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## **BACKGROUND**

STUDENT RESEARCH YIELDS HISTORIC CONNECTIONS

December 11, 2000, from 6-7 PM at Intermedia Arts

PRESENTATION BY URBAN GEOGRAPHY STUDENTS

Of David Lanegran, Ph.D., Dean of Social Sciences at Macalester College  
ON GREENWAY CORRIDOR

To members of Midtown Community Works Partnership, Public Art Committee, Greenway Coalition, Project Resource Team, Public Art Demonstration Project Writers and Photographers, and others interested in the Greenway

*Welcome*

Gretchen Freeman

*Introduction and Overview*

David Lanegran

*Urbanization of South Minneapolis*

Patrick Baldwin

*Death and Destruction in South Minneapolis – Depressing the Milwaukee Tracks*

Ben Matukas and Patrick Baldwin

*Development of the Lake Street Business Community*

Talia Sadowy

*The Changing Identities of Lake Street Neighborhoods, from Development Plans to Personal Narratives*

Michaela Ahern

The background research conducted by the Macalester students yielded two major arguments that tie the planning for the future of the Greenway to its past. Simply stated, they are as follows: 1) The very existence of the Greenway is an expression of community activism and 2) demographic change is a constant for Greenway neighborhoods. The awareness of these two forces, of community activism and of demographic change, should be reflected in the work and art to come as the Greenway gains new uses and new users.

## *The Greenway as an Expression of Community Activism*

Community activism created a legacy for the Greenway. As Eden Spencer notes in *The Twenty-Ninth Street Tracks: From Neighborhood Activism to City Power*,

“Today people pass over the tracks which run parallel to Lake Street along 29th Street not realizing their importance to the city of Minneapolis. Eighty-five years after the depression project was completed these tracks will now provide entertainment for area residents rather than a possible tango with death. What began as a neighborhood petition to save lives ended up defining the powers of railroad companies, industries, the railroad commission, and the city. It was a project meant to better the neighborhoods in South Minneapolis, but it also managed to better the entire city as well.”

From the late 1880s through the early 1900s, the population of Minneapolis increased significantly as the reach of the railroads extended to serve the flour industry and other businesses. The clash between their competing interests — to minimize dangerous crossings and the deaths that resulted from them, versus the desire to sustain and develop local and long distance rail links — fueled a controversy that continued for many years. The Reverend E.P. Savage began circulating petitions and the newspapers asked in large headlines, “Why Does the City Council Dawdle, With Death Still on Watch at Grade Crossings?” (March 15, 1908) The controversy went all the way to the Minnesota Supreme Court, which rendered one of the most important decisions at that time for the city of Minneapolis: The right to regulate commerce and exercise its police power without interference by the state railroad commission or by the owners of the most “glamorous” industry of the time, the railroads, or by any private industry. The power of the railroad had never previously been successfully challenged by the city and the forced depression of the Milwaukee Road tracks is evidence of the power of communities and the city to act on its own behalf to determine its landscape, transportation corridors, and character.

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What began as activism within the community grew to be a powerful force for change. The legacy of that power and that change, which is the Greenway itself, should be reflected in the work and art to come as the Greenway gains new uses. Rather than hide the historic industrial evidence of the past, the Greenway can celebrate these industrial “leftovers” and integrate them into the fabric of the future landscape.

### *The Dynamics of Demographic Change*

The constancy of demographic change is a key finding that can drive the connection between the past and present. As Ben Matuzas notes in *Changing Demographics in the Area Around the Greenway 1940-1990*, the urbanization of South Minneapolis beginning in the 1880s was directly related to improvements in the transportation systems, especially the steel railroads, which allowed flows of goods from the upper Midwestern hinterlands into and out of the new marketing centers of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The growth of the neighborhoods of South Minneapolis from the 1880s to the 1920s was due to expansion from crowded central districts, improved streetcar transportation, the pavement of Lake Street, and increased automobile ownership.

A slower growth of the city and Greenway neighborhoods occurred during the 1920s because of immigration quotas of 1921 and '24, a general economic slowdown, the decline of wheat farming in the Midwest, and continued escalation of auto ownership and a movement toward living in auto-scaled edges of the city.

