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RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Ramsey County Historical Society
"History close to home"
Landmark Center, 75 W. 5th St.
St. Paul, MN 55102

Three Madams in
Post-Civil War
St. Paul ...
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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.

Closing of Mattocks School — End of an Era in Education

By Rachel A. Bonney

The closing of Mattocks School, on James and Macalester, in St. Paul in June, 1979, could be considered the end of an era in the St. Paul school system. Not only did this mark the end of more than a century of service to school students, first as a country school in "Reserve Town" and later as part of the St. Paul public school system in the Highland-Macalester Park areas of St. Paul, but it was also the closing of one of the oldest of St. Paul's schools and the oldest school in the area. Indeed, the history of Mattocks School is almost as old as the history of St. Paul, and it reflects the growth of "Reserve Town" (Reserve Township of Ramsey County) and the present-day areas of Groveland-Macalester-Highland Parks in St. Paul.

In the early 1850s, at the same time that St. Paul was emerging from its origins as a small pioneer settlement and developing into a rapidly-growing town and city, pioneer settlers, primarily of German and Irish origins, were establishing claims on the east bank of the Mississippi River, on the lands of the former Fort Snelling military reservation. This land, released by the federal government in 1854, was sold at public auction at Stillwater, Minn., in September, 1854. Much of the land was purchased by William R. Marshall in a block for the early settlers.¹ Names of some of these early settlers, many of whom staked what were probably illegal claims there between 1849 and 1854, survive in present-day street names in the area: William Brimhall, William Davern, Adam and Peter Bohland, G. Bayard, William Finn, and John Kent, for instance. Cleveland Avenue was originally called Heide Place, named after Rudolph Knapheide, whose farmhouse was located at Randolph and Cleveland.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Rachel A. Bonney, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, is a descendant of Rudolph Knapheide and grew up in what would have been his garden and vineyard in the Highland Park district of St. Paul. She received her B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Minnesota, and her doctorate from the University of Arizona in 1975.

BY 1858 THE SETTLERS had organized into a community, known as Reserve Town, with a town government and elected officers. At its August 7, 1858, meeting, the town board voted to create two school districts, to be known as Districts 1 and 2 (later changed by the state to school districts 8 and 9). The school in District 1 (8) was Quincy School, and Mattocks School, originally called Webster School, was the District 2 (9) school.²

The first Mattocks School was a small wooden structure, twenty by thirty feet, built on the southwest corner of Randolph and Snelling in 1860, under the direction of the elected school district officers, Rudolph Knapheide, director; Joseph Weissinger, treasurer; and William E. Brimhall, clerk. A grove of trees, predominantly oaks, was planted around the building, which served as the school until 1870. As the population and the number of students in the district increased, the ten-student capacity of the wooden structure became inadequate, and in 1870 the voters of the school district approved a tax of \$1,200 to build a new school. Construction began in the same year, and the gray limestone building was completed in 1871 at a cost of \$1,800. "Webster School Number 9" opened in 1871, and the old wooden building, having been sold to Reserve Town for use as a town hall, was moved to the east side of the lot and remodeled for this purpose.³

In 1887 Reserve Township was annexed into the city of St. Paul, and the name of Webster School Number 9 was changed to Mattocks School, in honor of the Reverend John Mattocks, a prominent Presbyterian minister who was secretary of the Board of Education.⁴ At this time, the old wooden school/town hall became an outbuilding for the school and was used as a storage shed for wood and coal. By about 1916, it was necessary to add a new classroom, in the form of a portable, for the first and second grades, while grades three, four, and five continued to be taught in the stone building.⁵



Richard F. Bonney with Chief Curley Bear who visited Old Mattocks School in 1921.

