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RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Ramsey County Historical Society
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Three Madams in
Post-Civil War
St. Paul ...
Page 3



Volume 15
Number 1

St. Paul in 1869, looking very much like a raw frontier town. This is Jackson, looking toward Seventh Street.

Ramsey County History

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Correction: Jim Sazevich, St. Paul's "house detective," points out that we led readers of the City Birthday Party edition of this magazine (published in the fall of 1979) to believe that the Jackson Street Methodist Church, built in 1856, is still standing. It is not. This last landmark in the Lowertown neighborhood (other than the Dahl house) was razed several years ago. Also, the house at 26 Irvine Park, identified as the William R. Marshall house, is known historically as the Henry Knox house. The house at 30 Irvine Park is the Parker-Marshall house, leased by Marshall from 1877 to 1880.

Long Kate, Dutch Henriette and Mother Robinson: Three Madams in Post-Civil War St. Paul

By Joel E. Best

On November 28, 1868, Kate Hutton, Henrietta Charles, and Mary E. Robinson were among those brought before St. Paul's police court. The court convicted each of the women on a charge of keeping a house of ill fame, fining Hutton \$35 and Charles and Robinson \$55 apiece.

The three women were familiar figures in the courtroom, their appearance a monthly ritual. Beginning in 1865, St. Paul regulated brothel prostitution through regular arrests. Madams of disorderly establishments were taxed through the imposition of monthly fines, while police raids closed troublesome brothels. This system served to keep prostitution under the supervision of the police, minimizing problems, such as robberies of customers or the spread of vice into respectable residential neighborhoods. While technically illegal, brothels located in the vice districts — along Fifth Street between Cedar and Sibley streets, and “under the hill” on Hill and Washington — operated with little official interference in St. Paul.

Dozens of women managed brothels under this system, but Hutton, Charles, and Robinson achieved special notoriety. Each operated a house of ill fame for several years: Hutton accumulated over 100 vice arrests from 1867 to 1881; Charles and Robinson had over sixty-five arrests apiece from 1865 to 1874. The newspapers often covered their court appearances, and the three women became familiar figures to their readers. Moreover, running a brothel was a tough trade; the madams' battles with their customers, the authorities, and one another frequently made news. While many madams and prostitutes left few records,

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enough is known about these three madams to reconstruct their biographies. Their different stories reveal a great deal about vice and the position of women in the 19th century city.

KATE HUTTON

Reporters could count on Samantha “Long Kate” Hutton to make news. Tall, attractive, and dressed in flashy clothing, her striking appearance was matched by outrageous conduct. After her death, the *St. Paul Pioneer-Press* described her: “She was fully six feet in height, and was constantly, when on the street, arrayed in costly materials and gaudy colors. She was the most notorious of her class, and was a ‘loud’ appearing personage.”¹

Born in Kentucky around 1847, Hutton took one of the most common pathways into prostitution. As an unmarried, pregnant adolescent, she was abandoned by her lover. Nineteenth century society had little sympathy for “fallen” women; they were unable to find respectable work, and many entered vice to support themselves. The fate of her baby is unknown, but Hutton became a prostitute and eventually moved to St. Paul, arriving in 1867.

HUTTON BEGAN working as an independent prostitute, unaffiliated with a brothel. She started with little money, but her good looks attracted customers. Unlike most young prostitutes, she was shrewd enough to parlay her earnings into a successful business. Less than a year after her arrival, she moved up to the status of madam, renting rooms to other prostitutes and collecting a portion of her “boarders” earnings. Posting bail for one of her inmates in 1868, she reported having \$1,500 in real estate.

Hutton displayed her new wealth in ostentatious, expensive clothes. A yellow jacket became her trademark, and her courtroom costumes included a “very rich suit of black velvet” and a “sea green gown and a black silk runabout, trimmed all over with pretty little shiny bugles.” In 1869, she paid \$2,500 for the

house and lot at 7 Hill Street, located on the hillside overlooking the river. She operated her brothel at that address for the rest of her life.²

Her business was interrupted in 1870, when George Morton, the lover who had deserted her when she was an adolescent, stopped in St. Paul. He had become a notorious burglar and the police watched him carefully. They feared that he planned to rob the capitol building's vault, but no theft occurred. Hutton spent a week in Morton's company before he moved on again. After he left, she became moody and eventually swallowed strychnine in a suicide attempt. Prostitutes frequently tried to kill themselves, but Hutton changed her mind and told her inmates what she had done. Doctors arrived in time to save her.³

