



# tour **SAINT PAUL**

Rice  
Street



work  
roots  
heritage

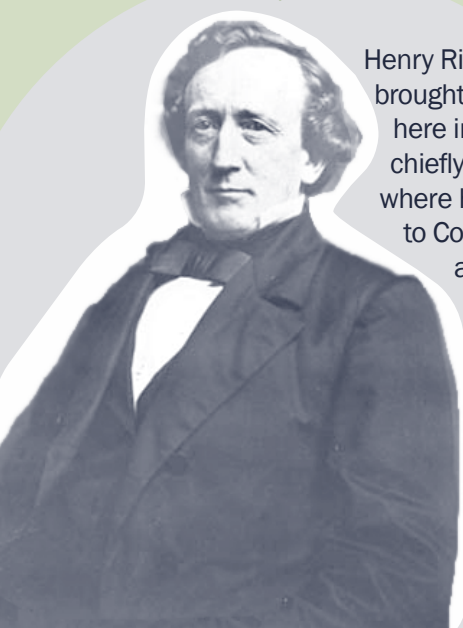
# Rice

## street

### Rice: A Street that Works

Located in the North End neighborhood, Rice Street began as a commercial corridor that served St. Paul's working class. Rice Street is unassuming; when it was rushed into being more than a century ago, there was no time for ornamentation or ostentation. Despite its utilitarian appearance, Rice Street has a character that is unique to the street and the North End. A trip along Rice Street reveals a rich neighborhood history with proud ethnic and working class roots. Rice Street was and is a street that works.

### Who was Rice?



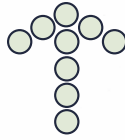
Henry Rice (1816-94) was a footloose Yankee brought to St. Paul by the fur trade. He settled here in 1849 and quickly made a fortune, chiefly in real estate. Then he went into politics, where he served as a Territorial representative to Congress (1853-57), and then (1857-63) as one of Minnesota's first U.S. senators. Rice served also as a regent of the University of Minnesota, president of the Minnesota Historical Society, and treasurer of Ramsey County. Rice County, Rice Park (he donated the land), and Rice Street bear his name. He is buried in Oakland Cemetery.

Left: Henry Mower Rice

Photographer: Mathew B. Brady

# The North End

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Though Rice Street begins its northward flow at Interstate 94 just south of the State Capitol, this tour begins at the Great Northern railroad tracks just north of Como Avenue. To the west of the railroad tracks rises

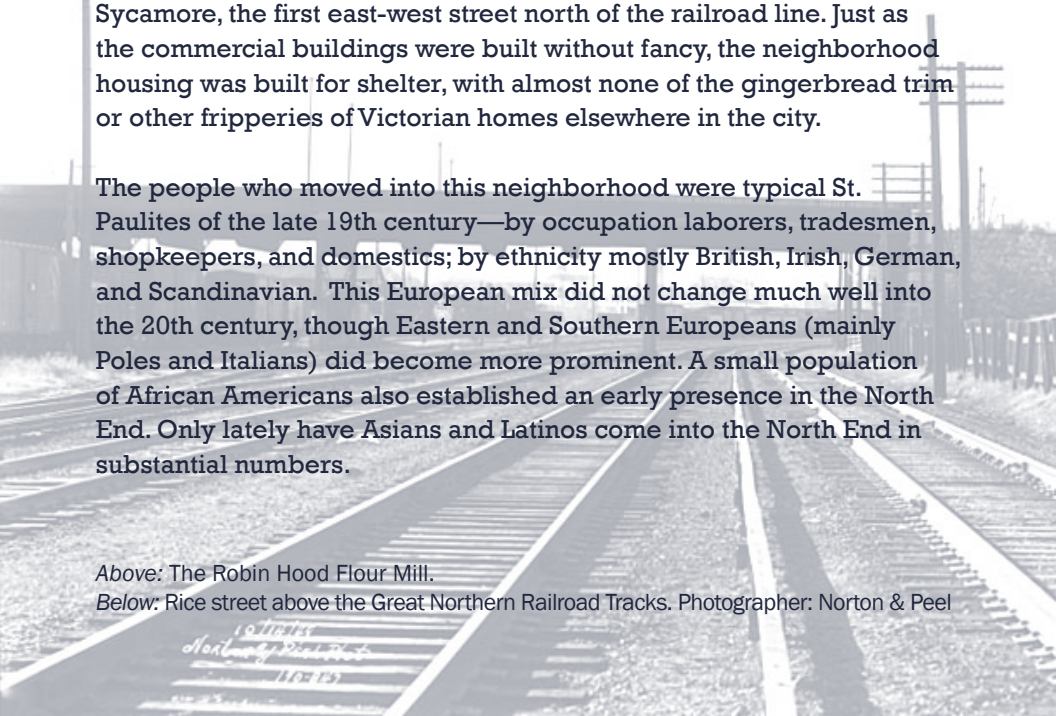
the Robin Hood Flour grain elevator. With its fanciful crenellation at the top, the elevator resembles a medieval tower. The elevator was built in 1918 for the Capitol City Milling Company of St. Paul and is a reminder of the city's milling history, which goes back to the 1850s.