ABOUT 1921 some of the students were transferred from Mattocks to the new Groveland Park School on St. Clair and Cleveland, but the school was still too small, and in 1922 the new Mattocks School, a two-story brick structure located on James and Macalester, was opened. The old stone schoolhouse was used for special classes until 1929. From about 1931 until about 1960 it was maintained by an American Legion Post.⁶ In 1964 it was moved from its original location at Randolph and Snelling to the grounds of the Highland Park Junior and Senior High Schools on Edgecumbe and Snelling, where it is maintained by the Minnesota Historical Society. It was to be restored to its original appearance with appropriate furnishings and would also serve as a classroom for special classes for the high school.⁷

Old Mattocks School, then, surrounded by its grove of trees on the southwest corner of Randolph and Snelling, was a one-room county school. The portable that was added about 1916 stood to the southeast of the school, and a double outhouse and the small shed that had been the first school were also at the back of the school. Across from the school, on Brimhall, just off Randolph, was the Koenig farmhouse. Down the slope from the Koenig farm and the school, on Snelling, was a small lake or pond, called "Koenig's Pond," which was used as a skating pond in

the winter by the children at the school and whose banks bloomed with blue forget-me-nots during the spring.⁸

By 1915 a drugstore, Sattler Drug Store, stood on the northeast corner of the intersection and was a source of ice cream cones, candy and other treats for Mattocks students. Indeed, Sattler's son sometimes shared his father's candy with his classmates. Dietrich's Grocery was located to the east of or behind the drug store on Randolph. Shortly after 1890, the streetcar line or "dummy" line was built from Snelling to Cleveland on Randolph, and the tracks for the cars ran in front of the school on Randolph.⁹

THE CARS ON THE Randolph dummy line were closed, identical at both ends, with trolleys that connected to the overhead electrical wires and controls for running the car at each end. When one trolley was not in use, it was fastened down, and the trolley at the opposite end was swung into place on the overhead wire. In this way the car did not have to be turned around; the conductor-motorman simply moved to the controls at the opposite end of the car.

The line ended at Randolph and Cleveland, in front of what is now 2064 Randolph, and the motorman-conductor would get out of the car, pull down the trolley at the back by a rope

and tie it down. Then he would release the front trolley and attach it to the overhead wire. When this was accomplished, the car would wait at each end of the line for a while before starting the return trip. A favorite sport of school boys of the time was to "pull the trolley" — pull the trolley off the wires, forcing the motorman to climb to the top of the car, pull the trolley down, and put it back up on the wires, with the trolley "sparking like mad" all the time.

There was a sandbox attached to the car, and in icy weather the motorman could pull a lever to release sand onto the tracks for better traction. It was sometimes necessary to use the sandbox on Halloween, when pranksters soaped the tracks halfway up the Randolph hill so that the car was unable to make it to the top. Between the 1890s and 1920, the streetcar was free.¹⁰

THE GRAY LIMESTONE BLOCKS used to build old Mattocks School were quarried from the bluffs of the Mississippi River. The walls were about 20 inches thick. At the front of the school was a bell tower about forty feet high,¹¹ although this was not used in the last years of the school. Immediately inside the front door was a vestibule with hooks on the walls, which served as a cloakroom. The classroom, which held between thirty and forty students, was entered by doors on either side of the cloakroom. Wainscoting ran around the room, and there were blackboards on the front wall behind the teacher's desk. Two large windows were located high on each of the side walls.¹²

The students' desks, which were placed toward the front of the room, were the "old-fashioned" individual type in which the desk top was fastened to the back of the seat in front of it, and the seats could be flipped up. Inkwells were set into the upper right-hand corner of each desk top, and students had to dip their pens into the ink wells repeatedly while writing their lessons. The desks were arranged in four to six rows of about six to eight desks per row and were bolted to the floor.¹³

The school was heated by a pot-bellied wood-burning stove at the rear of the classroom, and students would gather around the stove to keep warm. Mr. Hinkle, the school's janitor during the early 1900s, lived nearby on Randolph. He kept the school supplied with firewood and started the fire in the morning, but the teacher and older

students kept the fire going during the day. Mr. Hinkle also brought drinking water for the students in a large pail, and all the students used the same dipper. This was the school's only source of water.¹⁴

