

Franklin (Auditorium) Street, St. Paul



IT IS COMMONLY THOUGHT that St. Paul has been far kinder to its built heritage than Minneapolis, but the historical record suggests otherwise, especially in the downtown area. Various forms of intervention—from wholesale urban renewal to freeway construction to huge projects like RiverCentre—have combined over the years to reshape St. Paul’s downtown, large portions of which look nothing like they did as recently as the 1980s. But what really sets this downtown apart from its neighbor across the river is how much the streets have changed. Most streets in downtown Minneapolis are pretty much where they’ve always been, but that is far from the case in St. Paul.

A few downtown St. Paul streets have disappeared altogether. Among these ghost thoroughfares is Franklin (later Auditorium) Street, where this delightful photograph was taken in 1890. The picture centers on the long-vanished Jacob Hammer residence, a fine Victorian townhouse designed by architect H. R. P. Hamilton. With its merry mingling of gables, turrets, bays, arches, patterned brickwork, and other goodies, the house is just what you’d expect from a well-appointed dwelling of the period. Note the equally ornate Victorian townhome next door, as well as the simple wood-frame house on the other side.

Franklin Street itself survived longer than Hammer’s colorful townhome. Paralleling Washington Street a block to the west, Franklin ran south from Ninth Street to Kellogg Boulevard (formerly known as Third Street). At Kellogg, the street made a westerly turn to Irvine Park. A short section of today’s Ryan Avenue east of the park is the only remaining vestige of Franklin.

Franklin’s gradual disappearance didn’t begin until well after it was renamed in honor of the first St. Paul Auditorium, constructed on the present site of the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in 1907. The street suffered its first amputation, between Fourth and Fifth, in 1932 when what is now known as Roy Wilkins Auditorium was built. Another section of the street vanished beneath the St. Paul Civic Center, constructed



Jacob Hammer residence, 380 Auditorium Street, 1890 (MHS COLLECTIONS)

in the early 1970s. Expansion of the St. Paul (now Travelers) Insurance Company complex and various road realignments in the 1980s claimed the last two blocks of Franklin-cum-Auditorium Street, which is now just a footnote in downtown St. Paul’s long saga of change.

—LARRY MILLETT

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