

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Ramsey County Historical Society

Cattlemen and Capitalists—
And the Founding of
New Brighton

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ON THE COVER: *The Cattlemen's Hotel, later known as the Exchange Building, was a plush and ultra-modern establishment that came with the stockyards development in the late 1890s. In the last sixty years it has been the home of Beisswenger's Appliance and Hardware Store. The Marston Block (small photo) stood at the southeast corner of Brighton's main street intersection -- downtown New Brighton around the time of World War I.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: *The photographs with the story on New Brighton are used with the permission of their owners, the following residents and organizations of New Brighton: page 16, Larry Vanden Plas for the New Brighton Area Historical Society; pages 21 and 41, Stella Flygard; page 29, the New Brighton Bulletin; page 49, Julie Beisswenger. The photograph on page 15 is from the files of R.C. Blumberg, general manager of Zimmerman Realty and a grandson of Moses Zimmerman. The photographs on pages 16-22 are from the Minnesota Historical Society collections from the following sources: Minneapolis Star and Tribune. (page 17); the St. Paul Pioneer Press (page 20).*

Cattlemen and Capitalists— And the Founding of New Brighton

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The city of New Brighton, once one of the 19th century historic villages of Ramsey County, is celebrating 100 years of a colorful history that has been captured within the pages of a new book, "A Centennial History of New Brighton, Minnesota," by Gene F. Skiba, a long-time editor of the New Brighton Bulletin and a descendant of one of the city's founding families. Publica-*

tion of the history by the New Brighton Area Historical Society was made possible through the generosity of Julie Beisswenger, founder of the society and also a founder, almost forty years ago, of the Ramsey County Historical Society. Excerpts from Skiba's account of New Brighton's earliest years are published here with the permission of the New Brighton Area Historical Society.

By Gene F. Skiba

The first residents of what became the New Brighton area were the Dakota (also referred to as the Sioux) and the Ojibway (commonly known as the Chippewa) Indians. The two tribes were bitter enemies and ultimately the Dakota were driven out of the state after the Indian war in 1862.

The Dakota Indians had major centers around Brainerd, Bemidji and the headwaters of the Mississippi River about 500 years before the white man (who as fur traders and explorers came in about 1660). The Ojibway Indians came to what was to become Minnesota in about 1720, taking over part of the Dakota's territory. The tribes fought many battles.

The Sioux were driven from the Mille Lacs Lake area about 1740. Around 1755-60 they began to cluster around Rice Creek at Long Lake in the present-day New Brighton-Mounds View area. The Indians named Long Lake after themselves — a lake whose name meant "People of the Lake," and their village Otonwewakpadan, or "Village on a Stream." The French traders called the Indian settlement "Grand Village."

There is no clear record of when or how long the Grand Village at Long Lake existed, but it is thought that the 1755-60 date, extending until about the end of the Revolutionary War in eastern America, comes close. As witnessed by our early white settlers, however, Indians locally were passersby more than residents. The Dakota passed through the area every fall until the early 1900s enroute from their headquarters around Shakopee to Rice Lake for their wild rice harvest. The home of Heman Gibbs, early settler in Rose Township, was a favorite stopping place for them, as they traded fish and animal hides for the fresh bread Mrs. Gibbs baked. The Gibbs home still stands as part of the Gibbs Farm Museum owned by the Ramsey County Historical Society.

The New Brighton area's first settler was also one of the first residents of what is now Minnesota, dating back to early Fort Snelling days. He was Charles Perry, who settled at Lake Johanna in 1849. He was born in France on March 10, 1816, to Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Perry (originally Perret). His family — which included five sisters — soon moved to Switzerland and then to North America in 1821 when Charles was 7 years old. The Perrys had left Switzerland for the Selkirk colony at Pembina in Canada.

In 1826 the Perrys were among a party of Swiss who abandoned the colony and traveled to Fort Snelling, a bastion at the confluence of the Mississippi and the St. Peter (later Minnesota) rivers established as a military post by United States Army Lieutenant Zebulon S. Pike. At Cold Water Spring, a small farm near Fort Snelling, Abraham Perry and his family grew potatoes and corn and sold them to the army and fur traders. In 1839 they were evicted from the military reserve and, with about thirty other families, moved to what became St. Paul. In 1849, the year Minnesota became a territory, Charles Perry purchased a farm of eighty-nine acres at Lake Johanna, where he would remain for the rest of his life.

A NUMBER OF FIRSTS are associated with Perry. He grew the first crop of potatoes on three acres of land in what later became Mounds View Township, selling them at the St. Paul settlement for 50 cents a bushel. He was a member of the first town board of Mounds View in 1858, the year Minnesota became the 32nd state of the United States. The birth of Charles Perry's daughter, Damis, on August 15, 1851, was the first recorded for the township, which itself wasn't officially on the books yet. His first son, George, born November 13, 1854, was the first to die in the area, in February, 1856.

