THE CURIOUS CASE OF BROWNDALE PARK

This is the story of an old, very tight knit community that, according to period maps, seemed to bounce from St. Louis Park to Edina and back again in the early days of the last century. The Browndale Park neighborhood is bounded on the west by Highway 100, the north by Morningside Road, the east by Wooddale Ave., and the south by 44th Street. The border between St. Louis Park and Edina cuts through Browndale Park, and even through some houses; some homeowners pay taxes to both St. Louis Park and Edina.

The land that would become Browndale Park was part of Henry F. Brown's 77-acre "Browndale Farm." Much of northern Edina and southwest SLP sits on land that was once owned by Brown, who raised award-winning cattle and Clydesdale horses.

Here's where the confusion starts. An 1889 map of St. Louis Park shows the future Browndale Park within its Village limits. But nine years later, a map of Edina shows the future Browndale Park within *its* Village limits. A map from 1901 shows the property within St. Louis Park.

Brown sold the future Browndale Park portion of his farm to Frank J. and Florence Mackey in 1909. Frank Mackey was a wealthy investor from Britain – he owned the Leamington and Nicollet Hotels. Mrs. Mackey, an American, was well known as a stylish lady and socialite who entertained lavishly in Minneapolis.

The Mackeys filed the plat of Browndale Park in 1909. This 150-lot addition includes homes on Morningside, 44th, Wooddale, Browndale, Mackey, Brook, Coolidge, Dart, and Glen Place. It was then that the eastern edge of Aurora Ave. (later Highway 100 south of Excelsior Blvd.) was first laid out.

Part of Browndale Park was sold to George B. Dartt in 1913. Dartt sold real estate and had a home in Browndale Park, although on 44th Street and not on the street named for him. For some reason, the second "t" in Dartt Ave. fell off, probably when the streets were all renamed in 1933.

The confusion continues. A variety of maps, from 1913 to 1925, show Browndale Park in both St. Louis Park and Edina. Since the area was part of a larger farm, there wouldn't have been many people living there, so maybe the jurisdiction didn't matter to Henry Brown or subsequent owners. There may not have even been property tax at the time. There was probably only one school district – Pratt School was at Wooddale and Excelsior in St. Louis Park, and Jonathan Grimes of Edina built Wooddale Ave. to take his kids to school.

As it turns out, Browndale Park was always part of St. Louis Park. Cartographers may have mistakenly included it in Edina maps because so much of the Browndale Farm was in Edina.

THE BROWNDALE PARK/WOODDALE COTERIE

An interesting sidelight to the Browndale Park story is the Browndale Park Coterie, which started in 1917. Membership was open to women who lived on Wooddale Ave. between Morningside Road and 44th Street, and the houses on 43 1/2 Street. An early constitution states its purpose as "to promote sociability, friendliness, and mutual helpfulness."

Club members would discuss books, the arts, travel, religious figures, and world events. Lunch was held in each other's homes or in nearby restaurants such as the Colonial Inn. In the 1920s, the Coterie was a member of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs. In the early 1930s, invitations of reciprocity were received from other women's groups, including the Thursday Musical, Ladies of the Roundtable, Phi Mu Lau, and the Linden Hill Study Club. There are references to a men's club as well, particularly with regard to sharing the cost of folding chairs for the groups.

Despite the apparent confusion as to whether their neighborhood was in the Park or Edina, by 1931 the ladies were sure they were in St. Louis Park when they held a special meeting to pass a resolution urging a recalcitrant Mayor E.F. Martin to run for re-election. (He did and won by a landslide.)

Some time in the late 1960s, the name of the group changed to the Wooddale Coterie. The group survives today, and is family oriented, holding picnics and parties in line with tradition. The group also does volunteer work.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN BROOKSIDE…

What brought the Browndale Park situation to our attention was a flurry of correspondence with independent researcher Daniel Grobani. Although Daniel lives in California, he became intrigued with the intersection of Brookside Ave. and 44th Street on visits here several years ago. With good reason, as there was a lot going on there.

First, there was the 44th Street streetcar, which started in 1905 and made development of the Brookside neighborhoods in both St. Louis Park and Edina possible. It stopped at a little station at 44th and Brookside before rumbling off into the swamp at a breakneck speed all the way to Excelsior. Oldtimers remember a wooden bridge that took automobiles on Brookside Ave. over the streetcar tracks, but we haven't tracked down a picture of it. The streetcar was replaced by buses in 1954.

There was also the Dan Patch Railway, with stops in Elmwood and Thompson's Store in St. Louis Park, and on Brookside Ave. in Edina, where there was a small station between the tracks and Brookside Ave. near Division Street. No photos of that either, that we know of. Passenger service ended in 1942.

And there was Docken's Store, a fixture at the intersection since at least 1926. The Docken family came to the area in 1895 and built several cottages on the west side of Brookside Ave. to live in and rent out. Family members worked at Park businesses such as Monitor Drill and the Lindsay-Greenfield Vehicle Co., and Elizabeth Docken taught at Lincoln School for a time. The store (later owned by the Garners) closed in the mid 1950s and the entire area was razed for the Brookside Court Condominiums in the late '60s.

Daniel is a wizard on the Internet, and atlas maps that he found showed the back-and-forth of Browndale Park. He also noticed that some people were identified as being from "Brookside, Minnesota," as if it were its own village. Early maps show that there was only farmland between the Brookside neighborhood and Elmwood, isolating the area to the extent that the newspaper reported ball games between the "Brookside" and "St. Louis Park" teams. And, Daniel found historic right-of-way maps of Park highways and railroads that have been posted to Mn/DOT's web site http://gisservices.dot.state.mn.us/geocortex/essentials/web/viewer.aspx?site=rwmm We have printed some of them out (they are many feet long) and are available for view on Saturday afternoons at the Depot. Our thanks to Daniel - and to our friend Marci Matson at the Edina Historical Society – for providing us with all of these great new resources.