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Bound for the Future***

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photo by Harvey Winje

Pauline Fjelde's former house at 3009 Park Avenue. A delay to demolition application is being sought by community historian activists, to verify its historical significance, because Pauline Fjelde and many of her immigrant family made significant artistic contributions to the history of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and America.

Unfortunately, insensitive alterations have eliminated or concealed many of the architectural details of this very classic style of house so familiar in early 20th Century south Minneapolis. The removal of the full-width, front, two-story front porches and the smaller side porches all most likely with bold, fanciful round columns and fancy wooden or wrought iron railings drastically altered the relationship of the house to the street as the house now appears starkly tall and less inviting than it did with its characteristic porches. Removal of the ornate wood brackets and stucco over the the frieze board beneath the roof's eave-overhang has added to the insensitive monolithic changes. The original clapboard siding has been concealed by stucco resurfacing. Aluminum combination storm windows, satellite antennae, and other modern "amenities" further compromise its original beauty. Fortunately, it is possible to reverse these alterations.

#### BY BRIAN FINSTAD

A recent request for a wrecking permit of a Central Neighborhood residence has unearthed some very significant history in the story of our city. Application has been made to demolish the residence at 3009 Park Avenue in order to create a surface parking lot for the neighboring commercial property. What has been discovered is that this was the residence of Pauline Fjelde, a renown seamstress, embroider, and weaver who emigrated from Norway to MPLS in 1887. Pauline and her sister Thomanne together completed the embroidery of the first Minnesota State Flag that was commissioned for the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Interestingly, her sister Thomanne lived directly across the street from Pauline at

3008 Park Avenue. Together, they are our own "Norwegian Betsy Rosses" of Minnesota.

If the story were to stop there, it in itself would make an interesting anecdote of history; however, that is really only the beginning. Pauline came from a family of highly acclaimed artisans whose collective contributions to the arts of Norwegian American heritage is unparalleled. Pauline's father was a renown woodcarver. Her brother, Jakob, a famous sculptor whose works include the Minnesota monument at Gettysburg, the Minerva sculpture at the Minneapolis Public Library, the Ole Bull statue in Loring Park, and the iconic Hiawatha and Minnehaha sculpture at Minnehaha Falls. A niece, Astrid, went on to become an opera singer with the

National Opera Company in New York City. Paul Fjelde, a son of Jakob, also became a sculptor whose fame was even greater than his father's. His works include a bust of Abraham Lincoln that was a gift to Norway and stands in Oslo to this day. Other works are too numerous to mention but can also be found at the Smithsonian. A grandson of Jakob's translated the works of Ibsen into American English, founded the Yale Poetry Review, and was bestowed the Norwegian Royal Medal of St. Olaf for his contributions to the arts. Jakob died at an early age when his children were quite young and their mother moved the family to North Dakota. However, as the children came of age and pursued their own educations and studies in the arts they came to

*Fjelde Family Artists, Artisans, and Performers Works Enrich our History and Culture.*

## The Home of Pauline Fjelde is Threatened by Wrecking Ball

Minneapolis, many coming to live with their Aunt Pauline at 3009 Park Avenue.

Pauline herself left Minneapolis in December of 1910 and for nearly two years traveled Europe studying the works and techniques of the masters of her time. Her places of study included Copenhagen, Paris, Luxembourg, and of course Norway. Pauline returned to Minneapolis and began creating artistic tapestries utilizing the Gobelin tapestry weaving technique learned in Paris in which she worked from the reverse side of the tapestry while looking at her design image placed behind her through a mirror. The image for the design of her famous "Hiawatha" tapestry was created for her by the famous Danish painter Brendekilde. Pauline is credited with incorporating the traditional pictorial forms of tapestry with the Arts and Crafts Movement underway in Europe and bringing those influences to Minnesota. A Duke University School of Law article entitled "Cultural Aspects of Immigration: Its Impact on our Arts and Sciences" credits Pauline Fjelde's works in its example of textile handicraft. Pauline's works have been described as truly "Norwegian-American" works of art in that they represent "Norwegian craftsmanship applied to a distinctly American subject." The "Hiawatha" tapestry is reported to have taken between 10-13 years to create. Pauline's works have been displayed at the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts, the Walker, the Art Institute of Chicago, and have toured in Norway. In November of 1917 Pauline's "Animal Kingdom" tapestry was featured on the cover of the bulletin of the Art Institute of

Chicago. Both Pauline's "Nisse" and "Animal Kingdom" tapestries now are in permanent collection at the Vesterheim, the National Norwegian American Heritage Museum in Decorah, Iowa while the "Hiawatha" tapestry remains locally in the care of a descendent of her sister Thomanne.

