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A Peoples History of the Seward Neighborhood

ed. Wendy Epstein, Marilyn Matheny, and Rick Musser

The Seward neighborhood in South Minneapolis has long been known for its liberal politics and community activism. It has been home to railroad porters and socialist agitators, state governors and hippy bicycle mechanics, state-of-the-art recording studios and dairy co-ops with links to the Scandinavian tradition. The essays collected here, written by Seward residents and often based on oral histories, tell the stories of the men and women who followed Dakota trails from Fort Snelling to the Falls of St. Anthony, attended the State Fair during the years it was held in Seward, worshipped at local churches of several faiths and denominations, worked in the local rail yards or at Minneapolis Moline, and swapped stories after work in the bars of the Hub of Hell.

There are chapters devoted to art and music, parks and recreation, the first settlers, Mom and Pop stores, the changing architectural styles of the neighborhood, and the community's efforts to preserve that heritage from government mandated urban renewal during the 1960s. The concluding chapter traces the arrival of East African immigrants to the neighborhood—a movement that echoes and also advances the activist and community building energies that have brought life to the neighborhood from the beginning.

In his foreword, local historian Iric Nathanson observes, “The book is an apt representation of the cooperative spirit that characterizes this very special neighborhood. The Seward story will inspire people everywhere who look to neighborhoods as the foundation of a healthy civic life.”

About the contributors: This collaborative work was produced by the History Committee of the Seward Neighborhood Group. It includes contributions from twenty neighborhood writers and editors. Marilyn Matheny, the project director, managed the production department of Llewelyn Publications for ten years. Co-editor Wendy Epstein has more than thirty years of experience with genealogical and local history research and writing. Co-editor Rick Musser, Ph.D., is professor emeritus at the University of Kansas School of Journalism and Mass Communications, and holds a Ph.D. and M.A. from Indiana University. The publication of the book was made possible, in part, by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

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