THE NEWSPAPERS reported other instances of trouble. Hutton drank heavily and had a violent temper. One 1870 story offers an account of one drunken episode (as well as an example of the ironic style adopted by the papers in reporting news about prostitutes):

"Becoming obstreperous on Saturday night, she raised one of those delicate little feet that decorate her graceful form and plunged it through a window on Jackson street. On Sunday she paid a flying visit to several of the saloons on the same street, where she performed several extraordinary gymnastic feats, to the astonishment of the inmates. Finding, at last, a gentleman whose personal appearance suited her refined taste, she made love to him, and in doing so managed to get her mouth in such a situation as to surround his thumb. Having thus got her forces into position, she closed in upon the thumb and sought to sever it from its parent stem . . . The sequel will appear in the Police Court this morning."

When the court fined her \$9.50 for this spree, the *Pioneer* reported that: "She made no complaint about the price, but thought she ought to be allowed to enjoy herself a little without being disturbed."⁴ Hutton also battled her customers and inmates, as well as other madams. Madams feuded over the right to house popular inmates and customers complained of robberies and assaults. The relationship between madam and brothel inmate was especially likely to become violent. Prostitutes were constantly on the move, sometimes ejected by an angry madam, sometimes over the madam's objections.

Police were called to Hill Street at least twice when Hutton refused to let inmates take their luggage from the house before they paid the rent they owed her. But she also tried to protect her inmates; when Kate Cook became pregnant, Hutton, perhaps recalling her own pregnancy, advised her to have the child. Instead, Cook took an abortifacient medicine and died of poisoning.⁵

AS TIME PASSED, stories about Hutton's fights and other escapades appeared less often. After managing the Hill Street house for more than five years, she rented the operation to Maggie Morse (who would become a prominent madam in her own right) and moved downtown to live with her current lover. Hutton remained relatively successful and difficult to get along with, and the couple had several noisy fights. Arrested after one such incident, Hutton left \$2,000 worth of jewelry — apparently what she was wearing at the time of the arrest — as a guarantee that she would appear in court to face charges.⁶

In late 1876, she returned to Hill Street; she managed the brothel for over a year, then closed it for a few months in 1878 before reopening once more. Complaints of robberies, assaults, and other disorders began to be heard and, in February, 1880, the police closed the house after learning that inmates had attacked a customer with knives, slashing his clothing and nearly injuring him. Hutton moved out again and Pauline Bell opened a brothel on the premises, paying Hutton rent. Then, in February, 1881, Hutton had her last vice arrest:

*"The chief of police testified that, acting under the direction of the mayor, he had ordered her to close her house, but that she was keeping it open again, despite these orders. He explained that she was in the habit of getting drunk and had so many rows at the house that it was deemed necessary to keep the establishment closed."*⁷

In response, Hutton argued that she had no other means of supporting herself (conveniently ignoring the rents from the Hill Street house). Apparently persuaded, the judge fined her \$100 but suspended the sentence on the condition that she cease working as a madam. Hutton co-operated by moving outside the city.

Long before she was driven out of business, Hutton became Ed Wright's lover. Wright was a petty criminal, frequently arrested on minor charges, and, more importantly, he was



black. Their relationship was a scandal in a community which viewed interracial sex as sufficient cause for arrest. As in her earlier relationships, Hutton had violent quarrels with Wright, sometimes leading to arrests for disturbing the peace. The newspapers reported these with sarcasm:

“The dusky Adonis presented for the edification of the court a very finely developed black eye, which he received in his bout with the Phyllis of his affections.”⁸

In the spring of 1881, after Hutton received her suspended sentence, the pair moved out near the end of Dayton Avenue, on the outskirts of the city. Late that summer, Wright rode into town and said that he had accidentally shot and killed Hutton with a rifle. The police arrested him for murder, but the evidence was insufficient to bring the case to trial. Wright remained in St. Paul, occasionally getting arrested for minor offenses.

