





# SNIVELY'S ROAD

M A R K R Y A N

*Winding Mission Creek Road, native-stone  
bridge, and Hupmobile, about 1926*

IN THE LATE SUMMER of 1929, dignitaries gathered to dedicate Duluth's recently completed Skyline Parkway, a picturesque drive winding high above Lake Superior along the crest of the city's hills. Among those present was Mayor Samuel F. Snively, the man chiefly responsible for the construction and development of the unique boulevard system. Through personal determination and a remarkable talent for raising donations, Snively brought more than three-quarters of the parkway to fruition, helping establish one of Duluth's most noted landmarks.

Terrace Parkway, as the initial portion of the road was first called, was the brainchild of William K. Rogers, a native of Ohio who became president of the State Bank of Duluth and the city's first park board. In 1888 Rogers had presented a plan for a hilltop boulevard that would follow the ancient gravel shoreline left by glacial Lake Namadji, a larger ancestor of present-day Lake Superior. A companion park stretching along Lake Superior's shore from Seventh Avenue East to Fortieth Avenue East would be connected by perpendicular links following several rivers and creeks that plunged from the crest of the hills toward the lake. In the late 1880s

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*Equestrians explore Terrace Parkway in springtime, 1890s*

Duluth experienced a real estate boom, and city officials optimistically foresaw a population growth of nearly half a million within five years. They deemed a park system such as the one Rogers suggested an essential advertising tool for promoting the up-and-coming city.<sup>1</sup>

During the last half of the nineteenth century, a strong park-building movement led by Frederick Law Olmsted was sweeping across the United States. As the size and density of the country's population centers grew, the demand for urban open space also increased. Parks were established in many cities, including New York's Central Park in 1853, Philadelphia's Fairmont

Park in 1867, and Boston's Franklin Park in 1883. Nor was park building restricted to urban settings. The country's first national park, Yellowstone, was created in 1872, as were several county and state park systems such as Minnesota's, begun in 1891 with Itasca State Park. Rogers's plan for Duluth fit well into the movement's emphasis on following the natural contours and features of the land.<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1887, Duluth's board of public works had surveyed the natural boulevard line along the crest of the hills, and a newspaper editorial that same year appealed to the city council and citizens to develop a parks system. When the city created a park board two years later, the

<sup>1</sup> *Duluth Herald*, Apr. 10, 1933, sec. 2, p. 6, Apr. 29, 1911, p. 25, Aug. 4, 1910, p. 8, hereafter *Herald*; R. L. Polk and Co.'s *Duluth Directory*, 1887–1888, p. 363; *Duluth News Tribune*, Mar. 31, 1935, p. 4, hereafter *News Tribune*; Dora M. McDonald, *This Is Duluth* (Duluth: Central H. S. Printing Dept., 1950), 12; *Duluth Tribune*, Jan. 21, 1887, p. 4, hereafter *Tribune*; Duluth Dept. of Parks and Recreation, *1911 Annual Report of Board of Park Commissioners* [n.p.].

<sup>2</sup> William D. Hunt, Jr., *Encyclopedia of American Architecture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1980), 399; Charles E. Doell and Gerald B. Fitzgerald, *A Brief History of Parks and Recreation in the United States* (Chicago: Athletic Institute, 1954), 58; Roy W. Meyer, *Everyone's Country Estate: A History of Minnesota's Parks* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991), 5.





*A popular tallyho caravan, 1900s*

Minnesota legislature gave it the power to fund parks through municipal bonds. A \$300,000 bond was eventually issued, and work on the first leg of Terrace Parkway began in 1889 under Rogers's close supervision. By midsummer three miles of boulevard were nearly ready for use. When finished two years later at a cost of \$312,000, the roadway ran 450 to 600 feet above lake level from Chester Creek in the east to Millers Creek in Lincoln Park (then called Garfield). Rustic logs rimmed the drive, and granite boulders lined curves, such as those around the small lakes known as Twin Ponds.<sup>3</sup>

"Tallyhos" became the popular vehicle for excursions along the boulevard. Teams of four or six horses usually pulled these single- and double-decker coaches that seated up to 15 passengers. Luxury steamers coming from the east made weekly calls to the port of Duluth, where tallyhos

would line the dock. They also stopped at the downtown Spalding Hotel for riders. Coaching parties became a common sight, and tallyho caravans carrying large groups of sightseers—as many as 30 wagonloads at a time—traveled along the hilltop to present their passengers with stunning panoramas of the city and its large harbor. When presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan campaigned in Duluth in 1900, he toured the boulevard and reportedly agreed afterward with the local assessment that there was no finer drive in America. The *Duluth Daily News* claimed Terrace Parkway's only rival in the world was along the Mediterranean. After Luther Mendenhall succeeded Rogers on the park board, that body eventually renamed the parkway Rogers Boulevard. Despite its popularity, by century's end it still spanned only about five miles.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> McDonald, *This Is Duluth*, 95; *Tribune*, May 20, 1887, p. 4; *Duluth Evening Herald*, July 1, 1889, p. 3, July 11, 1889, p. 3, hereafter *Evening Herald*; *Herald*, Aug. 4, 1910, p. 8; 1911 *Report of Park Commissioners*.

<sup>4</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, Jan. 19, 1964, Picture Magazine, p. 18; *Evening Herald*, Oct. 1, 1900, p. 1; McDonald, *This Is Duluth*, 96, 123; *Herald*, Apr. 10, 1933, sec. 2, p. 6; 1911 *Report of Park Commissioners*.

**E**nter Samuel Frisby Snively. Born near Greencastle, Pennsylvania, on November 24, 1859, and a graduate of a Philadelphia law school, Snively had arrived in Duluth on March 21, 1886. Twenty-six years old and with only \$15 in his pocket, he had by year's end formed a partnership with another lawyer, Charles P. Craig, creating what would become a notable law firm in the city's early history.<sup>5</sup>

Snively was a "good-sized man," recalled his niece, Zelda Snively Overland. "Broad shouldered, with a tenor voice, steel-blue eyes, light brown hair. Gregarious, outgoing, but stern. He didn't fool around; he wasn't that kind of person."<sup>6</sup>

Snively's short diary, kept during his first year in Duluth, reveals a man who worked hard at his law practice and at bettering himself. He often spent evenings working at his office, socializing at the homes of friends, or attending lectures on English literature. Walks around town and visits to a gymnasium kept him in good physical health.<sup>7</sup>