ONE OF THE FIRST TEACHERS at the old Mattocks School was Walter Kittredge Mulliken, a handsome red-headed man born in 1846 in Ornsville (near Bangor), Maine. Sometime before 1860, the Mullikens — Walter, his parents, and his sisters — moved to a farm near Zumbrota, Minnesota. Books and education were important to Mulliken, and he attended a preparatory school connected with Carleton College in Northfield, for four years before entering Carleton. He had to trudge "miles to school, carrying his shoes to save them for the classes he would attend."¹⁵ In 1876 he graduated from Carleton, salutatorian in a class of twenty-six students. His first teaching position was old Mattocks School, then Webster School Number 9, where he taught from 1876 until 1879 or 1880.¹⁶

In a 1922 newspaper interview, Mulliken described the school and his role as a teacher:¹⁷

"Lexington Avenue was then the Western limit of St. Paul . . . The place where the little school house stood, as it stands today under branching trees on the edge of green meadows, was known as Reserve Town. It was a country school.

"School began when I rang the bell at 9 o'clock and ended at 4 in the afternoon. We had two fifteen minute recesses during the day and an hour for lunch. All the pupils walked at least a mile to school, many of them more. All carried their lunches. I had forty pupils ranging in age from 5 to 25 years.

"I taught thirty classes a day. When one class was filing down another was filing up to recite. I had a well-ordered classroom because I kept them busy. There was no time for nonsense."

At that time it was customary for unmarried school teachers to board with community members, and Mulliken boarded at the home of the school district treasurer, Rudolph Knapheide. Two years later, in 1878, he married the oldest Knapheide daughter,

Sophia, who, with her younger sister Anna, had been students at Mattocks School. Although none of the five Mulliken children attended Mattocks School, five of the grandchildren were students there.

Mulliken was apparently a stern taskmaster, had a hot temper, and was a strict disciplinarian who ruled his home and his classroom with an iron fist.¹⁸ And he told his interviewer:

"I am not in sympathy with this present-day idea that children must be entertained in school. I believe in instilling lessons in the minds of the scholars, not in writing things on paper, and later consigning the corrected papers to the waste paper basket. The place for lessons is in the child's head . . ."

"The trouble with the schools of today is that they have gotten away altogether from the old common school education idea.

"Today some of my pupils are building bridges across the state. Others are preaching, practicing medicine, working in foreign fields. But that ground work in the little old school, even if it was NOT painted red, gave them their start. I am proud of my pupils. In fact . . . I

Walter Kittridge Mulliken



married one of them. I met my wife, Sophia Knapheide, while teaching. Two years later we were married."¹⁹

The last two teachers at the old Mattocks School were Miss Brennan, who taught grades one and two in the "portable," and Miss Canning, who taught the other classes in the stone building. Miss Canning was remembered by several of her former students as wearing a black straw hat, "like a Kelly Straw."²⁰

Most of the Mattocks students came from the area to the south and west of the school; students from the district to the north of Mattocks transferred to Groveland Park School when it opened about 1921.²¹ Students walked to school in the early days, some coming from farms as far away as Cleveland and Hartford. They would cut across the campus of St. Catherine's College to shorten the walk, which seemed even longer on bitterly cold winter days. When the snow was especially deep, some children were given rides to school on horse-drawn bob-sleighs. After the dummy line opened, students from around Randolph and Cleveland would ride the dummy to school rather than walking. They would walk to school if they were late and missed the dummy, or, if they were early, they walked until the car came along.

The dummy also served student needs other than transportation (and recreation) in the early days of its service. On one occasion a second grader had dashed off to school in such a hurry that he forgot to put on his shirt. When he arrived at school, he was chagrined to discover that he was wearing only an undershirt beneath his jacket. His embarrassment increased when the next car to come by the school brought his shirt, sent by his mother and delivered by an older girl.

STUDENTS WERE CALLED to classes and in from recess by a large bell rung by the teacher; sometimes students chosen by the teacher were allowed to ring the bell as a reward. During the early years, old Mattocks School had eight grades, but by 1916 there were only five. The curriculum consisted of the basic school subjects of that day: reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, history, geography, singing, and art. Art also included crafts like beadwork and weaving. Grades were taught separately, and lessons were recited to the teacher by one class while the other classes worked on their lessons.

