



tour **SAINT PAUL** frogtown



Resilient Urban Hub
A Place to Start
A Place to Stay

Why Call it

Frogtown?

Located northwest of downtown Saint Paul, the area known historically as Frogtown includes several smaller neighborhoods: Mount Airy, Capitol Heights, Rondo, Lower Rice Street and East Midway. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad tracks, Interstate 35E, University Avenue, and Lexington Parkway are borders of the Saint Paul planning district called Frogtown, but the historic neighborhood boundaries extend south of University several blocks.

One story is that then-Archbishop John Ireland, hearing a chorus of frogs here, referred to the area as “Froschberg” or Frog City.

The name Frogtown dates back to the 1860s and 1870s. Father Alexis Hoffman, an early neighborhood historian, states that the area bounded by University and Western avenues, Rice Street and what was Carroll Avenue (now part of the Saint Paul College-Christ’s Household of Faith property) was called Froschenberg or Frogtown because of its swamps.

Above: Frogtown Marching Club clicker, ca. 1959

Background: Street dance at a carnival near Rice and University, ca. 1910, Johnston



Above: Dahlem Nicholas Wagner house, 537 North Western, ca. 1885

Railroad Roots

Minnesota's first successful locomotive run took place here in 1862, providing a huge boon to the community in terms of jobs and industry. Many working-class Frogtowners labored in the Dale Street and Jackson Street shops and the area's many railroad-related industries. The Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad, later Great Northern and now BNSF, provided jobs here through the 1980s. One of the largest industries where Frogtowners worked was the Saint Paul Foundry, which opened in 1901 and operated until the 1980s. Its site is now part of the Saint Paul Port Authority's Great Northern Business Park. The Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway Company Shops Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. The site at Jackson Street and Pennsylvania Avenue includes three old shop buildings converted for modern uses. The site is known today as Empire Builder Industrial Park.

The Minnesota Transportation Museum at 193 Pennsylvania Avenue occupies the former Jackson Street Roundhouse complex. The main structure was built in 1907.





The Places We Call Home

The first Frogtown streets were platted in the 1850s. Frogtown's earliest residents settled in the Capitol Heights and University-Rice areas over the next two decades. The oldest remaining homes are on Sherburne, Charles, and Como east of Rice Street.

Neighborhood growth was to the west. One prominent developer, Benjamin LaFond, platted LaFond's Addition in 1857, including LaFond Avenue, Lake Street (now Blair Avenue) and Bluff Street (now Van Buren). Many histories incorrectly state that Thomas, Edmund, Charles, and Ellen (now Sherburne) avenues were named for LaFond family members. Historian Don Empson said those streets were platted by other earlier developers.



Houses were a mix of wood frame and brick construction. The area between Rice and Dale Streets saw the most growth and development during the 1880s, with working-class homes interspersed with small stores and an occasional row house. Many houses were built on narrow lots, with smaller “mother-in-law” homes built in the backyards. A trip through this area reveals many existing Victorian-era working-class homes, with detailed window openings, porches, and trim.

At 419 Sherburne Avenue is the Charles James home. James was a member of a pioneer Saint Paul African-American family. He was a national leader in the Boot and Shoe Workers Union in the early 20th century.

The neighborhoods west of Dale Street filled in the 1890s. Many Queen Anne, Eastlake, and Colonial Revival style homes remain here, with newer bungalows and a few Prairie-style homes west of Victoria Street.

Frogtown Family Lofts at 653 Galtier Street, built in 1917 and used to manufacture everything from printing presses to clothes, was converted to artists' lofts in 1992.



One long-gone home, at 665 University Avenue, was home to African-American leader Frederick McGhee. This son of slaves grew up to be one of the nation's first African-American lawyers, a writer, and a pioneer in early desegregation and civil rights cases. He was a co-founder of the Niagara Movement, forerunner of the NAACP, in 1904. A plaque about McGhee is displayed at Western Bank on University Avenue.

Top to bottom: Saint Paul home (possibly 179 Sherburne), ca. 1908. Karl A. Buetow Residence, 567 Edmund, ca. 1890. Frederick McGhee house, 665 University Avenue, ca. 1918

School Days

Frogtown has been home to more than a dozen public, parochial, and charter schools over the years. Jackson Preparatory Magnet School, 437 Edmund Avenue, is the only Saint Paul Public School left in the neighborhood. The oldest section of the current building dates from 1924.