Snively's diary also reveals that he spent much of his time as a lawyer examining abstracts for real estate transactions. Seeing land prices beginning to surge fired a new passion in the attorney. The final entry in his diary, dated January 27, 1887, reads: "Spent the evening alone in the office drawing complaints and dreaming over real estate."<sup>8</sup>

Like the rivers and creeks cascading down the slopes of his newfound city, Snively became known as a "plunger." Possessing the ability and

persistence to turn dreams into reality, within a few short years he amassed a small fortune buying and selling real estate. He just as quickly lost it in the panic of 1893 which swept across the country.<sup>9</sup>

Snively left the city a few years later to try his luck prospecting in the gold fields of

Alaska. When that proved unsuccessful, he returned to Duluth, where he established a real estate business called the Spring Garden Company and began developing property he owned in the back country above the eastern Duluth neighborhoods of Lakeside and Lester Park. In 1901 he started building a summer home there. The house, which featured stone walls as much as two feet thick, became the centerpiece of a 400-acre farm. Snively raised dairy cattle and feed crops, and the farm, profitable from the start, was known for its beautiful setting and layout. Offering an impressive glimpse of Lake Superior through nearby Amity Creek valley, the property included two stone barns, a bunkhouse, and a small racetrack in front of the house. Farm guests could bet on

horse races or eat lunch in the pines along the creek north of the house where he had designed and constructed several picnic sites with stone tables and benches.<sup>10</sup>

Snively had inherited his appreciation for the outdoors from his mother, Margaret H. Snively. "My mother," he once wrote, "was a woman of restless energy, a lover of all that was grand and beautiful in nature, and an influential representa-



*Samuel Snively, father of Duluth's parkway system*

<sup>5</sup> Samuel F. Snively, "Autobiography," Aug. 5, 1931, typescript, 2 p., biography file, Duluth Public Library; *Herald*, Jan. 23, 1938, p. 1, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Zelda Snively Overland, interview by author, tape recording in author's possession, Duluth, May 17, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel F. Snively, Diary, Jan. 1, 1887, in possession of Douglas Overland, New Brighton, Minnesota. Snively kept the diary from Jan. 9 until Jan. 27, 1887. Contained is a memoranda section with a few entries dated between Sept. 10 and Oct. 8, 1888.

<sup>8</sup> *Herald*, Apr. 29, 1911, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> *News Tribune*, Nov. 23, 1934, p. 1, 2, Jan. 23, 1938, p. 1, 2; *Herald*, Apr. 29, 1911, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Overland interview; Durbin Keeney (former owner of Snively house), telephone interview with author, May 18, 1991; *News Tribune*, May 7, 1911, sec. 3, p. 1, Jan. 23, 1938, p. 1, 2; *Duluth Directory*, 1898, p. 454; Henry A. Castle, *Minnesota, Its Story and Biography* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1915), 2:811.

tive of that which was most ennobling and uplifting in life.”<sup>11</sup>

These were all traits that Snively himself possessed. He often took long treks alone surveying and assessing his land until he knew every byway and section. At the turn of the century he began building a road along Amity Creek, the western branch of the Lester River. “I was then impressed,” he recalled, “with the beauty of this stream, its winding course, its dells and falls.”<sup>12</sup>

Snively foresaw his road eventually joining up with the planned eastern extension of Rogers Boulevard. The hardships he saw in 1893 had apparently sparked in him the dual-purpose idea of developing the city boulevard system for posterity and providing jobs for the unemployed during hard times. “I knew the ownerships of the different tracts of land through which this roadway would extend,” he later stated, “and thought it probable to secure this right of way on the theory of having communications with other existing roadways. . . . After much writing and explaining,” he continued, “the right of way was pledged but on condition that the road should be built.”<sup>13</sup>

Donating 60 acres of his own to the project, Snively appealed to fellow property owners for financial help to build the road. With \$1,600 collected and money out of his own pocket, he began construction in 1899. The city of Duluth pledged an additional \$1,500 with the stipulation that the completed road be turned over to the city. Snively hired men living nearby to do the work and himself supervised the progress.<sup>14</sup>

“It was a very costly and difficult road to build,” he said. “Amid the dead and down timber, the brush and trees had grown, and there were many trees and stumps all difficult of removal, and the nature of the creek demanded long and high bridges, and there was also the important feature of building the road to assure the best scenic and park development without regard to the ease of construction.”<sup>15</sup>

Snively often joined in on the pick-and-shovel work himself, a practice he would continue into

his eighties. “He loved to work,” recalled Douglas Overland, Snively’s great-nephew. “He was an extremely strong man. A powerful man. He’d jump right into a hole and start digging with them.”<sup>16</sup>

Building roads was in Snively’s blood. His Swiss ancestors were engineers who had worked as surveyors for William Penn, platting what would later become Pennsylvania. Penn rewarded them with two counties of land in the Cumberland Valley, Samuel Snively’s birthplace, but all that remained of that inheritance for his father, Jacob S. Snively, was a small farm.<sup>17</sup>

When completed, Snively’s road ran along Amity Creek southwest into Colbyville near the site of his new house. Concerned especially with the beauty of the drive, he made it wind picturesquely into the hills through pine forests and cross the river in 10 places, for which he had rustic wooden bridges constructed. The venture was only partly altruistic, since the road also provided easier access to his and other hilltop farms than the steep, older route. Remembering the project, Snively recalled that he “built the road north from Lester Park, including the bridges, and for a distance of about two and a half miles beyond, and then stopped suddenly in a heavy bank of clay, feeling the need of financial refreshment.”<sup>18</sup>

The pause gave citizens an opportunity to view the road’s progress and the beauty of the creekside scenery. Additional donations came forward, and the road was finished in 1901. Two years later the city extended it westward to Twenty-Sixth Avenue East and Third Street in Duluth’s east hillside district. In the end Snively Road (as it came to be called) cost more than \$12,000, nearly half of which came from his own pocket. Although he also had plans to build a parallel roadway on the other side of the ridge, for the time being he handed over his road to the city and turned his attention back to his farm, his mining interests on Minnesota’s Mesabi Iron Range, and his real estate activities.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, Duluth continued to enhance and advertise the celebrated, if short, Rogers Boule-

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<sup>11</sup> “Autobiography.”

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Overland, interview with author, tape recording in author’s possession, New Brighton, May 23, 1991; *News Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1934, feature sec., p. 1, July 6, 1912, p. 7, Apr. 7, 1937, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *News Tribune*, July 6, 1912, p. 7, Mar. 19, 1939, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Legal notice, *Herald*, July 29, 1911, p. 26; *News Tribune*, Jan. 23, 1938, p. 1, July 6, 1912, p. 7; *Evening Herald*, May 18, 1900.

