Changing Dinkytown: Remembering The Swain Company and Tom Swain
An Interview and article by Tom Daly, editor / Class of ’55.

On Thursday, January 10, 2013, eight Marshall alumni gathered at Kafe 421 for lunch. There were lots of things to talk about; one of the hot topics was the changes being planned for Dinkytown. Our old school building is being torn down and replaced by several hundred apartments and some new retail stores. The iconic House of Hanson and some other stores may be on the auction block. It all seemed hard to imagine, and then we met Tom Swain.

Tom was having lunch at the next table. He seemed to have overheard enough of our conversation to learn that we were old Marshallites. He introduced himself and showed us some pictures that he had in a manila file folder. The pictures were of the Swain family business which had been located in Dinkytown before the 1950s. In fact, its most recent location was at 423 4th Street SE, right next door to where we were having lunch.

Several of us talked with Tom Swain; we even took a few snapshots of each other. Tom is a very delightful and engaging gentleman, and I decided that I would like to do an article about Tom and his family’s business for our May issue. What follows is based on my interview with Tom Swain.

More than one hundred years ago, the Swain family set up shop in Dinkytown, or what was to become Dinkytown. That was before the House of Hanson existed, or Simms Hardware, or Eklund Clothing Co. or Bridgeman’s. Over the years, many businesses came and went in Dinkytown; eventually the Swain family business was one of them.

Tom’s great grandfather, Harold L. Swain, started the Swain Company about 1885 on East Hennepin, but moved to 413 14th Avenue SE about 1890. He sold coal, wood and hardware. Within a few years, he sold the hardware business to William Simms who set up his hardware store at 411 14th Avenue SE. The Swain Company moved across the street to 414 14th Avenue, and by 1910 they moved...
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again to 408 14th Avenue.

In the early years, the Swain Company used horse drawn wagons, then horses and trucks, and finally only trucks. During the early 1900s, the Swain Company had its barns, stables and garages between 14th and 15th Avenues on the land that today is occupied by McDonald’s.

Harold Swain sold his business to his son Charles (Tom’s grandfather) and the company name was changed to Swain Farmer Co. Although they continued to sell coal and wood, the company added a transfer and baggage business to its services.

In those days, many college students attending the University of Minnesota traveled to the Twin Cities on trains and they shipped their belongings in trunks. The Swain Company delivered many of those trunks to students’ houses and dormitories.

Tom Swain’s dad, Earl E. Swain, was born in 1896, served in World War I and returned home to take over the family business. He managed it at its final location, 423 14th Avenue SE. In addition to selling various forms of coal, the company sold stokers, oil burners and water heaters, and did long distance and local hauling.

The 1928 Cardinal, Marshall High School’s yearbook, carried an ad in its advertising section for Swain Farmer Co. which promoted its furnaces, heaters and several forms of fuel. But the fates were not kind to the Swain Company.

The Great Depression made life difficult for families and businesses. In the 1930s, a large coal company did its best to squeeze out small companies like Swain. Tom recalled that 1936 was a very tough year; the winter was the coldest ever with 47 days recording temperatures below zero. Tom’s dad prayed that the
weather would turn warmer so that people would use less coal. He was being forced to sell coal below cost; he was losing money on every ton of coal that he sold.

In 1939 a strange thing happened, Tom’s dad vanished. Tom was a freshman at the U of M at the time. Tom recalled that his dad had some business with the Wisconsin State Highway Department. He asked Tom to drive him downtown to the Milwaukee Road station. He planned to catch the noon “Hiawatha” to Madison, Wisconsin.

Tom drove his dad to the station in their family car. He dropped his dad off, and that was the last he ever saw of him. Earl Swain just vanished. There was some speculation that his father might have suffered amnesia resulting from injuries he suffered in World War I, but what happened to Earl Swain remains a mystery to this day.

After about 50 years in Dinkytown, the Swain family business closed. Tom’s mother moved with her four sons to an apartment near 45th and Nicollet in south Minneapolis. Tom and his three younger brothers all worked their way through the University of Minnesota; his mother found work with an insurance company.

Tom Swain earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration in 1942 and served with the Air Force in the Pacific during World War II. In 1946, Tom returned to the University of Minnesota and became its first athletic scholastic advisor. He helped a number of athletes including Bud Grant, Billy Bye, and Verne Gagne.