Franklin (at 690 Jackson Street); Scheffer (at Marion and Thomas Avenue); and Drew (at Thomas and Avon), were the neighborhood's other public elementary schools. Franklin's building is still standing.

Scheffer Elementary's old school bell is in front of Scheffer Recreation Center, 237 Thomas Avenue. The school was torn down in 1974. Its ball fields include the site of the city's first playground, Como Playground, established in 1903.

Ryan Park, at Thomas Avenue and Avon Street, was until 1974 the site of Benjamin Drew Elementary School. The property was purchased by the city as a housing site but became a park about a decade later, after a successful lobbying effort by the District 7 Planning Council. It is named for local businessman Dennis Patrick Ryan, who was murdered during a 1984 robbery of his plumbing store at 811 University Avenue.

At one point Frogtown had three Catholic grade schools – Saint Agnes, Saint Adalbert, and Saint Vincent, and Lutheran schools affiliated with Saint Stephanus and Trinity churches. Children at Saint Agnes spoke German, children at Saint Adalbert's spoke Polish, and the Irish children at Saint Vincent spoke English. Saint Vincent's teams, especially in baseball and basketball, had an illustrious history and produced many star baseball players including Saint Paul Saints and Chicago White Sox star Larry Rosenthal. School alumnus Jim McCarter made *Ripley's Believe it or Not* in 1931 when he struck out all 27 batters for Saint Vincent's in a game against Saint Andrew's. Internationally known boxers Mike and Tommy Gibbons were also from Saint Vincent.

Saint Agnes, founded in 1888, continues today as a K-12 school. The Saint Adalbert building erected in 1901 at 260 Edmund Avenue is the primary building for Saint Paul City Charter School. The Saint Vincent building at 643 Virginia Street, erected in 1902, is the middle school. Saint Vincent's grade school closed in the 1970s and Saint Adalbert closed in the 1990s.





Left to right: Student paper drive, Scheffer School, Saint Paul, ca. 1923, Saint Paul *Dispatch & Pioneer Press*. Minnehaha Playground recreation building, 1938. Nickel Joint Tavern, 501 Blair, 1957, Saint Paul *Dispatch & Pioneer Press*. Nickel Joint Tavern Champion's Old Timers Baseball League, 1941, Amos Photo Co.

Minnehaha Avenue Memories


Minnehaha Avenue is one of Frogtown's major east-west streets, and marks a section line on early land surveys. Part of Minnehaha was originally University Avenue because it was seen as a connection between Hamline University and the University of Minnesota.

As early as 1918, city officials sought to extend Minnehaha Avenue and create a longer, regional east-west road. That idea was replaced in more recent years by plans to link Pierce Butler Route to Phalen Boulevard.

One important Frogtown landmark on Minnehaha Avenue is the West Minnehaha Recreation Center. "West Minne" is one of the city's older playgrounds, located on what was once a swamp and a dump. The original Platteville limestone recreation center building was erected in 1937-38 as one of many Works Progress Administration (WPA) buildings in Saint Paul. The playground itself dates from the 1920s and was served in its early years by a small wood frame building. The playground was used over the years for neighborhood festivals including the Frogtown Festival, ethnic festivals as well as the Saint Paul Winter Carnival, and recreation center and area school sporting events.

The area of West Minnehaha Avenue bounded by Victoria, Chatsworth, and LaFond was the home of Amherst H. Wilder Foundation headquarters until 2007. Between 1883 and 1967, the site was occupied by the House of the Good Shepherd. Operated by the Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the facility housed unwed mothers, prostitutes and girls deemed "incorrigible." The massive Gothic building, with towers and a large dome, was torn down in the late 1960s.