<sup>15</sup> *News Tribune*, July 6, 1912, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 26, 1926, p. 8, Nov. 24, 1934, p. 1; *News Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1934, feature sec., p. 1; D. Overland interview.

<sup>17</sup> “Autobiography”; *Herald*, Nov. 7, 1952, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 7, 1903, p. 13; *News Tribune*, July 6, 1912, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 7, 1903, p. 13; *News Tribune*, July 6, 1912, p. 7, Nov. 11, 1934, feature sec., p. 1.



vard. To replace the aging fence that had lined it, the park board planted more than 2,000 trees. By 1907 an additional three miles of road had been started to the west. A portion of this was the work of Leonidas Merritt, one of the original discoverers of the Mesabi Range. The park board reimbursed Merritt for his effort and later finished the extension with money from a \$50,000 bond issued in 1910.<sup>20</sup>

That same summer, the *Duluth Herald* organized a contest to rename the expanding boulevard system (and, no doubt, sell papers). Because the official name, Rogers Boulevard, had never achieved much popularity—most people simply referred to it as “The Boulevard”—the paper’s editors called for a more descriptive title to help promote it, especially to out-of-towners. The final choice, an announcement read, would be left up to the park board, but the reader who suggested the winning name would receive a \$10 check from the newspaper.<sup>21</sup>

Over the summer some 1,500 entries from around the state and as far away as New York poured in. Among the possibilities were such names as Kitchi Gammi Drive, Lovers’ Lane, Zenith Promenade, Hillcrest Boulevard, and Grand View Drive. The names Skyline Drive and Skyline Parkway were even offered, but they would have to wait several decades to be appreciated.<sup>22</sup>

While a number of citizens including the park board’s Mendenhall protested that the boulevard already had a name, the contest continued. In the end, not surprisingly, the park board chose reader Ada White’s suggestion: Rogers Boulevard. As before, the name never caught on, and within a few months the paper was again referring to the drive simply as “The Boulevard.”<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, Snively Road, transferred from the city to the park board in 1909, had fallen into disrepair. Weeds had overgrown it and the rustic bridges had fallen to ruin, making

<sup>20</sup> McDonald, *This Is Duluth*, 123; *Herald*, Apr. 10, 1933, sec. 2, p. 6, Sept. 8, 1910, p. 15, Oct. 31, 1910, p. 11; Official Proceedings (city council), *Herald*, Sept. 8, 1910, p. 15; *Evening Herald*, July 9, 1904, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Herald*, Aug. 5, 1910, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Herald*, Aug. 3, p. 7, Aug. 4, p. 3, Aug. 5, p. 5, Aug. 6, p. 15, Aug. 8, p. 8, Aug. 9, p. 9—all 1910.

<sup>23</sup> *Herald*, Aug. 12, p. 5, Sept. 2, p. 2, Oct. 31, p. 11—all 1910.



*Road building along rugged hilltops, 1910s*



*One of nine stone-arch bridges along Snively Road*

the drive useless to automobiles and carriages. Only pedestrians who did not mind the occasional rough footing or wading across the creek enjoyed its beauty. A year later the park board announced that money from the bond issued for the western extension of Rogers Boulevard would also be used to upgrade Snively Road. The improvement would include hiring landscape architects to design new bridges. When completed, the road would officially become part of the city's growing hilltop boulevard system.<sup>24</sup>

The board's plan, of course, was good news to Snively: "It greatly pleased me, for it assured the consummation of the very purpose I had in view, the appropriation by the city for park and boulevard purposes of some of the most scenic and natural park property in and about the city." During the next two years the park board surveyed, cleared, and regraded the road and began con-

struction on nine stone-arch bridges. Snively assisted during the preparatory stages, often joining park-board meetings, consulting privately with commissioners, and accompanying them on inspection tours.<sup>25</sup>

Designing the handsome bridges was the Minneapolis firm of Morell and Nichols. Well known in Duluth, Anthony U. Morell and Arthur F. Nichols had created the landscaping at Chester A. Congdon's Duluth estate, as well as Congdon Park. The nine concrete structures they designed were faced with native granite, blasted from cliffs in the vicinity and collected from the creek bed. Six-inch copings made of pink opal granite quarried near St. Cloud detailed the length of the bridge walls and piers, completing the design. A tenth bridge, modestly made of concrete and iron pipe, connected the parkway to Snively's farm.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Herald*, Oct. 24, 1910, p. 11, Oct. 25, 1910, p. 8, Apr. 3, 1911, p. 2, July 5, 1912, p. 12; *News Tribune*, Apr. 9, 1911, p. 8, Apr. 23, 1911, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> *News Tribune*, July 6, 1912, p. 7; *Herald*, Oct. 31, 1910, p. 11, Nov. 15, 1910, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Herald*, Apr. 3, 1911, p. 2, July 5, 1912, p. 12; *News Tribune*, Apr. 9, 1911, p. 8, Apr. 23, 1911, p. 16, July 6, 1912, p. 7; Greg Kopischke, "Morell & Nichols: An Influential and Productive Partnership," *Minnesota Common Ground* 1 (Winter 1994): 7; Timothy Howard, Duluth Parks and Recreation Dept., telephone and personal interviews with author, Mar. 31, 1993; bridge blueprints, Morell & Nichols Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota, St. Paul.



In the summer of 1912 Snively Road reopened, thereby adding nearly six miles to Duluth's growing boulevard system. Renamed Amity Boulevard, it was touted as one of the city's finest beauty spots. Wildflowers lined much of the drive. Its stone bridges frequently appeared on postcards and in park brochures.<sup>27</sup>

When Duluth changed to the commission form of government in 1913, the park board disbanded, and improvements to park property, including the boulevard system, declined for the next few years and during World War I. Snively, however, continued donating property to the city for parks and boulevards, as did men such as Congdon, who gave the right-of-way for Congdon Parkway along Lake Superior.<sup>28</sup>

**O**n October 12, 1918, one of the country's most devastating forest fires hit northern Minnesota. Gale-force winds drove the fire eastward from its origin near Bemidji, and whole towns burned to the ground. More than 500 people perished, most within a 50-mile radius of Duluth. While the city served as a haven for survivors, the hillside outskirts were less lucky. Pockets of fire scathed the forest and land, razing some 200 structures near or along Snively Road. Snively's stone house remained untouched (and still stands today), but all of his other buildings burned to the ground, and many of his thoroughbred animals died.<sup>29</sup>