HUTTON WAS ONLY 35 when she died. Her vice arrests in St. Paul spanned fifteen

Section from an 1888 panorama of St. Paul showing Kate Hutton’s house (1) with its three porches descending the river bluff at 7 Hill Street, the NSP site today at Kellogg boulevard. Henrietta Charles’ house was a block down Hill Street from Hutton’s where Washington Street joined Hill (2). Directly to the left of the numeral is the house of Nina Clifford, another famous St. Paul madam. Mary Robinson’s house was located on Eighth Street between St. Peter and Wabasha (3), about a block from the twin spires of Assumption Church. The park in the center of the picture is Rice Park.

years, nearly half her life. The press reported her death and the murder investigation in detail, just as it had covered her life. While not wealthy, Hutton did not die a pauper. She was buried in Oakland cemetery; her will stipulated that no more than \$500 should be spent on her funeral and tombstone. The remaining property, including real estate, cash, and an oil portrait, was left to her mother and sister living in Indiana.

A Brace of Disreputables.

Ed. Wright, colored, and companion of "Long Kate," appeared in the municipal court yesterday morning to answer the charge of disturbing the peace. The dusky Adonis presented for the edification of the court a very finely developed black eye, which he received in his bout with the Phyllis of his affections. He pleaded a desire to get out of town, and promised to cut for Minneapolis forthwith if the court would deal leniently with him. But as that gentleman had made promises of amendment before, the court copped his application and fined him \$30, or forty days in jail. Regretting his inability to produce the needful and as his fair innamorata, who also got on the prisoners' bench awaiting the disposition of her case, evinced no desire to put up for him, he left the court with an officer for the summer resort over the way.

Kate Hutton, who is known by the somewhat euphonious name of "Long Kate," for short, having listened with bated breath to the dread doom pronounced upon her sometime admirer, next appeared. Several reputable citizens, whose misfortune it is to be neighbors of the frisky Kate, testified as to the general character of her domicile, and to the disturbance which occurred there a few evenings ago. Kate indulged in some biting sarcasms as to the general inefficiency of the police, and was promptly fined \$10, a warning fine, his honor called it. Then she desired to say a few words to the court. She thought she had been treated pretty rough; that the police made it their business to persecute her unnecessarily, etc., etc. As she produced her purse and paid the fine with the gentle hope, audibly expressed, that the money would "send them all to hell," his honor was paralyzed. Before he could recover speech in time to have Kate committed for contempt she had flounced out of the court in a towering rage.

HENRIETTA CHARLES

"Dutch Henriette" — Mrs. Henrietta Charles — was several years older and far less attractive than Kate Hutton. One account described her as "stout, fat." The newspapers continually poked fun at her appearance and character:

"Mrs. Charles is of a ruddy complexion and of fair proportions, though perhaps some might think her appearance a little too much like an apple dumpling. She has the appearance of an easy liver, with an abundance of the good things of this wicked world, wherewithal to render the journey through this vale of tears tolerable comfortable, notwithstanding the botheration of policemen, police courts, fines, and jails."¹⁰

Little is known about Dutch Henriette's early life or her entry into prostitution. She was born in Germany around 1837. Her parents were respectable citizens who re-

mained in Europe. Either before she left Germany or after arriving in the United States, she married Henry Charles, also German-born, a sometimes stage driver who was thirteen years older than Henrietta. By 1865, they were settled in St. Paul, where Mrs. Charles was managing a brothel. Their house was at 62 Washington Street, at the bottom of Hill Street, only a block away from Kate Hutton's.¹¹

It was unusual, although not unheard of, for madams to be married and living with their husbands. Henry Charles apparently took no part in running the brothel; he was not arrested on vice charges or mentioned in many of the newspaper stories about Henrietta. He may have spent some of his time away from St. Paul; several city directories from the period list only his wife. He was present for the 1870 census, which listed the couple's property, \$7,000 worth of real property and \$1,000 of personal property, as belonging to Henrietta. Mrs. Charles did not need her husband's help. She was a success; before an interested court, she once took out "a roll of greenbacks, which indicated that business in her line was profitable, and that she kept an eye to the main chance." On another morning, she was unable to make \$500 bail at first, but returned in the afternoon with the money, which the *Pioneer* speculated had been extorted from "a well-known merchant."¹²

Like Kate Hutton, Charles's career as a madam was punctuated by violence. In fact, the two women had a brutal fight in a saloon in 1868; unfortunately, the newspaper report of the incident did not explain its cause. Charles also appeared in court on charges of assaulting a male employee (whose duties were not specified) and to complain of an attack by one of her inmates. On another occasion, a popular inmate left Washington Street and moved to the "Cave House," a rival brothel. Angry, Charles followed her there and assaulted her. Not all her battles were as evenly matched; twice, groups of men visited her brothel and became involved in arguments with the madam which ended in her being severely beaten.¹³

