

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Ramsey County Historical Society

Cattlemen and Capitalists—
And the Founding of
New Brighton

Volume 22
Number 2



Ramsey County History

Published by the
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Editor: Virginia Brainard Kunz

Contents

Volume 22
Number 2

Cattlemen and Capitalists --
-- And the Founding of New Brighton
by Gene K. Skiba - Page 3

The Great Horse Market Years at
Prior and University
by John S. Sonnen - Page 13

Boxing in Minnesota in the Postwar Era
The Fighting Flanagans
by Scott Wright - Page 16

ISBN 0-934294-54-2

Ramsey County History is published several times a year and copyrighted 1987 by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 West Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102. Membership in the Society carries with it a subscription to Ramsey County History. Single issues sell for \$3. Correspondence concerning contributions should be addressed to the editor. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Manuscripts and other editorial material are welcomed. All articles and other editorial material submitted will be carefully read and published, if accepted, as space permits.

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).*

The Great Horse-Market Years at Prior and University

By John S. Sonnen

A century ago -- March 4, 1885, to be exact -- the expanding city of St. Paul reached westward from its then boundary of Lexington Parkway to annex not only the blossoming developments of Merriam, Union, Groveland and St. Anthony Park but also the fledgling Minnesota Transfer Railway's original 200 acres. At the southeast corner of the railroad's property the intersection of Prior avenue with University would appear, once Prior became platted along its 3/4-section bearing. Here at this corner during the last years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th there would develop the largest horse market trading center in the Northwest.

The vital and needful presence of the horse along St. Paul streets and Ramsey county roads undeniably contributed greatly to the area's economy. Livery/dray operators, wagon/carriage makers, blacksmiths/horseshoers, harness/leather dealers all were established artisans, service people and merchants whose numbers and business kept growing through those years. In the late 1860s there were ten livery/boarding stables in the city. By 1888, three years after the city's expansion westward from Lexington Parkway, there were more than sixty. In 1900 there were some fifty carriage and wagon manufacturers and 100 blacksmiths and horseshoers in St. Paul.¹

From whence, then, came all the horses? Early directories of the city have no category of marketers, dealers, or traders of horses. It becomes evident that anyone wishing to buy a horse had to approach a variety of possible sellers: livery stable and dray operators, local farmers or stock drivers who, if not owning a surplus animal or two that appealed to the buyer, knew someone or other who used horses and might have one for sale. Thus the buyer would make the rounds of such places as ice and fuel dealers, grocers, mercantile houses, peddlers, wholesalers and acquaintances. In short, he became vulnerable to any stable-hand, teamster or citizen who knew about a "strong, good-toothed, straight-backed, sparking bay" for sale. The capaciousness of the growing market brought on by the growing city and the broadening

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John S. Sonnen, a freelance writer by avocation, has contributed a number of articles to Ramsey County History. He is a graduate in journalism and geology from the University of Minnesota and has lived since 1939 in the Merriam Park neighborhood of St. Paul where his father once operated a grocery business, founded by his grandfather.

rural settlements, created in turn by the widening web of railroad lines, created a demand for horses that was about to be recognized as a viable cog in the machinery of the local economy. The "horse-trader" was about to come into his own.

In 1896 a "Horse Dealers" category was published in the St. Paul City Directory for the first time. There were four listed:

Barrett & Zimmerman - 1933 University Av.

Brown & Dickey - University Av. N.E. corner Prior Av.

D. Ringer & Co. - 69 East 4th St.

H. A. Winslow - 1961 University Av.

Of the four, only D.W. Ringer had a Lowertown address. His company, registered in previous directories as "Cattle Dealer," apparently had pens and corrals established and in place. The other three, formerly listed as livery or boarding stable operators, undoubtedly found their Prior and University sites advantageous to the facilities of the Minnesota Transfer Railway along the west side of Prior avenue.

THE MINNESOTA TRANSFER, founded as Union Stockyard/Minnesota Transfer in 1880, became incorporated in 1883 as Minnesota Transfer Railway Company - a cooperative development of nine railroads serving St. Paul and Minneapolis. It was established as a switching and marshaling yard for the purpose of relieving the congestion that freight traffic was creating at the railroads' respective in-town terminals.² In 1888, five years after its incorporation, horses alone in its "Stock Handled" tabulation totaled 14,566. Destined to become the nation's second largest such facility, the Transfer by 1893 had 250 employees and was operating over 82 miles of trackage while switching and shunting 1,500 cars per day.³

That same year it acquired the trackage of the Belt Line Railway & Transfer Company that had originally been chartered (1889) as a primary livestock handler between Fridley and New Brighton for the Minneapolis Stock Yards & Packing Company. Occasionally a car of horses would appear among its stock shipments (it was handling 9,000 hogs per week alone) and the car would be shunted to the Prior avenue area or "C" yard trackage where holding pens, feeding and water facilities abutted the west side of Prior avenue at the southeast corner of the railroad's

property.⁴ It is no surprise that three out of the first four officially listed horse dealers in St. Paul chose Prior and University for their location. The Barrett & Zimmerman partnership (John D. Barrett - Henry Zimmerman) even moved over from Minneapolis where they operated a mule and horse livery stable. Within two years (1898) D. W. Ringer & Co. had their horse-stock dealership at 1943 University avenue.⁵