During the 1880s and 1890s, railroads and the jobs they bought fuelled much of the bountiful growth of St. Paul. A new neighborhood arose north of downtown—the North End—and Rice Street was its main artery. Rice was a commercial street from the beginning. Housing grew up on the parallel and perpendicular streets, starting with Sycamore, the first east-west street north of the railroad line. Just as the commercial buildings were built without fancy, the neighborhood housing was built for shelter, with almost none of the gingerbread trim or other fripperies of Victorian homes elsewhere in the city.

The people who moved into this neighborhood were typical St. Paulites of the late 19th century—by occupation laborers, tradesmen, shopkeepers, and domestics; by ethnicity mostly British, Irish, German, and Scandinavian. This European mix did not change much well into the 20th century, though Eastern and Southern Europeans (mainly Poles and Italians) did become more prominent. A small population of African Americans also established an early presence in the North End. Only lately have Asians and Latinos come into the North End in substantial numbers.

Above: The Robin Hood Flour Mill.

Below: Rice street above the Great Northern Railroad Tracks. Photographer: Norton & Peel



# St. Mary's



Above: St. Mary's Romanian Orthodox Church

One small ethnic community made a striking contribution to the Rice Street landscape. Around 1900, a few hundred Romanian emigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire made their way to St. Paul, and some settled in the North End. In due course they formed an Orthodox parish and in 1914 began construction of the Falling Asleep of the Ever-Virgin Mary Church, more commonly known as St. Mary's. All of these people came from the Barat region of what is now western Romania, and their church is a replica of one in the town of Sannicolau Mare (the birthplace of composer Béla Bartók). It stands unchanged at the corner of Atwater Street and Woodbridge Street (two blocks west of Rice Street). Its purely ornamental painted clock is set mysteriously and forever to 4:00. Though there is now no Romanian community around Rice Street, the congregation still flourishes.

## Commercial Functions

All along Rice Street commercial buildings predominate, designed for profit, not for show. Between 1880 and 1925, both sides of the street from Sycamore to Maryland filled with storefronts and workplaces. These were groceries, barber and beauty shops, cleaners, cobblers, undertakers, taverns and an occasional professional office. Rice was a streetcar route (horsecars from 1880 to 1891 and electric cars from 1892 to 1953), and it developed accordingly. When people shopped on foot or by streetcar they could not travel fast or carry much, so businesses relied on small purchases from nearby patrons, hence the many corner groceries.

In 1930, there were twenty-four grocers, butchers, confectioners, and bakers operating along Rice Street between Sycamore Street and Maryland Avenue. Though less than half of the original commercial buildings are extant, Rice has few vacant lots or empty storefronts. The old buildings were mostly replaced with newer ones serving similar

functions. The 1989 strip mall on the west side of Rice between Milford and Atwater Streets offers a vivid contrast in commercial design to the original buildings nearby.

The best place to catch a glimpse of the Rice Street of old is at the southern end, starting at Atwater Street and looking north. Here, near downtown, more old structures survived than on the northern stretches. These blocks were also home to some of Rice's longest-lasting enterprises.



Above Left: A Rice Street grocery store, 1930

Above Right: John Jahr's Saloon, 1917

- **842 Rice Street** (a well preserved Victorian commercial building) was the Caron-Fabre furniture store for more than forty years, and before that a sheet metal shop, a tavern, and a Goodwill second-hand furniture store.
- **843 Rice Street** (built in 1922) was Kroemer's Grocery from the 1920s into the 1960s.
- **849 Rice Street** was Michael Sarafolean's residence and barbershop from the 1920s into the 1960s.
- **854 Rice Street** was the Woodburn and Brandl grocery and meat store for more than forty years, and most recently the Flower Hut.
- **857 Rice Street** (built in 1889) was a Romanian rooming house during its early years, and later a mattress factory.
- **879 Rice Street** was a drugstore owned by Oscar Zandell for more than forty years.



