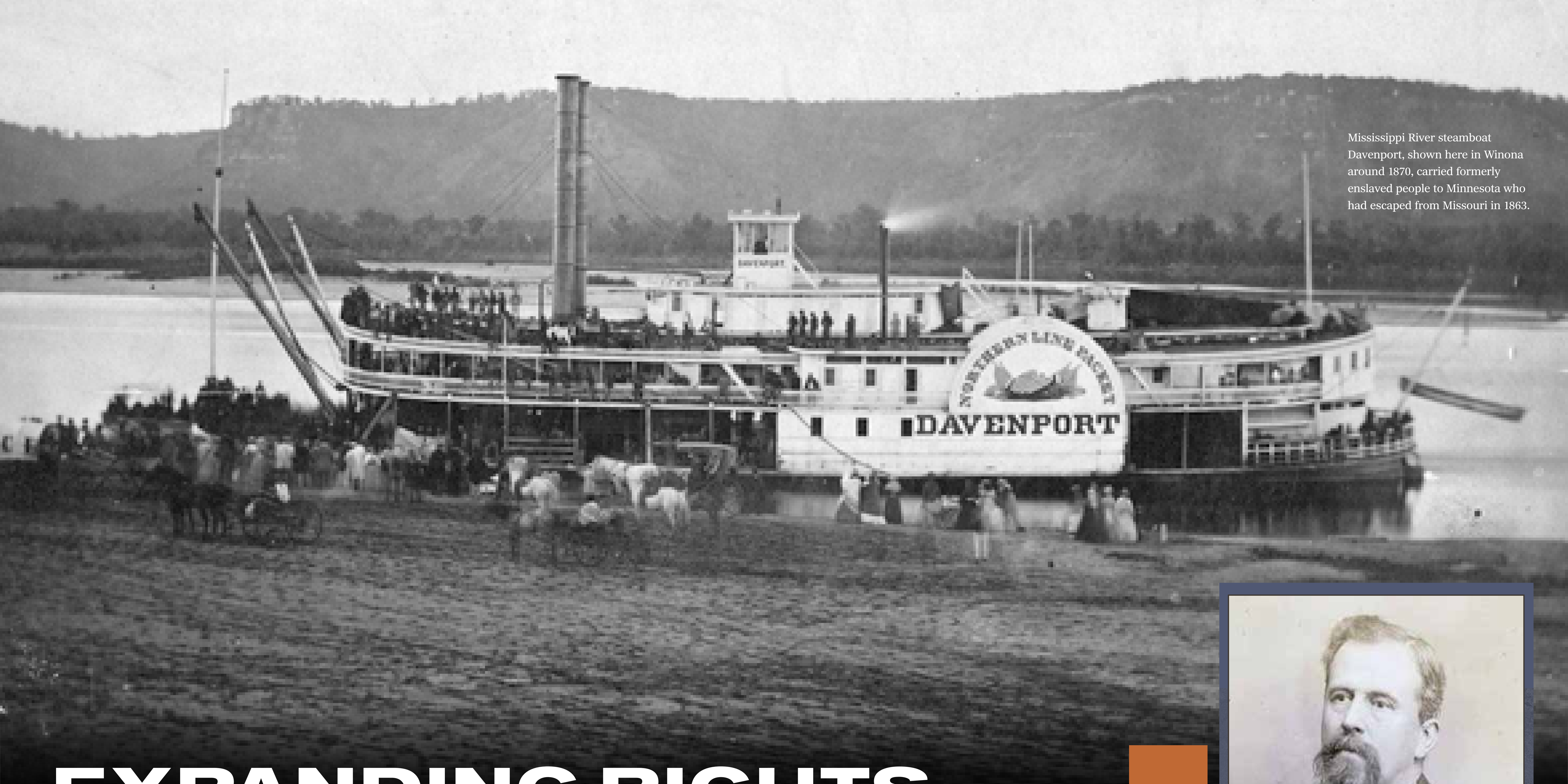
Officer Leo Pavlak, a 38-year-old, married father of two young children, was killed in the line of duty on August 30, 1933. The ambush, by members of a notorious Depression-era gang, happened in front of the South St. Paul Post Office, a few feet up the sidewalk from where you are today. Pavlak was escorting bank messengers as they delivered payroll for Swift and Company—about

\$30,000 in cash—to the bank. The messengers took cover under a livestock truck near the Stockyard Exchange Building. Pavlak’s partner, Officer John Yeaman, sustained injuries in the gunfire.

