

Minneapolis-St. Paul

People, Place, and Public Life

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**University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis
London**

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Published by the University of Minnesota Press
2037 University Avenue Southeast, Minneapolis, MN 55455-3092
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Adams, John S., 1938-

Minneapolis-St. Paul: people, place, and public life/ John S. Adams
and Barbara J. VanDrasek.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8166-2236-1

1. Saint Paul (Minn.) — Social conditions. 2. Saint Paul (Minn.) —
Economic conditions. 3. Minneapolis (Minn.) — Social conditions.
4. Minneapolis (Minn.) — Economic conditions. I. VanDrasek,
Barbara J. II. Title.

HN80.S3A24 1993

306'.09776'579—dc20

93-2836

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The University of Minnesota is an equal-opportunity educator and employer.

a few rounds, and hobnob. For those on a budget, there are dozens of public and park board golf clubs.

Twin Cities residents make heavy use of their metropolitan area for outdoor recreation, sometimes creating a nuisance for one another. Conflicts over public access versus private property, incompatible uses, and compromised water and lakeshore quality will demand more government intervention in the near future (fig. 7). Voluntary and legislated zoning, rationing by permit, and user fees for lakes, campgrounds, and other overtaxed facilities will make the region more pleasant for all users. For the foreseeable future, Twin Cities residents will find high-quality fishing, small-game hunting, hiking, camping, cross-country and downhill skiing, sailing, and water skiing no more than a forty-five minute drive from their doorsteps.

Indoor Fun For those who prefer indoor exercise, the Twin Cities area offers many opportunities for young and old. Minneapolis and St. Paul once claimed 10 percent of the public ballrooms in the United States. Four public ballrooms still thrive in the metro area, a link to the Big Band Era for some and a respite from the bar scene for others. Many others survive in small rural towns as holdovers from the ethnic folk-dance traditions of an earlier time.

If all else fails, Twin Citians go shopping. From late May until well into autumn, both Minneapolis and St. Paul as well as many of the surrounding suburbs hold daily or weekly farmers' markets. Local truck farmers set up shop outdoors with freshly picked produce, and recent immigrants market their handicrafts. For many Minnesotans shopping is a social event. In the Twin Cities shoppers focus on the "Dales" (Southdale, Brookdale, Ridgedale, Rosedale), shopping malls developed by the Dayton Hudson Corporation, the high-priced stores and shops downtown, and the specialty



markets and malls, which flourish for a while but seem to have trouble hanging on.

Social Conservatives and Economic Liberals

Perhaps because of their homogeneous culture, the Twin Cities seem to support conservative social policies and liberal (by national standards) economic policies. The typical nationwide alignments of liberals and conservatives on social, economic, and international questions take on a special character here.

Religion and Politics as Partners Conservative social outlooks of a largely churchgoing, family-oriented population coexist with a vigorous liberal economic agenda that includes strong unions, support for co-ops, generous welfare programs, progressive income taxes, above-average unemployment insurance benefits, and worker-compensation benefits so

FIGURE 7. Shoreline development at high density; year-round homes. Prior Lake, Minnesota.

PHOTO BY J. S. ADAMS.

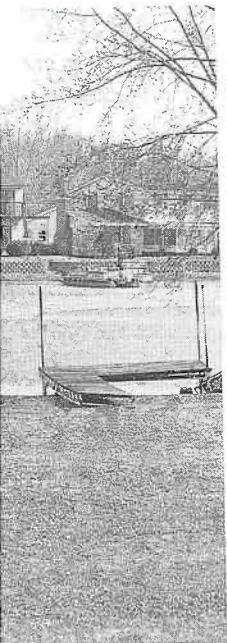


FIGURE 7. Shoreline development at high density; year-round homes. Prior Lake, Minnesota.

PHOTO BY J. S. ADAMS.

generous that they sometimes interfere with the rehabilitation and reemployment of injured workers. Politicians learn quickly that it is all right to support higher taxes for schools or environmental protection, but it is not smart to attack churches or to be too vocal in support of expanded liquor patrol limits. Concern for the clean reputation of state government led to several successful initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s to improve financial and program auditing of state government operations.