Who We Were and Are



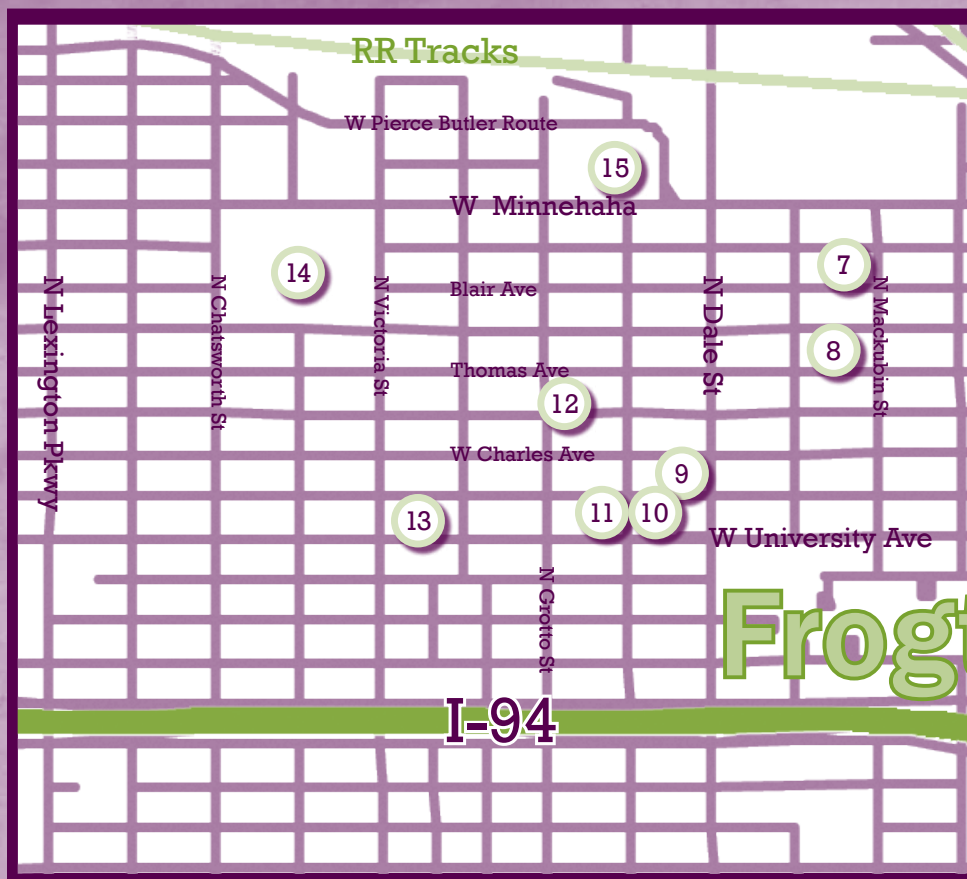
Frogtown has always been one of Saint Paul's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods. In the early days, the most dominant groups were Germans, Austrians and Hungarians. The Irish, Poles, Scandinavians, British, and French-Canadians also have had a presence here. Eastern European Jews and African-Americans moved in later in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Many 19th-century newcomers came to work for the railroads and railroad-related industries. Others opened their own small neighborhood businesses along University Avenue and the small business districts of Rice Street, Dale Street and at smaller nodes along Western and Victoria. At one point in the early 20th century, the neighborhood had more than four dozen small grocery stores, fruit and meat markets, and confectioneries. Many of these businesses were owned and operated by immigrants, including Dale Street Greenhouse, Dietsch's Hall at Thomas and Western, Willard's at Thomas and Grotto, and the Nickel Joint. The Nickel Joint, which still operates as a bar, has been home to the Baseball Old Timers Hot Stove League since January 1939. The original group was founded in 1939 by 14 members of the New York Yankee's farm system who lived in Saint Paul. A display of historic baseball pictures can be seen on request.

Below: Kim Long's Golden Dragon Restaurant, 439 University, ca. 1981, Alan Ominsky

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Hmong, Lao, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Thai and other Asian groups have settled here, as have many from African nations. One of the earliest pioneers of this generation of businesspeople was Kim Long, who opened his Golden Dragon restaurant at 439 University Avenue in the late 1970s.