In 2023, the South St. Paul Post Office was renamed in Officer Pavlak’s honor.

Officer Yeaman, far left, and Leo Pavlak, second from right, stand with the South Saint Paul Police Department in 1933.





Mississippi River steamboat Davenport, shown here in Winona around 1870, carried formerly enslaved people to Minnesota who had escaped from Missouri in 1863.

EXPANDING RIGHTS

During the Civil War, a small number of African Americans migrated to Minnesota to help alleviate a labor shortage. This included formerly enslaved escapees on river steamboats, who came to St. Paul from southern ports. Following the war, though few Black families lived in Dakota County, they faced discrimination in employment, real estate, and education.

But local advocates, including Winona legislator Charles Griswold, fought for change. Griswold's petitions in 1865 gathered signatures in Hastings, Winona, and Rochester in support of Black suffrage. Voting rights in Minnesota expanded in 1868, two years before the 15th Amendment granted Black men the right to vote nationwide.



Portrait of legislator Charles Griswold in 1865.



SOUTH ST. PAUL WOMEN FIRST TO VOTE UNDER AMENDMENT

Group of New Citizens Waiting When Polls Opened at Suburb, 6 a. m.



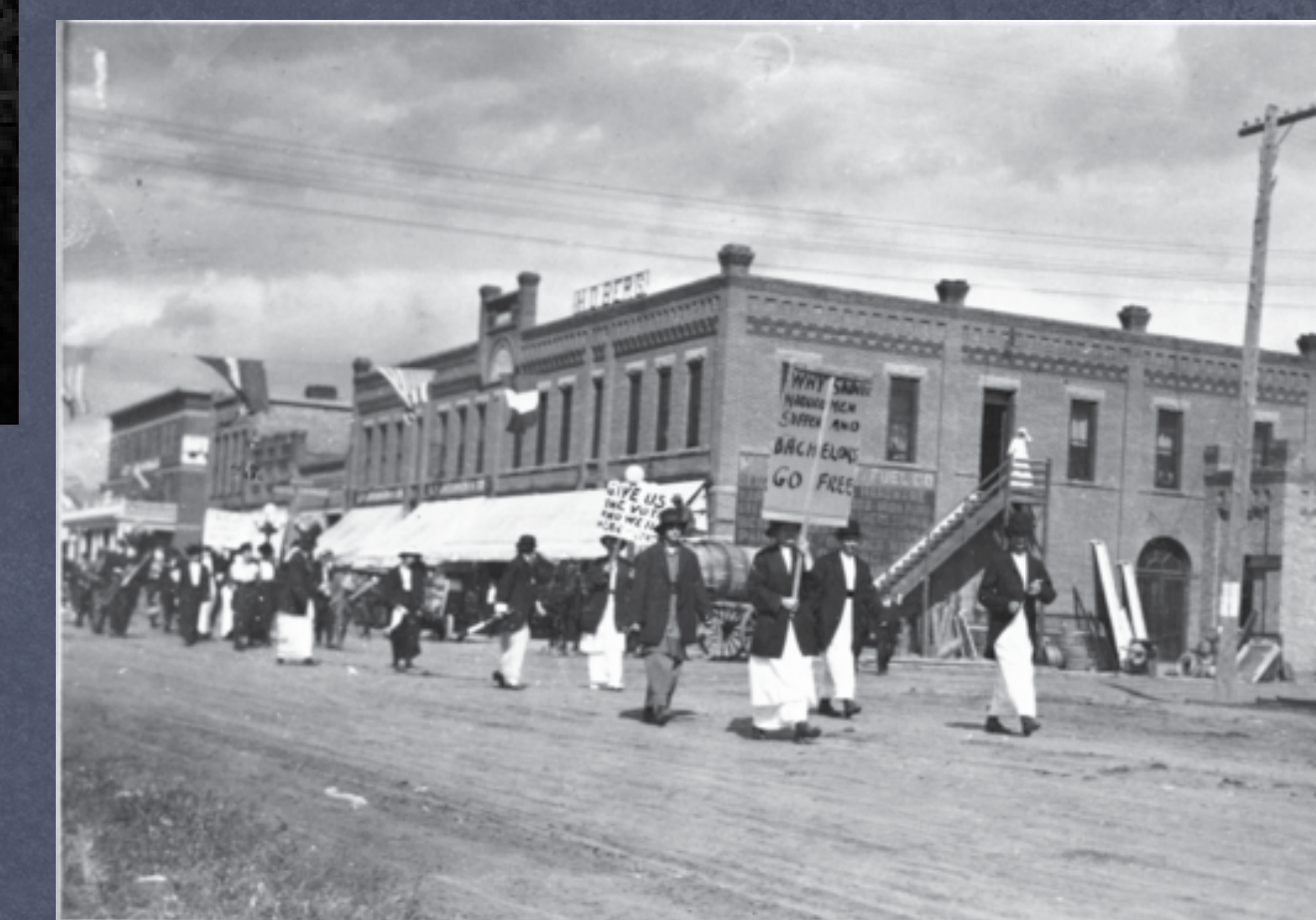
Women's Suffrage

From left to right: Erna Fearing, Mrs. J.R. Stevenson, Mrs. Clyde Weber, Mrs. H.G. Stevens, Mrs. Al Leininger, and Mrs. John Conlin.

FIRST IN LINE

Just one day after the certification of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, the women of South St. Paul rose at the crack of dawn. Eager to make their voices heard, they headed to the polls to vote on August 27, 1920—some of the earliest documented in the nation. Their first issue? A \$85,000 waterworks bond to expand the city's water supply.