The dominant culture, rooted in northwestern Europe and seasoned by the comfortable bonds and barriers of Lutherans and Catholics, makes for a secure community that welcomes immigrants to the area, including refugees. Many households have adopted children from Asia and Latin America; such adoptions are unremarkable and receive community support. Per capita, such adoptions are more common here than in almost any other area in the country. In a place where economic liberalism and social conservatism are happily married, programs favoring healthy children have a good chance of succeeding.

The sharp cultural and social gradients that foster tension and conflict in many cities have been much less marked in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and there is a strong commitment to conflict resolution, producing a metropolis in which social and cultural conflict has rarely attained the proportions it has in other large cities. As social and civil justice issues arise, local leadership usually responds quickly, recognizing that a fair solution is in everyone's interest. On most contentious issues, minority interest groups are well organized and have reasonable and politically astute leadership, so that most political action takes place within established channels. Minnesotans do not like to leave problems unattended.

Minneapolis was one of the first U.S. cities to elect a female majority to its city council, and two women have served as council president. The council has had an openly gay member, vice president Brian Coyle, who among his other contributions shepherded the city's domestic partners ordinance into law before his death from AIDS in 1991.

Perhaps the most important and enduring impact of Minnesota's Scandinavian stock is its progressive grass-roots political tradition, in part the legacy of the progressive activism of immigrant Scandinavian farmers and laborers. More than 2,000 people elected to state and local offices in Minnesota since World War II, and nearly every governor since 1915, have been of Scandinavian descent, prompting many candidates to capitalize on (or wish for) a Scandinavian surname.

Minnesota turns out a higher percentage of voters in national elections than any other state in the country, with 68.5 percent of the electorate voting in 1980, 68 percent in 1984, 66.3 percent in 1988, and 71.9 percent in 1992. Despite the tradition of active political leadership, the majority of Minnesotans prefer to express their political views firmly but privately—behind the voting booth curtain, around the dinner table, or through financial support for candidates. The state's reputation for consensus building can be linked to its profound aversion to public confrontation on difficult issues. As a result, intractable issues are often compromised into consensus. Although the Twin Cities area seems to be slowly becoming more like other major U.S. metropolitan areas on the "goodness" and "badness" indexes, important distinctions persist. Crime rates are relatively low, and education levels and incomes remain above national averages.

The general conviction of Twin Cities residents that problems are solvable is evident in the politicians they elect at all levels of government. The progressive

image of New Deal governor Floyd B. Olson, for example, and the violent but successful Teamsters' strike of 1934, reflect an abiding grass-roots social concern and activism that have often been translated into legislative innovation backed by a willingness to provide concrete backing for education and social legislation. Hubert H. Humphrey, for example, enjoyed widespread political popularity in the Twin Cities in a career that began with a term as mayor of Minneapolis. Since then both cities have had good success (despite occasional lapses) at electing thoughtful and accessible mayors. Right down to the local level there is a spirit of openness and honesty in political affairs. The electorate expects open, honest, and efficient government, and their expectations are usually fulfilled.

Churches, companies, individuals, and groups are surprisingly well informed and active in international affairs. This is perhaps a legacy of the high educational levels of the founders from New England and northwestern Europe, the state university as a crossroads for international visitors, and the international marketing of agricultural products since the early days. Even the most conservative Protestants usually are liberal on issues of international justice, regional education, and social welfare.

Standards of Public Conduct The community seems to have high standards of personal conduct, and it demands exceptionally high standards for public officials. Ever since Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey waged a reform campaign in 1945, politics in Minnesota are so clean that people joke about it. Apparently Minnesotans figured out that it was possible to control political conduct just as they controlled the rest of their lives—through focused public attention. In one month of 1982 in other states, a senator resigned in scandal, a legislator was convicted of

racketeering, and a mayor, city council president, and ex-councilman were all indicted for fraud. Meanwhile, back in Minnesota, the public was rocked by revelations that friends of public officials had been granted free rounds of golf at Minneapolis parks, and that a Minneapolis alderman had been allowed to park illegally at a Twins game.

