

**Joanne Englund, Prospect Park resident and former staff member at St. Paul Dept. of Planning and Economic Development**

Interviewed by Peter Myers at Olivet Congregational Church, St. Paul, January 2012

Q Tell me a little bit about yourself....

A I was born in St. Paul – Anchor Hospital. But we moved back with my grandmother; we lived in Minneapolis till I was 3. My grandmother was living alone. My grandfather had died in 1918 and my grandmother lived in the house at 1431 Edmund, right north of Montgomery Wards. So we moved back in with her; we became her tenants and rent was cheap. My dad was out of work. This was 1933 and I lived there until I left and got married. And my mother lived there until she was 95 or 94 and then I sold the house. So the house was in our family from 1910 until 2000. Nice neighborhood to live in. As a kid, my bike was my main way to get around and the streetcar was, of course, for a dime or a token I could get downtown, which I did as a teenager. My school was in the neighborhood, of course – Wilson High School, Galtier Grade School. Just about anything you needed was around the corner. I worked at Wards as a kid, when I was in high school, and walked back and forth. My grandmother and grandfather worked at Bohn Refrigerator, which was right there. I think it was on the site Wards went on. It was either there or Brown & Bigelow. So that's why they built in that neighborhood. That was where they were working. And then - that was 1910 - they built a shack on the back of the lot and lived in the shack for five years while they built the house. By the time the house was done in 1914, they rented it out. Or the intent was to rent it out and build another one with the rent money that they got. But my grandfather died in 1918 and they moved into the house before he died. My grandmother had enough of the shack; she didn't want to live in that any longer.

Q And that's the house at 1431 Edmund?

A House is still there. Yeah I sold it in 2000.

Q A lot of people have talked about Montgomery Ward. Talk about your experience working there when you were in high school.

A I used to go there a lot as a kid. You know, we'd order things from Wards. The catalog was our family bible and that's what we read together. So it was always a fascinating place because these people would come on their roller skates to deliver the things to the counter. So I looked forward to getting a job at Wards. But I was put behind a little desk and went through file cards writing down what people bought and keeping track of their orders. So working at Wards wasn't as exciting as I thought it was going to be. I never got the roller skates.

Q You talked about your parents working at Bohn Refrigerator....what do you remember about that?

A That was my grandparents.

Q OK

A I have a plate, a metal plate that's enameled with 1431 on it that my grandfather must have made when he was working there, because his job was enameling.

Q Another name the White Enamel Refrigerator Company....

A It's the same place, I think. I don't know the history of that but I think it's probably the same company.

Q You mentioned your memories of the streetcar and bikes. What other things can you remember about the street at that time?

A Well, the movie theater, of course. That was on University about across from Wards - Hamline Theater. Our Saturday's were spent there, pretty much. And my grandmother kept a journal from, for about ten years from about 1935 to 1940-something. And in there she talks about going to the movies at the theater and often they'd be Saturday. So I'd come home from the matinee and we'd have dinner and go to the evening movie. So I think we watched movies like you watch television today. At least on certain occasions.

Q There's a little piece about you on the Ramsey County Historical Society website talking about your grandmother and there was some comment about watching Montgomery Ward building being built; is that right?

A You know, she remembered, she talked about the streetcar barns. When they were building the house, she told me she could see the streetcar barns from the house and I was a kid looking out the window looking at these what looked to me like old houses – they were built ten or twenty years earlier than me – and the trees and I couldn't imagine that you could see the streetcar barns from there. But it must have been pretty open. My dad worked at the streetcar barns. That was one of his jobs; he worked there.

Q Do you know how long he worked there?

A I don't know. That was after the Depression so he had a number of jobs at that time. He worked for the transfer station, his uncles and his dad worked for the Minnesota Transfer. So it was a time when people worked where they lived, you know? Lived where they worked.

Q One of the things that people today may not be aware of, and that was the importance of the railways during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A Yeah. I can remember sitting on the fence. There was, as I remember it, who knows what's real, but as I remember it there was a fence along I want to say it was Prior, and my dad would go visit his uncle and his dad who were working on the other side of the fence and I remember watching cattle while he was gone off talking to them. And one of his uncles was killed there. He got caught between two boxcars in the coupling process and was killed. So the Transfer has a big piece in our family.

Q If you were asked to describe the eastern section of University Avenue today, what would you say?

A Well, an international feast. I worked for the city of St Paul in Planning and Economic Development and my hope was that we would see that stretch, and maybe we still will, with flags of different nationalities running down the street and shops from different places and the ability to walk up and down the street. I worked for the Model Cities program, went to work there in 1970, and of course we were trying to get the corner of Dale and University redeveloped. So there was a big effort to build the Uni-Dale Shopping Center, which never really took off. There's a small center there, but not what was intended. And we couldn't get the anchor tenants. Nobody would move into that area. And I realized how long it takes to build a confidence again when you try to turn around a neighborhood or try to turn around a street. So we'll see how long this one takes.

Q It took a long time to get the Faust Theatre closed down. Talk about your role with PED during that era of the 1980s.

A I came into the city when Model Cities no longer was funded nationally, federally, and worked in the planning department and then Planning and Economic Development when it was formed. So the economic development piece of the old Housing Authority was Housing and Redevelopment was broken off and put with the city and most of the concentration was on downtown. Model Cities was the idea to redevelop the neighborhood, and Community Development came in afterwards and that was to develop various neighborhoods in the city. So Thomas/Dale was one and we ended up with our district councils out of that. And then the neighborhoods themselves were supposed to come up with the plans and then negotiate with the city to implement things that happened. It's a slow process, though.