RUNNING A BROTHEL was a business and madams needed managerial skills as well as a willingness to fight. Many brothel inmates had pimps who added to the madam's problems. On one occasion, Henrietta put up bail for a pimp in order to keep the inmate happy. In another case, a pimp and inmate tried to work a badger game, where the pimp

broke in on the prostitute and her customer, pretending to be the outraged husband in order to extort money from the customer. Charles refused to permit this, "simply on the ground that such a practice would injure the reputation of her house," but the pair later robbed a customer in the brothel and were arrested.¹⁴

Relations with the authorities were another sore point. Regularly fined by the police court, madams occasionally were brought before the district court as well, sometimes in response to complaints by reformers who wanted the brothels closed, rather than merely regulated. The police court could not impose a penalty heavier than a \$100 fine, but a district court conviction could lead to a prison sentence. Madams sought to avoid these heavier penalties by challenging the officials' right to charge them for the same offense in two courts. Charles appealed one of her district court convictions to the Minnesota Supreme Court, but it affirmed the lower court's jurisdiction. However, this conviction, like those in the police court, led only to a fine. There is no record of Henrietta Charles, or Kate Hutton or Mary E. Robinson, ever serving a jail sentence.¹⁵

Henrietta stayed in touch with her family in Europe. In 1872, she even returned for a visit. She told her family that she ran a respectable boarding house, rather than a brothel. When she paid for her younger brother's passage to the United States and brought him to her house, he was shocked to learn the truth. He left the brothel to enter a religious college, but returned to Washington Street to live, "indulging riotously in the wickedness of the establishment." In 1874, he tried to shoot himself "in a crazy, drunken fit," but the bullet did not penetrate his skull. (The *Pioneer* story used the heavy-handed headline: "A Good-for-Nothing Revolver that Failed to do its Duty.")¹⁶

THE FOLLOWING JANUARY, Henrietta died at the age of 38. Her death certificate listed "Congestion of the brain" — a euphemism for advanced syphilis — as the cause of death. About the same time, one of her inmates entered St. Paul's Magdalen Home and also died from venereal disease. The brothel remained open for a few months under the management of L. E. Atwood. In March 1876, after she abandoned the building, an arsonist burned it down. Within months, Maggie Morse took over the property and built a new, fashionable brothel on the lot, continuing the site's tradition of vice.¹⁷

MARY E. ROBINSON

Only a few facts about Mary E. Robinson's background are known. She was born in New York around 1826. She arrived in St. Paul in 1854. She was a widow, but nothing is known about her husband. Her first known arrest for vice in St. Paul was in 1865, but she was probably operating a brothel for several years before that.¹⁸

This lack of information is unfortunate because Robinson was the central figure and the most fascinating character in early St. Paul's *demi-monde*. She was the city's most prominent madam, overseeing its most fashionable brothel, and she was spectacularly successful at her trade. Her holdings included rental property, as well as her brothel at 18 W. Eighth Street and her personal residence at No. 20 next door. In the 1870 census, she reported owning \$75,000 worth of real property and \$2,000 of personal property. These were large sums for a woman to have accumulated in this period. Robinson may have been the city's most successful female entrepreneur. The newspapers acknowledged that she was "a woman of more than ordinary ability" and they treated her with respect.¹⁹ Where the papers mocked "Long Kate" and "Dutch Henriette," they carefully referred to "Mrs. Robinson" or, on rare occasions, "Mother Robinson."

ROBINSON OCCUPIED a key place in the network of vice in St. Paul. She became involved in her share of violent episodes, including fights with rival madams such as Kate Hutton and Georgia Wright. When Hutton marched on Robinson's house with an angry inmate who wanted to retrieve her luggage, Robinson drove them off with a pistol. But she also let other madams draw on her financial resources. When Emma Dibble could not make her own bail in district court, Robinson put up the money; years after Robinson retired, she performed a similar service for Emma Lee, one of her former inmates, who became a madam.

