



## History\*

The West Side is the only St. Paul neighborhood south of the Mississippi River. It has three distinct topographies: the bluffs, the terrace, and the flats. The West Side's identity pre-dates the City of St. Paul. When early merchant ships brought goods north to trade with the first peoples on this land, the Dakota, traders were often told to unload their vessels on the west side of their ships for trading. This area would become Dakota County and St. Paul, in Ramsey County, was established across the river. However, through a settlement over tax trade crossing the bridge into Ramsey County, the City of St. Paul acquired the land from Dakota County, and this area was officially called the "West Side" of St. Paul within Ramsey County.

The West Side was originally inhabited by the Dakota peoples, who lived in the area because of its diverse natural resources. They were forcibly displaced from the land throughout what is now St. Paul, including the West Side, by northern Europeans in the mid-1800s. French Canadians and New Englanders were the first non-indigenous residents of the Flats, followed by Irish and Germans. Due to political events in Russia, Russian Jews immigrated to the West Side Flats and by 1915, more than 70% of the Flats residents were Jewish. In the twentieth century, non-Jews such as Christian Syrians and Mexican Americans arrived to the Flats in significant numbers.

The Mississippi flooded every spring, directly affecting the Flats and its residents. In 1952, the flood was severe enough to show the vulnerability of frame houses\* on a floodplain. In 1956, the city's Port Authority announced the creation of Riverview Industrial Park, which would consume the land of the Flats. As a result of this decision, life for those living on the Flats changed quickly and significantly. In 1961, the city began buying the houses, only to tear them down in 1962. By the end of 1963, all the residents had been displaced from the Flats. In 1964, a flood wall was built. While the flood wall was necessary to protect the Flats, it was built solely to benefit industries rather than restore the families to their homes. The life of the industrial park was short-lived, yet left behind toxic sites that have affected generations.

Today, the West Side continues to be racially, ethnically and economically diverse. According to the Minnesota Compass report, "Planning District 3: West Side Neighborhood" (2018), 55% of West Side residents are people of color. The Metropolitan Council reports 75% of the West Side is an "Area of Concentrated Poverty" which means 40% of the residents have incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty threshold. The West Side continues the legacy of being a historic immigrant community even today, with one in five residents born outside the United States and over a third (34%) speaking a language other than English at home (ACS 2012-2016). Given these statistics, it is easy to recognize the West Side's vulnerability to those interested in its rich natural resources. We honor the original people of this land by creating a unified vision that protects our environment for future generations. Dakota people would say, 'Mitákuye Oyásin'. We are all related.

\* from the WSCO Equitable Scorecard History section