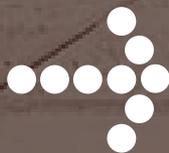




tour  
**SAINT PAUL**

selby  
Avenue



origins  
growth  
vitality

## follow the growth...

Since 1840, St. Paul has taken on different identities: frontier hamlet, steamboat burg, provincial capital, railroad boomtown, city in stagnation, city in decline, city in revival. These transformations have left their marks all over town. Nowhere can one see them better than on Selby Ave.

Follow Selby Ave. west from where it begins. At Selby Ave.'s beginning, you will find remnants of the empire-building years of the late 19th-century atop Cathedral Hill. Here lived people of wealth, ambition, and ostentation. A little farther along, there are vestiges of the city's expansion along streetcar lines. As St. Paul boomed in the late 19th-century, housing and commerce marched west across what must have seemed to developers an endlessly spacious prairie. The relative density of Cathedral Hill gives way to rows of the single-family houses. Then come signs of the stagnation of the mid-20th century and the decline and devastation of the 1950s and 1960s – empty lots – and signs of recent revival as well. And finally, around Snelling Ave., evidence of St. Paul's more recent identity as a city of inviting neighborhoods. It is all there for people interested to see it.

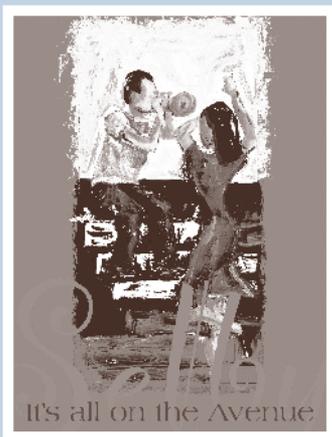
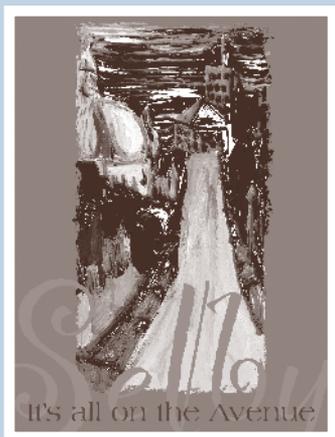




# WHO WAS SELBY?

Born in Ohio in 1820, Jeremiah W. Selby arrived in St. Paul in 1849 and purchased a 40-acre plot on St. Anthony Hill, the present day site of the Cathedral, for \$50 an acre. Fittingly, Selby was described by his peers as “industrious, economical and thrifty.” After farming potatoes, Selby went on to serve in the Minnesota Territorial House of Representatives. Selby Ave. was part of Jeremiah W. Selby’s homestead; the street was platted and named after him in 1854. Selby died one year later.

*Above & Below:* The banners for Selby Avenue were designed by a team of neighborhood residents, artists, architects and others for the Selby Area Community Development Corporation ([www.selbyareacdc.org](http://www.selbyareacdc.org)).



# Cathedral Hill



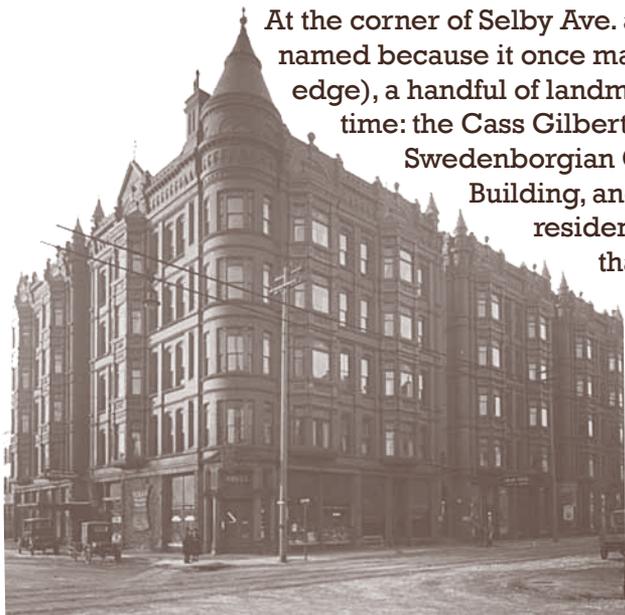
The best place to begin an exploration of Selby Ave. is where the street begins, at its intersection with Summit Ave. This is the edge of what St. Paul's early residents called St. Anthony Hill. The site offers one of city's best views: to the north, the Capitol; to the east, downtown below and Dayton's Bluff in the distance; to the southeast, Cherokee Heights. The observer blessed with imagination may see it as it was before transformed by the human hand: the tree-lined river gorge, the great turn of the river to the south, low hills rising on the left, white cliffs, sandbars in the channel, wetlands and woods where downtown now stands, and prairie in the distance.