- **870 Rice Street** was a confectionery and then a tavern operated by Anthony Bassi from the 1930 into the mid-1960s.

Although they are unassuming, Rice Street's commercial buildings have colorful histories. For example, the building at 900-904 Rice Street is linked to the story of Hillard Hoffman, an immigrant to St.

Paul from the distant shores of Superior, Wisconsin. Hoffman started as a coppersmith and later became a hardware dealer. On this site he built a hardware store in 1889, and then tore it down to build the current building in 1914. The 904



address has been a *Above: 842 Rice Street*

hardware store forever, first Hoffman's, and then the Weyandt Brothers'. The tenant at number 900 for forty years was the Bluebird movie theater (later called the Royal).

Hoffman lived in the North End neighborhood, just up the street and around the corner, first in the Colonial Revival cottage at 112 Manitoba Avenue, and soon after that (Hoffman liked to build) in the much bigger Colonial Revival next door at 118 Manitoba Avenue. Both houses stand, little changed in the last one hundred years. That block, Manitoba Avenue between Rice Street and Park Street, retains most of its original character from the turn of the 20th century.

## Lyton Park

Two blocks east of Rice Street at the lower reaches of Park Street, one will find St. Paul's smallest and oddest public space, a skinny oval called Lyton Park. It was named for no one famous—the Lytons just owned a few lots nearby—and is too small to do much of anything but interrupt the local traffic, which is sparse to begin with. By the 1970s the surrounding neighborhood had declined badly into poverty and physical decay. In the 1990s the city removed many houses, especially along nearby Sycamore, and refurbished the park. The park is cheerful now.

*Below: North End Improvement Club, 1937*



At the next corner north from the schoolyard stand 961-963 and 965 Rice Street, ancient veterans of Rice Street commerce. They were built in 1890, 1893, and 1894, respectively, as a grocery store and butcher shop. When the high school opened in 1929 the corner store was a tavern and next door stood Joe Griemann's barber shop. They remained a tavern and Griemann's barbershop into the mid-1960s. No doubt many Washington scholars got trimmed at one, but surely not the other, establishment over the decades.

Just up the street stands a neighborhood institution, the North End Improvement Club, popularly known as the Klub Haus. The building opened in 1928 and is one of the few intact pre-1930 buildings on this stretch of Rice Street. A local entrepreneur recently purchased the Klub Haus and has beautifully restored the interior.

The new Rice Street branch of the St. Paul Public Library, opened in 2002, is the second on that site and the third over all. The first library was in a commercial building at 1108 Rice Street. The new library is the result of a neighborhood effort to bring a common gathering space to Rice Street. The library is heavily involved in outreach and collaboration with the surrounding neighborhood.

On the next block stands the longest-surviving business on Rice Street, and surely one of the oldest retail operations in St. Paul, the Tschida Bakery at 1116-1118 Rice Street. Henry and Caroline Tschida opened the store in 1930, and the family ran it for nearly 50 years. The Anderson family now runs the bakery.



*Above: Tschida's Bakery, 1930*



## St. Bernard's

The dominant Rice Street institution for the past 115 years has been St. Bernard's Church and school. Like St. Mary's several blocks to the south, St. Bernard's has its roots in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many of the original parishioners

*Above: St. Bernard's Church, 1910*

(the parish was organized in the spring of 1890) came from five villages in what was called the Deutsch Ungarn, a German ethnic region of what is now western Hungary. The parish began very near its current location, in a rented house on Jessamine Street. This was mostly unbuilt territory at the time (most of the housing was still south of Front Avenue), but not for long. As an early parish historian observed, "From the time the church was built in 1890, that part of the City grew rapidly. Business on Rice Street sprung up like mushrooms over night, residences were built on all side streets up until 1893 and after the hard times in 1896...

"St. Bernard's grew bigger and bigger, not only from year to year, but almost daily. New immigrants came from across the big pond and even if they did not have much money, they generally had lots of children. And how they grew up!"

And how St. Bernard's grew! A new church and school building opened in 1891, a convent in 1893, a parish hall in 1895, a rectory in 1900, a new church (the current one) in 1906, a new convent in 1911, a new school in 1922, and a new rectory in 1939. St. Bernard's School, the only Catholic school in the area, was an instant hit. By the early 1900s the students were "packed like sardines in a tin can, in 14 rooms, some of which were as small as 12 feet by 18 feet." According to a diocesan history, enrollment reached 1,280 in 1934, making it "the largest grade school west of Chicago." It certainly dwarfed all the public grade schools on the North End.