The house on Eighth Street was the largest such establishment in the city, with up to ten prostitutes, two female servants, and one male servant on the premises. St. Paul's prostitutes often shifted from one brothel to another, and a substantial proportion of them spent some time in Robinson's house. On at least one occasion, Robinson went outside local channels and arranged with a Chicago madam for the transportation of four prostitutes from that city to Eighth Street.²⁰

Robinson's brothel was recognized as the finest house in the city. When it burned down in 1869, the *Pioneer* described it:

"Probably no institution in the state had a more widespread notoriety . . . It was the leading and, so to speak, the fashionable resort for men of easy virtue, and the abiding place of the more select among the 'soiled doves' of the city . . . The reputation of the establishment has extended far and wide, and its existence was well known to every citizen of St. Paul."²¹

It was probably the most profitable operation in the city; Robinson claimed that she made \$500 a night from the house. However, the brothel's elegance and its profits may have been exaggerated. The four Chicago prostitutes brought in to join the staff left after a few weeks, complaining:

"They say the place isn't aristocratic enough. In Chicago, they say, their companions were the best men of the city — merchants, bankers, capitalists, first class clerks, etc. — men who wear linen shirts and jewelry. Here, they do not find that class of men among the habitues of their boarding houses, but only a low set, who have plenty of money to be sure, but do not sport the ruffled shirts and jewelry of the class above mentioned."²²

More is known about Robinson's brothel than about rival establishments because of newspaper coverage of the November 17, 1869, fire. Both the brothel and her residence next door were destroyed, although some furniture was saved. Robinson charged that George Crummey, the city's most notorious gambler, had started the fire deliberately. According to her account, Crummey and some friends arrived at the brothel around midnight, drunk and argumentative; they attacked Mrs. Robinson and then set the fire in the attic. Crummey denied the charges, but Mrs. Robinson announced that she would sue him. She also said:

*"I shall build again on the same lots in the spring. This time I shall put up a stone block that cannot be fired. In the meantime I shall endeavor to get another house, and if I cannot find one, I will build a temporary one and move into it. I shall take care of my girls and see that they have enough to eat and to wear also."*²³

Robinson had insurance policies totaling \$10,000 on the two buildings, but she claimed greater losses. The *Pioneer*, which covered the fire and subsequent developments with enthusiasm, reprinted a long list of items that she claimed to have lost in the fire, along with their estimated value. The list included:

One velvet stair carpet	\$49.00
One marble top center table	22.00
4 Large pictures	40.00
6 Pictures	60.00
1 Bathing tub	104.00
1 Mink fur circular	300.00
Jewelry	100.00
Bedding and table linen	300.00
1 Set silver plated ware	500.00
Gas fixtures	900.00
Wearing apparel	1000.00
1 Piano	300.00
8 Pictures	60.00
210 yards carpeting	735.00
Wardrobes	350.00
7 Complete sets bedroom furniture	2236.50
5 Sofas, 1 stove, 4 pictures, 2 window shades, 1 walnut stand, 3 spittoons, 1 piece oil cloth, 3 cotton shades, 3 pictures, 8 yards stair carpet, stair brasses, Dutch wool carpet, 2 walnut bedsteads, 2 spring beds, 2 hair mattresses, 4 pillows	580.00

The complete list cataloged nearly \$9,000 worth of personal property.²⁴

In May, 1870, Robinson took her case to district court, suing Crummey for \$28,750 in damages. The newspapers continued their intensive coverage, publishing transcripts of all the testimony during the four-day trial. Robinson's statement described what began as a typical evening in her brothel. The establishment opened about eight o'clock on the evening of November 16, with seven inmates in residence. During the course of the evening, they entertained thirteen customers, who also bought nine pints of wine (one of the most profitable sidelines in running a brothel was the sale of alcohol). By midnight, four of the inmates had retired — at least two of them accompanied by customers who were spending the night. The three remaining inmates were stationed in the back parlor. Several of the inmates were feeling the effects of the evening's drinking. The witnesses could not agree on the sequence of events after Crum-

mey's arrival. Robinson and her inmates testified that Crummey was abusive and set the fire on purpose, but Crummey and his friends denied committing arson. The jury could not reach a verdict and, after failing to get the case prosecuted in the criminal courts, Robinson was forced to bear the costs of her losses.²⁵

Two years later, Robinson returned to district court for another scandalous trial. This time she was the defendant in a suit for \$20,000 in damages brought by Margaret Brisbin, the wife of a prominent attorney, who charged that Robinson had assaulted her. The case involved Harry Shaw, the proprietor of the Merchant's Hotel and Robinson's lover.

(Shaw was a well-known, if unsuccessful, gambler. He once took two pieces of jewelry, "a diamond ring set with seven large stones, and a gold cross containing six brilliants of a larger size" valued at \$1,300, from Robinson's collection without her permission, and lost them in a game. She recovered the pieces years later.)

