

Augustine Martinez, United States Army, 1944-45

Born in 1919 in Mexico, Augustine Martinez moved to St. Paul with his family at age seven. He was 25 years old, a married father of two working at American Hoist in St. Paul in 1944 when his military deferment expired and he was drafted into the army. Leaving, he recalls, was hard.

They came around, they called me in the office. "Hey, Martinez, you've got to go. We can't do anything. You have to go." Oh, no! There I went. I had to report to Fort Snelling for examination, physical. Everything went all right. Number one [1-A draft classification]. I said, "No, no, no. I'm old. I can't go. I have a wife." They said, "Sorry, Martinez. There's nothing wrong with your hands. You can hold a rifle, can't you?" Oh, boy! That was it.

I didn't like it, because I had children already, and a wife. They're left behind, you know. Work and food and things like that. I didn't feel good.

Hey, what's going to happen here? You go away for months and months, and during a war you never know if you will come back or not. Everything was on my mind there. You cry. You just don't feel good.

It was terrible. We cried. The kids cried. We went to the train depot here in St. Paul. That's where I left from. Yes, that was hard. Oh, my, it was hard. I'm not kidding you. Oh, I remember, I cry all the way. It was terrible! It's worse than war, leaving your family like that.

—Thomas Saylor



Augustine Martinez

Thomas Saylor, associate professor of history at Concordia University, St. Paul, interviewed Mr. Martinez for Remembering the Good War: Minnesota's Greatest Generation (2005).



In 2005 the Minnesota Historical Society launched a long-term project to preserve and present the history of "Minnesota's Greatest Generation," the men and women who grew up during the Great Depression and came of age during World War II. This essay is part of a series that spotlights the experiences of generation members from all walks of life. For more on the MHS project, visit www.mngreatestgeneration.org.

Erickson Gas Station St. Paul



BACK IN THE 1960s, the architecture of the great American roadside could be a rambunctious and even exhilarating affair. Take, for example, this zippy little gas station operated by Erickson Petroleum Co. (now Holiday) just east of downtown St. Paul.

What makes the station so much fun is its single-minded devotion to forward momentum, beginning with the signs. Shaped like Flash Gordon rocket ships and mounted atop tilted posts, the signs fairly leap out at the street in an effort to lure in passing motorists. The station's upthrust glass facade and splayed lights are equally aggressive (note how sedate the old city street lamps along Seventh seem in comparison). Erickson operated other stations of similar design in the Twin Cities in the 1960s, but none survive in their original form, reflecting both changes in the gasoline business and in architectural tastes.

Assertive, in-your-face design was a common feature of gas stations, eateries, motels, and other roadside

buildings in the 1950s and 1960s. The idea was to convey a sense of speed and modernity—two concepts that have long been related. By the 1970s, however, roadside architecture began to grow much tamer. A number of factors contributed to the demise of the old architectural free-for-all along the highways. National chains became dominant and imposed standardized designs. The interstate highway system also encouraged homogeneity. Critics, too, weighed in, and in books like Peter Blake's *God's Own Junkyard* excoriated the ugliness of the typical American commercial strip. Quiet good taste, in other words, came into favor.

Alas, good taste can be a dangerous thing, and it's rare now to find roadside buildings with anything like the high-flying exuberance of the old Erickson station. Instead, big boxes and historical pastiches prevail along the streets of both city and suburb. In keeping with that trend, the Erickson station pictured here gave way years ago to a standard Holiday outlet, where the signs stand straight and there's nary a rocket ship in sight.

—LARRY MILLETT

Larry Millett is the author of Strange Days, Dangerous Nights: Photos from the Speed Graphic Era (2004) and numerous books and articles on architectural history.

Erickson gas station at St. Paul's East Seventh and Kittson Streets, 1962





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