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| <p>1 MN Transportation Museum and Jackson Street Roundhouse
193 Pennsylvania Avenue</p> <p>2 Ford Building, 1913
117 West University Avenue</p> <p>3 Charles Avenue Homes
148-208 Charles Avenue</p> <p>4 Scheffer Recreation Center and Scheffer School Bell
NW corner of Thomas Avenue and Marion Street</p> <p>5 Minnesota Milk Company, Old Home Dairy building, 1912 & 1932
SE corner of Western Avenue and University Avenue</p> <p>6 Charles James House, 1916
419 Sherburne Avenue</p> <p>7 Nickel Joint, 1903
501 Blair Avenue</p> | <p>8 Church of Saint Agnes, 1912
548 LaFond Avenue</p> <p>9 Dale Street Greenhouse site
533 North Dale Street</p> <p>10 Frederick McGhee Historical Marker
Western Bank, 663 University Avenue West</p> <p>11 Saint Paul Fire Department Station #18, 1908
681 University Avenue West</p> <p>12 Willards Liquors, 1908
783 Thomas Avenue West</p> <p>13 Victoria Theater and Ray-Bell Studios, 1915
825 West University Avenue</p> <p>14 Home of the Good Shepherd site
Largest collection of mature oak trees in Frogtown</p> <p>15 West Minnehaha Recreation Center, 1938
685 West Minnehaha Avenue</p> |
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This guide was developed by Historic Saint Paul as part of the “Tour Saint Paul” interpretive guide series highlighting the cultural and historic resources of the city’s neighborhoods. Visit www.historicsaintpaul.org

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Grant Recipient
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL
& CULTURAL GRANTS

Cover Background: Dale Street looking north from University Avenue, 1952, Norton & Peel
Cover Top Left to Right: Removal of trolley tracks, University Avenue, 1954, Saint Paul Dispatch & Pioneer Press. Lang’s Sweet Shop, University and Western, 1933, Mando Studio. Thomas B. F. Lee and family, 427 Van Buren, ca. 1900, Charles Affleck. Saint Paul Fire Department Ladder 9, Station 18, 681 University Avenue, ca. 1925.

We Gather in Worship

Frogtown's many old and beautiful churches are one of the neighborhood's best-kept secrets. Saint Paul Fellowship was built in 1908 as University Avenue Congregational Church and was designed by noted architect Clarence H. Johnston. It retains many of its Carpenter Gothic style elements and is located at Victoria and Sherburne.

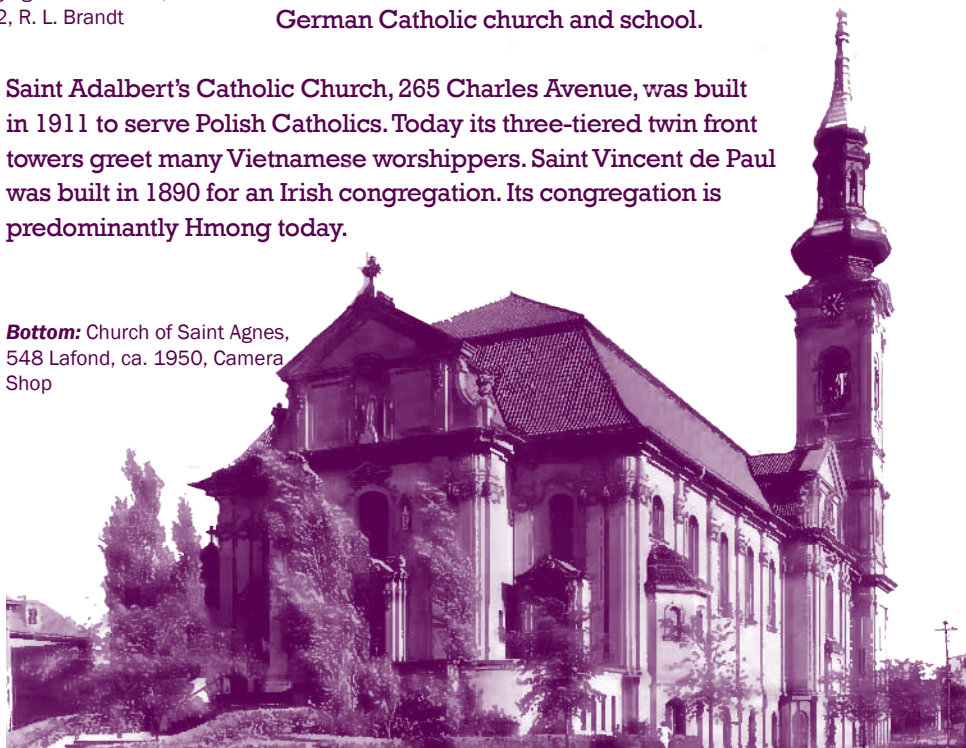


Above: Ground breaking for addition to University Avenue Congregational Church, ca. 1962, R. L. Brandt