During the decades of 1930 to 1980, the inner city and Lake Street lost its luster and population declined, especially the entrepreneurial population, as storeowners moved to the edges of the city and its new suburbs. Autos were no longer considered a luxury and people could afford to separate home life and the work place.

With the completion of 35W in 1969, traffic bypassed the Lake Street shopping areas, and lower income groups began to inherit the stock of affordable housing. While there was virtually no black population in the Greenway area until 1950, there was a rapid influx of blacks through the 1970s and 80s, which was later repeated by Hispanic and African immigrants in the

1980s and 1990s. These and other new groups that moved to the central area of the Greenway helped offset the population loss from white citizens leaving the area. Minority influences have made the Lake Street and surrounding area one of the most diverse areas in the Twin Cities.

Economic activity along Lake Street also mirrors demographic change. As Talia Sadowy notes in *The Evolution of Lake Street: A Study of the Economic Development along Lake Street, Minneapolis, from 1930-1990*,

“The streetcars allowed for the development of nodes of commercial activity at intersections where trolley lines met. Passengers rode the lines with their neighbors, and most businesses were small and family owned. The automobile had a great effect on Lake Street, first aiding in its development and later adding to its demise. During the 1920s and 1930s, Lake Street was the center for automobiles in Minneapolis. Auto shops occupied a great portion of the street and contributed to its success. But by the 1960s, increased automobile use in the Twin Cities led to the suburbanization of Minneapolis. Highways and shopping malls took people away from Lake Street, as they gravitated toward enclosed, climate controlled shopping with easy access to parking. Lake Street began to deteriorate with an influx of porn shops and large numbers of vacancies. Recently, immigrant entrepreneurs and inner-city developers have begun to reverse this trend with new commercial developments along the strip. While the exact future of Lake Street is unknown, it is certain that with public and private investments – and with local initiatives – Lake Street will continue to be a commercial hub for South Minneapolis and for the Twin Cities.”

Today’s immigrant and minority populations share much with their antecedents: all immigrant groups lead to a turnaround for the Greenway neighborhoods from the 1880s to the present, and all share in increasing opportunities to find affordable housing and entrepreneurial prospects as they create areas of high density. More recent newcomers to the neighborhoods (Native Americans, immigrant Southeast Asians, and Africans included) stabilize neighborhoods and redefine community.

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As Michaela Ahern concludes in *Themes of Change, The Identities and Diversity of Neighborhoods along Lake Street*,

“The neighborhoods of Lake Street have grown and developed with the ebbs and flows of this historic street. Each new generation brings fresh looks and different identities. From the time Lake Street was settled to today, new waves of people bring unique perspectives and elements of character. Running alongside this historic marker, the Midtown Greenway will bring even new dimensions to the complex neighborhood identities. Serving not only as a quick and easy way to travel across Minneapolis, the Greenway has the potential to connect the diverse, yet interconnected neighborhoods of Lake Street.”

For over a hundred years, there have been continuous waves of new groups moving to the Greenway area, putting down roots, developing homes and businesses. The process continues to today and the Greenway must celebrate this change and continuity.

### *Midtown Greenway Coalition*

The Midtown Greenway Coalition agreed to engage in an on-going project to map the character of the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the Greenway. The results of this mapping project, when complete, will provide a valuable source of information for artists working on public art projects in the Greenway.

### CHARACTER MAPPING QUESTIONS

Landmarks in your neighborhood: What would you take a visitor to see? Is it beautiful? Historical? Humorous?

Institutions or cultural sites: What anchors hold your neighborhood together? School? Church? Library? Theatre? Shops?

Is there a building material – for houses or fences, or a plant type – that is so typical of your neighborhood that, when you see it, you know you are home?

Who are the people who live here? Is the neighborhood fast-moving, with new neighbors all the time? Or is it slow-moving, with long-term residents?

Can you name something, someplace, or some people that, if gone tomorrow, would cause this neighborhood to stop being this neighborhood?

Give us one word that describes your dream for the Greenway.