Out of the ashes rose the phoenix of Snively's dormant dream for Duluth's boulevard. Listing his title as president of the Duluth Land and Development Company, Snively filed as a candidate for mayor in February 1921. Two months later the political neophyte won office. Although already 61 years old, he would serve Duluth for the next 16 years, leading the city through the high times of the 1920s and the depression of the

1930s. Throughout his four terms of office—the longest in Duluth's history—Snively remained respected for his leadership, enthusiasm, and compassion.<sup>30</sup>

The new mayor's duties included heading the city's parks and boulevards department, a task Snively surely relished. In this capacity, he immediately announced his administration's chief aim: "Duluth should have the finest system of parks and boulevards in America. It is my great ambi-



*Sightseers enjoying a view of Minnesota Point, about 1919*

tion to see this plan realized." Snively's plan included resurrecting the park board and expanding on Rogers's original concept of linking Duluth's parks and playgrounds with boulevards from one end of the city to the other.<sup>31</sup>

When Snively took office, the existing boulevard stretched only about eight miles from Chester Creek west to Oneota Cemetery. In between, it circled Central Park (near where Enger Tower stands today) and intersected only two ravine parks: Chester and Lincoln. On the east end, Lester Park and the additional six miles of Snively's Amity Boulevard formed a terminus to the system, isolated by a two-mile gap between Congdon and Chester Parks.<sup>32</sup>

Mayor Snively first set to work extending the

<sup>27</sup> *News Tribune*, July 3, 1912, p. 16, July 6, 1912, p. 7; *Herald*, July 3, 1912, p. 5, July 5, 1912, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Herald*, Apr. 10, 1933, sec. 2, p. 6; Deeds 425 and 464, Records Office, St. Louis County Courthouse, Duluth.

<sup>29</sup> *News Tribune*, Oct. 13, 1918, p. 1, Oct. 18, 1918, p. 4; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1918, p. 4; Keeney interview.

<sup>30</sup> *News Tribune*, Feb. 2, 1921, p. 1, Apr. 6, 1921, p. 1, Apr. 15, 1937, p. 1, Oct. 4, 1924, p. 6; *Labor World*, Jan. 14, 1933, p. 1, Apr. 1, 1933, p. 3; Samuel W. Morris, "Having My Say-So," *Duluth Steel Plant News*, Feb. 11, 1933, clipping, from four clipping scrapbooks compiled 1924–37 by Snively's secretary, Alta Marie Johnson, in possession of Douglas Overland (hereafter, scrapbooks); *Herald*, Apr. 15, 1937, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> *News Tribune*, Apr. 22, 1921, p. 1, May 27, 1921, p. 2; *Duluth Advertiser*, Nov. 12, 1925, scrapbooks; *Labor World*, Jan. 17, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Duluth-Superior map (St. Paul: McGill-Warner Co., 1921), copy in Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; *Herald*, Nov. 16, 1927, p. 10.

boulevard westward beyond Rest Point (near present-day Interstate 35) and around Bardon's Peak to a junction with Becks Road above Duluth's westernmost suburbs. Work on the new road, referred to in city records as the "Mayor's Boulevard Extension," progressed during the early 1920s. While crews tackled one section, Snively busily acquired the rights-of-way for the next. Some mornings the mayor would show up at the work site clad in overalls, ready to dig as well as supervise. Other days he hosted early-morning tours to view the progress, and citizens interested in joining the motorcade were instructed to notify his office.<sup>33</sup>

When the new western extension opened in the summer of 1925, the entire system was praised by local newspapers as "one of the outstanding scenic driveways of the world" and "an asset beyond price." These were not exaggerations. Spectacular views overlooking Lake Superior took in the entire expanse of Duluth, as well as a good portion of Wisconsin along the lake's southern shore. On clear days the Apostle Islands were visible some 60 miles away.<sup>34</sup>

In announcing his bid for reelection in 1925, Mayor Snively pointed proudly to his record: "Since I came into office I built some nine miles of boulevard." In his first term he had more than doubled the length of the original Rogers Boulevard and had also increased overall park space in the city. Before Snively took office, the park department claimed some 405 acres in park area, excluding boulevard rights-of-way; by 1923 the total had grown to nearly 1,780 acres, and by mid-1926 it would expand to about 2,500 acres.<sup>35</sup>

While criticism often arose regarding the outlay of public funds for Snively's park and boulevard projects, more than 60 percent of the properties acquired during his first term had been donated by citizens at no cost to the city. He remained convinced that his program would serve the city well. "I do not believe that the people of Duluth yet realize how our grand scenic driveways are advertising our city. . . . Go where you will and meet anyone who in the last few years has

visited Duluth, and at once our wonderful scenic driveways are mentioned. It is the outstanding feature in our city that impresses itself most upon our visitors."<sup>36</sup>

Although the boulevard was his favorite project, Snively also helped establish and improve other Duluth parks including Memorial, Congdon, Brighton Beach along Superior's north shore, and Fairmont (which housed the predecessor of the Lake Superior Zoo). Snively also made improvements to Lakeshore Park (renamed Leif Erikson Park in 1927) and advocated building a municipal nursery in Fond du Lac on the west. Smaller parcels also received the mayor's attention, and he pushed successfully for the construction of several playgrounds. Although he never married, Snively kept a place in his heart for chil-

*Snively and great-nephew Douglas Overland*



<sup>33</sup> Dept. of Public Works, Engineering Div., Records, City Hall, Duluth; *News Tribune*, Oct. 4, 1924, p. 6; *Herald*, Oct. 20, p. 22, Oct. 21, p. 10, Nov. 15, p. 4—all 1924.

<sup>34</sup> *Herald*, May 25, 1925, editorial, p. 12; *News Tribune*, Oct. 4, 1924, p. 6; "Duluth, Minnesota: Where Rails and Water Meet," visitor brochure, 1929, copy in Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

<sup>35</sup> *Labor World*, Jan. 17, 1925, p. 1; *News Tribune*, Aug. 25, 1923, p. 6; *Herald*, Nov. 16, 1927, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> *News Tribune*, Nov. 18, 1924, p. 1; *Labor World*, Jan. 17, 1925, p. 1; *Herald*, June 8, 1928, p. 19.



dren. During the 1930s he initiated annual picnics at the zoo for the city's orphans, which he personally hosted.<sup>37</sup>