Today the inescapable presence that dominates this part of the skyline is the Cathedral of St. Paul. Begun in 1906 and dedicated in 1915, the Cathedral was the last of Archbishop John Ireland's great works. Designed by the Frenchman Emmanuel Masqueray, it is hard, all granite and marble; somber, in shades of gray; and vast, soaring both outside and in. Nothing like it will be built again.

Signs of past wealth and ostentation begin just west of the Cathedral, in the surrounding Cathedral Hill neighborhood. St. Paul's early elite favored this location—higher, drier, and quieter than downtown below. They built mansions, elegant apartments, and imposing residential hotels. Many of these buildings remain.

*Above: View from Cathedral Hill, 1885  
Below: The Cathedral of St. Paul*

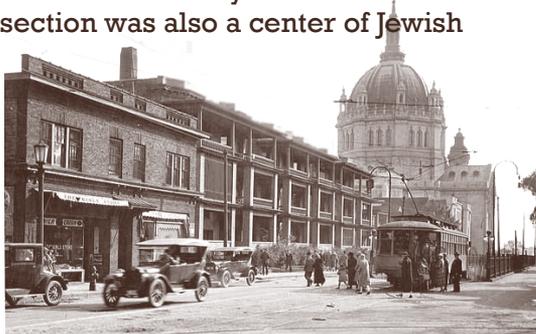
At the corner of Selby Ave. and Western Ave. (so named because it once marked the city's western edge), a handful of landmarks recall this grander time: the Cass Gilbert-designed Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church, the Dacotah Building, and the Blair Flats, once a residential hotel (The Angus) that miraculously evaded the wrecking ball. Several more excellent buildings look out on nearby Frank Boyd Park (named for an African American labor leader). This part of town has an old-city feel hard to find elsewhere in St. Paul.



## The Streetcar Era

Electric streetcar service began in St. Paul in 1890. Three streetcar lines ranged west from St. Anthony Hill along Grand Ave., Rondo Ave., and Selby Ave. People filled the neighborhoods, and businesses followed the people, clustering along the streetcar lines. Each of these commercial corridors had its own character. Selby Ave. businesses catered to people's daily needs: food, clothing, and services. By 1930, roughly the peak of streetcar commerce, there were nearly a hundred businesses on Selby Ave. between Western Ave. and Lexington Parkway—groceries, confectioneries, cobblers, moviehouses, butchers, pharmacies, and dressmakers. The Selby-Dale corner was the hub: at one time there were twenty-six businesses on a single block. This intersection was also a center of Jewish commerce: Proprietors named Levy, Cohen, Braufman, Eisenberg, Herman, and Katz ran stores there.

*Above: The Angus Hotel, 1920  
Right: A Streetcar on Selby Ave.  
near Nina Street.*



## Streetcar Tunnel

Streetcar service began on Selby Ave. in 1890. St. Anthony Hill, however, proved to be a vexatious impediment; the steep grade made for slow and hard going, especially in winter. At about the same time that work began on the Cathedral of St. Paul, the city began digging a solution to the streetcar problem: the Selby Tunnel. It opened in 1907, taking people from the base of St. Anthony Hill beneath Selby Ave. to an opening near Nina Street. Streetcars used the tunnel until their demise in the early 1950s. The tunnel closed in 1959, but its lower entrance can still be seen, just down the slope from the Cathedral.

# Decline and Resurgence

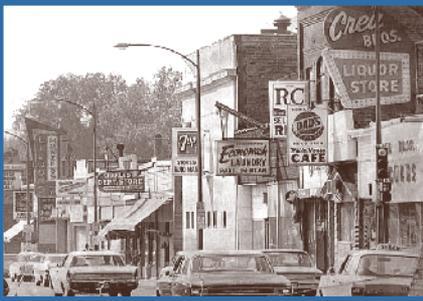
Changes—economic, demographic, and physical—accelerated along Selby Ave. after World War II. Buses replaced the streetcar line in the early 1950s. Suburbanization drew people and money out of the area. The Rondo neighborhood to the north, historically the center of African American life in St. Paul, saw a steady increase in black population as whites moved their homes and businesses to the suburbs. In the early 1960s, the building of Interstate 94 tore through the Rondo neighborhood and displaced hundreds of African-American homeowners. As people abandoned the neighborhood, thousands of houses and apartments fell into disrepair.

