



CPED STAFF REPORT

Prepared for the Heritage Preservation Commission

HPC Agenda Item #4

July 22, 2014

BZH-28268

HERITAGE PRESERVATION APPLICATION SUMMARY

Property Location: 2330 Hennepin Avenue South
Project Name: Thomas Lowry Memorial
Prepared By: Andrew Frenz, Planning Intern, (612)-673-3851, with John Smoley,
Senior Planner, (612)-673-2830
Applicant: Chuck Lutz, CPED Interim Director
Project Contact: Andrew Frenz
Ward: 7
Neighborhood: East Isles
Request: Nomination for Designation as a Local Landmark

HISTORIC PROPERTY INFORMATION

Current Name	Thomas Lowry Memorial
Historic Name	Thomas Lowry Memorial
Historic Address	Virginia Triangle (intersection of Hennepin, Lyndale, and Douglas Avenues)
Original Construction Date	1915
Original Owner	Lowry Memorial Commission
Original Architect	Karl Bitter
Original Builder	H. N. Leighton Co
Historic Use	Public Art
Current Use	Public Art
Proposed Use	Public Art
Other Historical Designations	N/A

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The Thomas Lowry memorial was built to recognize the contributions of Twin City Rapid Transit Company founder and real estate magnate Thomas Lowry to the City of Minneapolis. In 1910, just over a year after Lowry's 1909 death, the Thomas Lowry Memorial Association was organized by several prominent Minneapolitans seeking to embed the memory of Mr. Lowry forever in the public consciousness. The association selected world-renowned sculptor Karl Bitter to design the memorial, which was built by the H. N. Leighton Company under the oversight of Minneapolis sculptor Charles S Wells. The memorial was dedicated on August 19, 1915. Originally sited at the Virginia Triangle (the intersection of Hennepin, Lyndale, and Douglas Avenuess), the memorial was relocated to Smith Triangle Park (2330 Hennepin Avenue South) in 1967 to make way for the construction of Interstate 94.

The memorial consists of a nine foot tall bronze statue of Mr. Lowry atop a granite pedestal, backed by a fifteen by thirty foot granite screen featuring two classical carvings of a man and a woman, along with the following inscription: "In memory of Thomas Lowry. Be this community strong and enduring it will do homage to the men who guided its growth. The lesson of a public spirit: life is a tree ever bearing new fruit."

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Staff has received no public comments on the nomination.

ANALYSIS

CONSIDERATION FOR NOMINATION

Per section 599.230 of the Heritage Preservation Regulations, the Heritage Preservation Commission shall review all complete nomination applications. If the Heritage Preservation Commission determines that a nominated property or property appears to meet at least one of the criteria for designation contained in section 599.210 the commission may institute interim protection and direct the planning director to prepare or cause to be prepared a designation study of the property.

SIGNIFICANCE

The nominated property appears to meet at least one of the criteria for designation contained in section 599.210:

(1) The property is associated with significant events or with periods that exemplify broad patterns of cultural, political, economic or social history.

Streetcars were instrumental in shaping Minneapolis into the great city that it is today, allowing the city to expand beyond the bounds of walking distance and giving average citizens access to homes, jobs, and recreational opportunities far greater than what had previously been available to them.¹ As identified under the street railways context statement in the *Minneapolis Preservation Plan*, street railways enhanced property values, and shaped building, neighborhood, and commercial development. Much of Minneapolis' built environment owes its form to streetcar development patterns; however, this form does not currently serve as a reminder of Minneapolis' streetcar heritage in the public consciousness to the extent that the Thomas Lowry Memorial does.

(2) The property is associated with the lives of significant persons or groups.

Thomas Lowry first served as president of the Minneapolis Street Railway Co, before merging it with the Saint Paul City Railway Co and becoming the first president of the Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company (TCRT).² Under Lowry's visionary leadership, TCRT extended service to new areas, driving growth and shaping much of the urban fabric of modern Minneapolis.³ Regarded as one of the City's great visionaries, Lowry was mourned across the city and indeed across the country upon his death in 1910. He was eulogized by Charles M. Loring, first president of the Minneapolis Park Board, who described Lowry as "as good a citizen as this city will ever have [...] [who] realized that Minneapolis was to be a great city and [...] showed that he had faith in it. He knew that Minneapolis would make good. [...] There is no question that this city will miss Mr. Lowry."⁴ The Thomas Lowry Memorial has been the property most associated with Mr. Lowry since the demolition of the Lowry mansion at the present site of the Walker Art Center in 1932.⁵

(6) The property exemplifies works of master builders, engineers, designers, artists, craftsmen or architects.

Karl Bitter was internationally recognized as among the greatest sculptors of his era, winning the silver medal in sculpture at the Paris Exposition in 1900, the gold medal at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, the silver medal at the Philadelphia Exposition in 1902, and the gold medal at the Saint Louis Exposition in 1904. He also served as the director of sculpture at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, the 1904 Saint Louis Exposition, and the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition. In addition, Bitter served three terms as the vice-president of the National Institute of Arts and Sciences, and one term as president of the National

¹ John W. Diers and Aaron Isaacs, *Twin Cities by Trolley: The Streetcar Era in Minneapolis and St. Paul* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2007), 4.

² Goodrich Lowry, *Streetcar Man: Tom Lowry and the Twin City Rapid Transit Company*. (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1979), 40, 48-50, 127.

³ John W. Diers and Aaron Isaacs, *Twin Cities by Trolley: The Streetcar Era in Minneapolis and St. Paul* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2007), 47, 217, 230, 246-247, 249.

⁴Peter S. Sussman, "The Thomas Lowry Memorial," *Twin City Lines* 5.2 (2011): 11-12.

⁵ Larry, Millet, *AIA Guide to the Minneapolis Lake District*, (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2009), 12.

Sculpture Society.⁶ Bitter worked on the Thomas Lowry Memorial from 1911 until his death in 1915, four months before the completion of the memorial.⁷ Bitter is responsible for dozens of memorials and much sculptural ornamentation across the country, however, the Thomas Lowry Memorial is his only extant work in Minnesota. The closest other works of Bitter are ornamentation on the Wisconsin state capitol building, followed by three pieces in Saint Louis, MO—one public sculpture and two in the collection at the Missouri History Museum.⁸

The subject property may also be eligible for designation as a landmark under the other four designation criteria. Such an analysis would be conducted as part of a designation study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development for the Nomination for designation as a Local Landmark:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the Heritage Preservation Commission adopt staff findings and **approve** the nomination of the Thomas Lowry Memorial as a landmark; **establish** interim protection; and **direct** the Planning Director to prepare or cause to be prepared a designation study.

ATTACHMENTS

A. Nomination

⁶ Ferdinand Schevill, *Karl Bitter: A Biography* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago, 1917), xiii.

⁷Peter S. Sussman, "The Thomas Lowry Memorial," *Twin City Lines* 5.2 (2011): 18-19.

⁸ Ferdinand Schevill, *Karl Bitter: A Biography* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago, 1917), x-xi.