Mrs. Brisbin, who was jealous and suspicious of her husband's ties with Robinson, showed Shaw a letter, supposedly written by Robinson, arranging an assignation with Brisbin. Shaw spoke to Robinson, who denied writing the letter and went to the Brisbin house to confront Mrs. Brisbin. She demanded to see the letter and, when Mrs. Brisbin refused, the two women fought. The resulting four-day trial was filled with attacks on the character of everyone involved, and the newspapers covered the proceedings with relish. The jury settled the case by awarding only \$200 in damages.²⁶

IN THE SPRING OF 1874, Robinson announced her retirement from vice. Reformers hoped that this was the first step in closing the city's brothels, but several new houses opened by the end of the year. Robinson closed her business with style. She even offered to let the city's new Magdalen Society — dedicated to the salvation of fallen women — use the house on Eighth Street for five years, rent free. The deal fell through when the members refused to pay her asking price for the house's furnishings. Ever the shrewd businesswoman, Robinson sold the goods at public auction and realized nearly twice what the Society had offered to pay. She moved to another house but remained in St. Paul for more than thirty years, speculating in real estate. She lived to be at least 80.²⁷

* * *

Our image of the 19th century brothel draws upon Hollywood movies and legends about aristocratic madams, such as Chicago's Everleigh sisters and New Orleans' Josie Arlington. We picture beautiful women in expensive clothing, surrounded by fine furniture and velvet draperies, with ragtime piano music in the background. It is a romanticized image which excludes the harsh realities of prostitution, including violence, disease, and early death.

These sketches of Kate Hutton, Henrietta Charles, and Mary E. Robinson reflect some of the realities of the madam's life. These three women were among the most successful madams in St. Paul; each managed to stay in business for several years, and each accumulated at least a modest amount of property. Most of their colleagues were less fortunate. The typical madam stayed in business for only a year or two; some closed their establishments within months after they opened the doors.

Many lived tragic lives. Like Henrietta Charles, Lizzie Caffrey died from venereal disease. Like Kate Hutton, Frankie Brown tried to commit suicide. Others, like Frank Livingston, skidded from the status of madam down to that of brothel inmate. Livingston became an alcoholic; by the end of her career, she was "frequently found in a state of helpless intoxication on our public streets, and makes weekly, and sometimes tri-weekly trips to the police court." Alcohol abuse and morphine addiction were common in the brothels, even among madams; Florence Campbell died of heart disease at age 31 as a result of her drug habits. While the fates of most madams remain unknown, there is ample evidence they faced many risks and considerable stress. Mrs. Robinson's success was exceptional. Even Hutton and Charles — two relatively successful madams — died before their fortieth birthdays.²⁸

GIVEN THE HAZARDS, why did women become madams? The answer to this question lies, in part, in their alternatives. Middle-class 19th century women were discouraged from working. Respectable employment opportunities for poorer women, who had to work, were effectively limited to three careers: domestic service, the needle trades, and waiting tables. Each offered low status, low wages, and little or no opportunity for improvement. For many young women, prostitution appeared to be an attractive alternative. Some women, like

Kate Hutton, entered prostitution because they had been seduced and abandoned; as "fallen" women, they were barred from respectable work. But many others made a calculated decision to become prostitutes. It was a dangerous life in many ways, but it offered relatively high income and, more importantly, independence. When reformers found adolescent girls in St. Paul brothels and tried to "rescue" them, the prostitutes often refused the aid. They preferred prostitution to a respectable life with domineering parents, overbearing employers, and little money.

If the position of prostitute had its attractions, the madam's lot was even more appealing. Blocked from most prestigious respectable careers, women found vice open to female entrepreneurs. While few madams were as shrewd or as successful as Mrs. Robinson, the opportunity for advancement was there. Many madams began as brothel inmates or, like Kate Hutton, as independent prostitutes. Others may have started out as landladies of respectable boarding houses, then discovered that their skills could be transferred to the more profitable brothel trade.

Certainly, madams faced problems: they were barred from respectable society; they faced drunken, sometimes violent customers and managed inmates who could be equally rough; they were vulnerable to harassment, arrest, and imprisonment by the authorities; and, even under a system of regulation like St. Paul's, there was the risk that reformers would triumph and successfully close their businesses. They were sometimes diseased, beaten, and robbed. Suicide attempts, alcoholism, and drug abuse were not uncommon.

