



History of Maplewood

The written history of Maplewood begins about 165 years ago when European and French-Canadian settlers began farming in this area. Prior to this time, the land was inhabited by the Dakota Indians with occasional visits by French and English fur traders and explorers. The landscape was a mix of scrub oak and prairie with many wetlands and lakes.

In 1850, a group of families ventured from St. Paul along an Indian trail that is now Hazelwood Street. They were the Bells, Caseys, Conlins and Vincents. At today's County Road C, they turned to the east and began to build their log cabins. The sound of their axes alerted the Dakota who had a hunting camp nearby and thought the land was still theirs. The Dakota asked them to leave and the newcomers quickly retraced their steps. The settlers made repeated attempts to claim the land they had bought for two dollars per acre from the Federal government. Finally in 1853, after the Dakota moved to a reservation on the Minnesota River, the pioneers could build their cabins. About this same time, southern Maplewood was first settled when Thomas Carver began farming in 1852 to the west of Carver Lake.

The first organized transportation in this area was a stagecoach line that ran north along Edgerton Street and Desoto Street from St Paul to Duluth. This line was started in 1856 and the cost for a 36 hour, 156 mile trip was 10 dollars. The line remained in service until the first railroad was completed from St Paul to Duluth in 1870. This was the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad that followed today's Bruce Vento Trail. In 1877 it was reorganized as the St Paul and Duluth Railroad and in 1900 it was acquired by the Northern Pacific Railroad and still later it became the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad.

In 1884-86, the Wisconsin Central Railroad built a line from St Paul to Wisconsin that intersected with the St Paul and Duluth Railroad at Lake Phalen Junction. Lake Phalen Junction was renamed Gladstone in 1887 when William and Mary Dawson purchased the adjacent land, platted a town site and predicted it to "rival St Paul". The town site was named after William Gladstone, a popular British statesman of that time. Dawson relocated his St Paul Plow Works to the northeast corner of the railroad intersection and convinced the St Paul and Duluth Railroad to build their maintenance shops in the southwest corner, which is today's Gladstone Savanna. For a time, Gladstone prospered and by the 1890's, the businesses employed 1,000 workers. It had a post office, a hotel, at least two saloons, a brothel and a population of about 150.

But Gladstone suffered a series of misfortunes that lead to its demise. First, a fire destroyed the Plow Works in 1892. The company rebuilt but in 1896, the major stockholder, William Dawson, filed for bankruptcy. In 1903, the plant reopened under the name Poirier Manufacturing Company but it declared bankruptcy in 1908. In 1910, the railroads changed the name of the depot to Gloster to avoid confusion with Gladstone, Michigan but locals continued to call the area Gladstone. The last straw for Gladstone's industries was when the railroad shops closed around 1917. Gladstone became a semi-ghost town by the 1920's with many people leaving for jobs elsewhere. The price of houses dropped and the burning of houses to collect insurance money became a regular occurrence. Trains still operated and some residents commuted to work in downtown St Paul. The depot continued in operation through the 1950's.

The area south of Hudson Road became McLean Township when Minnesota became a state in 1858 and the area north of Hudson Road was New Canada Township. New Canada's first town meetings were at a school building in today's Little Canada and McLean's were at a school building near Point Douglas Road

and Lower Afton Road. In 1879, New Canada Township built a more centrally-located town hall near the north shore of Lake Phalen. This was moved to Gladstone around 1900. In 1887, the residents in the northeast corner of New Canada voted to withdraw from New Canada township to incorporate as the village of North St Paul. During the last half of the 19th century, the City of St Paul repeatedly annexed land from both townships and around 1890, the remaining five square miles of McLean merged with New Canada. Annual meetings were a big event and the little town hall was packed with residents. By the early 1950's, the old town hall was sold and offices were moved to a back room of the Gladstone Fire department with annual meetings held in the Gladstone School.

After World War II, the housing boom began in New Canada Township when returning veterans started families, received low financing rates on new houses and sought city water, sewer and better roads. This led to many debates at township meetings between the new residents wanting improved services and the older residents who did not want the increased taxes. In 1953, residents of Little Canada broke away from the township to incorporate as a village. The Township had increased to 14,200 residents, appointed a planning commission, adopted a building code and had two constables. In 1955, 3M built its Central Research Laboratory on 150 acres along Highway 12 in New Canada Township. This land was outside the city limits of St Paul but rumors began that St Paul wanted to annex the area for the additional taxes. After much discussion, the residents of the Township voted to incorporate as a village on February 26, 1957 by a vote of 5 to 1. This kept 3M on the village tax base and also allowed the village to become eligible for a share of the state gasoline tax.

Waldo Luebben was the first mayor and many of the former New Canada Township board members became village officials. Ed O'Mara suggested the name "Maplewood" for the new village and Warren Berger found a maple leaf in his backyard and traced the outline for the village logo. For a few years, life was much like that of the former township with offices located in Gladstone. The Engineering Department was in a former barber shop and grocery store. The town constable slowly evolved into the Maplewood Police Department with offices in a converted house. Fire protection for the township was started in the mid 1940's by the Gladstone volunteer fire department and was soon joined by the Parkside and East County Line volunteer departments. In 1997, these organizations merged to become the Maplewood Fire Department. In the 1950's the decision had been made to consolidate the village departments in a new municipal building. But construction was so slow that Building Inspector Oscar Londin was alleged to have grabbed a shovel and said "I'll do it myself!" The two story city hall was finally completed at 1380 Frost Avenue in 1965. The residents voted to adopt the council-manager system in 1968 and the village became a city in 1982. It only took twenty years to outgrow the two-story city hall and in 1985 a new city hall was built at 1830 East County Road B. By 1990, the population was 30,954.

Truck farming was a main industry in McLean and New Canada Township through the first half of the twentieth century because of the close proximity to the Farmers Market in St Paul. Dairy farming was also popular and milk was shipped to creameries in St Paul or delivered directly to homes by local farmers. But as property taxes increased and land prices soared after World War II, these farmers could no longer make a living from the land and began selling small plots to developers for houses, retail stores and highways. Highway 36 was constructed in 1955 and Maplewood Mall, I-94 and I-694 were all opened in the early 1970's. The last operating farm was probably the Bruentrup Heritage Farm on White Bear Avenue where the last hay crop was cut in 1998. In 1999, these buildings were donated to the Maplewood Area Historical Society and moved to city-owned Open Space along County Road D. In the year 2000, the population of Maplewood was 35,258 and covered an area about 18 square miles – this is ½ the size of New Canada Township when it was created in 1858.