After a solid victory in the 1925 election, Snively set to work completing the last link of the western extension: a 2.25-mile road along Mission Creek connecting the upper boulevard with Jay Cooke State Park southwest of Duluth. Created around 1915 by an act of the Minnesota legislature, the park was accessible only from the west on a road that dead-ended 3.5 miles inside its boundary. Visitors from Duluth faced a 20-mile trip to enter the park, and tourists from the Twin Cities had to backtrack to Highway 1 in order to continue on to Duluth. Snively wanted to eliminate this inconvenience. He grandly dreamed about making the city's boulevard connection to the park part of a road system reaching from southern Minnesota through Duluth to Canada on the soon-to-be-completed highway along Lake Superior. Five stone bridges and two railroad crossings would be necessary for the joint effort among Duluth, Carlton County, and two railroads, the Northern Pacific and the Duluth, Missabe & Northern.<sup>38</sup>

Snively saw this Mission Creek road as complementing his eastern Amity Creek drive, book-ends to the city's boulevard system. But he hit a roadblock when members of the Fond du Lac Community Club complained that the new road would bypass their community. The mayor appeased them by promising an additional connecting link.<sup>39</sup>

As work on the main link progressed through the spring and summer of 1926, Snively began making good on his promise to the people of Fond du Lac. After learning that the additional

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<sup>37</sup> *Herald*, May 16, 1921, editorial, p. 10, Oct. 29, 1926, p. 8, Sept. 27, 1926, p. 6, June 13, 1925, p. 3, Nov. 19, 1925, p. 1, July 28, 1936, p. 2; *Labor World*, Jan. 17, 1925, p. 1; *News Tribune*, Nov. 18, 1924, p. 1, Aug. 1, 1927, p. 1, Aug. 13, 1931, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> *News Tribune*, Apr. 8, 1926, p. 6, Aug. 4, 1929, p. 1, June 20, 1925, p. 5, Nov. 26, 1926, p. 8; *Herald*, June 11, 1925, p. 7, June 13, 1925, p. 3, Sept. 24, 1926, p. 20, Dec. 31, 1927, p. 23; Meyer, *Everyone's Country Estate*, 45–49.

<sup>39</sup> Information in Snively's handwriting from back of Mission Creek Road photograph, in possession of Douglas Overland; *Herald*, Dec. 22, 1925, p. 8.

*Chambers Grove at Fond du Lac, parkland acquired for development as a tourist resort*











*Breaking ground for city hall, 1927: Mayor Snively (with shovel) and supporters, including finance commissioner W. S. McCormick (far left) and public works commissioner Peter G. Phillips (at Snively's left).*

mile-and-a-half secondary roadway and two bridges would cost \$20,000, he ignored bureaucratic channels and decided instead to make personal appeals for donations.<sup>40</sup>

As a result, 10 private citizens donated \$50 each for clearing the right-of-way, and four others contributed a total of \$700 for grading the drive. City and county governments pledged \$5,000 for bridges, plus an additional \$1,000 for labor costs. The two railroads also assisted in building the bridges. As usual, Snively frequently showed up at the site dressed in work clothes to share in the pick-and-shovel work and urge the laborers on. Within 90 days they finished the road. Its cost: about \$8,500, which was less than half of the original estimate.<sup>41</sup>

By the fall of 1927 the Bardon's Peak—Mission Creek—Fond du Lac road to Jay Cooke State Park was complete, adding 12 miles to Duluth's boulevard system and bringing the total to 28 miles. Among the many individuals Snively

thanked for helping make it a reality were former Mayor Clarence R. Magney, whose administration had begun the process, and Jed L. Washburn and John G. Williams, who had dedicated most of the right-of-way for the Mission Creek Road. Snively's personal network no doubt played a significant role in the accomplishment: around the turn of the century, Washburn, Williams, and Snively had been partners in the Boston Farm and Development Company that helped place settlers in Carlton County.<sup>42</sup>

**T**hroughout the 1920s automobiles became increasingly affordable, and auto touring rose dramatically. Visitors to national parks, for instance, sextupled between 1918 and 1929, and urban tourist camps sprang up everywhere. Roadways also changed to accommodate the automobile. While sharp curves made little difference to the snail-paced horse and carriage, those same curves caused accidents for speeding cars. Motor-

<sup>40</sup> *Herald*, Sept. 24, 1926, p. 20, Nov. 26, 1926, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 26, 1926, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Herald*, Oct. 27, 1927, p. 4, Apr. 10, 1933, sec. 2, p. 6; "Autobiography."

ists pressed for improved roads through and between cities to facilitate all-season travel.<sup>43</sup>

As a result, in August 1927 Snively and St. Paul Mayor Laurence C. Hodgson met on a bridge in Pine City and, in front of a crowd of 5,000 onlookers, officially dedicated the newly paved Minnesota Highway 1 between Duluth and the Twin Cities. This event, which promised to bring many more tourists to Duluth and points north, made it all the more crucial that the gap inside Jay Cooke State Park be finished.<sup>44</sup>

At the end of the year Snively outlined his plans for upcoming civic projects. Doubling as measures against creeping unemployment in the area, they included widening the existing boulevard in narrow and dangerous places and constructing two new links in the system: a five-mile addition along Amity Creek connecting Snively's original drive with Vermillion Road and a parkway descending from the upper boulevard along Knowlton Creek into Fairmont Park. "I am very anxious," Snively said, "to get all the work done, or so shape matters that I know it will be accomplished in the event that I am relieved of my position as mayor of the city." Snively, however, easily won his third term in office, defeating O. E. Thompson in the April 1929 election.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, Duluth contractor Charles R. McLean, whose firm had constructed much of the western extension, had won the contract to complete the highway through Jay Cooke State Park. After a crew of 50 men cleared the right-of-way, two steam shovels worked from each end of the 1.5-mile gap, finishing the job in early 1928. Seven separate parkways now made up the boulevard chain: Rogers, Amity, Bardon's Peak, Mission Creek, Fond du Lac, Congdon along the lake shore, and, finally, the road through Jay Cooke.<sup>46</sup>

On the morning of August 3, 1929, a motorcade of park officials from Duluth and Minneapolis left Duluth's civic center for dedication ceremonies at the municipal nursery in Fond du Lac.