Q By this time, Midway Center was already up and running. What was the concept behind the Uni-Dale Mall?

A Yeah, it would have had more, I think, large tenants, nationally known tenants and would have had second and third floor of office space. So it would have been just a bigger presence on that corner and would have then helped develop the other corners. It didn't get that.

Q One of the theories behind the light rail is that that investment will provide enough confidence for more private investment to come in. What are you seeing so far?

A I guess I'm holding judgment on that one. I'll see what happens. Watch the little businesses that I pass, as I walk – I'm walking by a lot of the mile and a half down University of small storefronts that are vacant, or small storefronts that are really struggling to hold a little restaurant open or hold a shop open. A lot of them don't make it. Personally I'd like to see a lot of small businesses start up again and regenerate that little business, the old Jane Jacobs idea: you have your store downstairs and the owner upstairs and they live on the street and they own it. I don't know if we'll ever see that again or not, but that would be my desire. I think what we will get is the larger – because that's where we're at – the big box companies coming in. Menards seems to be doing very well and they replace old buildings that needed replacing so that's not all bad, either.

Q Switching back to the western end of the avenue where you live, in the Metro Lofts, just over the border in Minneapolis. Talk about that.

A I live at 2650 University, so I'm right at the, I'm in the first block for Minneapolis. I've been a loyal St. Paulite for most of my life, with the exception of 20 years that I lived in Shoreview, but I'm one block a loyalist yet to St. Paul. And I used to take the streetcar when I was in college. I'd take the streetcar from Montgomery Wards down to that corner where Minneapolis and St. Paul joined and then get off and walk the rest of the way because it cost two tokens or two dimes to go from St. Paul to Minneapolis at that time. Or I'd take it to that corner and walk home. So it's a familiar corner. Not that I can say what used to be on it. But it's a fun neighborhood to live in. Our building is a lot of students or past recent graduates, fun kind of environment to be in. Emerald Gardens is behind us on Franklin and there's a new student housing on the north side if you go back a block – large student housing back in there. And my biggest worry, or one of them, when I moved into Metro Lofts four years ago was the loss of trees and ground, you know to just be able to walk on the ground – I'm on third and fourth floor. But I can go to Prospect Park and walk around. Prospect Park is still a wonderful, wonderful community with huge old trees that have to be a hundred years or more. And I go to St. Anthony Park, Desnoyer Park and Iris Park. They're all within walking distance, besides the river of where I live. So I think that area is going to just keep buzzing with Carleton Lofts in there and Lyric – more and more people are coming. I'm waiting for the grocery store but we have little Hampton Coop, which is great.

Q Where do you have to go if you need to go to a big grocery store?

A I can go to Midway Shopping Center because there's a Cub and a Rainbow in there. Or to Larpenteur and Lexington or to Rosedale.

Q Think about your time on the streetcars when you were in college....what do you remember?

A They were nice and easy. They ran frequently, you could count on them being there, you could take them downtown. My girlfriends and I would do downtown shopping and we'd walk in, just touring in and out the dime stores that were downtown at the time, or down to the movies. Just hop the streetcar and go down. We never went the other direction. Minneapolis was never on the list. We just went to St. Paul. For one of my birthday parties – I don't remember which – I'm guessing my 13<sup>th</sup> but who knows? My mother rented a streetcar and I had my birthday party on the streetcar and the streetcar just toured streetcar lines around the city and brought us back. I don't know how long we were out but I had a couple dozen kids on the streetcar with me and that was fun. I remember them being cold and clanky and noisy and not particularly comfortable but quick and easy and used a lot.

Q Sounds pretty accurate from all I've heard. Back to today...what role do you think University Avenue plays in the economic and cultural life of the Twin Cities?

A Right now, I would say not a whole lot when you look at the whole Twin Cities. The suburban shopping centers are still taking a majority of the business. I love Mai Village to eat at. It's just a wonderful little restaurant, a beautiful couple that run it. I've been going there since before the new restaurant and gone to the old one as well. But I'd like to see more customers in there. And I go to some place out in Shoreview or Roseville at Rosedale and you know, they line outside the door. And so I hope we get a balance. I don't want to take the trade all away from there, but I want to see a lively

community on University and we're not there yet. And I'd like to be able to walk it so I hope they do nice things to walk in.

Q If you could imagine University Ave. five or 10 years from now, what would you see?

A Nothing in particular. I'll just go back to my daydreams, which have no fact in reality but that it will have small shops, that we'll be able to walk in and out of them and they'll be multicultural. I would love to see all the diversity possible on University Avenue, love to see it be the strip between the two cities that ties everybody who lives here, together.

Q Could you say that again?

A Ten years from now, what are we at? It's 2020. Lets look at 2020 where we've got good vision. What does it look like in 2020? I see it filled with people walking, moving around, easy parking wherever they put their cars in the background not on the front, and small stores not huge ones. Again as a walker, walking by a flat half-block long building doesn't do anything for me. But walking by little stores with windows here and there, that feels alive. So that's what I'm hoping for. That's what I see.

Q Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A Just one thing that comes to mind every now and then that doesn't happen this way anymore and I can remember...I don't know if I had a cold or if I had a sore throat or what, but I remember my mother sent me to the doctor and my cousin came with me. And we walked to Prior and University from Snelling and University to go to see the doctor because I was sick. And you don't hear that anymore.