



# Calvary's Corner

A HISTORIC SUMMARY OF THE LAND AT 26<sup>TH</sup> AND BLAISDELL

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## 1805 U.S. Senate illegally takes ownership of Bdote

What is today Minnesota was Dakota homelands for more than a thousand years. Those centuries created communities, traditions, sacred places, and burial mounds. Bdote, meaning “where two waters come together” (Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers) is where the Dakota believe their people were created, coming from the sky and into being on the land. Some have called it the Dakota Garden of Eden.

In 1805 American explorer Zebulon Pike, despite having no legal authority to do so, makes an agreement with just a few Dakota leaders that the U.S. Senate later decides includes 100,000 acres, including present-day Whittier Neighborhood. The Senate sets the value at \$2,000, despite Pike estimating the land value at \$200,000. No Dakota are present in D.C. to agree to these terms and President Jefferson did not proclaim it an official treaty, as is required and typically done.

## 1819 Fort Snelling Military Reservation established

The military outpost was intended to control the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations and ensure the fur trade was not interrupted. Beyond the walls of the fort, the U.S. military controlled present day south Minneapolis, Richfield, and Bloomington. No legal land claims are allowed in this region.

From the *History of Minneapolis*, a large volume published in 1923, Fort Snelling is remembered as critical to the “*settlement of the Country and the development of the great city of St. Anthony Falls (which became Minneapolis). After the treaties of 1837 and 1851, Snelling stood as the ‘watchman over the gate’ to protect pioneers against Indian depredations (attacking and pillaging). It represented the strong arm of Uncle Sam on the frontier and gave encouragement to the settlers in their work of building up a civilization in the wilderness.*”

## 1849-1856

Minnesota Territory is created in 1849 and Hennepin County in 1852. The 1851 Treaty forces most of Minnesota’s Dakota bands to a reservation along the Minnesota River Valley, running northwest of Mankato, a hundred miles or more from Minneapolis.

John True Blaisdell arrives in 1849 from Maine and stakes an illegal land claim by building a simple log cabin just a few blocks northwest of where Calvary is today. Brother Robert Jr. Blaisdell arrives in 1852 and stakes a claim directly south of his brother. The Blaisdell brothers are then given land patents, or grants, from the U.S. Government for 160 acres each in the winter of 1856. Today this land is the entire western half of Whittier (see a map of 1862 Whittier on page 4).

In total six men of significant financial means from the eastern U.S. are granted ownership of the entire present day Whittier Neighborhood (1 square mile, or 640 acres). At the time the land was almost completely undeveloped. The land patent documents were issued in Minneapolis but signed in D.C. by, in the case of the Blaisdell brothers, by President Franklin Pierce.

The language of the official document (just a single page in length) makes it clear: Each man is "GIVEN and GRANTED" the land from the government and the new owners can "have and hold the land with all the rights, immunities and privileges of ownership...forever." In the case of the men of Whittier, forever meaning until you develop it and sell it, or give it to your heirs.

## The Blaisdell's

After the Blaisdell brothers returned from the Civil War, John builds a six-room wood frame-house, and the parlor serves as the area's first school. In 1882, John Blaisdell builds his manor at Blaisdell and 24th Street, at which time the family moves out of what becomes Blaisdell School. A year later, Blaisdell, Longfellow and Irving Schools are annexed to the expanding Minneapolis school system. In a naming tradition common for the city, the school board renamed the school Whittier after the 19th century poet and abolitionist, John Greenleaf Whittier.

Called the "millionaire pioneer of Minneapolis" in his New York Times obituary, John True Blaisdell died in 1898 at age 71 and is buried, with his family, at Lakewood Cemetery.

## 1881 Baptist Union at 26<sup>th</sup> & Blaisdell

A few years after starting a nondenominational mission outreach at 26<sup>th</sup> and Nicollet, Rev. Henry Herrick, a Baptist, creates the Baptist Union and moves it to Calvary's current location. With the help of First Baptist Church downtown, an old chapel is moved on site. The land for the chapel, and soon after a parsonage for Herrick, is purchased from the Blaisdell's for \$1300 by Zelora Brown, a member of First Baptist. Interestingly Brown, a real estate developer and farm implement salesman, later sold the plots to his own church for a \$700 profit. Historical records also show Brown and his associates transacted more than \$1,000,000 in Minneapolis real estate a year.