That afternoon, the seven parkways were consolidated and officially called Skyline Parkway, a name gleaned from nearly 4,000 entries submitted in a second newspaper-sponsored contest. (Snively had served as one of the contest's five judges.) Six winning entrants shared the *News Tribune's* cash prize for the new name. Anxious to make certain the name stuck, the city placed road signs with a new parkway symbol along the entire length of the boulevard. Duluth artist Nelson A. Long designed the logo, depicting pine trees silhouetted against a full moon. Minneapolis officials in attendance praised Duluth's system of parks and drives, and Minneapolis's park superintendent, Theodore Wirth, facetiously offered to trade his city's Lake Harriet for Skyline Parkway.<sup>47</sup>

Snively's devotion to the system was widely known, and in 1926 a gift of 40 acres of park land along the western boulevard had been named Snively Park at the wishes of donor Thomas H. Martin. As the Amity extension neared completion in late 1929, Duluth honored Snively again by erecting two large stone pillars at the beginning of the original Snively Road in Lester Park. Designed by members of the city's planning department, one marker read "The Snively Boulevard," while the other displayed the dates "1901-1929."<sup>48</sup>

As expected, Skyline Parkway became a favorite tourist attraction in Duluth, and summer traffic was often congested along the drive. Automobiles and buses of all sizes now traveled the road, having replaced the horse-drawn tallyho wagons popular at the turn of the century. Special tour coaches were also a common sight. About this time, people began referring to Snively as the "father" of the boulevard system.<sup>49</sup>

Ironically, for all his love of roads, Snively never learned to drive an automobile. When the city council authorized money to purchase a car for the mayor, he declined it and instead had the money donated to the zoo fund. When necessary,

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<sup>43</sup> Jean-Pierre Bardou, Jean-Jacques Chanaron, Patrick Fridenson, and James M. Laux, *The Automobile Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 113-20; "Where Rails and Water Meet," visitor brochure, 1929; Charles W. Eliot, Jr., "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," *Landscape Architecture* 13 (Oct. 1922): 27-37; Arthur A. Shurtleff, "The Effect of Automobiles On The Design of Parks," *Landscape Architecture* 12 (Apr. 1921): 111-14; *News Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1926, editorial, p. 6; *Herald*, Nov. 16, 1927, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> *Herald*, Aug. 6, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 24, 1927, p. 7, Dec. 31, 1927, p. 23, June 8, 1928, p. 19; *News Tribune*, Apr. 3, 1929, p. 1, 5, Apr. 4, 1929, p. 1.

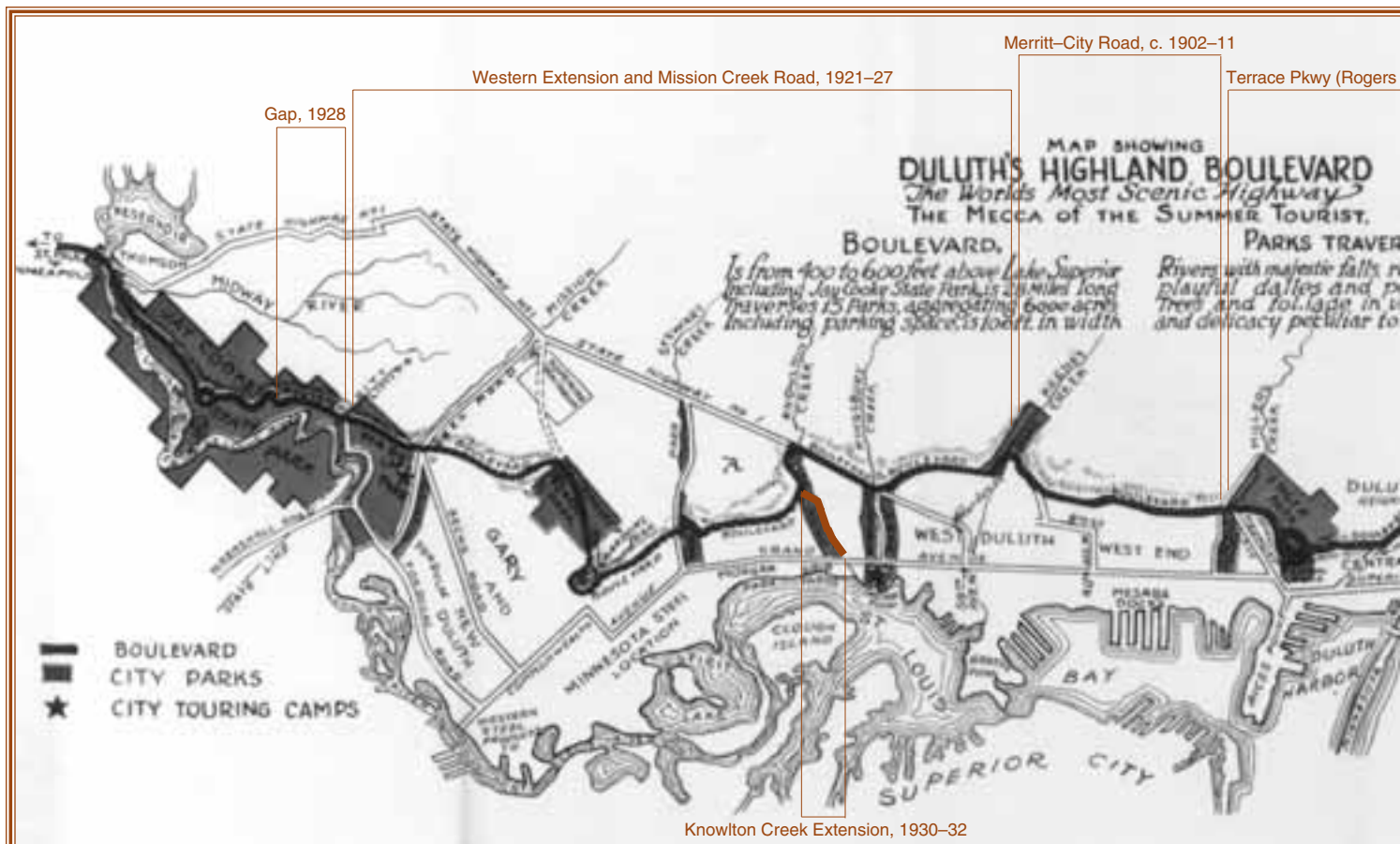
<sup>46</sup> Dept. of Public Works, Engineering Div., Records, City Hall; *Herald*, Oct. 20, 1924, p. 22, Aug. 4, 1927 (scrapbooks), Dec. 31, 1927, p. 23; *News Tribune*, Mar. 15, 1930, clipping, Duluth Parks file, Duluth Public Library.

<sup>47</sup> *News Tribune*, July 18, p. 1, July 26, p. 5, Aug. 3, p. 1, 6, 11, Aug. 4, p. 1, 2—all 1929.

<sup>48</sup> *Herald*, Oct. 30, 1929, p. 5; *News Tribune*, Oct. 30, 1929, p. 1; unidentified clipping, Sept. 8, 1926, Duluth Parks file, Public Library.