Decline became disaster in late summer of 1968. Racial tensions that had been building for a long time intensified in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, and blew up in two nights of violence. Several Selby Ave. businesses were firebombed; many others left the Avenue soon after. A year later one of the remaining merchants pronounced Selby Ave. commerce near death, and he was not wrong; over the next several years, perhaps hundreds of houses and

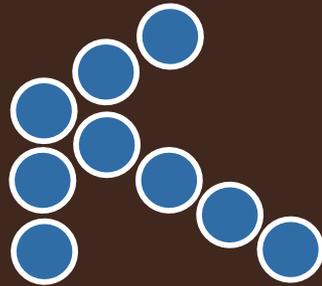


commercial buildings on the street were destroyed. The wounds of this calamity can still be seen, most clearly on the north side of Selby Ave. west of Dale Street. Many of the older buildings between Dale Street and Lexington Parkway are gone, and there are still many vacant lots on both sides of the street. Commerce here remains a fraction of what it was fifty years ago.

But there has been revival too. In response to the decline, several community organizations began promoting the street and neighborhood as an asset. Sections of Selby Ave. returned to vibrancy as people and money came back to the Cathedral Hill neighborhood, starting in the 1980s. Upscale restaurants and shops have opened on Selby Ave., and many of the streetcar-era commercial buildings have found new life. There is some new and renovated housing as well. This revival slowly spreads westward.



Left: Selby-Dale, 1967  
Below: Selby near Dale, 1975





Above: The Dacotah Building, 1976

## A Neighborhood Street

Selby Ave. west of Lexington Parkway bears no relation to the Selby Ave. of Cathedral Hill. Here the street is part of a 20th-century Midwestern residential neighborhood. The old-city urban of the Cathedral district has given way to the ancestor of suburban sprawl.

The intersection of Selby Ave. with Snelling Ave. is an excellent example of an early 20th-century commercial streetcar-and-auto corner. All the buildings at or near the corner went up between 1908 and 1927. These endlessly adaptable brick and stone structures have served the neighborhood in many ways over the decades, including amusement. O’Gara’s Bar and Grill has been there since 1942; 1595 Selby Ave. was once the Park Theater; the basement of the bank building (northeast corner) long housed the Park Rec, a bar and bowling alley.

Fans of the Peanuts comic strip will recall that Charlie Brown’s father worked as a barber. This was pure autobiography: Charles Schulz’s father ran a barbershop at 1574 Selby Ave. (now part of the expanded O’Gara’s). Schulz grew up in the neighborhood and graduated from nearby Central High School. Selby Ave. thus links two of St. Paul’s greatest creators, John Ireland and Charles Schulz, and their iconic works.

Selby Ave. offers the attentive visitor a course in the history and human geography of St. Paul. Selby: It’s all on the Avenue!

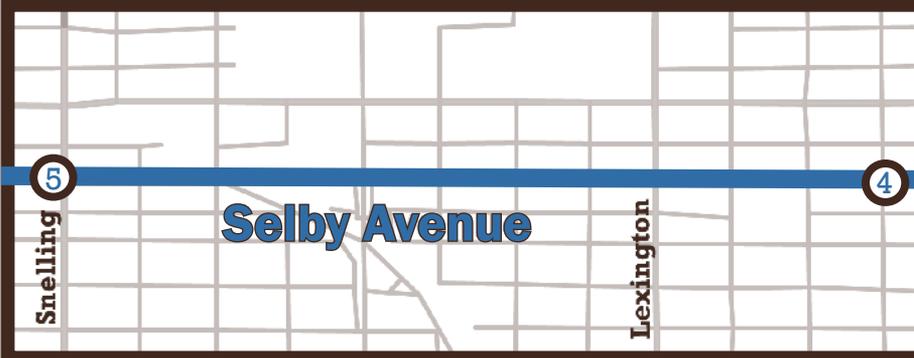
## Selby's Restaurant Row

Selby Ave. has recently developed a reputation for its many popular restaurants. The formation of the Selby Ave. eating district can be traced to 1974, when John and Peggy Rupp purchased the 1889 Dacotah Building at the corner of Selby Ave. and Western Ave. The Rupp converted the former pharmacy into a bar and restaurant with the intent of preserving the building. W. A. Frost (named after the pharmacy) has since developed into one of the Twin Cities' finest restaurants. Other bars, bistros, cafes, bakeries and coffee shops soon followed. Many of the restaurants occupy historic buildings such as the fire station at the intersection of Selby Ave. and Mackubin Street. The street is now known for its wide variety of cuisine and numerous patios. Restaurants continue to play a major role in the revitalization of Selby Ave.