St. Bernard's Church is a thing of unique beauty. It has no basement and no steeple—twin spires instead. The sanctuary floor slopes gently from the back to the communion "so that people in the rear rows can see the Communicant as well as those in the front rows." The



# Rice Street Neighborhood Institutions

The most magnificent setting on or near Rice Street belongs to Washington Middle School. It rises on Marion Street above a long terrace of school grounds and playgrounds. The original building is a fine example of the stately school buildings of the 1920s, designed to resemble universities. The style belongs to the school of the architect William Illing, the so-called “Frank Lloyd Wright of school architecture.” Clarence Wigginton, the famous African American St. Paul architect, collaborated on the design of the building. Three tiers and three blocks long, this great terrace sets Washington apart from all other schools in the city.



Washington opened as a high school in 1929 and drew from a handful of public grade schools—Whittier, Rice, Smith, and Gorman—all of them now gone. As the only public high school in the North End, Washington was a community center and anchor, much the way high schools are in small towns. Fifty years after it opened, Washington was converted to a junior high and later a middle school. Above: Washington High School Left: Kids move books to the new Rice Street Library, 1944

# Oakland Cemetery

Just three blocks east of Rice Street lies, very quietly, one of St. Paul's loveliest, most serene, and most interesting greenspaces, Oakland Cemetery. Founded in 1853, Oakland is St. Paul's oldest public cemetery. Among its gentle contours and beneath its towering hardwoods rest the bones of pioneers, magnates, heroes, nameless poor, the first immigrants to the city and the most recent. Henry Sibley, Alexander Ramsey, Norman Kittson, and Amherst Wilder are here, as are Archibald and Edyth Bush of 3M. There is a plot for war veterans, going back to the Civil War. St. Paul firefighters who lost their lives on duty are honored by a touching monument here. Alongside the city's first settlers lie many of its most recent from the Hmong community. No place in St. Paul more deserves an hour of the visitor's time than Oakland Cemetery.

Right: Firemen's Memorial, Oakland Cemetery.  
Photographer: A.F. Raymond



# Worker Housing

A century ago the Rice Street area, especially between Sycamore and Front, was a new and densely populated neighborhood. There were lots of rooming houses and many big families. Lyton Park Place today is a quiet, two-block street running east from Rice to Oakland Cemetery. In good weather you can find a few kids on bicycles or pausing in the park. Census takers in 1905 found 141 people living in just 23 households on those two blocks, 68 of them 18 years of age or younger. Their names were Mulligan, Taack, Stinsky, Miller, Hollman, Guindon, Woods, Woodburn, Hancock, Leuzinger, Comer, Best, Martin, Douglas, Peterson, Johnson, Ordmann, and Howe. Many of these houses are still there. Another good place to see original housing, less changed than on Lyton Park, is the single block of Marion Street between Atwater Street and Milford Street.

# Rice Street Map



1

**209 Sycamore St.**  
Capital City Milling

2

**800 Block of Rice St.**  
Commercial Buildings

3

**189 Atwater St.**  
St. Mary's Romanian  
Orthodox Church

4

**1041 Marion St.**  
Washington Middle  
School

5

**1011 Rice St.**  
Rice Street Library

6

**1079 Rice St.**  
Klub Haus

7

**1116 Rice St.**  
Tschida Bakery

8

**187 Geranium Ave.**  
St. Bernard's  
Catholic Church

9

**927 Jackson St.**  
Oakland Cemetery

10

**Lytton Place &  
Sycamore St.**  
Lytton Park

barrel-vaulted ceiling gives the interior a spacious, airy feeling. Scenes from the life of the church's namesake are painted on the ceiling and behind the altar. The renovation completed in 2006 gives the building a contemporary freshness. St. Bernard's church and school continue to flourish more than 115 years after their founding.

*Right: The Interior of St. Bernard's, 1910*



## Conclusion

Does Rice Street flourish? Here and there. The last five decades have not been kind. Flight to the suburbs, school closings, and the loss of industrial work contributed to the loss of people, buildings, and neighborhood cohesion. The signs of struggle and loss are easily seen. Will Rice revive, even gentrify, as other commercial streets have done? It is hard to tell. In some ways Rice Street retains aspects of its original working class and ethnic character, but the ethnicity and the work have changed forever.

### HISTORIC SAINT PAUL

Celebrate Heritage | Renew Neighborhoods | Strengthen Community



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. See [www.historicsaintpaul.org](http://www.historicsaintpaul.org) for more information. It was made possible by:

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