In a letter to the *New Brighton Bulletin*, early 20th century New Brighton resident Kenneth Gregson said that during those early years in the jewelled wilderness the area was so quiet the Perrys could hear water rushing over St. Anthony Falls, about seven miles away. In addition to farming, Perry and his family operated a popular bathing and picnic beach at Lake Johanna which served as a resort and vacation area in those years of short travel distances. Charles Perry spent the last fifty-five years of his life at his place at Lake Johanna. When he died at age 88 in 1904, he was then the oldest settler in Ramsey County and had lived continuously in Minnesota for seventy-eight years.

Role of the Railroads

Railroads played a highly important part in the founding and development of New Brighton. Had they not come when and as they did, there would have been no cattle stopover or packing plants here and probably no iron rolling mills either, and rather than precipitate a settlement here in the early 1890s, the portion of Mounds View Township that became New Brighton Village probably would have remained rural in nature, as did the rest of the township for many decades.

It was James J. Hill, the "Empire Builder," who projected the idea of a railroad transfer system to answer the problems and opportunities plaguing expansion and delivery of goods and commodities. Following the bulk of early post-Civil War years, activity and progress began to pick up, and by the 1880s Hill saw the growing need for transfer railroads to ferry products between railroads and, to be sure, to bring rail service where it had not been before.

By the early 1880s, nine railroads had been started in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, with Hill's transfer type system containing some 200 acres of tracks and switches constructed in the Midway district of St. Paul.

The Minnesota Transfer Railroad Company, which officially organized on March 10, 1883, had connections with other railroads for receiving and handling of livestock. A federal law specified the number of hours — 36 — livestock could be kept on trains before being taken off for feeding, inspection, and rest, and the Twin Cities area was a handy stop-off for that purpose between the western shippers and their cattle's destination in Chicago.

A.B. Stickney, president of the Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad (forerunner of the Chicago Great Western Railroad), proposed the plan of locating a stockyards at South St. Paul — based on the observation that 75,000 head of cattle passed through St. Paul from the west to Chicago each year, and the projection that the Twin Cities market would

consume that amount in addition to that produced in Minnesota. In April of 1886, Stickney attended a cattlemen's convention in Miles City, Montana, and suggested the establishment of a packing plant in St. Paul — giving them a market that would save 400 miles of transportation and the risk and shrinkage that went with it. Cattlemen in turn paid a return visit to St. Paul in May of 1886.

It was readily determined that opportunity was wide open and competition slight for a stockyards and packing plant in the Twin Cities area. What livestock market there was, was at the Minnesota Transfer in the Midway district of St. Paul, but the principal business of its yards and trackage was the handling of western stock trains for the midpoint resting and feeding enroute to Chicago. Otherwise, the daily receipts activity was small, though, interestingly, it attracted buyers to the point that everything that came in was sold. Wrote A.A. McKechnie, secretary of the Saint Paul Union Stockyards Company: "Five cars of cattle and sheep made a big day."

BY THIS TIME, the Stickney group had secured options on a tract of land at South St. Paul about two miles from the St. Paul city limits and on the line of the Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad, and also had plans and estimates for building a stockyards and packing house.

James J. Hill also attended the South St. Paul development and spoke of his own experience of feeding cattle in Minnesota and difficulty in overcoming established prejudices. Hill was encouraging, telling the group that a market could be supported in the Twin Cities and further, that if cattle were brought in good condition, "we will buy them and have a market for our own people and we won't go broke on wheat. I will show you some cattle from ranges tomorrow — cattle fed on nothing but roots."

The next day Stickney took the gathering to see the proposed stockyards and packing house site at South St. Paul, and in the afternoon Hill took them to his farm at North Oaks. Although Hill's Great Northern isn't mentioned at this point, he was pushing its plans westward and by such meetings as this one, was establishing St. Paul as a major transportation, banking and commercial center.

As a follow-up, Stickney's group proceeded with the venture. On June 30, 1886, the organization of the Saint Paul Union Stockyards was announced and the financing arranged. The townsite of South St. Paul was part of the plans and the stockyards were laid out similar to those of the Chicago and Kansas City yards. Construction and development proceeded fast, and on Sept. 30, 1887, the first trainload of cattle arrived at the South St. Paul stockyards. It was a big

event for the community; 25,000 head of cattle were received that fall and when the first local shipments came in November of that year, the South St. Paul stockyards began to make themselves known. Hogs played a prominent part along with beeves and many were put into feedlots until packing houses opened in early 1888.