Minnesota is not without its real scandals, as demonstrated by the 1989-90 ethics committee investigation of Senator David Durenberger, and by the 1990 state elections in which allegations of dirty campaigning and moral impropriety eliminated top gubernatorial contender Jon Grunseth and ultimately helped to unseat his incumbent rival Rudy Perpich. The allegations contributed to the defeat of Senator Rudy Boschwitz as well. Although the events of this election were considered an aberration in recent state history, the cathartic response of the Minnesota electorate to the mere appearance of flawed character was entirely typical—they rejected *everyone* who seemed even the least bit tainted. The media make such fireworks over infractions, and the public is so unforgiving, that officials who stumble will likely find themselves not only out of a job next election day, but under prosecution as well. After all, this is a place where a candidate was indicted for “improper campaign inducements” for allowing coffee and rolls to be served at campaign parties.⁷

Preservation in the Midst of Change

Minnesota and the Twin Cities have earned a relatively good reputation in environmental protection and historic preservation. The state has not only a large per-capita expenditure for environmental protection but also effective publicly supported programs to protect water resources, wetlands, and parkland. Preservation

of historic structures also is taken into account in most urban development planning.

Environmental Activism Minnesota and Twin Cities environmentalist groups are active, successful, and credible. The most politically active groups are the Sierra Club's North Star Chapter and its lobbying arm, Project Environment; the State Audubon Council; and the smaller Isaak Walton League, which provides a close link with sporting groups. The state environmental movement is said to have come of age largely over three controversies: an attempt in the early 1970s to mine copper-nickel in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA); the 1978 congressional passage of a strict mining and lumbering protection law for the BWCA; and the passage of a state Superfund Act for hazardous wastes.⁸

The disposal of nuclear wastes became an important issue in Minnesota in the 1980s, as it did elsewhere in the United States. A large share of Minnesota's electric power is generated by Northern States Power Company's Monticello and Prairie Island nuclear plants. Several major industries also produce low-level radioactive wastes, including Honeywell, 3M, and Kallestad Laboratories. The state sent about 27,000 cubic feet of this by-product out of the state for permanent disposal in 1990.

Minnesota's toxic waste problem is modest compared with some heavy-industry states. Still, some of the country's worst waste sites can be found here, such as FMC Corporation's munitions plant waste disposal site in Arden Hills north of St. Paul, once named by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as the worst toxic waste dump in America. Plans to protect vital groundwater resources came late to Minnesota's environmental policies, but during the 1980s more attention was sharply focused on this need. The public debate

centers on questions of who is to blame and who should pay, and has not yet come to terms with the idea that whoever is to blame, the costs are borne by all.

Historic Preservation St. Paul has had less pressure to change over the years than Minneapolis has had, so it is left today with much that appears worth preserving. The city's Summit Avenue, where many of the city's founders built their homes, is perhaps the best-preserved Victorian street in America; the challenge is to figure out how to preserve and reuse it economically (fig. 8).

As every city grows and changes, some old uses persist, some relocate and thrive, and many artifacts of historical significance survive. St. Paul moved its historic farmers' market to a new location, where it continues to serve its original purpose. In Minneapolis, a struggle took place over the placement of a new, eighteen-story jail building that the county wanted to erect on the site of the 1930s art deco National Guard Armory building. The arguments on each side were compelling and revealed much about the difficulties of preserving the past in changing times, when the need to manage a metro area efficiently often conflicts with the wish to protect its legacy.

Truth about the Good Life in a Pretty Good Place

Unless one's childhood was a totally dismal experience, one's hometown remains among the best places in the world. Natives hold fond memories of places that others abhor. Nevertheless, comparisons between the Twin Cities and other metropolitan areas encourage the conclusion that the Twin Cities are a better-than-average place to live. The climate serves up winter hardships, summer irritations, and a niggardly spring, but it also