Mrs. K.E. Michaelmore, accompanied by her daughter, Katherine, rushed to the 2nd Precinct of the 2nd ward. Marguerite Newburgh arrived at the polls at 5:45 a.m., casting a ballot mere seconds after they opened. Women's votes were stored separately in case legal challenges contested their ballots.



Women's suffrage efforts included marches like this one in Madison, Minnesota, around 1916.





NARROW ESCAPE

A gas leak at the Old Town Hall nearly ended in tragedy, if not for the actions of Mayor Theodore Piekarski. On the evening of February 5, 1957, Inver Grove Village council members began a regular meeting. Two hours later, Mayor Piekarski woke up to find his fellow members unconscious next to him.

As he raced to call for help, citizens from a nearby tavern pulled out the victims. All nine members—including the mayor, village attorney, clerk, three aldermen, and two policemen—survived the incident, which was the result of a leaky gas pipe in the building's basement.

The Old Town Hall, shown here in 1957, was a community center for the Village of Inver Grove before the building fell into neglect.





Students pose in their Dakota County classroom around 1895. This is possibly in the Castle Rock area, but the exact location is unknown.

OLD SCHOOL

As Minnesota Territory neared statehood, its schools were few and far between. In 1851, only three schoolhouses served 250 children—but none were in Dakota County. Local settlers took matters into their own hands. Dakota County's first school was built in 1854 near River Road and 67th Street.

Miss Rosetta Harris likely taught her first students in 12-week terms, like other 19th-century schools in Minnesota. The original school survived only 18 years before it burned to the ground in 1872. Its second chapter fared no better: the re-built brick building, located between two railroad tracks, was condemned in 1913.





**Placeholder
Photo**

Touchdown Next Stop!

A trading card featuring Kostka was created by the National Chicle Company to promote Diamond Stars Gum.

