

**Historical Research Summary for
452 Thomas Avenue**
(originally No. 446 Thomas Street.)
St. Paul, Minnesota
Built: 1889

This two and one-half story, frame dwelling was built in 1889, as rental property for Charles Peterson, a real estate speculator. He paid \$1,500 to have the house built, which was completed during the largest building boom in the entire history of St. Paul. The house is similar in construction and design to dozens of other structures in the Frogtown neighborhood. In an early rental advertisement for the house, it is advertised as a “nine room house, with city water”. The building appears to be in a fair to good state of preservation, with some of its original architectural features intact, including some of the original decorative window sash.

Nothing more could be learned about the original owner, Charles Peterson. Further research is necessary to properly identify him, his occupation, etc. It is highly likely he never lived in the house at 452 Thomas Avenue.

The house is sited on a lot, approximately 40 x 125 feet, which is part of the Stinson Division, a tract of land first platted in 1856, and then subdivided over the next several decades, to form thirty-two city blocks, bounded by Minnehaha Avenue on the north, Western Avenue on the east, Dale Street on the west, and University Avenue on the south.

Building construction in the Frogtown neighborhood began in the 1850s, but by the 1880s, the area was still sparsely settled. Much of the area was covered with marsh land and ponds, and could not be easily built on. Just five years before No. 452 Thomas Avenue was built, the four city blocks north of the site of 452 Thomas, were vacant land, and the block south, and contained only one structure.

The house at 452 Thomas Avenue was known as “446 Thomas Ave.” periodically during the first decades after its construction. Both numbers, 446 and 452 are used to identify this property in various records. Number 446 is obviously not the correct number, because it is out of numerical order, because No. 448 is to the east of the house, and No. 458, is to the west of the house at No. 452. This obviously makes for a very confusing situation, when trying to identify the house in historical records.

The houses on both sides of No. 452 Thomas, were built the same year, **No. 448** as an owner-occupied dwelling, and **No. 458**, as rental property. The first residents of **No. 448** Thomas Avenue were Swan Stomm, a tailor, and several boarders, most of who were painters. Both of these buildings also cost the owners \$1,500 to build, an average cost for a three-bedroom house at that time in St. Paul.

The first recorded residents of No. **452 Thomas**, were **John Parsons**, a common labor, and **Charles E.** and **Jonas Parsons**, carpenters, working for the Blossom Bros. & Merrill Company, a window sash, door, and blind manufacturer, located in the Northend neighborhood of the city. The Parsons lived on Thomas Avenue for only one year, from 1890 to 1891.

From 1892 to 1896, Charles Lipke, a Minnesota born, 39 year old tinsmith, working for the Northern Pacific railroad, occupied the house with his wife Minnie, and their four children. Their youngest child, Casper Lipke, was born in the house in 1895.

In 1900, the house was occupied by two immigrant families from Belgium, of four adults, and five children. One of the families was supported by a carpenter, and the other a wallpaper hanger. Both families were renters.

In 1905, there were fourteen people living in the house, in two families. One family with roots in Belgium, and the other Germany. Both families were renters. One head of household was an engineer at the Water Works, the other a foreman in a twine factory.

In 1910, the house was occupied by four small families. Florence Cunningham, a 30 year old divorcee, is listed as the owner of the property, living with her two daughters, ages 6 and 8 years. The other living units were occupied by a single mother with a daughter, a widow with three sons, and a railroad laborer with his wife, and two sons.

The family most identified with the house at 452 Thomas Avenue is the **Victor E. and Mary E. (Keating) Donaldson** family, who owned and occupied the house from 1913 to 1968, or fifty-five years. Victor Donaldson was born in Canada in 1873, and immigrated to the United States in 1895. He married Mary Keating (1876-1964) in St. Paul in 1898. The couple had two children, Mildred, born in 1902, and Herbert P. Donaldson, born in 1905. Victor Donaldson had worked as a compositor for the Ramaley Printing Company, since his arrival in St. Paul in 1895. He later worked as a stockman and shipping clerk for a wholesale paper company in the city.

Victor Donaldson died in 1943, and his widow Mary in 1964. Their son Herbert Donaldson owned and occupied the house at 452 Thomas Avenue, nearly to the time of his death, in November 1968.

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| Payne, near Ivy | 1,500 |
| Charles F Arrol, three 3-story brick apartment houses, west side of St. Albans, between Ashland and Laurel.. | 20,000 |
| Ole A Carlson, 2-story frame dwelling, (458) Thomas, near Mackubin | 1,500 |
| X Charles Peterson, 2-story frame dwelling, (452) Thomas, near Mackubin | 1,500 |
| Maurice Hurley, 2-story frame dwelling, South Robert, near Louisa..... | 1,500 |
| Fred Brandt, 2-story frame block of three dwellings, Isabel, near Clinton..... | 10,000 |
| Eight minor permits | 2,800 |
| (St. Paul Globe, June 19, 1889) | |
| Total, eighteen permits .. | \$53,800 |

| BUILDING PERMSSS. | |
|---|-----------------|
| Thomas H Ivey, 1½-story frame dwelling, Rondo, near Victoria..... | \$2,400 |
| Mark Costello, addition to brick store, Third, near Cedar. | 2,475 |
| W C Happe, 1½-story frame dwelling, Campbell, near Brown. | 1,000 |
| Board of Education, 2-story brick school, Nash, near Mississippi | 45,000 |
| X Sophia Erickson, 2-story frame dwelling, Thomas, near Arundel..... | 1,500 |
| J O Peterson, 1½-story frame dwelling, Charles, near Grotto..... | 1,000 |
| Henry Hinkens, three permits, 2-story frame dwellings, Grant, near Viola... | 7,350 |
| Andrew Bogaereigh, 1-story frame dwelling, Gaultier, near Thomas.... | 500 |
| John J Ward, repairs to dwelling, Carroll, near Western. | 1,500 |
| Eugene Mehl, 2-story frame dwelling, Portland, near Chatsworth..... | 12,000 |
| Seven minor permits | 2,300 |
| Seventeen permits, total..... | \$79,025 |
| (Globe, June 26, 1889) | |

| BUILDING PERMITS. | |
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| The following building permits were issued yesterday: | |
| William Goodkind, 2-story frame dwelling, Martin, near Dale | \$2,450 |
| Martin Blixt, 2-story frame dwelling, Edmund, near Grotto | 2,450 |
| Bernat Olson, 2-story frame dwelling, Rose, near Greenbrier..... | 1,500 |
| F O Holstrom, 1-story frame dwelling, Lawson, near Edgerton..... | 1,000 |
| C Robert, 1½-story frame dwelling, Charles, near Virginia..... | 1,500 |
| X Swan Stamm, 2-story frame dwelling, (448) Thomas, near Arundel. | 1,500 |
| T E Helmick, 2-story frame dwelling, Langford, near Blake..... | 5,000 |
| Robert Thorn, 1½-frame dwelling, Butternut, near Bay | 1,000 |
| William Burrows et al., 2-story frame dwelling, Marshall, near Grotto..... | 6,000 |
| A J Wallraff, 2-story frame dwelling, Aurora, near Virginia | 5,000 |
| John Fruhwirth, 1½-story frame dwelling, Lafond, near Dale..... | 1,000 |
| Hans Manson, 2-story frame dwelling, Chelton, near Prior..... | 2,450 |
| John E O'Brien, 3-story brick flat, east side Mississippi, between Nash and Thirteenth..... | 14,000 |
| Three minor permits..... | 700 |
| Sixteen permits, total..... | \$45,550 |
| Globe, July 6, 1889 | |