But while a boom to the city of St. Paul and the Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad, the South St. Paul stockyards were quite the opposite to the city of Minneapolis and the Soo Line Railroad. Whether Minneapolis interests had been invited to the South St. Paul meetings is not stated, though whether those interests would have attended seems questionable. In any case, Minneapolis interests were left out in the cold.

NOT BEING A PART of the Minnesota Transfer Railroad System and, therefore, not likely to receive hauling consignments, the Soo Line wanted to

develop another stockyards, as did Minneapolis interests which, before the Stickney group development, had anticipated establishment with the faster-growing Minneapolis.

By late April of 1887, the Minneapolis Stockyards and Packing Company was officially formed, its purpose to build and operate stockyards and slaughter and packing houses and to own, improve and sell

Bulwer Junction, the Soo Line Railroad's New Brighton depot, preceded development of any kind in New Brighton. It was built in 1887 and was in service for 95 years. It was equipped with living quarters occupied by station agent Charles Nixon for 34 years. Located south of the pole yards, the depot was acquired by the New Brighton Area Historical Society whose plans are to develop it into an historic museum. A wooden frame one-story building 24x64 feet, it consisted of five rooms including the office, a waiting room, freight room, bedroom, auxiliary rooms and platform. There was also a train depot at the stockyards, operated by Charles Espenett from 1897 until his retirement in 1938 when the station was closed.



real estate. Its capitalization was in the amount of \$1,000,000 (the capital stock of the South St. Paul venture also was for that amount). The officers were H.E. Fletcher, president; W.H. Dunwoody, vice-president; John S. Pillsbury, treasurer; and William H. Eustis, secretary.

A concern that rose with the development was that the Soo Line Railroad should not have complete control over the stockyards and the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* of April 8, 1887, carried an article in which Fletcher was quoted as saying "that these yards will be run in the interest of the Soo Line Railroad is a most radical mistake...Several of our officers are prominent officials of that incorporation, but you can say that these yards will be run in the interest of no incorporation." In 1888, wrote editor George W. Wright in the *Twin City Livestock Reporter* on July 4, 1892, the Minneapolis Stock Yards and Packing Company was organized "to intercept the heavy shipments of livestock from the territory tributary to this market and establish yards, slaughter houses and packing plants to supply the home demands...and to claim a share of the growing trade."

The Minneapolis Stockyards and Packing Company chose a 900-acre site along the southeastern shores of Long Lake in Ramsey County, which while in the same county as the city of St. Paul was geographically nearer to the city of Minneapolis. The name of New Brighton — credited to W.H. Eustis, who had served as mayor of Minneapolis and owned a show horse farm in Mounds View Township — was given the site, named after the Brighton Stock and Rail yards in Brighton, Massachusetts, itself named after the resort town of Brighton, England.

WITH CAPITALISTS from St. Paul and Minneapolis investing in their venture, the stock yard company also secured title to approximately 1300 acres of land east of the Belt Line railroad extending from the north to and beyond Long Lake, and the Stock Yards Land Syndicate purchased 800 acres on the west side of the road and extending up the west and north sides of Long Lake, according to an article in the *Minneapolis Tribune*. The prominent names of W.O. Dunwoody, Thomas Lowry, John S. Pillsbury, W.D. Washburn and William H. Eustis are found on early plat maps as property owners or directors of industries centered around the stockyards in New Brighton.

The stockyards, completed in September of 1889, could accommodate 5,000 cattle, 10,000 hogs, 20,000 sheep and 500 horses at its 30 acres. The facilities included feed barns, horse barns, an ice house, a depot, a steam driver, a pump house, packing plants, and a roundhouse for the railroad. Railroad

tracks were built from Fridley on the Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads. An independent company formed for construction of the road was called the Belt Line Railroad, which would serve all railroads.

Two large packing houses, the Twin City Packing Company and the Minneapolis Stock Yards and Packing Company, were formed and located immediately south of the yards. The Twin City Packing Company, the first packing company to do business at the stockyards, began its operation on October 22, 1889. The packing house was a large three story brick building with facilities for killing rooms, refrigerator capacity, hide rooms, lard rooms, and smoke meats and sausage facilities (three of which remain in 1987). Numerous slaughter houses, rendering works and hide houses were located in an area called "Butchers Spur."

An interesting sidenote is that after the packing house burned down, Clem Lamont, a local railroad worker, salvaged brick from the ruins to build a home in St. Paul.

A four-story brick Exchange Building was built at a cost of \$35,000 to accommodate 150 guests. This building also held the commission men's offices.