But, in spite of these risks, managing a brothel offered a rare opportunity for a 19th century woman — a chance for a lower class or working-class woman, beginning with little money and limited opportunities, to achieve financial independence in the city. Nineteenth century characterizations of the madam emphasized her supposed depravity. A modern interpretation might point to her accomplishments in the face of difficult odds.

Footnotes

- ¹*St. Paul Pioneer-Press*, August 26, 1881. In addition to newspaper reports, this paper draws on St. Paul city directories for 1863-81, records of St. Paul's police court and municipal court, and the manuscript schedules for the 1870 census. On Hutton, see also: *St. Paul Pioneer*, May 14, 1868; August 30, 1870; *Pioneer-Press*, August 27, 1881.
- ²*Pioneer*, May 2, 14, 1868; November 7, 1869; April 22, 1871.
- ³*Pioneer*, August 30, 1870.
- ⁴*Pioneer*, January 18, 19, 1870.
- ⁵*Pioneer*, April 26, 1868; November 22, 1871; *Pioneer-Press*, May 6, 1879; *St. Paul Dispatch*, December 24, 1868; *St. Paul Press*, August 17, 1873.
- ⁶*Pioneer-Press*, January 11; August 24, 1876.
- ⁷*Pioneer-Press*, February 24, 1880; February 3, 1881.
- ⁸*Pioneer-Press*, August 20, 1880.
- ⁹*Pioneer-Press*, August 26, 27, 30; September 1, 2, 7, 10, 1881.
- ¹⁰*Pioneer*, November 29, 1865; May 14, 1868.
- ¹¹*Pioneer-Press*, January 24, 1875.
- ¹²*Pioneer*, November 29, 1865; May 14, 1868.
- ¹³*Dispatch*, December 24, 1868; *Pioneer*, December 31, 1867; October 13, 1870; April 7, 1871; January 3, 1872.
- ¹⁴*Pioneer*, September 16, 1869; June 15, 1871.
- ¹⁵*Pioneer*, July 15, 1871.
- ¹⁶*Pioneer*, April 14, 1872; July 30, 1874.
- ¹⁷*Pioneer*, January 24; February 25, 1875; *Pioneer-Press*, July 20, 1875; March 21, 1876.
- ¹⁸*Pioneer*, December 6, 1865; May 10, 1870.
- ¹⁹*Pioneer*, November 18, 1869.
- ²⁰*Pioneer*, November 11, 1865; November 9, 1866; August 27, 1867; April 26, 1868; *Pioneer-Press*, October 22, 1881.
- ²¹*Pioneer*, November 18, 1869.
- ²²*Pioneer*, September 4, 1867; April 22, 1870.
- ²³*Pioneer*, November 18, 1869.
- ²⁴*Pioneer*, January 29, 1870.
- ²⁵*Pioneer*, May 10-13, 1870.
- ²⁶*Pioneer*, March 19-23, 1872; *Pioneer-Press*, December 21, 1878.
- ²⁷*Pioneer*, March 20; May 13, 23, 1874; *Press*, March 21, 1874.
- ²⁸*Pioneer*, July 18, 1868; *Pioneer-Press*, November 13, 1875; November 14, 1877; April 23, 1878.



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THE GIBBS HOUSE

at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County Historical Society as a restored farm house of the mid-nineteenth century period.

The Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. Its chief function is to collect and preserve the history of the city and the county and share that history with the people who live here. The Society is the county's historian. It preserves those things from the past that are the community's treasures — its written records through the Society's library; its historic sites through establishment of the Irvine Park Historic District and its successful efforts to help prevent destruction of the Old Federal Courts Building, now Landmark Center. It shares these records through the publishing of its magazine, brochures, pamphlets, and prints; through conducting historic sites tours of the city, teaching classes, producing exhibits on the history of the city, and maintaining its museum on rural county history. The Gibbs Farm Museum, the oldest remaining farm home in Ramsey County, was acquired by the Society in 1949 and opened to the public in 1954 as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler. In 1966 the Society moved onto the property a one-room rural country schoolhouse dating from the 1870s. Now restored to the period of the late 1890s, the school is used for classes, meetings, and as the center for a summer schoolhouse program for children.

Society headquarters are located in Landmark Center, an historic Richardsonian Romanesque structure in downtown St. Paul, where it maintains the center's only permanent exhibit, a history of the building during the seventy-five years it was the federal government's headquarters in St. Paul.

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