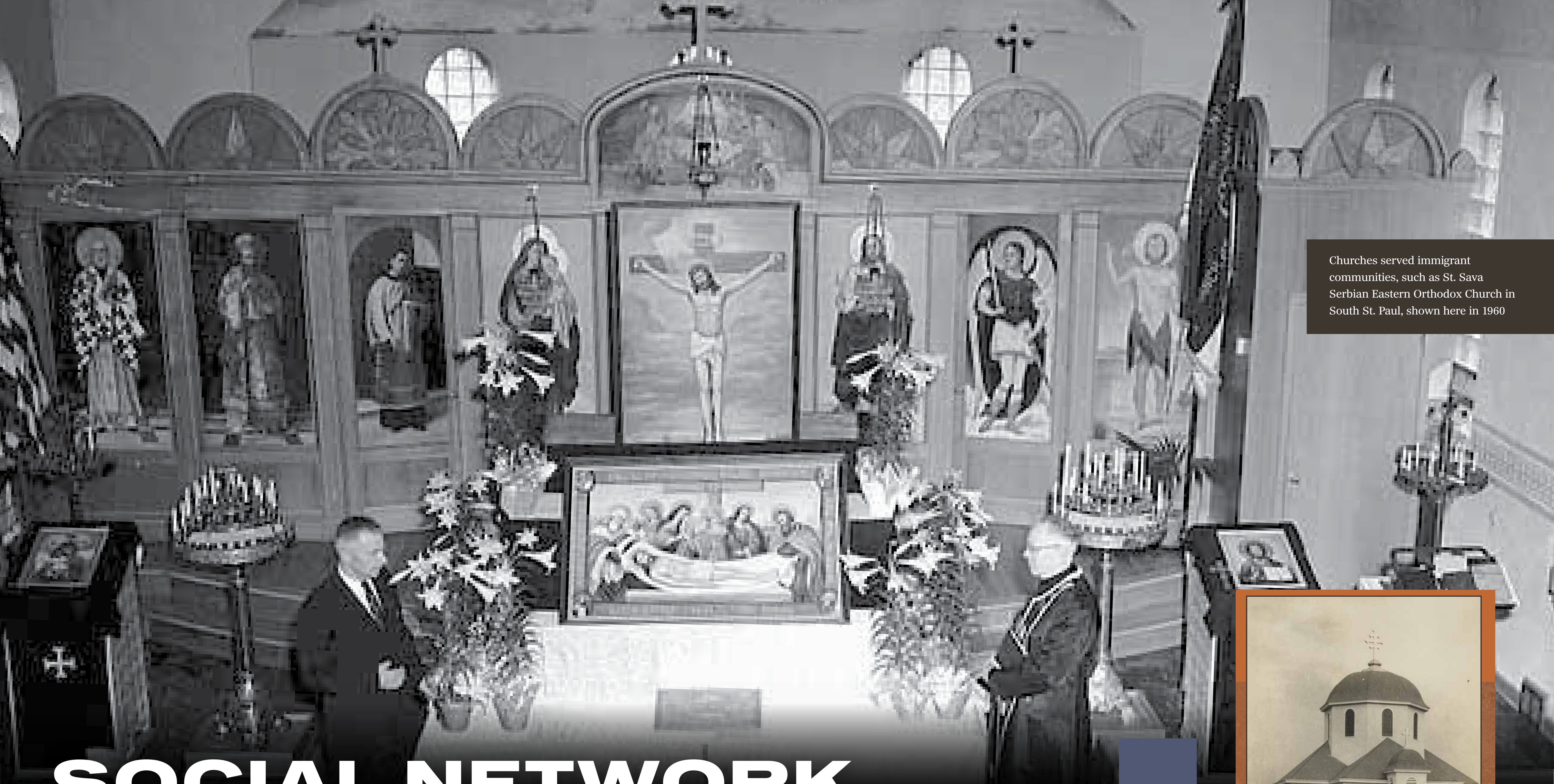
HOMETOWN STAR

Stan (Stanislaus) Kostka was born in 1912 to Polish and Bohemian parents near South St. Paul. While his brothers headed off to work at the stockyards, Kostka's stock rose in track, football, and baseball at South St. Paul High School. Built like a wall, the All-American fullback played for the University of Minnesota Gophers in 1933 and soared to the top of the sports world.

The National Football League's (NFL) annual draft began in 1936 in response to a bidding war for Kostka. The local star only ending up played for one season in the NFL, with the Brooklyn Dodgers, Kostka later coached football at North Dakota State. He also served as a Lieutenant in the Navy during World War II.



South St. Paul High School around 1945.



Churches served immigrant communities, such as St. Sava Serbian Eastern Orthodox Church in South St. Paul, shown here in 1960

SOCIAL NETWORK

In the early 19th century, Eastern European immigrants sought work at the railroads and meatpacking plants. As workers began their new lives in South St. Paul, cultural centers supported families and built community. Churches were also established, such as St. Stefan's Romanian Orthodox in 1924.

In 1909, Polish immigrants built a hall for weddings, funerals, and other community functions. The Serbian Home, founded in 1924, was a multi-purpose gathering place: part school, lodge, and social hall.



