



'Where the biggies leave off...'

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Never-published aerial photographs from 1920s-30s provide bird's-eye of our Hill and Lake neighborhoods

By Michael Wilson

A remarkable treasure trove of aerial photographs of Minneapolis neighborhoods and their schools in the 1920s and '30s, never before seen by the general public nor included in institutional archival collections, has recently come to light.

The photographs were taken by Joseph E. Quigley and his associates for the Minneapolis Board of Education, presumably to aid the Board in documenting its existing schools (111 in 1930) and in planning for future growth. School district enrollment shot up from 54,000 students in 1916 to its peak of 90,073 students in 1933, necessitating replacement or expansion of old buildings and construction of new ones at a breakneck pace.

One aerial photograph from the 1920s, for example, shows Alcott School at West 29th Street and St. Louis Avenue, comprised of two portable classrooms trucked to the site, with the block between Drew and Chowen Avenues stretching from Sunset Blvd. halfway to Lake Street outlined in white, with the caption "Alcott (new site)." A new bricks-and-mortar Alcott School was never built, however, and the portables ceased operation in 1940 after district enrollment had begun its long, gradual slide.

Historical research involves a lot of digging laced with moments of serendipity, and one such moment occurred when, during my research on Alcott School, Cedar-Isles-Dean resident Nora Whiteman, who lives across from Alcott Triangle and whose mother-in-law attended Alcott School, recalled seeing aerial photos of the site many years ago. That tip led ultimately to Peg Carlson, a recently retired MPS media and information technology specialist, who has shouldered on a volunteer basis the enormous task of saving and organizing scores of boxes of old MPS photos, documents, and memorabilia. In addition to the aerial photos, Carlson has graciously shared many other items for future Hill & Lake Press stories.

According to his induction page on the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame website, Joseph Quigley was born in Minneapolis in 1892 and began his aerial photography career in 1925 when he went to work for a flying circus, taking aerial pictures and selling them. He took thousands of photos all over Minnesota for organizations such as Northwest Airlines and the Minnesota Air National Guard, whose 109th Observation Squadron he joined in 1932s as director of their photographic section. He served with the unit in WWII as an observer and aerial gunner. He retired from the Guard in 1945 and died in 1953.

Quigley's aerial photographs feature remarkable clarity due to the high-quality Fairchild cameras typically used in that era and the 8x10-inch film negatives they produced. (Glass plates had been pretty much phased out by the 1930s, according to Noel Allard, historian and board chair of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame.) Thanks to their high resolution we can zoom in on the digitized photos close enough to see our neighborhoods in exceptional detail. (Email us at <hillandlakepress@gmail.com> if you would like copies of these and other photos.)



Alcott School at the intersection of West 29th Street and St. Louis Avenue, looking northeast. Opened in 1921 and closed in 1940, Alcott consisted (in this picture) of three portable classrooms. West Lake Street is at the bottom right, Lake of the Isles at the upper right. Note the grain silos and associated buildings, repurposed in the 1970s as Calhoun-Isles Condominiums. Note also the intensive railroad use at the confluence of the Kenilworth Corridor and today's Midtown Greenway.



Douglas School at the northwest corner of Dupont and Franklin Avenues, with the 1923 addition on the Emerson Avenue side. The Scottish Rite Temple is in the lower right corner. The second school built on this site, Douglas School, opened in 1894 and closed in 1974.

Photos: Minneapolis Public Schools, courtesy of Peg Carlson.