The New Brighton Land Company, S.C. Gale, president, was formed to improve and sell the lands platted by the Stock Yards Company. In the spring of 1887, the town of New Brighton was surveyed, lots were platted and the streets laid out. The first house was built in the summer of 1889. Also built were a hotel, The Transit House, the Marston Block, and the Merriman-Barrows Lumber Office along Front Street, the main thoroughfare.

New Brighton Incorporates

On the three consecutive Saturdays of December 20 and 27, and January 1, 1891, the *Twin City Live Stock Reporter and Market*, published in the Cattlemen's Hotel or Exchange Building, carried the legal notice of the election for the incorporation of New Brighton set for Tuesday, January 20, 1891, at Wick's store building on Front Street.

Following a census taken November 18, 1890, listing 196 residents in the 2,030-acre area to be incorporated as the Village of New Brighton, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners acknowledged the petition for the incorporation signed by 37 citizens and set the election date for it.

The first election for the new village was officially announced by the county commissioners for 9 a.m. February 7, 1891, at Wick's Store, located in the Marston Block.

The "count declaration" disclosed the following election results:

For President - J. T. Davies 63 votes, B.J. Kelsey 27, and W. H. Failing 1.

For Trustee - James Reid 91 votes, F. G. Marston 91, and F. G. Ziegler 90.

For Recorder - W. H. Failing 90 votes, and J. A. Lapenotere 1.

For Treasure - Allen Fitch 91 votes.

For Justice of the Peace - John G. Cawley 91 votes, Christian A. Trestor 90, and J. A. Lapenotere 1.

For Constable - Fred Searles 91, Frank Harmon 88.

A village had been born and its first officers elected.

The first meeting of the village council of the newly incorporated Village of New Brighton, Minnesota, was held in Room 19 of the Exchange Building on Monday night, February 16, 1891. All members of the council were present - John T. Davies, president; James Reid, Frank G. Marston and Frank G. Ziegler, trustees; and William H. Failing, recorder.

Stockyards Bedlam

The excitement and activity of the cattle runs continued for many years in New Brighton. A first-hand recollection of them was left in a letter in 1962 to the author by Kenneth S. Gregson, son of the chief engineer of one of the village's packing plants who was born there in 1893 and spent his boyhood there. For Gregson and his boyhood friends, the stockyards were a thrilling adventure, which he described thusly:

"Due to the national law, stock could be held on board a train just so many hours (36), then removed, fed and watered, so the New Brighton Stockyards were the target to head for in the length of time allotted. During the shipping season of July and August, the yards were really the busiest place in the country.

"Train after train brought thousands of loaded cars to the yards, where the beeves were processed as quickly as possible as that square mile of yards would hold just so many head. We've seen it with every pen full, every barn full, cars being unloaded on one side and loaded on the other, the yards full of cattle, the Butchers Spur filled with empties and the switch engine puffing around like an industrious ant, cattle bellowing and 'punchers' punching and yelling at the same time. It was a terrific bedlam!"

"At the top of the fences around the pen were catwalks for the working men and these were well used by spectators, also every kid in town that wasn't afraid! Those that were soon forgot they were in the sights and spectacles we viewed. Long horns, short horns, and some with none at all. Some seemed to be game, some wild, and some terrible!"



The Congregational Church, on an elevated hill and with its picturesque spire, was an attractive landmark in the village for many years and a center of community life as well as worship. The congregation, organized in 1890, has since become the New Brighton United Church of Christ.

"I recall one day some men were driving a load up one of the alleys and quick as a wink they turned on one man and over the fence he scrambled! The yard alley end-gates were always closed and locked but these beeves knocked the end-gate of one by six-inch oak board on both sides of two by four frames off, just as if it had been made of cheese."

"AWAY THEY WENT with some real horsemen after them! Three were returned in a short time but one got into the canning company's field of tall corn and they had a terrific time lassoing him. The fifth got away entirely but reports coming in by phone in reply to the phone calls going out to warn people about this killer, for that's what he was, let the Yard know he was headed for northeast Minneapolis. Mr. Mickel on his wonder saddle horse went after him. The steer was finally sighted over near Hillside Cemetery where Mr. Mickel put a bead on him and shot him, killing him with one shot from his .30-.30."



"The stockyard men seemed to enjoy having us kids around, for I cannot remember any time that they told us to get down off the cat-walks unless of course we jammed them up. Even the girls enjoyed the suspense."

This rush lasted from four to six weeks and for several years.

Occasionally a few cars of broncos would arrive but now they were housed in the stockyards and the buyers would make their deals there. All the cattle cars leaving the yards were "hayed" and the trains carried punchers who had to keep the cattle on their feet and were responsible for pushing the hay on the cars down to the cattle.