Punishment by the teachers between 1916 and 1920 was remembered as being relatively

mild. Students might be rapped over the knuckles with a ruler, but one student, who irritated the teacher because he twisted his nose and sniffed, was threatened with punishment in the form of a clothespin clamped on his nose.

There was no elaborate playground equipment for use during recess and lunch periods. In 1916 the only "equipment" consisted of swings in the huge old oak trees planted at the back of the school in the 1860s. Otherwise, students had to entertain themselves and make their own games. They played ball — softball (kittenball) — and games like tag and "Annie, Annie Over," and boys engaged in the traditional masculine activities of wrestling and teasing the girls.

Another popular game for school students about 1920 was a version of "King of the Hill," which was called "King of the Corner." In this version, one team would try to hold a corner from another team, who would try to pull them out. Their special target was the team captain. Such games were not without mishap — clothes were torn while playing "King of the Corner," and one boy playing "Annie, Annie Over" ran into the corner of the school building and hurt his head.

School activities were not confined to the three R's, for there were also special activities. "At times we would roast popcorn on the old wood stove, during, it seems to me, lunch hour or for special times."²² In 1921 a Blackfoot Indian from Glacier Park, Chief Curly Bear, dressed in war bonnet, visited the school, and the welcoming speech was made by Richard Bonney, the ten-year-old grandson of the former teacher, Walter Mulliken.

Probably one of the last special activities to be held in the old stone school was the May Day celebration in 1922 when Mulliken addressed the students. The last celebration for Mattocks School was held in June, 1979, to commemorate the closing of a school with a long history and tradition in Ramsey County. Former Mattocks students were invited to attend, and the oldest student was honored, Oscar Knoblauch of St. Paul, whose grandfather, Karl Peters, was one of the earliest settlers in Reserve Town.

Footnotes

¹Donald Empson, "Highland-Groveland-Macalester Park: The Old Reserve Township," in *Ramsey County History*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 15.

²J. Fletcher Williams, *History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul, and Outlines of the History of Minnesota*. North Star Publishing Company, Minneapolis. 1881, p. 255.

³Ibid.

⁴Information from Minnesota Historical Society sign, Mattocks School, Edgecumbe and Snelling.

⁵Information from Richard F. Bonney, 507 South Cleveland, St. Paul, and Thomas J. Ruth, formerly of 2094 Niles, St. Paul, now of Lake Worth, Florida, both grandsons of Walter K. Mulliken and great-grandsons of Rudolph Knapheide.

⁶Old Mattocks School sign.

⁷Beverly Mindrum, "Transplanted Mattocks School Again Calls Pupils to Class." *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 9, 1965, p. 23.

⁸Information from Oscar Knoblauch, 2157 Lincoln, St. Paul, grandson of Reserve Town pioneer Karl Peters, whose farm was located at Hartford and Cleveland.

⁹Information from Richard F. Bonney and Thomas J. Ruth.

¹⁰Information from Richard and Frances Bonney and Thomas J. Ruth.

¹¹*History of Ramsey County . . .*, p. 255.

¹²Information from Richard F. Bonney and Thomas J. Ruth.

¹³Information from Richard F. Bonney, Oscar Knoblauch, and Thomas J. Ruth.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Frances B. Bonney, *The Mulliken Family and Allied Families*. Xerox reproduction by the author, St. Paul, 1979, p. 57.

¹⁶Ibid, p. 56.

¹⁷M. Jesse Leitch, "Teacher Renews Days of Long Ago in Talk at School After 46 Years: Walter K. Mulliken, 76, May Celebration Guest at Mattocks Building." *St. Paul Daily News*, May 9, 1922.

¹⁸The Mulliken Family . . . , p. 58.

¹⁹"Teacher Renews Days of Long Ago . . ."

²⁰Information from Richard F. Bonney and Thomas J. Ruth.

²¹The data from this entire section are from Richard F. Bonney, Oscar Knoblauch, and Thomas J. Ruth.

²²Information from Richard F. Bonney.



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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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