## 1883 Calvary Baptist Church founded

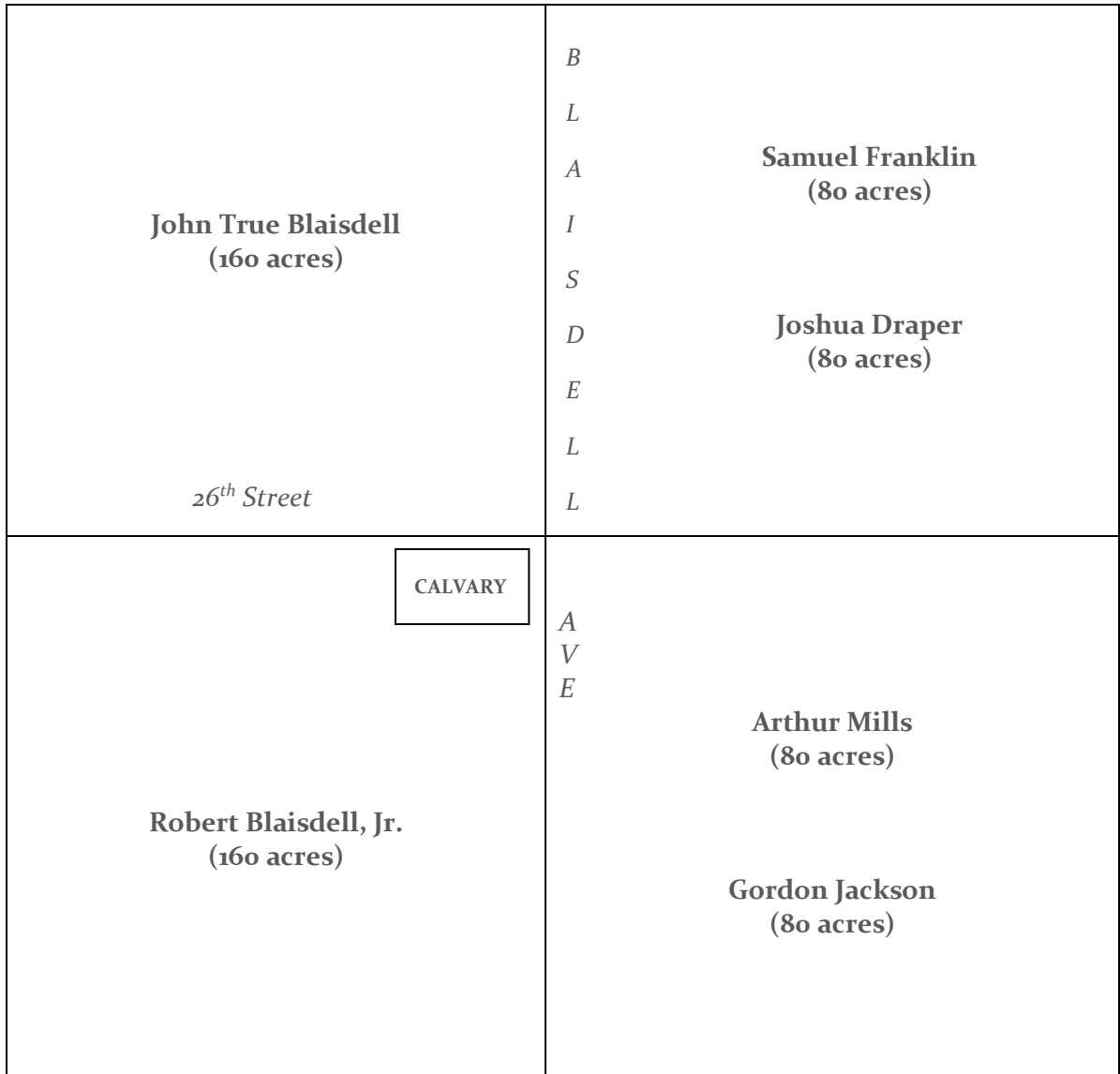
A few years later the Baptist Union resolved to start a new church in anticipation the city would grow rapidly to the south. In May 1883 23 members of First Baptist founded Calvary Baptist Church. First Baptist donated the two plots of land (one where the chapel sat, and the other where the parsonage was) to Calvary. Calvary's land footprint expanded for the final time in 1887, as plans to build a new church (today's Fellowship Hall) took shape, when church trustees secured additional plots worth \$2,500 from Blaisdell.

## Calvary's Land Historical Summary

The U.S. Government, via an invalid 1805 treaty, paid the Dakota less than 2 cents for what is today's Calvary's land. In 1856 the government then gave the land to wealthy east coast brothers, with the only requirement being that the Blaisdell's improve it and live there. The brothers had dairy herds and harvested timber, and as the city grew created real estate developments, that came to include Calvary's land. In Calvary's infancy the first plots were donated by First Baptist and then the final plots were purchased by Calvary for a total of \$2,500. Today our church's land is likely worth more than \$1,000,000.

# 1862 Map of Section 34, Hennepin County (Today's Whittier Neighborhood)

*Franklin Ave*



*Lake Street*