During these cattle "rushes" the Transit House and the Long Lake House had runners who would board the cabooses of trains going out and catch those arriving, wherever they'd hear where the next trainload was waiting. They'd do their "selling" to the punchers, owners and other men about the train, assemble their luggage and get them off to their particular train in a hurry.

These hotels had to be very competitive to get business, for right in the stockyards area was the magnificent Cattlemen's Hotel.

The shearing plant offered seasonal jobs for many, including farmers, in February and March. The small-seeming wages of \$2 a day was the going rate and

Montana cattle on a law-required rest and feeding stopover at the New Brighton Stockyards in New Brighton while enroute to Chicago.

not all that small for the time.

Manure from the yards was free for the hauling and to encourage farmers to haul it away, tickets were given entitling them to a bottle of beer for each load they hauled.

Early Social Events

The Young Peoples Social Evening Club was organized for New Brighton residents in 1892. New Brighton had a brass band. The Odd Fellows, Mounds View Lodge No. 200, I.O.O.F., was formed in 1892 at Beisswenger's Hall.

Many debating clubs were formed and active in New Brighton. In 1892 there were the Young People's Literary Society, debating such questions as, "Which has the better time, a lady bachelor or a gentleman bachelor?" and "City versus country life, which is better?" The Franklin Lyceum League Club, a debating club for young men residing in School District No. 25 (Snail Lake area), debated "Should emigration be restricted?" And in jest, the Roosters Club debated, "Is rain water intoxicating?", "Is marriage within the reach of all?", and "Are girls celestial beings?" The Oak Leaf Pleasure Club brought in elocutionists to give readings.

The Kickapoo Medicine Company, the New Brighton Comedy Company, and the New Brighton Dramatic Club presented plays and fun for the community.

Railroad men held balls and the butchers held "killing" contests and picnics.

Baseball was a favorite activity for young men in 1890. The New Brighton Packers were organized in 1892 and challenged the Ironmen from Irondale and other Twin City area teams to baseball games. The two packing houses at the stockyards also formed teams and Mounds View supplied one.

Fishing in Long Lake was good in the 1890s and sailing became a popular sport on both Long Lake and Lake Johanna.

Camping at Lake Johanna or Turtle Lake was often the family vacation, not just for New Brighteners but for many Twin Citians.

In the winter the lakes were used for horse "speeding," entailing horseback as well as riding conveyances including sleighs, cutters and wagons.

The New Brighton 12-piece band provided entertainment for a large number of residents at a dance held at Perry's Hall at Lake Johanna on August 18, 1892.

A Hamline Derby horse race was held in 1892, with no further details mentioned.

Over 200 members of the Social Evening Club attended a musical at the Exchange Club, it was noted in the Twin City Livestock Reporter's "Pencilings" column. Also, a highlight of the young village's social season was a performance by the Twin City Banjo, Mandolin and Guitar Club. On February 18 of that busy 1892 year, 30 couples went on a sleighing party for four miles on what was referred to as the St. Paul Road; music, cards and dancing later were added to the evening.

On April 8, 1892, Miss Cornelia May, an elocutionist, gave readings at the Young Peoples Literary Society. Admission cost was 25 cents, with the funds donated for relief of the starving in Russia.

The Beisswengers: First Permanent Settlers

Jacob and Caroline Beisswenger were about the fifth or sixth family to come to New Brighton and the first to remain. The year was 1883. They settled on the southwest shore of Long Lake.

Beisswenger originally was from Wittenberg, Germany, and Mrs. Beisswenger from 10 miles out of Stuttgart.

She was a relative of the Gluek brewing family and before she was married worked for the Glueks cleaning and cooking for a dozen people. It was hard and exhaustive work which included taking 10 o'clock and three o'clock lunches to the workers at the brewery at its Marshall Street plant in Minneapolis. In those days of early beginnings, the Glueks couldn't afford horses and their earliest beer deliveries went as far as could be done by wheelbarrow.

Following their marriage in Minneapolis, Jacob and Caroline Beisswenger came to Long Lake where Beisswenger bought property from a William James and built a two-room house.

The young couple bought a horse, quite a necessity when they had to travel to the city for groceries and staples, and began the arduous, seemingly endless task of clearing their dense, tree-studded property. As has been told and retold so that it seems almost legendary, their land was so dense when they first came that there wasn't a place clear enough to plant a potato. And the mosquitoes were so thick that Beisswenger found some respite in escaping to the middle of the lake in his boat to sleep.