What makes the story of Pauline Fjelde interesting is not only that she was a great artisan and a member of this great artistic lineage, but also her accomplishments as a woman during her time in history. Although her brother Jakob was considered famous for his time, reports indicate that financially he was near destitution. Pauline however, capitalized on her talent to embroider the linens of and make dresses for the upper crust ladies of Minneapolis with great financial success. Additionally she is noted as having specialized in embroidering silk banners for literary and musical organizations around the country. Utilizing these talents, Pauline attained the financial means as an unmarried woman to commission the construction of a large Park Avenue residence designed by the firm of Boehmme and Cordella (whose other works include the Gluek Building, Grain Belt Bottling House, and the American Swedish Institute). Construction occurred in 1907. This residence is adjacent to the commercial district as it served as both her home and "dressmaking and fine art embroidery shop" until her retirement in 1918. This is the structure whose fate is currently in question.

A special meeting was called by the CANDO (Neighborhood

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Organization) Housing and Land Use Committee in order to formulate an official Neighborhood recommendation. Discussion not only included the value of this property as a historic and cultural asset to our city, but also issues related to land use planning and the blight of the commercial blocks immediately adjoining Lake Street. The neighborhood would like to see these blocks become vibrant residential areas considered desirable to those who wish to live in close proximity to transit and amenities. However, destabilization and blight have occurred over time in part due to encroachment of commercial expansion and surface parking. By example, the blocks with the most intact residential character (such as Columbus) are the most stable and viable of these blocks.

The official City Council adopted Land Use plan for this area calls for it to be a pedestrian and transit oriented district and specifically recommends "Off Street Parking - Not Surface." Many in the neighborhood feel that parking is a collective issue of the district and as such should be problem solved and addressed in a collective fashion. Although these cases can seem to make sense on a case by case basis, the result of individual commercial frontages solving their individual needs through demolition into the surrounding neighborhood results in lack of confidence to invest in those immediately adjoining blocks as well as degradation of the overall residential character of those blocks. It should also be said that many in the neighborhood do not see the interests of the commercial district and residential blocks needing to be seen at odds with each other but rather envision that a healthy and respected boundary between what is commercial and what is residential could lead to vibrant neighborhood blocks supporting vibrant neighborhood businesses.

Another consideration is that Park Avenue embodies a wealth of architecture and fascinating historical stories along its entire length through the Central Neighborhood. Although not an officially a designated district, in the summer of 2008, the Heritage Preservation Commission sponsored a first ever Historic Park Avenue Walking Tour entitled "From Queen Annes to Classical Revivals: The Stories of Park Avenue and its People." This thoroughly researched and narrated tour set records in attendance and is planned to be repeated again in the future. Additionally, the state Historical Society has an

online tour of this district via Placeography. This property literally is the gateway property to future tours and this district.

Another aspect is that this property also tells the story of Lake Street. Whenever we celebrate Lake Street, we talk about immigrants past and present. There is ample evidence of today's immigrants (which is wonderful) but very little remains of the past. Due to its location adjacent to the business district and in an area of high pedestrian traffic, this property would make a very interesting "point of interest" to the visitor of Lake Street as well as serve as a connection point for the visitor of Lake Street to take a self guided tour down historic Park Avenue.

The special CANDO Housing meeting on December 13th was attended by 38 people who took time out of their Saturday to attend. Of those eligible to vote under CANDO bylaws, all voted in favor of requesting a Designation Study with the exception of Mr. James Schoffman, applicant of the wrecking permit. This recommendation will come before the CANDO Board of Directors on 12/18/08 for official approval. The Board forwarded the issue to the CANDO Economic Development Committee. Under HPC guidelines, only the mayor, a city council member, an HPC commissioner, or an owner can request a designation study of the property. Therefore, an option for the CANDO board could be to request council member Elizabeth Glidden to request the study on behalf of the wide spread support of the neighborhood recommendation.

In summary, this house is about more than a woman who could sew. And it is not only about our state flag. It's about an entire family of artisans whose contributions to Norwegian American heritage is unparalleled. It is about the travel of art forms, techniques, and influences between continents and across oceans. It is about the story of immigrant settlement along Lake Street. It is about the history of Park Avenue. It is about women's history. It is about respecting our future land use planning and wish to create vibrant residential blocks adjoining the business district. The significance of this property transcends beyond Minneapolis to state, national, and arguably international significance. But also, it is a part of the heritage of the Midtown area and the Central Neighborhood. It is our heritage.

**Brian Finstad is a resident of Central Neighborhood**