St. Stefan's Romanian Orthodox Church, pictured here in 1925.



Placeholder
Photos

Farmers Thab and Phuab plant bi-colored corn in their plot at the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) farm.

FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

A new generation of Hmong farmers is putting down roots. In 1975, the first political refugees fled war and violence in Laos and Thailand. More than 63,000 Hmong people now reside in Minnesota, including over 2,100 in Dakota County by 2020. The Hmong American Farmers Association, which formed in 2014, planted seeds for new connections to a unique agriculture heritage.

Hmong farmers grow fresh produce on 155 acres of land in Dakota County’s Vermillion Township, sold at local farmers markets, schools, co-ops, and restaurants.

“For Hmong people, farming is central to living. It was the skill for survival they brought to the US.”
— Janssen Hang



The Yong Vang Yang family arrived in St. Paul in 1979.



“The work of the beets is something most people should know about. Because all they know is that they get the sugar from there. They don’t know that we had to be on our knees making sure the plants had about 12 inches to grow. I think my bones are still healing from work. I must have gone and come back from Mexico on my knees.”

–Manuel Contreras, who arrived to work the sugar beet fields and meat packing plants in South St. Paul in the 1930s

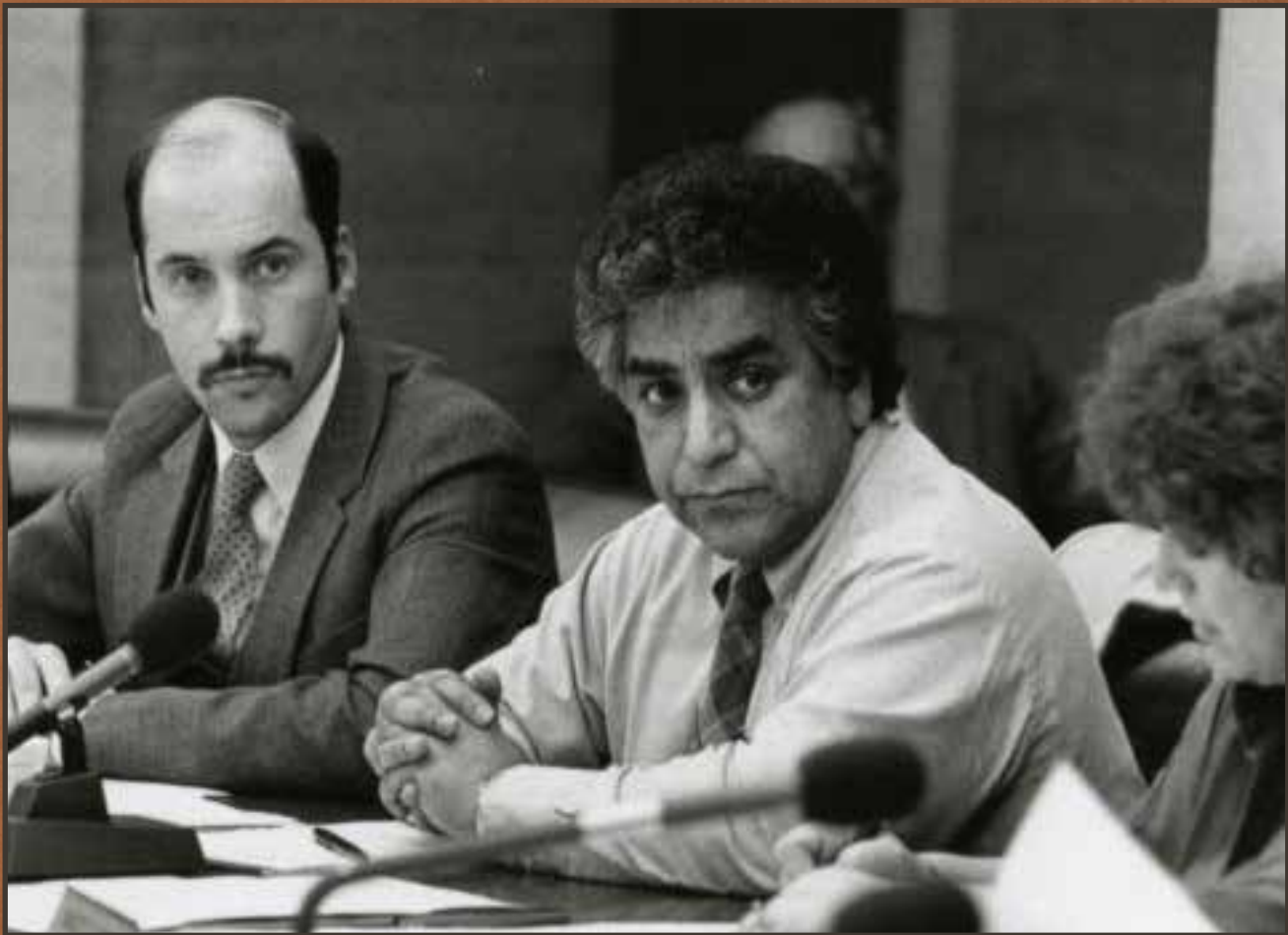
South St. Paul packing plants in 1935.