FROM THE FIRST they raised fruit and vegetables, a gardening occupation they were to pursue the rest of their lives. The marketplace in Minneapolis was an important part of their existence and added to their long days. To go to market meant feeding the horse at one o'clock in the morning, hitching it to the springwagon and leaving by 2 a.m. Caroline Beisswenger often accompanied her husband on the two-and-one-half hour trip. Winter onions, which were planted in August and harvested the following spring, were the earliest produce that went to market each year. Radishes of eight in a bunch sold for 10 cents for a dozen bunches, and 12 bunches of onions sold for a dime. The onions and radishes produced the first money the Beisswengers made at the market. Going into the hotel business seemed the thing to do for Jacob Beisswenger as the village boomed in the early 1890s and as many as a hundred men slept in the Beisswenger barn overnight. Some of these men were transients from northeast Minneapolis, attracted to Pike Lake, whose east and south shores were part of the Beisswenger farm, where the fishing was exceptionally good.

Beisswenger built a hotel on the south shore of Long Lake near the present day intersection of 10th Street N.W. (Long Lake Road extended eastward) and 8th Avenue (then a crude trail referred to as "the road to Minneapolis"). Beisswenger's Brighton Hotel did well. It was quite an attraction with its view overlooking serene yet busy Long Lake, conveniences that included even furnace heat, a luxurious bar and

pleasant sounding electric bells, and, to be sure, reliable service for its patrons. The late Rose Beisswenger Johnson recalled that a boardwalk extended all the way down Front Street to the Brighton Hotel.

But the hotel was destroyed by fire — one of New Brighton's suspicious fires that seemed to thrive on successful business enterprises and Jacob Beisswenger did not rebuild. He probably had determined that the soil was his principal interest and it was for the remainder of his long life. He found time to serve in public life as well, as village mayor and trustee and assessor.

The Beisswengers raised a large family. They had eight children of their own, five who lived to adulthood: Charlie, Lydia, Adolph, Rose and Fred. The Beisswengers, in addition, brought up Eva and Mary "Putzke" and three Schreiber children — all from destitute families. Also, August Beisswenger, a cousin, came from Nuremberg, Germany, after World War I and lived with the Beisswenger family for eight years until he died in an automobile accident at the age of 32.

"PEOPLE WERE POOR in those days — oh, how poor we were!" Rose Johnson remarked in an interview with the *New Brighton Bulletin* in 1972. Minimizing the great charity and generosity extended others by her own parents and family, she said that helping hands were extended whenever possible to anyone in need: "Everyone helped each other in those days," she said.

Mrs. Putzke (a form of her longer name) had a husband who was called Alcohol Bill who squandered his money on himself and others, leaving Mrs. Putzke to fend for herself and family. She was a very durable woman. At first in New Brighton she had lived at a vacant building where the Beisswengers had had their hotel. The living conditions were so bad there that Mrs. Putzke fed the rats in the marsh area away from the premises in the hope that they would not bother her at her makeshift quarters. But the authorities did not allow her to remain and she was forced to leave.

The Beisswengers took her in and she was to remain at the Beisswenger farm for 35 years. Mrs. Putzke's two daughters lived in the Beisswenger home and Mrs. Putzke lived in the farm sheds — peeling a lot of potatoes, topping vegetables and preparing berries and produce. She made her own clothes, starting with the wool fiber from the sheep pen in town.

Mrs. Putzke got the reputation of being an oddball character — the fact she lived permanently in the Beisswenger farm sheds was reason enough. She often was seen walking the road to downtown New

Brighton, wearing a nondescript dress that passed for both skirt and apron and a shawl that was common to women and girls in those years.

On Sunday mornings following the Saturday night revelries of others, she searched for cigarette and cigar stubs to smoke. (She smoked a pipe she had carved out of stone, Rose Johnson revealed.) A proud, stubborn and defiant woman, she refused to use the boardwalk in town following an incident in which she had been ridiculed, and she would spit haughtily as a return gesture at those who made fun of her or who had earned her enmity.

But back at the farm, Mrs. Putzke was always made to feel at home. Fred Beisswenger, Rose's younger brother, idolized Mrs. Putzke. "She was awful good to him," Rose said with simple eloquence.

Because the roads were so bad, Rose Beisswenger did not start school until she was eight years old. Roads were not kept open in her childhood years, and because it was a shortcut in both the shoveling and walking in winter, a path was shoveled across the lake to the lane through the Leier property.

The school near the New Brighton Community Church had eight grades and a high school upstairs when Rose's older sister Lydia and brothers Adolph and Charles attended. Rose did not know why the high school was discontinued — probably because of lack of interest and indifference. Children who did not go on to further education went to the Farm School at the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota — among them, Rose recalled, Dewey Searles, Flossie Devine and the Swanson sisters. Rose's brother Fred, however, was a graduate of North High School in Minneapolis.

