

'Where the biggies leave off...'

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Never-published 1920s-30s aerial photos of city's neighborhoods spark great interest, may go online

By Michael Wilson

Interest in a treasure trove of never-before-published 80-year-old aerial photographs of Minneapolis neighborhoods, first seen in last month's Hill & Lake Press, has swelled to the point that moves are afoot to make the entire collection available online to the public.

The images were taken in the early 1930s by noted aerial photography pioneer Joe Quigley, hired by the Minneapolis Public Schools' facilities and planning department to document all 111 school buildings in use at the time and to scout out sites for further expansion. The photographs were never intended for viewing by the general public and have languished for years in boxes and file drawers at North Star School, once the largest elementary school in the state and now a warehouse and repository for district support functions and old school records.

As reported in last month's HLP, district enrollment rocketed from 54,000 students in 1916 to a peak of 90,073 in 1933, an increase in just 17 years of 36,000 students – equal to the entire district enrollment of today. District officials were working overtime back then to find ways to accommodate the flood of new faces. The aerial photographs were one of their planning tools.

Fast forward to 2016 and to the remarkable volunteer efforts of Peg Carlson, a retired MPS media and information technology specialist described by former Burroughs School librarian Nancy Hennen as "tireless" and having "a heart of gold." Carlson has taken on the enormous task of saving and organizing hundreds of boxes and file cabinets of old MPS photos, documents, and memorabilia.

Although Carlson is known to historians and preservationists such as Ted Hathaway, senior librarian and manager of Special Collections at Hennepin County



West High figures prominently in this photo of Uptown and the southern end of the East Isles neighborhood. Calhoun School is on the right, facing Girard between Lake and 31st streets. Zoom in to see Jefferson Jr. High on the left at West 26th and Fremont; the property that is now the Jefferson playground was in private hands back then. Note that The Mall connected directly to Hennepin Avenue. The 29th Street trench – today's Midtown Greenway – was an active freight rail line.

Photos: Minneapolis Public Schools, courtesy of Peg Carlson. Captions: Michael Wilson



Noted aerial photography pioneer Joe Quigley (standing) used a high-quality Fairchild camera and 8x10 negative film to capture remarkably clear images of school properties and neighborhoods across all of Minneapolis. Enrollment soared during the 1920s, peaking at 90,073 in 1932-33, and the district's Planning Department used the new technology of aerial photography to help decide what to build, and where. Quigley's images predate the earliest known aerials of Minneapolis by ten years. (Photo: Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame, courtesy of Noel Allard.)



