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COVER Clockwise, starting at upper left-hand corner: Everett School was erected in 1887 and demolished in 1947. It replaced a school of the same name built in 1871 which was destroyed by fire in 1887. Both were on the site of the first wood-frame school built in 1851 on the northwest corner of University and 6th Avenues North in the Town of St. Anthony. This is the second North Side High School located on 17th Avenue North and Girard Avenue. It was built in 1896. Lowell School was constructed in 1893 at Willow and Logan Avenues North. Lincoln School was completed in 1923 on 12th Avenue North between Oliver and Penn Avenues. This is the second of two Washington Schools and was erected in 1888 at 6th Street South between 7th and 8th Avenues. It was drastically altered in 1917 and was demolished in 1971. The second Jackson School pictured here was erected in 1890 at 15th Avenue South and 4th Street. It was terminated for school purposes in 1942.

All photographs in this article from the collection of the Minneapolis Board of Education.

CONTENTS

Schools By Name—Not By Number by G. Rolf Svendsen Page 3

Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children by Carl S. Lagerquist Page 15

Lord Snowdon Visits Shriners Hospital by Peg Meier Page 19

The Curator’s Page by Ruth Zalusky Thorstenson Page 21

Recent Accessions by Ruth Zalusky Thorstenson Page 22

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Schools By Name—Not By Number

Minneapolis Schools have been named by a variety of means: by the governing few on the school board; by individual, neighborhood or PTA petitions; and finally by public referendum. The majority did not always rule!

By G. Rolf Svendsen

A school name identifies the most public institution in the democracy. It should, therefore, reflect the will of the people. In effect, school names should represent a series of public opinion polls of the past; a sort of hall of fame composed of public heroes. Moreover, since the schools are charged with the molding and edification of the young, the community is implicitly telling the students that they should admire and seek to emulate the person named above the door.

Why do the Minneapolis schools have the names they do? Unfortunately, the public record is mostly mute as to why any particular name has been chosen. Professor Sven Ofte Dahl, Secretary of the first Board of Education of the combined St. Anthony and Minneapolis school district, simply records on April 20, 1878, “The following names for the schools on the East Side were reported and accepted: 1st ward school: Humboldt; 2nd ward school: Everett; 3rd ward school: Winthrop; 4th ward school: Marcy.”

We cannot learn from the minutes which von Humboldt (Alexander or Friedrich), or which of the numerous Winthrops in American history the schools honored. Marcy, the only one of the four schools still in existence was named for William L. Marcy, President Polk’s Secretary of War and President Pierce’s Secretary of State.

Even prior to the consolidation of the St. Anthony and Minneapolis schools, the naming procedure was a matter of parliamentary acknowledgment. Neither in the minutes of the Board of Education, nor in the newspapers of the day, was there any public discussion or suggestion. While no one could object to the choices, the Minneapolis Tribune of June 14, 1868, notes only “The city school buildings were named as follows: Central School House ‘Washington School,’ North Minneapolis School ‘Lincoln School’ and South Minneapolis School ‘Jackson School’.”

As the city grew and new schools were built, Jefferson and Franklin took their place on the roster of public heroes. The Minneapolis School Board unanimously adopted the name Sumner (Charles) for a new school in 1876. The Minneapolis Tribune also recorded that the name Monroe was given to the “New school to be built in lower town.” When three schools were added to the city’s system by annexation of other districts in 1883, they were named Whittier, Longfellow, and Irving. The Board also

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voted on the same day that "... the school house being erected in North Minneapolis be named Hawthorne." They were apparently in a literary mood that day.

By 1883, Minneapolis had been an official municipal government for twenty-seven years. It was only then that the first Minneapolis pioneer was honored with a school name. "The Tuttle Building" gave recognition to Calvin A. Tuttle, one of the first to build a house on the west side of the Mississippi River, and an early contributor to the University of Minnesota. By this date, one can discern an emerging pattern in the naming of schools in Minneapolis.