A MEMORABLE OUTING was the Sunday school picnic at Como Park. The group traveled by farm wagons with planks for seats and took along feed for the horses as well as their own picnic baskets. "We didn't have a nickel to spend, but we saw all the animals, everyone ate together, and we had a glorious time," is how Rose put it.

Another picnic awaited each year was the school picnic, with each schoolroom having its own. These were eagerly treasured events at a time when gatherings and outings were few.

Although she was too young to go, Rose remembered the Saturday night dances at the big town hall. The dances cost 25 cents admission and many a couple met and became acquainted there. At midnight the dancers were served supper — usually oyster stew. After supper, the dance continued for a couple hours more. "The dances were about the extent of our entertainment," Mrs. Johnson said. "We didn't have card parties yet in those days."



Sometimes the dances became boisterous. Fights would break out between local young men and men from northeast Minneapolis. Many a city man woke up the following day in the New Brighton jail and usually was released. Wedding dances, of course, were extra social events most everyone looked forward to.

Rose Johnson made the interesting comment that "villagers were different in those days in that they whistled and sang when walking down the street. It was a nice, happy sound." The recollection suggests a quieter, more savory kind of life of slower pace than the later years brought.

The Women's Community Club of New Brighton put on a play each year. Red crepe paper was used for rouge and burned matches for eye blackening by the actors and actresses. Otherwise, the only theater the children knew were in the plays they took part in during Christmas time.

The youngsters followed the village baseball team each Sunday for its games at Lake Johanna, a central meeting place for area teams.

Fred Beisswenger, right, manager, and Jack Nabozney, left, butcher, at the Beisswenger and Johnson grocery store in the 1930s.

One of the favorite places at which young Rose Beisswenger and her friends were welcome was the St. John's Church parish house where the pastor, Father Vincent Yany, lived with his three sisters. One sister was a dressmaker, one kept house and one attended school. "He was one of the nicest men," Rose recalled. "He came to our piano recitals and church doings and was for everyone, not only his own parishoners. Us kids had a good time in that house and there was always something to eat." Many years later the church rectory became a funeral home.

In addition to the dances, the town hall offered the excitement of the jail where a prisoner was housed from time to time. The fire engine also was located in the building, and it, too, meant occasional excitement for youngsters.

For some forty years, Jacob Beisswenger served New Brighton as councilman, mayor and assessor.

He had the reputation of being a fair and honest man. Urged to tax the busy pole yards heavily, Jacob's answer was to ask those who suggested it whether they wanted the pole yards to move out of town, resulting in a lot of lost jobs for local people. Jacob's son, Fred, was to succeed him as assessor in later years and continue the Beisswenger reputation for honesty and fairness.

BEISSWENGER WAS AN EMPLOYER as well, hiring not only the professional grubbing man to grub trees and reclaim more garden space each year, but men and women, including young people, to work the garden farm with its many vegetables, berries and sweet corn for which the market in the cities, as well as later the Beisswenger and Johnson store in New Brighton, were steady customers.

Rose Beisswenger married Lawrence Johnson, who with her brother, Adolph, started the Beisswenger and Johnson grocery store — located at first in the old Transit Hotel building and later across the street on the east side between the bank and blacksmith building. Lawrence ran the store and Adolph operated the Beisswenger farm with his father. The two wives, Rose and Mable, more and more worked the store — and Rose permanently following her husband's death in an auto accident in 1925. Of the remaining family, Charlie Beisswenger ran a garden farm and summer vegetable stand in the village; Lydia remained unmarried and lived her entire life at the Beisswenger farm home, assisting with the gardening; and Fred, the youngest, ultimately became a partner in the grocery store and later operated the Beisswenger feed and appliance and later hardware and furniture store as well in the old Exchange Building.

As were similar stores throughout America, the Beisswenger and Johnson grocery store was a popular social gathering place, particularly around the cozy stove in winter time. Three or four men at a time often would sit visiting on the big tin bread box, which incidentally was filled each day with 100 loaves of bread brought from the Bulwer Junction depot at the pole yards.

Hamburger was ground by hand, corn flakes and oatmeal were the only cereals, and the store carried dry goods and clothing. A gasoline pump was installed outside in the front of the store following the coming of the automobile.

Milk was supplied from cows at the Beisswenger farm. It was first canned and later bottled for sale. Rose Johnson operated a milk route in the village. During "dry" periods when cows were "coming in fresh," she got milk from the Cummings farm on Long Lake Road to help fill the supply and demand of her

customers. At first the demand was small but as villagers less and less put up with the work involved in having their own cows, the milk business gradually grew.