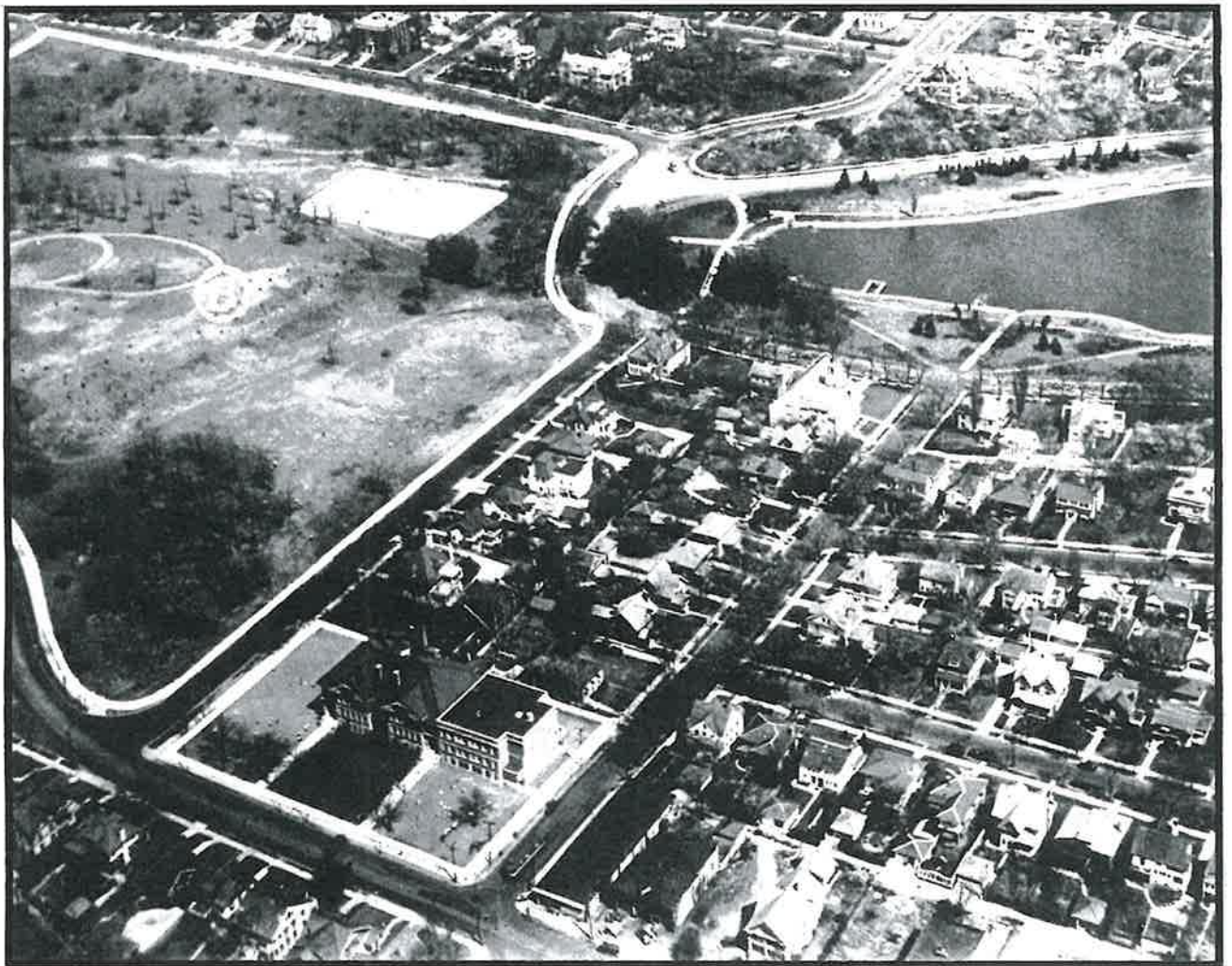
Peg Carlson, retired Minneapolis Public Schools media and information technology specialist, shows Ted Hathaway (left), senior librarian and manager of Special Collections at Hennepin County Library, and Hill & Lake Press writer Michael Wilson (right) some of the hundreds of previously unpublished aerial photographs of Minneapolis schools and neighborhoods dating from the late 1920s-early 1930s. The collection currently resides in cardboard boxes and file cabinets in an unused MPS former elementary school. (Photo: Chad Carr.)

Library, and StarTribune writer and columnist James Eli Shiffer, they were unaware of the Quigley aerials. Minneapolis City Clerk and history buff Casey Carl and Christian Rummelhoff, assistant city clerk in charge of the Records and Information Management Division, likewise had never seen the Quigley aerials before the March Hill & Lake Press broke the news.

Hathaway is currently in talks with Chad Carr, manager of Real Estate and Business for the district, for Special Collections to take over conservatorship of the photo archives, which also include boxfuls of beautiful and very old glass-plate photographs. Hathaway is stressing that not only will the general public benefit from being able to examine all these photographs; students will be able to access them too for History Day projects and other purposes.

Last month's HLP carried aerial photos of the Lowry Hill and Cedar-Isles-Dean neighborhoods. To examine those photos as well as the two photos printed on this page of the Kenwood and East Isles neighborhoods, go to our website (<hillandlakepress.com>), click on "Past and Present Issues," and open the PDF version of this or last month's issue. Use your computer's "Zoom In" command to examine these remarkable images in as much detail as you want.

Check out also the outstanding collection of aerial photos at the U of MN's Borchert Map Library (<www.lib.umn.edu/apps/mhapo/>). Note however that the earliest aerials in the Borchert collection date from 1938. The Quigley photos are five years older – and you saw them first in Hill & Lake Press!