During the next 60 years, Tom Swain’s career moved well beyond Dinkytown. He excelled in the business world, politics, higher education and public service. Tom was an executive with St. Paul
Swain: Continued from page 3
Companies, chief of staff to Governor Elmer Andersen, executive director of Minnesota’s Statehood Centennial Commission, director of The Courage Center, and president of the Citizens League and of the University of Minnesota’s Alumni Association. Recently Tom Swain stepped down from being mayor of the City of Lilydale.

Tom has come a long way from Dinkytown, and yet it was in Dinkytown that we met. Tom Swain told me that his mantra used to be “It is better to wear out than to rust out.” Now at age 91 with no rust showing, Tom reflects on the many friends and family members who have passed away. He says that now his mantra is “Growing old is a privilege denied to many.” Amen to that, Tom.

Tom Daly

Mr. Hegg driving the Swain-Farmer Co. truck about 1925. The house on the left, 1409 5th St. SE, is still there. (See photo below.)

Napolean (Poly) Ouellette was driving this Swain-Farmer truck about 1930. Was the driver Paul Ouellette’s grandfather? That’s Marshall High School in the background. The truck was made over from a Twin City Line bus.

Tom Swain, a man of many parts, shared his family’s story which was part of Dinkytown for more than 50 years.
From the late 1800s until now, Dinkytown has been under a continual turnover. Most of the businesses that existed in the 1950s have been replaced. Which one of the five shown below were in Dinkytown in the 1950s? In the 1970s? In the 1940s?
**How we dressed in the late 1930s!**

This was “definitely (a) conservative time, coming out of the depression”. The clothing students wore exemplified that statement from Marjory Jelmeland Immer class of ’39.

Although, students were told by teachers in preparation for their class photographs “to be sure to wear our dressier clothes and many of us were greatly surprised at seeing boys with ties for the first time”.

Everyday school-wear for the girls was shirts and blouses and skirts...skirts worn below the knees. “Actually, girls were told not to wear slacks in school. That gave us a little problem because it was cold walking to school without slacks, so we had to take them off as soon as we got in the door of the school and stash them in our lockers during the day and then hurriedly don them for the trip home”. Saddle shoes and penny loafers with anklets were in vogue and overshoes in the winter. “Hats were a no-no but we had to put them on before leaving the house to please our moms”. Bathing suits were made of wool, definitely one-piece and had skirts. Popular stores for girls clothing were Daytons or Donaldsons.

We wore prom dresses to the prom. “It snowed heavily the day of my prom held at the Loring Hotel and I only lingered through the dinner and got the streetcar (home) to avoid getting stuck in the snowstorm.” Several of the fathers rented rooms for their daughters.

“Boys certainly did not wear any flamboyant clothes, but dressed conservatively” as shown in the photo of students outside House of Hanson in 1937. This contrasts with how the retailers wanted them to dress. The presidents of the senior classes of each Minneapolis high school were featured in Maurice L. Rothschild ads in The Minneapolis Star. The ads stated “Every Saturday is High School Day at Rothschilds. Each Saturday until graduation the senior class presidents of all these high schools will be here to greet you and help you make your selection.” Each class president received a discount on his graduation suit purchased at Rothschilds.

Marshall class president Watson is shown on page 7 in lower right corner.

*Just as clothing styles changed, so did building styles. Below are photos of historic House of Hanson.

RKH
Marshall class president of 1937, Charles Watson, is shown above.
Dear fellow Marshall alumns,
Thanks to one of the 1963 MUHS class leaders (Lynn Gunderson) who informed me that the demolition of the Marshall High School building was going on in earnest. Lynn and his wife had just returned from the site. The next morning I left my home in New Hope and drove to the Dinkytown area where I shot 80 digital photos. It was an emotional experience. In close proximity were University Lutheran Church of Hope and St. Lawrence Catholic Church. Those two churches and Marshall, played a big role in many of our lives. Watching the destruction of Marshall made me choke up as memories flashed through my mind. I hope you enjoy the photos that follow.
Last summer, following lunch at the Kafe 421, Otto Lausten, Anne Lindgren, and Tom Daly gathered in front of Marshall. They had recently heard that the building would be torn down to make room for over 300 apartments. Goodbye building of memories. A hearty Thank you to all the teachers, counselors, administrators, coaches, maintenance people, and all those who served our classmates with disabilities. (MHS was a pioneer in that outreach.)