The young city was naming its schools after presidents and statesmen (it is probably more accurate to use the wider, if somewhat disparaging, term "politicians" for this group), and American authors. This pattern was to be continued, with variations, of course, up to about 1932, when the names of prominent local persons began to predominate. One might suggest here that it is only after a city is at least a generation old that it begins to have the self-confidence and pride in its own origins to look back for inspiration to local people. Indeed, it is in the Hennepin County suburbs that one finds the names of more recent Americans of national prominence: Kennedy, Eisenhower, Lindbergh and Armstrong.

In any event, the records of the Minneapolis Board of Education, from 1868 to the present, reveal two trends of historical interest. First, before the turn of the twentieth century, there is virtually never any indication why the Board saw fit to select any one name over any other. It is understandable, for example, that of the fourteen presidents’ names that have been used, James A. Garfield and William McKinley, hardly great presidents, are among them. These were martyred men, whom the city mourned. Both schools were named within a year of the assassinations. It is less understandable why, in 1882, the name of William Henry Harrison, who had served as chief executive for barely a month forty-one years earlier, should have been given tribute. Or again, why a Franklin Pierce School and not a Millard Fillmore? In either case it would be difficult to choose a more obscure president.

The second remarkable feature revealed in the records of the Board of Education is that the public at large had no apparent influence upon the selections that were made until well into the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1920s the process of selection has become increasingly democratic, but this is to jump ahead in the analysis. Before we discuss this trend, it will be instructive to examine some statistical data.

Of the 145 buildings that have ever been a part of the Minneapolis Public School system, 96 are now active. Many are defunct and their names have vanished; some have had their names transferred to newer buildings and thus used twice. Of the 122 names which consequently may be analyzed the following figures emerge:

**MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS NAMED AFTER**

- Politicians ........................................... 21
- Authors .............................................. 21
- Presidents .......................................... 14
- Geographical designations ...................... 12
- Businessmen ........................................ 11
- Educators ........................................... 9
- Military men ....................................... 7
- Scientists .......................................... 6
- People in medical professions ................. 6
- Institutional designations ...................... 5
- People in legal professions .................... 4
- People in the arts ................................ 3
- Historians .......................................... 3
- Total .................................................. 122

An occupational breakdown like the above is necessarily arbitrary in some cases. A man or woman was designated a politician if any significant part of his or her career was taken up in elective office or as spokesman for a political point of view. Thus, William Penn and Frances Willard, the women’s temperance leader, were
It is only proper to note that the schools named for Indians are not named for actual American Indians, but only legendary Indians, and specifically those who appear in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha.” While this epic poem is a source of local pride, the Indian names should not be construed to reflect honor upon Minnesota’s Indians. Rather they reflect a policy of the Board of Education to “. . . honor Henry W. Longfellow, the poet, who made these four names famous for all time.”

The two periods of greatest expansion in the number of buildings in the Minneapolis public schools were the decade 1880-1890, in which 29 schools and 17 additions were built, and the decade 1920-1930, when 27 buildings were constructed and 29 additions made. In the former decade these buildings were named solely by the Board, upon suggestion of one or more members, or motion of the superintendent. It was an oligarchic selection process. The only change in this policy up to the 1920s was that, increasingly, a select committee of the Board would be appointed to make recommendations to the Board at large.

In the twenties the procedure for selecting names of schools changed somewhat due to public pressures. One begins to find letters from citizens suggesting names, neighborhood and Parent-Teacher Association petitions, and in the most celebrated controversy, a public referendum. It will be illustrative to examine the procedures by which names were chosen for two South Minneapolis schools during the twenties.

On December 14, 1920, the Education

Monroe School constructed in 1878, had three additions, had its old gabled roof removed in 1919 and its use as a school ceased in 1966.
Committee of the Board of Education suggested the names Theodore Roosevelt and Charles M. Jordan for a new junior high school in South Minneapolis. The popular Roosevelt had died only the year before; however, Jordan, Superintendent of Schools from 1892-1914, was chosen. Roosevelt was brought before the Board again a year later as a suitable name for the new junior-senior high school by the South Side Joint Improvement Association. The name Roosevelt was so moved and adopted on that day, July 19, 1921. Since the Board had for some time referred to this location as the "Nokomis site" and had already begun construction, Director Lynn Thompson, who represented that district, objected strenuously, and apparently brought his objection to the City Council.