Joe Quigley's remarkably crisp photo of Kenwood School shows a largely undeveloped Kenwood Park outlined in white. The reason is unknown; certainly the school district wasn't planning to acquire part of the park for school purposes. Note that Franklin and Penn avenues meet at right angles at the corner of the school property. Taking a slice of parkland on the northeast corner in order to build Kenwood Rec Center was a battle that would be fought in the 1970s. St. Paul's Episcopal Church wasn't built on the corner of Logan and Franklin until 1956, as Kathy Kullberg recounts in her March 2016 article.

Author's Note: Joe Quigley's remarkable collection of aerial photographs, upwards of 200 in all, lay in a file cabinet at the Minneapolis Public Schools' Planning Department, undisturbed and almost entirely unknown, for 85 years, from 1933 until October 29, 2018, when the Special Collections Department at Hennepin County Library took ownership and moved them, plus many other school district historical treasures, to their preservation workshop at the downtown Central Library. Over the next several months Quigley's aerials will be digitized and uploaded to the library's website for all to enjoy.

It was a thrill in January and February 2016 to discover, by sheer happenstance, the existence of this collection. Individual shots, with their distinctive diagonal angle, had appeared occasionally on old-photo websites, but no one I spoke to had any inkling that a large collection of such aerials existed. Thus I felt safe in writing a headline about the "never-before published" aerials.

I did not take fully into account, however, the roster of distinguished folks who have written for Hill & Lake Press starting in 1976 -- including Will Craig, the associate director emeritus at the UM's Center for Urban & Regional Affairs and internationally known as a leading figure in the technical and institutional development of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). A Kenwood resident along with his wife Ginny, a mainstay for many years of KIAA and Hill & Lake Press, Will's byline appeared 17 times in the paper above substantial stories (such as "Light rail transit through neighborhood is temporarily derailed" in October 1984). In fact, in 1991 Will won the First Place Award for Best Investigative Story from the Twin Cities Neighborhood Press Association.

So ... "never-before published" anywhere else, that is, except in the pages of Hill & Lake Press -- twice!

(Michael Wilson / November 1, 2018)

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HILL and LAKE PRESS

March 6, 1982

The way we were: old photos show early vitality

by Will Craig

The aerial photos on these pages show the Hill and Lake Press neighborhood as it was half a century ago. They were found in the archives of the Minneapolis Public Schools. Each shows a school and its surrounding neighborhood in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Drastic changes since that time have occurred in the areas farthest from downtown. Changes in the older portions of the neighborhood are more subtle. Trees have grown. The few vacant lots have been filled. Additions have been made. In a few cases, older buildings have been replaced. Try to see what changes you can find.

West High is at the bottom of the upper left photo. Behind West is a panorama of the neighborhood. Note the trails of three steam locomotives. Two are on the M&St.

L. (now Chicago Northwestern) tracks between the lakes. The other is highballing west on the tracks to the south (left) of Lake of the Isles.

Douglas School is in the lower left photo. Franklin Avenue is at the bottom and Hennepin Avenue, complete with streetcar tracks, is in the upper right.

Kenwood School is at the bottom of the upper right photo--with a white line around it. The line around Kenwood Park probably indicates early School Board consideration of linking the facilities. Sound familiar? This is our current neighborhood plan.

Alcott School is in the lower right photo. Don't be embarrassed if you have never heard of it. The wood frame building was used only from 1921 through 1940; the site was sold in 1946. The neighborhood is the Sunset Sub-

division south of Cedar Lake. Lake Street is on the right and France Avenue, near the bottom. Alcott School is the white structure about one inch below the grain elevators in the upper right quadrant.

The Alcott photo may be the most interesting since so much change has occurred since it was taken. Note the virtually empty areas north (left) of the elevators. These areas now contain the Xerxes Avenue apartment complex and the Park Lane area. Below France Avenue is an empty St. Louis Park. Sunset Boulevard, originally platted as a rail right-of-way, has undergone much change above its intersection with Chowen. Landmarks remain however. Cedar Lake is the top left and the Calhoun Beach Club is in the upper right corner.