## Minority Owned Businesses

Twenty years ago, Selby Ave. was not the popular commercial street it is today. Credit for the revitalization of Selby Ave. is due in part to minority business owners who located their shops along the street. Over the past decade, approximately half of the businesses that have opened along Selby have been minority-owned. For example, Mychael Wright, one of several African American entrepreneurs along the street, transformed a blighted storefront into a successful coffee shop: the Golden Thyme Café. However, newfound success along the street has many minority business owners worried that one day soon they might not be able to afford to stay on Selby Ave. For that reason, neighborhood, business and non-profit organizations are working to keep Selby Ave. accessible to the minority entrepreneurs that are instrumental to the street's success.

Bus route 21 serves Selby Ave. See



Selby Avenue

### Selby Avenue Business Association

[www.saba.bz](http://www.saba.bz)

The Selby Avenue Business Association (SABA) has a directory of member businesses along the street. Visit their website for a list of shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities along the street.

### 1 Cathedral Hill

#### **Cathedral of Saint Paul - 239 Selby Ave.**

The first Cathedral of Saint Paul was a small log cabin. Today, the Cathedral dominates the St. Paul skyline. The Cathedral offers free tours of the majestic building on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 1:00 PM.

### 2 Selby and Western

#### **Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church - 170 Virginia St.**

Built in 1886, the Swedenborgian Church was designed by Cass Gilbert, the famous St. Paul architect, to reflect the tenants of the Swedenborgian faith. The church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

#### **Dacotah Building - W. A. Frost - 374 Selby Ave.**

This restaurant is consistently ranked as one of the Twin Cities' finest—in part because of the distinctive ambience inside the 1889 brownstone Dacotah Building.

#### **The Blair Flats - Selby Ave. and Western Ave.**

Built in 1887, this ornate landmark is a reminder of the grandeur of St. Paul's Victorian Era. Spared from demolition in the early 1980s, the building now houses apartments, offices and storefronts.

#### **St. Paul Curling Club - 470 Selby Ave.**

The sport of curling involves sliding heavy granite stones down a polished sheet of ice towards a target. Members of the St. Paul Curling Club have been sliding stones and sweeping ice since 1912 at the Selby Ave. clubhouse.



## Local Attractions

### 3 Selby's Restaurant Row

#### Restaurants, Food and Wine Shops - Selby Ave. between Western and Dale

Moscow on the Hill - 371 Selby Ave.

W. A. Frost - 374 Selby Ave.

Nina's Coffee Café - 165 Western Ave. N

Costello's Bar - 393 Selby Ave.

Fabulous Fern's - 400 Selby Ave.

La Grolla - 452 Selby Ave.

A Piece of Cake - 485 Selby Ave.

The Happy Gnome - 498 Selby Ave.

Solo Vino - 517 Selby Ave.

Bon Vie - 518 Selby Ave.

Zander Café - 525 Selby Ave.

Great Harvest - 534 Selby Ave.

Il Vescovino - 579 Selby Ave.

Thai Delight - 610 Selby Ave.

Louisiana Cafe - 613 Selby Ave.

Paisano's - 619 Selby Ave.

Muddy Pig - 162 Dale Street

#### Engine House #5 - 498 Selby Ave.

Built in 1882, Engine House #5 operated as a fire station until 1930. The building has since been adaptively reused as a restaurant.

### 4 Selby and Milton

#### Golden Thyme Café - 921 Selby Ave.

Stop by the Golden Thyme Café for a cup of coffee, a slice of sweet potato pie or other southern specialties. The café serves as a neighborhood gathering place.

#### Selby Ave. Movie Theater - 989 Selby Ave.

Built in 1911 as the city's first theater designed exclusively for movies, the now empty Selby Theater was the first in the vast Mann theater chain.

### 5 Selby and Snelling

#### O'Gara's Bar and Grill - 165 Snelling Ave. N

Enjoy a pint in Carl Schulz's (Charles Schulz's father) barbershop, now the game room of O'Gara's bar. This neighborhood institution has been owned by the O'Gara family since 1941.



# Selby Avenue Jazz Festival

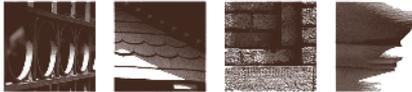
The annual Selby Jazz Festival features live music, food and family activities at the corner of Selby Ave. and Milton Ave. on the second Saturday in September. Visit [www.selbyareadc.org/jazzfest](http://www.selbyareadc.org/jazzfest) for more details.



Left: Members of the St. Paul Curling Club, 1925

## HISTORIC SAINT PAUL

*Celebrate Heritage | Renew Neighborhoods | Strengthen Community*



This guide was developed by Historic Saint Paul as part of the “Tour Saint Paul” interpretive guide series highlighting the cultural and historic resources of the city’s neighborhoods. See [www.historicsaintpaul.org](http://www.historicsaintpaul.org) for more information. It was made possible by:

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