A communication from the City Council in November of 1921 requested that the Board hold public meetings in the neighborhood in regard to the school name. No action was taken. Instead, the name Roosevelt was inscribed on the building. The result was a heated controversy which lasted for two years and during which the Board acted with arbitrary disregard for the wishes of many citizens.

Since Thompson and twelfth ward Alderman C. H. Rudslif were socialists, the specter of Bolshevism was inevitably raised. The Secretary of the Board of Education impugned the loyalty of Thompson and Rudslif, referring to them as "agitators." A. J. Barnette, Secretary of the South Side Joint Improvement Association, defended the good name of the "rough rider," argued for compulsory military training in the high schools, and declared, "We favor the name Roosevelt . . . because it is a name which stands for one-hundred-percent-Americanism."

Undaunted, the Nokomis High School District Association, representing people of the seventh and twelfth wards, succeeded in having a referendum taken in their wards at the general election. The results were nearly three to one in favor of the Nokomis name. Thompson then moved that the Board comply with the results of the referendum, but was voted down. The next day the Association announced plans to bring a suit against four Board members for malfeasance in office. Their attorney challenged the Board to "... make good on its repeated boasts of superior Americanism by giving force of effect to the first principle of Americanism, the rule of the majority." Besides the legal action, the residents began a move in the City Council to have the name of 28th Avenue South changed to "Nokomis" and a street sign installed which would read "Slow Down—Nokomis School."

The name remains Roosevelt, the street 28th Avenue. Early in the new year, however, Superintendent William F. Webster attempted to soothe the residents' feelings in a letter to the Nokomis group. In it he rejected the principle of "majority rule," arguing that this "would bring confusion in the City of Minneapolis regarding names of school buildings." But Webster did promise to recommend that when a new junior high were built in the neighborhood it should be named Nokomis.
In 1924, construction began on a new high school on the grounds of the Washburn Memorial Orphan Asylum. This charitable institution was built in 1886 from a bequest in the will of General Cadwallader C. Washburn, one-time Governor of Wisconsin and for many years a director of the Minneapolis Mill Company. Curiously, in the summer of 1924, Webster submitted the name ‘W. D. Washburn’ for the new high school and it was adopted by the Board. William D. Washburn, brother of Cadwallader and likewise a major stockholder in the Minneapolis Mill Company, had represented Minneapolis in the Congress from 1880 to 1885, and again in 1889. As a Minnesotian, he may well have been a better choice than his brother, but the school was to be built on the site of Cadwallader Washburn’s philanthropic institution.

From the opening of Washburn High to this day its students have been taught that it was named for Cadwallader Washburn, and probably this was the intent of the Board. A. E. MacQuarrie, the first principal of the school, kept a portrait of General Washburn in his office. Nonetheless, the school has always legally been William D. Washburn High School.

Washburn served both senior and junior high school students until 1929. At that time the orphan home was razed and construction began on a new building. Superintendent Carroll Reed recommended that ‘the new senior high at the Washburn Home site be named the William Watts Folwell High School.’ Students, teachers, residents, and alumni united in opposition, and the board voted to retain the name Washburn for the high school and the new building was named Alexander Ramsey Junior High. Folwell was subsequently applied to another junior high school.

These actions demonstrated that by the late twenties public interest in the naming of schools was sufficiently strong to rescind Board action. However, the procedure of public involvement in naming was still only a plebiscitarian response to a name they did not want. And while letters from citizens suggesting names were received and filed throughout the thirties and forties, no specific policy that would encourage and be guided by local initiative was adopted.

If in practice the selection of school names was becoming more democratic, Superintendent Rufus A. Putnam was able to write in June, 1954, ‘Frankly, we have no specified policy.’ Putnam was not to suggest a policy until two years later after a long controversy over the name of a new junior high at Hayes Street and 30th Avenue North East. But there is still no explicit
The present Marcy School at 11th Avenue Southeast between 7th and 8th Streets was built in 1908.

The naming of Northeast Junior High is of interest for several reasons. First, no other school has had so many names suggested for it or so many people involved in the selection process. Secondly, it further illustrates the degree to which the school board was reluctantly committed to the principle denied by Superintendent Webster in 1929: namely, majority rule. Finally, it indicates in a tangential way, how powerful an effect television has on the public imagination.