One of the oldest and largest churches is Saint Agnes Catholic Church, 548-50 LaFond Avenue. It began as a basement church in 1897, with its massive church building dating from 1912. The classic Baroque style, Indiana limestone edifice was modeled on an Austrian monastery church. Its clock tower, topped with a gold cross, rises 205 feet above street level. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is on a block that includes a school and residences for staff. Parish histories note that Frogtown's high water table meant building a higher-than-usual church basement and tall steps up to the church entrance. Founded as a mission of Assumption Church, Saint Agnes was once considered Minnesota's largest German Catholic church and school.

Saint Adalbert's Catholic Church, 265 Charles Avenue, was built in 1911 to serve Polish Catholics. Today its three-tiered twin front towers greet many Vietnamese worshippers. Saint Vincent de Paul was built in 1890 for an Irish congregation. Its congregation is predominantly Hmong today.

Bottom: Church of Saint Agnes, 548 Lafond, ca. 1950, Camera Shop





Left: House of the Good Shepherd, 931 Blair, ca. 1890

While Catholicism is considered a dominant religion in Saint Paul history, Frogtown has been home to many Lutheran congregations. Christ Lutheran Church on Capitol Hill was built in 1913 as Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The church is still occupied by its original congregation.

Trinity Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, 515 N. Farrington, was built in 1885. It has been occupied by a number of congregations over the years. Saint Stephanus Lutheran Church was built in 1890 at LaFond and Grotto to serve a German Lutheran congregation. The building has been renovated twice, after a 1925 fire and a 1990 windstorm. Visitors can see two cornerstones, one for the original 1890 building and one for the 1990 renovation. Faith Lutheran Church at 499 Charles Avenue is a 1932 Gothic brick structure that is largely unchanged. Saint Matthew's Lutheran Church at Dale and Sherburne was demolished in 2010 but its 1930s-era Sunday School building remains.

Centers of Commerce

University Avenue is Frogtown's best-known commercial street and was once home to one of the Twin Cities' busiest streetcar lines. Central Corridor light rail is slated to start operations here in 2014.

Over the years the ethnicity of the business community changed with that of the surrounding neighborhood, with many Asian, Hispanic, and African nationalities represented today in ownership of restaurants, grocery stores, and retail and service businesses.

Many buildings are second- and third-, even fourth-generation structures on their sites. Many storefronts have been altered but other former commercial and industrial buildings are well-preserved. Owens Motor Sales (now Lifetrack Resources) at 709 University (1917, second floor 1922-23) is one of the last vestiges of an auto industry that included more than half a dozen vehicle dealerships. The 1915 Victoria Theater, at 825 University, was later a nightclub during Prohibition. The Scott Building at 935-937 University and the former Brioschi-Minuti Studio and Showroom at 908 W. University are other well-preserved storefronts. Brioschi-Minuti was an ornamental plaster and sculpture showroom.





Left to right: Men and movie cameras in front of Ray-Bell Films, Inc., 817-823 University Avenue, ca. 1925. Eisenmenger Meat Market, 567 University, 1917

One unique business was Ray-Bell Studios which made commercial, industrial, sports, and promotion films into the 1940s. Its studio building stands at 817-823 University Avenue.

Manufacturing uses were present along University. Examples include the 1914 Ford Building, 117 W. University, an early motor vehicle manufacturing building; and the former Old Home Dairy building at Western and University. The Old Home building was built in 1912 and remodeled in a sleek Art Deco design in 1932.

Other commercial streets that retain their character include Dale Street, where the former Dale Street Greenhouse, a former gas station at 631 North Dale Street, and other 19th-century storefronts are still present. Many of lower Rice Street's 19th- and early 20th-century commercial buildings remain intact between 516 and 562 Rice Street.

Commercial and small industrial buildings are scattered throughout the neighborhood, including a cigar factory turned artists' studio at 629 Kent Street and the former Saint Albans Grocery at 573 N. Saint Albans Street, built in 1898. Many examples of older commercial buildings are found throughout Frogtown, although several former corner grocery stores and confectioneries have been converted to housing.

Below: Vehicles advertising the Mueller Furnacette in front of General Oil Heat Company, 779 University, ca. 1925, Charles P. Gibson