These first designated horse-dealers were livery stable operators, or, in the case of D. W. Ringer, farm stock salesmen. From this cadre of traders at Prior and University came others during St. Paul's first years of the 20th century: J. D. Brooks, 2427 University; Wilson & McGetrick, 1911 University; William Wood, 1945 University.⁶ There were sales to be made by all. Demand for good work horses was constantly growing, for the horse was an important adjunct of not only every farm but most businesses as well. Also, there were the sports or "gay-young-blades" of the Twin Cities who, if they wished to make any kind of mark with the local girls, just had to have a high stepping Hambletonian hitched to their Mitsch & Hecht gig. The horse population of Minnesota, recorded in the 1880 census at 257,000,⁷ was growing fast and now, with the yards and facilities of the Transfer railway right next door, the Prior and University horse-traders really came into their own. However, the firm that was destined to become the "wheel horse" of the lot was the partnership of Barrett & Zimmerman and from within this partnership emerged one of St. Paul's legendary entrepreneurs: Moses (Mose) Zimmerman.

Henry and Yetta Zimmerman brought their family to St. Paul in 1882 after some years in Davenport, Iowa, where Moses, their 11-year-old son, showed his resourcefulness at an early age by earning money as a bootblack and newsboy along Davenport's riverfront.⁸ The elders of the family had planned to make their way to the Pacific northwest, but in stopping off at St. Paul and Minneapolis they became impressed with the two cities and the area's opportunities. Henry entered into a partnership with one John D. Barrett, a mule and horse livery man in Minneapolis. Moses, or "Mose", as he came to be known, soon picked up where he had left off in Davenport: hawking necessary services which included helping out around the stables. Within ten years he took up residency in St. Paul and while living at 168 Fairfield became active as a fruit peddler along the Lowertown streets.⁹

FROM EXPERIENCE at his father's stables he had acquired knowledge of the varient temperaments and needs of horses. The local farmers and truck gardeners he was dealing with noticed this attribute in him and soon he found himself spending more time offering advice about horse trades and swaps than

arguing and haggling over their produce prices. Considering these facts, it is of no surprise that Mose Zimmerman's first brokered horse deals were among these farmer acquaintances and the various suppliers to St. Paul's "used" horse market. One such steady supplier was the St. Paul Street Railway Company. The economic life of a streetcar horse was two years.¹⁰ With a horse inventory of almost 800 during those last years of horse-propelled streetcars (1890-1895), it follows that the street railway welcomed the services that Mose Zimmerman offered. During those years a good, healthy, serviceable horse was commanding in St. Paul a price of \$125 to \$155. A "nag" or "sway-back", whose next stop would be a permanent one at the rendering plant, was being sold for between \$25 and \$50. The connection Mose had with the streetcar people indicates he was not dealing in just the dregs of the market's supply. A streetcar carried at least fourteen passengers¹¹ and no nag could move that car and its impatient load in a satisfactory manner. That is why the company chose to sell off their horses after they had served for two years.

Henry Zimmerman died in 1896, leaving his half interest in the Barrett & Zimmerman partnership to his wife, Yetta. She then called upon Mose to join her and his brother, Max, in the firm and at age 25 Moses Zimmerman found himself in his real vocation: horse-trader.¹² Throughout the next twenty-five years he was constantly on the go buying and selling more horses than any other man in the Northwest. Concentrating on volume buyers, the partnership negotiated contracts not only with the United States government, but with the British and French as well.¹³ Those sales, exceeding a million dollars a month, made demands upon a supply line that had to be sure and dependable.

Consequently, Mose Zimmerman crisscrossed thousands of miles throughout the Dakotas and Montana buying herds of wild western horses rounded up by Indian tribes and cowboy drovers. Along the railroads that kept expanding westward he negotiated with isolated settlers, Indian tribal leaders, frontier town wranglers, and shipping agents. Lasting relations were established with frontier town businessmen and rural homesteaders. Pastures, needed for holding areas, were rented or purchased as assembly points for car-lot shipments.¹⁴ Into the Minnesota Transfer yards, then, came "Mose's western herds" and from the pens and breaking-corral at Prior and University went Barrett & Zimmerman's horses to the world. The horses that needed more breaking or nuturing than was available at the Transfer yards were cut out and moved on to pasture areas and farms in nearby

Wisconsin where at one time the firm held land plots totaling 30,000 acres.

BY 1910 THIS ADDED business activity of land management resulted in the formation of Barrett & Zimmerman, Inc., Real Estate: John D. Barrett, president; Moses Zimmerman, secretary-treasurer.¹⁵ Their horse market, however, through the years of World War I remained their primary business venture. Thousands of western horses continued to be broken at their corrals and pasture farms before shipment to the Allies.¹⁶ At the end of the war in 1918, the partnership made its third diversification: army goods salvage. By becoming bulk-lot buyers of army goods salvage, the shelves and counters in their sales office, heretofore stocked with horse collars, harnesses, saddles and buggy whips, also had to accommodate army ponchos, pup-tents, blankets and mess kits.