<sup>49</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 24, 1927, p. 7.





Tourist map, about 1926, with overlay showing approximate routes and dates of construction

Snively would enlist city officials or relatives to chauffeur him to and from city business. “I drove him everywhere,” recalled his niece. “He was scared to death of driving.” Snively’s fear may have stemmed from his blindness in one eye, the result of damage to an optic nerve during an operation for his sinus problems, or from his involvement in a number of automobile accidents.<sup>50</sup>

During the difficult years of the depression, Snively often found his desk at city hall piled high with job requests from out-of-work men. If people walked into his office for assistance, as they often did, Snively offered advice or simply listened. Sometimes he took matters into his own hands, sending fuel or food to a person in need.<sup>51</sup>

Believing strongly in the dignity of work, Snively also helped create a number of unemploy-

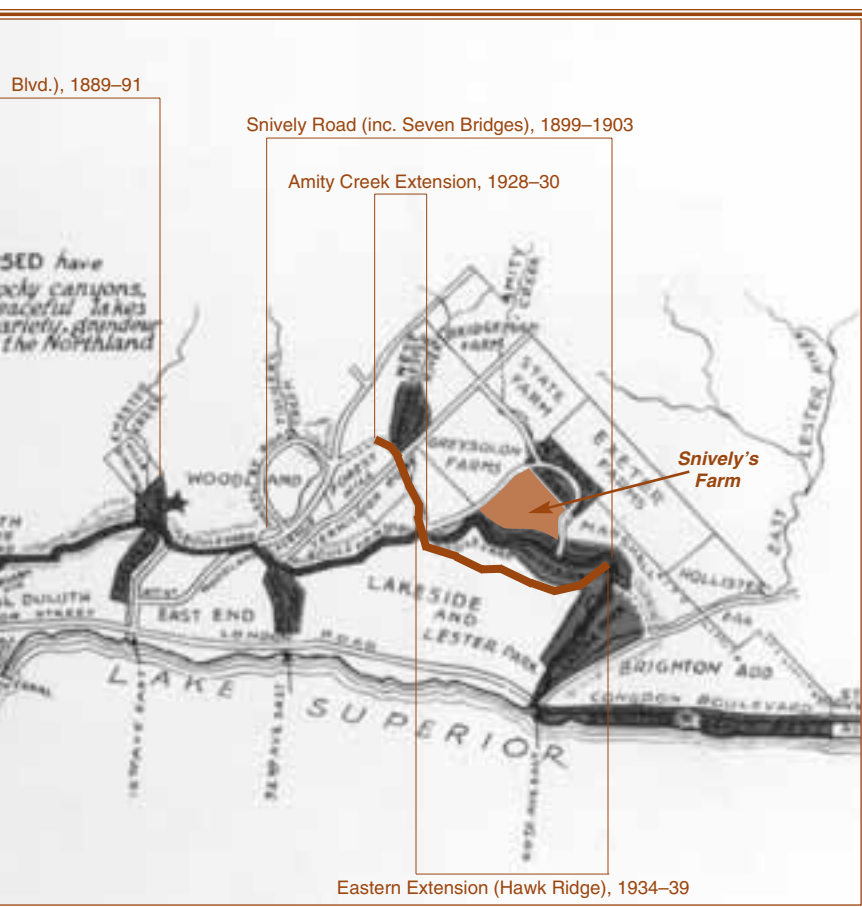
ment funds. He knew from his direct contact with working people that an able-bodied individual would rather work for pay than receive a handout. Most of the projects born out of the city’s unemployment funds involved clearing brush and litter from city parks and along the boulevards, work for which no money was otherwise budgeted. Sometimes Snively created new jobs to extend the parkway or connect gaps. When funds were depleted, workers were sometimes paid with firewood from trees felled along the construction route.<sup>52</sup>

Snively may have given up as much as two-thirds of his own salary to help the unemployed during the leanest times. At one point he lived on less than \$50 a month so he could pay a road crew to finish one of his projects. “Money meant absolutely nothing to him,” said his great-nephew.

<sup>50</sup> D. Overland interview; *Herald*, May 21, 1928, p. 26; *News Tribune*, Oct. 4, 1929, p. 7, July 1, 1935, p. 1; Z. Overland interview; *News Tribune*, June 7, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Herald*, Dec. 9, 1927, p. 21, Jan. 5, 1928, p. 4, Sept. 15, 1932, p. 13; D. Overland interview.

<sup>52</sup> *Herald*, May 16, 1930, p. 1, 6, June 21, 1930 (scrapbooks), Feb. 20, 1932, p. 1; *News Tribune*, Sept. 19, 1932, p. 2, Sept. 7, 1932, p. 3.



Park steam shovel loading dump truck, about 1930



“He gave away most of his money. He had nothing when he died, or in fact during the time he lived with us.”<sup>53</sup>

Despite hard times, 1932 was a banner year for Snively and his city. In July the U.S. Department of Labor announced the results of its park census, and Duluth topped the list with an acre of parkland for every 41 city residents. (An acre per 100 people was considered good.) Two years later, the Swedish American League commissioned a sculpture honoring Snively for his efforts to promote the city’s parks and boulevards. The bronze relief tablet with the mayor’s likeness was mounted on the side of the Lincoln Park pavilion.<sup>54</sup>

Later that year Snively announced what would be his last major roadbuilding project: a 2.5-mile ridgetop boulevard overlooking Lakeside and Lester Park—the same district as his first, turn-of-the-century road. This final venture was the finishing touch on his original plan: “I’ve visioned this for 30 years, and my one hope is that I’d live to see the job done.”<sup>55</sup>

The new, eastern extension would connect with the original road near the seventh bridge and wind west through the forest of evergreens planted in 1926 to replace trees lost in the 1918 fire. It would then ascend to its highest point (at present-day Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve some 600 feet above Lake Superior) and follow the ridgeline west for about two miles. The mayor hoped to give travelers the finest views possible of the surrounding area.<sup>56</sup>

Nearly 75 years old when he started this final project, Snively spent the early summer of 1934 quietly laying out his plans on paper and obtaining the appropriate easements from property owners. This time a 180-foot right-of-way was acquired in case future modifications were necessary. Early in the day, Snively usually could be found in the hills walking over the planned route, clearing and staking it with one or two workers funded by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, private donations, or with his own money. Occasionally he would cajole others into helping him. Zelda Overland’s husband William remembered driving Snively up to the site several times: “We’d go out there on Sunday mornings,

<sup>53</sup> *News Tribune*, Nov. 23, 1934, p. 1, 14; Suinto Wessman, “Between Us,” *Herald*, Nov. 10, 1952, p. 7; D. Overland interview.