—Otto Lausten, class of 1955

The following five pages show the recent demolition activities taking place on 14th & 15th Avenues and 5th & 6th Streets.
Demolition Workers hosing down the dust. As seen from the corner of fifth Street and 15th Ave. SE

Demolition Workers separating the material. Many of the exterior bricks were salvaged.
The Sixth Street–or North side. The pile in the foreground is a stack of bricks from the exterior of MHS. Due to many requests for souvenirs of exterior bricks the demolition management set a large pile aside for people desiring momentoes.

Photo below contains ten Marshall High School bricks salvaged by class ’55

The Main Entrance of 1313 Fifth Street SE. Also known as University Technology Center and before that John Marshall High School. Soon to be a large apartment and store complex.
The South Side of Marshall along Fifth Street SE.

A view of the West parking lot and University Lutheran Church of Hope in the distance.
The 14th Avenue Side of Marshall.

The Sixth Street Side of Marshall.
Photo above shows the north and west sides and the demolition worker’s office trailer.

Otto Lausten having a sad moment.
Marshall High School Class of 1958 Reunion Planning Team announces their 55th Anniversary Reunion. The celebration/party is to be held the evening of August 28, 2013 at Jax Café, on University Avenue in Northeast Minneapolis. Scott Johnson and Nancy Bjergen Green will emcee the class interactions and frivolity. The reunion occurs during the Great Minnesota Get-Together: The State Fair, so plan for two great events while you are here. Place this on your calendar; ticket information is available by contacting Larry Petersen, 651-483-1564 or email: petersen651@comcast.net

Marshall Class of 1963 is planning a 50th anniversary reunion for the weekend of June 7th and 8th. The Saturday night, June 8th, event will be held at Jax Café. Classmates to meet Friday evening @ 6:00 pm at Stub & Herbs. For more information contact Lynn Gunderson: lpgundy@comcast.net

Marshall Class of 1967 says “We plan to have another fun reunion in 2017, and hope that every classmate will mark August 26, 2017 on their calendar and make every effort to attend. A number of classmates who were unable to attend the 45th reunion promised to see us in 2017. We look forward to seeing you there too.” www.marshallclassof67.org

Marshall Class of 1973 “does not currently have a reunion planned”. Any ’73 classmate who might be interested and has suggestions can contact Roseann Yund Parke at parkepoint@aol.com

REMEMBERING CLASSMATES WHO HAVE PASSED—

Marvin Donley ’47, Nov 20, 2012. Marvin lived in Las Vegas. His Show Stoppers group performed several times at our Marshall reunions in Laughlin.

Hello MHS Alumni!— Use your graphic design and editor talents!

I am Otto Lausten, Production person for the Marshall, Marshall U High Alumni News. The editors are Tom Daly and Bob Hayes, all of us are from the Class of 1955. The originator of the AN was Hap Corbett. Due to illness, and a fire that destroyed his home in the Brainerd area Hap passed the MHS newsletter on to the three of us. I had a stroke two years ago, Tom Daly has had two major cardio incidents. We are seeking young Marshallites to pick up the publication and keep it available for fellow students. Issues of past Newsletters (published three times a year—January, May, and September—are posted on the University of Minnesota’s Disability Services web site. Address below.

We hope someone will take the torch and run with it. You may contact the three of us at:

Tom Daly: TMDALY@q.com
Bob Hayes: Robertkhdjh@aol.com
Otto Lausten: owlausten@msn.com

The new University of Minnesota Disability Services web site is:

www.Diviversity.umn.edu/disability

Next “surf” to the center of the lower row of links and select John Marshall Alumni Newsletter. You will see several years’ issues.

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Watch for the September, 2013 issue of MUHS Alumni News
It will be posted on September 1, 2013 at:
www.diversity.umn.edu/disability
In the center of the lower row of links and miscellaneous items select “John Marshall Alumni Newsletter”. “Voila!”

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Give generously and give a boost to those in need.

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