The Northeast Planning Committee was charged by the Board in early 1955 to recommend names for the new school. Among the names most energetically proposed were Susan B. Anthony (favored in a letter from Hubert H. Humphrey), Casimir Pulaski (advocated by the American Polish Society), and Floyd B. Olson.

The Planning Committee held a neighborhood referendum with over 30 names on the ballot. The results of the vote were: 1. Northeast; 2. Harriet Godfrey; 3. Davy Crockett; and 4. a tie between Susan B. Anthony, Floyd B. Olson, and Father Hennepin. The inclusion of Davy Crockett, who could have absolutely no historical connection with Minnesota, is explained perhaps by the extraordinary popularity he was then enjoying as a part of the Walt Disney television program. The first air date for this show in the Minneapolis area occurred in December, 1954, so in less than three months the frontiersman had captured the imagination of Northeast Minneapolis to a remarkable degree.

At this juncture the Board asked the Committee to review the names, since it did not wish to name the school after a section of the city. With West, South, North and Southwest already among the school names, this was a ridiculous argument. The Committee did not amend its recommendation, and on March 29, 1955, the Board voted to accept the name Northeast Junior High School.

We have examined the occupation, ethnic background, and gender of the honored people. We have observed an increasing role being taken by the public in the suggestion and selection of school names. And we can demonstrate here another phenomenon which was suggested earlier; namely, that since 1932 Minneapolis has become more parochial, more likely to name a school after a woman, and less likely to name it after a politician.

Of the fourteen new names for schools built since 1932 only three have honored people of
national reputation: Walter Reed (a temporary school no longer in existence), Susan B. Anthony, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Three new names identify geographical points of the city: Southwest, Shingle Creek, and Northeast. Seven new names appeared honoring people who have made primarily a local contribution: Waite Park (Judge Edward F. Waite), Maude D. Armatage, Sister Elizabeth Kenny, Elizabeth L. Hall, Governor Floyd B. Olson, Rufus Putnam, and George J. Gordon.

Of the ten schools named since 1932, five were named for men and five for women. This contrasts quite sharply with the 4.5 to 1 ratio of men to women in the school names prior to 1932, and it is certainly a fair and welcome trend.

Ethnically, there seems little change, however. A Norwegian politician, a Negro educator, and a Jewish doctor have taken their places alongside seven more Anglo-Saxons. It would also appear that occupationally the men and women selected have been involved in professions which provide services to the community: juvenile court, education, and medicine. The trend seems to be away from naming schools after politicians.

What these trends imply for future school names in Minneapolis remains to be seen, but new schools will be built and many of the older schools will be replaced. The State Board of Education issued desegregation guidelines for the Minneapolis schools in 1970. To meet these guidelines, three proposals were presented to the Minneapolis Board on September 14, 1971. Each of them calls for the demolition of several old and proud elementary schools, to be replaced by larger complexes. Irving, Hawthorne, Lowell, and Whittier will soon be only nostalgic memories. Two of our most brilliant and capable presidents will have been removed from the honored ranks when both Adams and Madison schools are torn down.

Unquestionably, the public will take a keen and lively interest in the naming of these new buildings as it has done in the recent past. Womens’ groups certainly will suggest names. In a period of heightened ethnic consciousness, many of the unrepresented ethnic groups will make strenuous suggestions to the Board. This is good and encouraging. The politicization of the naming procedure will hopefully save us from lifeless and uninspiring titles like “South Complex I” or “Middle Grade Learning Center.” We need the measure of man now more urgently than before.
A. Laying the corner-stone at Roosevelt High School in 1922.

B. This dwelling first used as Gresham School in 1919 at 35th Avenue North East and 2nd Street was last used for school purposes in 1926.

C. Irving School was erected in 1884 at East 28th Street and 16th Avenue.

D. East Side High was constructed in 1890 at Central Avenue between University Avenue and 4th Street South East.

E. Adams School as seen here after the 1904 addition was located on 16th Avenue South between East 19th Street and Franklin Avenue.

F. This is the Madison School as it appeared after the 1889 addition at 5th Avenue South and East 15th Street.