

## Lake View Store, Morgan Park Duluth



THE LAKE VIEW STORE in the U.S. Steel-owned settlement of Morgan Park (today a Duluth neighborhood) was a benign version of the company store, the oppressive institution made famous by Tennessee Ernie Ford's "Sixteen Tons." Morgan Park itself was considered a model company town, built along City Beautiful principles to house workers at the adjacent steel plant and subsidiaries opened by J. P. Morgan's industrial colossus in 1915.

The neighborhood covers 190 acres about 10 miles southwest of downtown Duluth, along the St. Louis River. Areas were reserved for businesses and houses, arranged by workers' status and income level. Residents had to be employed by U.S. Steel or its subsidiaries, though no more than a quarter of the company's local workforce ever lived there. Community services ranged from fire and police to gardens, churches, schools, parks, and a clubhouse.

The Lake View Store, like all Morgan Park buildings, was constructed of concrete blocks manufactured nearby in U. S. Steel's cement plant. The store, said to be the nation's first indoor mall, housed all retail business in Morgan Park. Privately owned companies in the 200-foot-long, two-story (plus basement) building included a shoe store, pharmacy, bank, barbershop, hair salon, and dentist office. U.S. Steel



*Lake View Store, 1076–1096 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue West, Morgan Park Historic District, photographed in 1990 by Jet Lowe for the Historic American Buildings Survey (LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)*

owned the department/grocery store. The building's grand opening in July 1916 was an event. Thousands took the guided tours.

In the early years, a Ford Model TT truck delivered goods to residents. There was no company-issued scrip. Employees could run a tab for groceries, to be deducted from their paychecks. While they were not obligated to buy at the store, company personnel were known to check on those who went elsewhere for lower prices.

Morgan Park's era as a company town was relatively short. By the end of the 1930s the grocery store had been leased to others. By the end of World War II, U.S. Steel sold all of its Morgan Park holdings, save the steel plant. It closed in 1971.

The deteriorating Lake View Building had but one business tenant

when it was purchased in July 2011 by Paul and Brandon Johnson, father and son. A multiyear restoration is underway. The building's first business, a coffee shop/bistro and adjacent artists gallery, will open by late spring 2012—new gathering places in a neighborhood that once provided it all.

*Sources:* 1984 Historic American Building Survey documentation; Arnold R. Alanen, *Morgan Park: Duluth, U.S. Steel, and the Forging of a Company Town* (2007); "Morgan Park Mall Project in the Works," *Duluth News Tribune*, July 25, 2011, p. 1C; phone conversation, Paul Johnson with Laura Weber, Jan. 30, 2012.

*Laura Weber, a Minneapolis writer and historian, has twice received the Solon J. Buck Award for the year's best article in Minnesota History.*



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