

'Where the biggies leave off...'

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Neighborhood parks, neighborhood schools: Prized assets for strong communities

Alcott Triangle, Alcott School history brought to light

By Michael Wilson

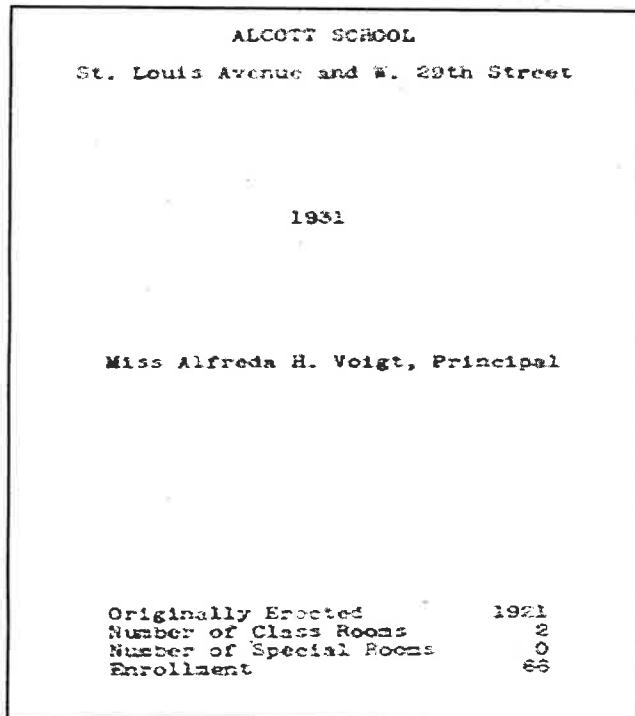
Neighborhood parks and neighborhood schools are important components in the glue that binds our communities together. They become familiar landmarks in our communities both for those who use them every day and for those who simply enjoy looking at them as they drive, walk, or bike past. Without parks and schools our neighborhoods are simply tracts of houses. With them our neighborhoods become communities.

Our four Hill and Lake neighborhoods are blessed, of course, with two of the four major lakes that comprise the Chain of Lakes Regional Park, one of the most heavily visited recreation destinations in the entire state, as well as with a fine segment of the Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway. But we also are blessed with a bounty of neighborhood parks as well, including two of the largest in the Minneapolis Parks system: 45.8-acre Parade Park, which includes Spring Lake; and 32.9-acre Kenwood Park, the jewel of our many Hill and Lake neighborhood parks.

(Ranking Minneapolis neighborhood parks by size gets a bit dicey since two of them include golf courses while others consist mostly of a lake. Go to the "Parks & Destinations" tab on the <minneapolisparcs.org> website for detailed information on all 170+ park properties, including David C. Smith's fascinating histories of each park property. Be sure to explore the section on "Triangles & Other Tiny Parks.")

Small parks: much appreciated, lovingly tended

The Lowry Hill neighborhood contains two small parks: Fremont Triangle, on Mt. Curve Avenue; and beautiful Thomas Lowry Park, lovingly maintained by dedicated neighborhood volunteers. East Isles contains



three small parks: Smith Triangle, across from Temple Israel, site of the Thomas Lowry Memorial (see related story on page one) Levin Park, also known as Levin Triangle, formerly Euclid Triangle, renamed in 1988 in grateful memory of Joanne R. Levin, who spearheaded community efforts to transform the triangle into a true neighborhood gathering place; and (interestingly enough) The Mall Park.

Cedar-Isles-Dean wins the prize with no fewer than five small parks: Chowen Triangle, at Chowen and West 28th Street; St. Louis Triangle, at Chowen and West Lake Street; West End Triangle, at Cedar Lake Avenue and West 28th Street; and Park Siding Park alongside

the Kenilworth Trail, Cedar-Isles-Dean's lovely and somewhat hidden gem, generously supported by the neighborhood through volunteer efforts and CIDNA board appropriations.

And small park number five? That would be Alcott Triangle at the intersection of St. Louis Avenue and West 29th Street, unusual if not unique among all Minneapolis properties as the orphan park that for decades no one really wanted.