<sup>54</sup> *Herald*, Mar. 27, 1934, p. 1, Apr. 6, 1934, editorial, p. 16, July 6, 1932, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *News Tribune*, Aug. 29, 1932, p. 1, 5, Nov. 11, 1934, feature sec., p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Herald*, May 14, 1926, p. 37; Duluth Dept. of Parks and Recreation, records, City Hall; *News Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1934, feature sec., p. 1.



and I'd have to hold the stick up, and Zelda did, too. He was surveying the darn thing but we didn't know what the heck he was doing."<sup>57</sup>

Snively even appealed personally to President Franklin D. Roosevelt for assistance. Former Duluthian Henrietta Nesbitt worked as a housekeeper in the White House, and Snively, who visited her whenever he was in Washington, D.C., sent FDR a Lake Superior trout along with a request for a donation. FDR responded with a contribution. Funds and workers from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were used to complete the new eastern extension, although progress was slow, and finishing touches were delayed until the summer of 1939.<sup>58</sup>

When finally completed, the drive boasted overlooks with stunning, sweeping views of Lake Superior and the surrounding countryside, arguably the best vista in the Arrowhead region. Riding along the road today, it is easy to understand what appealed to Snively when he first trekked this portion of the young city.

**I**n the 1937 election, Snively, now age 77, lost his fifth bid for the office of mayor by less than 900 votes. The following January, he was inducted into the Duluth Hall of Fame for his tireless development of city parks and boulevards. And although Snively's reign as mayor was over, he still held the boulevard foremost in his mind.<sup>59</sup>

From the early 1930s until the end of the WPA in 1943, more than \$1 million in government funds went into improving Skyline Parkway. Narrow stretches were widened, dangerous curves eliminated, and the western and eastern sections regraded and graveled. WPA workers also cleared brush and litter and moved into place many of the large guard boulders that line the outer rim of the parkway. The original stretch between Chester and Lincoln Parks was the first to be resurfaced with asphalt in a WPA-funded project. Snively participated in ribbon-cutting ceremonies in the fall of 1940, along with former mayors William I. Prince and Magney. The latter



*Campaign blotter for 1937 election, which proved to be Snively's only defeat*

introduced Snively as "Duluth's greatest park builder."<sup>60</sup>

The next spring Duluth's city council approved creation of a department of boulevards, and the 81-year-old Snively was named its superintendent. Given a small office in city hall and a monthly salary of \$150, he spent his days poring over maps in search of ways to improve the boulevard system he had created. He served in that official capacity for the rest of his life, although a severe car accident in 1943 and deteriorating health slowed him considerably. Douglas Overland remembered his great-uncle's unremitting dedication to the parkway: "We'd go by bus out to the zoo and my uncle had a satchel and he carried tools in there. . . . Many times he would rake and do some little fixing up. Maybe the rain had come down and washed out a little bit of a part of the path, and he would get his shovel and fix it up."<sup>61</sup>

Snively's personal road came to an end on November 7, 1952, a few weeks short of his ninety-third birthday. He died quietly in the home of his niece, where he had lived out his last days. Snively had dedicated more than six decades of his life and some \$100,000 of his own money to bettering Duluth and the region, both as a private citizen and as the city's chief executive. His greatest legacy, Skyline Parkway, stands as a monument to his vision and determination. "To be the creator

<sup>57</sup> *News Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1934, feature sec., p. 1; *Herald*, Nov. 14, 1934, p. 4; William Overland, interview by author, tape recording in author's possession, Duluth, May 17, 1991.

<sup>58</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 10, 1952, p. 7, July 22, 1936, p. 9; *News Tribune*, May 24, 1936, rotogravure sec., July 15, 1935, p. 1, June 24, 1938, p. 13; D. Overland interview; Duluth Dept. of Parks, records, City Hall.

<sup>59</sup> *Herald*, Apr. 7, 1937, p. 1, 3, Jan. 24, 1938, p. 5; *News Tribune*, Apr. 15, 1937, p. 1, Jan. 23, 1938, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> F. W. Paine photograph albums, Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, Duluth (10 booklets containing approximately 100 negatives each), 1926–1937; *News Tribune*, July 7, 1935, p. 4, Sept. 24, 1936, p. 14, Oct. 25, 1940, p. 1; *Herald*, Nov. 3, 1938, Oct. 25, 1940, p. 11; "WPA 'In Operation,' Southern St. Louis County, City of Duluth, Parks Department," Jan. 4, 1950, copy in Duluth Public Library.

<sup>61</sup> *News Tribune*, May 22, 1941, p. 16, June 26, 1941, p. 13, Mar. 22, 1944, p. 5, June 7, 1943, p. 1; D. Overland interview; *Duluth Directory*, 1943–52.

and maker of 22 of the 28 miles of our city's Skyline boulevard is a gratification to me," he once reflected simply.<sup>62</sup>

Today, Skyline Parkway is a 25-mile stretch of road running northeast along the crown of the city from Becks Road to Lester Park. The system's only gap is the 2-mile break where motorists return to city streets between Chester Park and the short section still bearing Snively's name. Portions of the eastern and western extremes remain unpaved and closed during winter. Both roads through Mission Creek valley and the back-ridge segment of Snively's original drive are now hiking paths, closed to all motorized vehicles except snowmobiles. Seven of the nine stone-arch bridges built along the Amity Creek route (known today as Seven Bridges Road) are still in use, although the effects of eight decades of automobile collisions, vandalism, and natural erosion are evident. One thing about Skyline Parkway remains unchanged: the panoramic views it affords are as spectacular today as they were when Samuel Snively first explored the eastern hills of the city to formulate his dream. He expressed his own feelings about it in the 1930s while standing on the boulevard near today's Hawk Ridge. "Sometimes," he said, "when I become discouraged, I say to myself, I should have gone to another city to seek my fortune. But when I look over these hills and see the great natural beauties of our community, I console myself and wonder—where in all this wide world could I find such a view as this."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *Herald*, Nov. 7, 1952, p. 1, May 27, 1937, p. 4, Mar. 2, 1937, p. 9; Z. Overland interview.


<sup>63</sup> *News Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1934, feature sec., p. 1.

*The photos on p. 149 and 154 are from MHS; those on p. 148, 152, 161, and the brochure are from the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, University of Minnesota, Duluth. The map is in the author's collection. All other images are in the Douglas Overland collection.*

# See Duluth

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*Brochure promoting Skyline Drive tour, about 1958*





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