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Quigley aerials from 1920s-30s featured in May 23 program

By Michael Wilson

Folks who want to see more of the remarkable Joe Quigley aerial photographs will have another opportunity on Wednesday, May 23, when the Linden Hills History Study Group presents "Southwest Minneapolis 1930: From the Air." The program at St. John's Episcopal Church, 4201 Sheridan Ave. S., begins at 7 pm.

Minneapolis public school enrollment soared during the 1920s, often by as many as 2800 additional students per year and once, in 1920-21, by 4000 additional students. District enrollment reached an all-time high in 1932-33 of 90,073 students. (Current MPS enrollment is 36,531.)

Finding enough sites and money to build new schools and expand existing ones was a challenge, to say the least. Imagine having to build the equivalent of four new Kenwood Schools every single year! One of the Planning Department's strategies to address this challenge was to hire Joe Quigley, a district plumbing supervisor who was also a pioneer aerial photographer, to survey all district schools and Minneapolis neighborhoods from the air.

First published in 1982 HLP.

Quigley was a photographer, not a pilot. (That's Joe, standing behind the cameraman in the May 23 program flyer.) He used a large Fairchild camera which made high-resolution 12-inch negatives. And since Quigley didn't have to worry about flying the plane at the same time, he could aim and take diagonal photos ("obliques") which show the sides of buildings, not just the tops.

By contrast, the earliest aerials of the Twin Cities in the collection of the world-famous Borchert Map Library at the University of Minnesota date from 1938, ten years later than Quigley's. And the Borchert aerials are low-resolution, grainy orthogonals - straight down.

I first came across the Quigley aerials in January 2016, thanks to a James Eli Schiffer article in the StarTribune which led me to Peg Carlson, a fellow MPS retiree. When the district moved out of its longtime office/storage/warehouse building at 807 NE Broadway, there was talk of trashing the historical collections, which were just a jumble of boxes. Carlson stepped in to save the aerials, which now sit in a file cabinet in the lower level of North Star School — coincidentally, in what used to be Kenwood resident Julie Sabo's 4th grade classroom.



In the late 1920s and early 1930s, pioneer aerial photographer Joe Quigley was hired to take images of all Minneapolis schools. These remarkable high-resolution photos have been in the school district files for 80 years. Join local historians Michael Wilson and Tom Balcom to learn about Minneapolis schools and view the Southwest neighborhoods circa 1930.

Wednesday May 23, 7:00 p.m.

St. John's Episcopal Church
4201 Sheridan Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55410

JOIN THE LINDEN HILLS
HISTORY STUDY GROUP
Everyone is welcome.

Courtesy Linden Hills History Study Group

In March 2016 Hill & Lake Press published my article with the breathless headline, "Never-published aerial photos from 1920s-30s provide birds-eye views of our Hill and Lake neighborhoods." Imagine my pleasant surprise (and chagrin) when two months later, while reading through all 427 old issues of HLP in preparation for the paper's 40th anniversary celebration, I discovered that the estimable Will Craig had published the exact same aerials in the March 1982 HLP ("The way we were: old photos show early vitality").

School district shows no interest thus far.

People seeing the Quigley aerials invariably ask, "Why aren't these amazing photos available to the public?" Ted Hathaway, senior librarian at Hennepin County Library's Special Collections department, and I have been trying to make that happen for the past two years. It should be easy: sign a transfer of ownership, load the aerials into a HCL van, and drive them downtown to Special Collections, where archivists will preserve and digitize them and put them up on the Digital Collections website.

It would be a win-win situation, right? The school district is freed of historical treasures which they have no plans (or money) to do anything with. The public, including MPS students and teachers, get free and ready access. It *would* be, that is — if the district had shown even a smidgen of interest over the past two years. Instead, district officials have met Hathaway's and my repeated efforts with a cold shoulder and stony silence.

Stay tuned for further developments. And attend the May 23rd program to see Minneapolis 1930 through the camera of Joe Quigley.