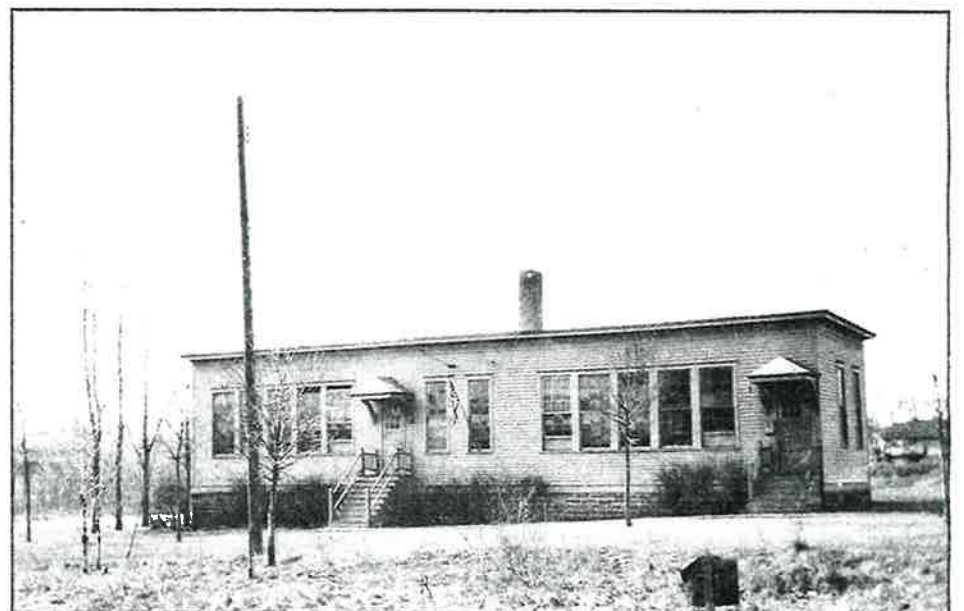
This triangular piece of land was labeled "Playground" on the 1887 plat map of the West End Addition, 2nd Division, long before houses were built in the area. The plat map made provision for a north-south street on the west side of the triangle - Abbott Avenue? Beard? - which was never built.

In 1921 three portable classrooms were moved to the site, two from Calhoun School in Uptown and one from Hale School in south Minneapolis, to form Alcott School - unusual if not unique among all Minneapolis schools in that virtually nothing is known about this small district outpost which educated Cedar-Isles-Dean children until it was closed in 1940.

Alcott Triangle: the orphan no one wanted

City records show that on June 10, 1927, the City Council voted to turn Alcott Triangle over to the Park Board. On August 9, 1927, however, the Park Board's Standing Committee on Designation and Acquisition of Grounds concluded that the property "is apparently of no use as a park but ... may be of some use in conjunction with the [neighboring Alcott] school property" and recommended that the City Council vest title to the property with the School Board.

Council proceedings indicate that the city intended



Two views (undated) of Alcott School, which stood next to Alcott Triangle on West 29th Street in the Cedar-Isles-Dean neighborhood from 1921 to 1940. Above: title page for a two-page 1931 facility report on Alcott School. If you or anyone you know attended Alcott School, or if you have recollections or information about the school, please contact us at <hillandlakepress@gmail.com> or (612) 743-6546. (Photos: Minneapolis Public Schools)

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to turn Alcott Triangle over to either the Park Board or the School Board, but apparently this was never done. According to Parks historian David C. Smith, in 1928 the School Board asked the Park Board for title to the land, but the Park Board still didn't officially own the land. In 1929 the School Board asked the Council to vacate the strip of land between the Triangle and the Alcott School grounds which had been earmarked for a street. The Council did so on May 31, 1929.

Smith writes that Park Board records do not indicate when the Board officially accepted title to the land from the city. Renay Leone, MPRB real estate planner, states that "coming at this from a real estate legal perspective, it seems that no one 'sold' the land to MPRB, but the owner of the larger parcel [between St. Louis Avenue and West 29th Street] actually dedicated it in the 1887 West End Addition 2nd Division plat as a park."

Leone continues, "Usually, that would have been enough to consider it owned by the Board of Park Commissioners, but often in those days the City of Minneapolis would take specific action to 'transfer' or 'turn over' land to the Park Board. This is apparently what happened in 1927. But apparently we didn't want it and thought it would be better off conveyed to the School Board, which we suggested the City do. Which they never did. And that pretty much brings us to today, where our practice is to consider it ours and maintain it as such."

A handwritten memo from December 1969 summarizes the prior history of the property, including a notation that "Marve Giving has cleared it [the Alcott Triangle property] for as long as he can remember." Leone surmises that 1969 "may have been when we actually did something with the land (started mowing it, or put some trees or benches on it). I haven't found anything in our files relative to the acceptance, transfer, or legal conveyance [of the property] from that era."

If parks could speak, the little orphan Alcott Triangle might say that all it wanted for decades was a little love. But the little triangle that nobody wanted might have the last laugh after all. According to Realtor and longtime Cedar-Isles-Dean resident Ed Bell, if the quarter-acre Alcott Triangle were put on the market today as a single-family home site – which the Park Board has no plans to do – its value would conservatively exceed \$300,000.

Editor's note: the story of our Hill and Lake neighborhood parks and schools will continue in our January issue, but to do so we need your help. If you or someone you know attended Alcott School, or if you're a longtime neighborhood resident with memories of Alcott School, please contact us at <hillandlakepress.com> or (612) 743-6546.