THE STORE'S REFRIGERATION came from an ice-box that used 10 to 15 cakes of ice a day and was filled from a slide on the outside. The ice came from the commercial ice houses on Long Lake. In addition to the Peoples Ice Company at the north end of the stockyards, local businessman and neighbor William Devine had an ice house on a small scale at the southeast corner of Long Lake adjacent to Beisswenger property. The ice houses were important to the economy of the village, for the winter work on the ice offered some men the only employment they could get at that time of the year. Jacob Beisswenger, living conveniently at the lake, and other farmers hired themselves and their teams out to work on the ice each winter season.

Mrs. Beisswenger's Salve, so hand-labeled on its varied-size jars, which along with Lysol, was an important ingredient on medicine shelves in days when cuts and scrapes were common in growing up, was an effective aid of high repute. Soaking cuts in water with Lysol — "Lysol water" — and then applying the salve and bandaging the wound was credited for quickening the healing, and preventing infection, of many a tear or wound. The salve was made from resin (pitch from trees), beeswax and sheep tallow. Rose Johnson continued to make the salve many years after her mother's death.

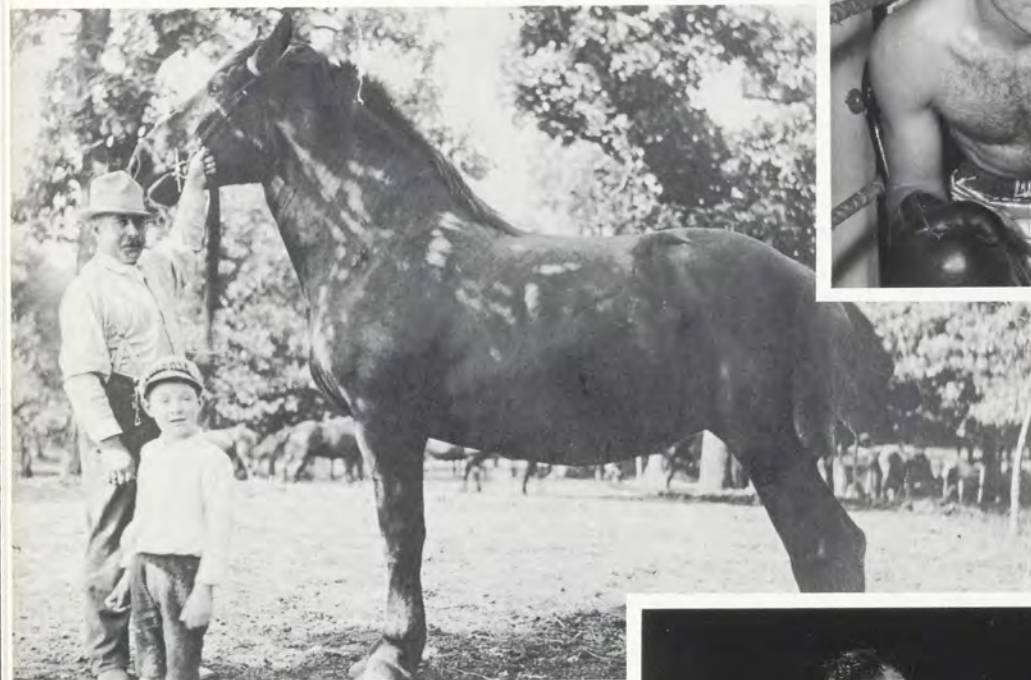
Following her husband's untimely death, Rose raised their three sons — Bob, Gordy and Willis — and was a prominent businesswoman and community spokesperson through the years. Very outspoken, she perpetuated the straight-from-the-shoulder high principles and proud independence that her parents had lived and engendered. In her later years, following her sister Lydia's death, taking up the role of ever-generous landlady for at times destitute or nearly-so lodgers at the big old Beisswenger farm place.

In a community where generosity and empathy were common traits, no one is known to have exemplified it as much and without question as did the Beisswenger family, New Brighton's first settlers.

Early resident Kenneth Gregson may have summed up the Beisswengers best of all: "Jacob Beisswenger was a man of the greatest stature. Both he and Mrs. Beisswenger had hearts much larger than themselves. A large family did not seem to be enough for them so they took in other families, the Postanoskys and the Schreibers, and their deeds were numberless, yet they were the most humble of all...Better people never lived."

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Mose Zimmerman with wide-backed mare. See pages 13-15.



Glen Flanagan.
 See pages 16-22.



Glen Flanagan with Jackie Graves.



Bulwer Junction depot, New Brighton.
 See pages 3-12.

The Gibbs Farm Museum, owned by the Ramsey County Historical Society, at Cleveland and Larpenteur in Falcon Heights.



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