HEADING NORTH

Around World War I, migrant workers from Mexico flocked north to Minnesota to find work. Families in search of a better life took hard labor jobs, rotating seasonally in agriculture, factories, or the South St. Paul stockyards.

By 1928, more than 7,000 Mexican workers labored in Minnesota sugar beet fields, which were harvested to produce sugar. Others found work on the railroads in Inver Grove Heights in Dakota County. Soon, migrants established themselves in the Twin Cities.

Placeholder Photos



Conrado “Conrad” Vega, born in South St. Paul in 1938, was the first Latino legislator in 1977, representing his Dakota County district in the Minnesota Senate until 1986.





Over 200 firefighters worked over two days to extinguish the fire.

Placeholder
Photos

SURVIVAL IN THE STOCKYARDS

Local firefighters met their match late in the evening on May 31, 1948. Fire quickly spread in the feeder division of the cattle yards. As debris burst and sailed as high as 300 feet, workers hurried to free about 2,000 animals from their pens. About 40 cows died, with estimated losses of more than one million dollars—and about 700 feet of fire hose. Volunteer firefighters from South St. Paul reported suffering from burned shoulders and hands, and smoke inhalation. Some speculated that striking stockyard workers had started the blaze.



Tensions rose in the months before the Memorial Day Stockyard fire, as workers began a strike on March 16, 1948, demanding higher wages. Nine days after the strike concluded, the stockyard lit up in flames.

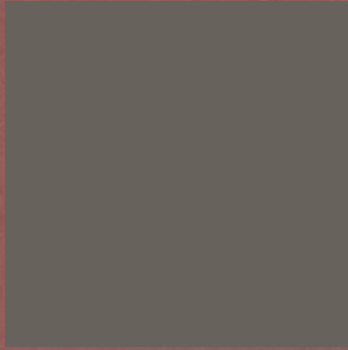


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Photos

Waterous Company
Workers pose in front of the first
Waterous factory in South St.
Paul around the late 1880s.

DOUSE THE FLAMES

Behind every successful firefighter is a steady stream of water. The Waterous Company, a local manufacture of fire fighting apparatus, has helped fight fires for over a century. Waterous was founded in Brantford, Ontario, in 1844. In 1866, the company factory moved to South St. Paul and then to St. Paul. The company’s products evolved over the years, from steam engines to fire pumps and hydrants. Today, Waterous Company’s products feature expanded firefighting technology.



A Waterous Company fire engine in 1910.

Placeholder
Photos

INVER GROVE HEIGHTS FIRE DEPARTMENT

First All-Female Crew

From left to right: Driver Debralyn Bryant, Crew Members Jennifer Mink, Bridget Mace, Elisabethann Schmidt, and Acting Company Officer Abigail Schmidt.



NO LIMITS

In August 2020, over 60 years after the founding of the Inver Grove Heights Fire Department, a team of women stood at the helm. The all-female crew of firefighters followed the trailblazing path set by Judy Smith Thill, the first woman to lead the department in 2007.

Less than 5 percent of firefighters across the United States are women, and many are volunteers. Female firefighters face an increased risk of job-related stressors, such as gender discrimination.



Judy Smith Thill, pictured above, was the first woman to lead the Inver Grove Heights Fire Department.

