



Map showing the vacation of Walnut Street. From the Louis W. Hill papers at the James J. Hill Reference library.

rental value of the house lies entirely in its location, as the same house in any other part of the town would not bring over \$10.00 per month in its present condition. Considering its location, however . . . it is well worth \$35.00 as it stands.” Although Summit Avenue had grown since the first homes were constructed in the late 1850s, it was not until after 1881 that it experienced tremendous building activity. From 1855 to 1881 only twenty-six homes were built on Summit and fifteen of those were torn down after 1880 to make way for new homes. Between 1882 and 1891, with economic good times and the relocation of the elite neighborhoods previously mentioned, St. Paulites constructed seventy-two new

homes on the avenue.⁴

Hill, a Summit Avenue resident since 1891, received a letter from C. E. D. Olmsted, dated October 31, 1898, informing him of the availability of the George Palmes property at a cost of \$23,000. Hill did not reply to Olmsted but on November 4th his secretary sent a note to Frederick Weyerhaeuser where, speaking of the property, he wrote, “. . . and as he [Hill] did not want to purchase it, he directed me to advise you of the same, as you might wish to take advantage of it.” On December 12th of the same year, Hill was again approached by Olmsted who told him that Weyerhaeuser had agreed to purchase the Palmes property for \$20,000, however,

“. . . afterwards withdrew it as his wife was opposed to it.” Hill now evidently decided that the price was right and on December 20, 1898, agreed to terms. The warranty deed was recorded in Ramsey County on February 21, 1899. Whether lowering the price was the main consideration, or not, Hill was now the new owner of 260 Summit, and a step was taken which would result in the avenue becoming home to several members of James and Mary Hill’s family. During the early decades of the twentieth century, Hill and five of his nine children had homes within a few blocks of each other, all on Summit Avenue: James and Mary at 240; Louis at 260; Clara at 251; Charlotte at 251 and later 435; Rachel at 505, then at 421 and finally at 366; and Walter at 465.⁵

In the two-and-a-half years prior to the start of construction on the house for Louis Hill, the old Noble home continued to be rented out. William P. Abbott remained until November 1899, when records show the home was rented to Charles C. Whitney, listed in the *City Directory* for that year as “State Expert Printer, Capital bldg.” Whitney continued to rent at \$25 to \$30 a month, through March 1901. William C. Jaeger [Yaeger] rented the home only for the months of April and May of 1901, with a monthly rent of \$20. As Louis Hill’s engagement to Maud Van Cortlandt Taylor was announced on April 10, 1901, Jaeger, no doubt, knew his residence at 260 would terminate when construction plans for the new home were in place. In a May 23, 1901, memo to W. C. Toomey, James J. Hill’s secretary, Louis writes, “Please ask the President [James J. Hill] if it is his intention to give me the Palmes property, and if so take up with him the question of closing the street and advise me as soon as you can whether the city will agree to this or not as it would be useless to think of building there without the street being closed.” James Hill must have informed Louis quickly on both points; by late May, Louis engaged architect Clarence Johnston for his new home and asked Toomey for an estimate of the total cost of the proposed house, broken down as follows: “1st estimate of excavations and foundations—2nd including