By 1920 the city directory listing of the firm's business activity was in this order: Real Estate - Army Goods - Horse Market. The horse had been relegated to the bottom rung. Undoubtedly, Barrett & Zimmerman were recognizing the automobile and the motor truck as determined interlopers into the horse-trading business. They had no further reminder of this than University avenue itself. Auto traffic was increasing daily. One mile west of the stables and store had risen the gothic-towered four-story warehouse of John Willy to be used as the Northwest distribution center for his four-cylinder Willys Overland. Even Mose bought a "passenger car," explaining during a 1929 newspaper interview: "Yeah, I bought a car, but I never really liked it. Now, you take a horse - well, you get to know a horse."

During that *St. Paul Dispatch* interview, conducted while Mose was being sketched by the paper's and St. Paul's well-remembered cartoonist/artist P. J. Hoffstrom ("Hawf & Hawf"), the question was raised as to the negative connotation usually associated with the term "horse-trader."

"Contrary to general belief," Mose replied, "successful horse dealing results from telling the truth and making no misrepresentations."

Mose, as well as all the horse-traders at Prior and University, may not have liked the automobile, but none of them could deny that the motor car was becoming more popular and that the motor-truck and tractor were becoming the work horse of commerce and farming. Even Mitsch & Hecht, venerable St. Paul manufacturers of carriages and wagons, by 1920 were concentrating on custom building truck bodies for installation upon motor car or truck chassis. Times were changing. Gasoline pumps were appearing in front of blacksmith shops, tire and battery shops were opening along commercial streets, carriage houses



Mose Zimmerman steadying a wide-backed mare at one of Barrett & Zimmerman's holding pastures. This sturdy breed was preferred by circuses that did business with Zimmerman. Bare-backed riders applied rosin to the horses' backs, assuring themselves of "keeping their seats." The youngster probably is the tenant farmer's son.

and backyard stables were being converted to garages, and automobile dealerships were springing up everywhere.

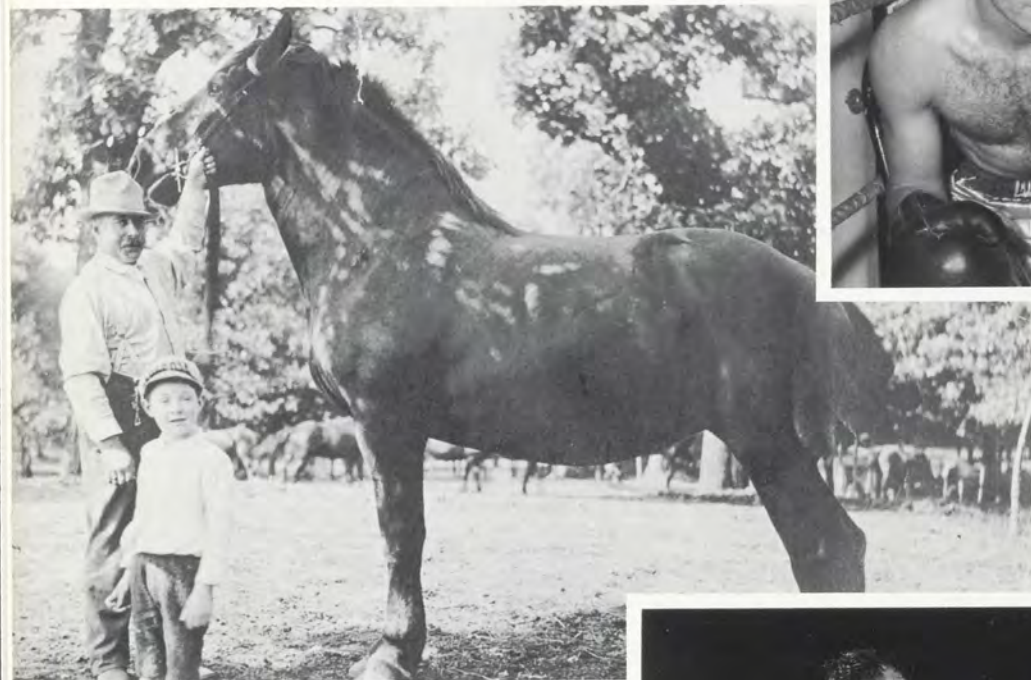
In the Twin Cities, the number of livery and boarding stables, after reaching a plateau from 1895 to 1910 (40 in St. Paul; 70 in Minneapolis), had been gradually decreasing, but the trend greatly accelerated through the 1920s, until finally in 1936 only three were listed in each city.¹⁷ The horse had become less and less a viable factor in the economic life of not only the area but also the nation. The internal combustion engine had sounded the death knell for the great horse-trading market at Prior and University.

FOOTNOTES

1. C. F. Schmid, *Social Saga of Two Cities - An Ecological & Statistical Study of Minneapolis and St. Paul Social Trends*, Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies, 1937.
2. J. M. Stottlemeyer, *The First Hundred Years - A History of the Minnesota Transfer Railway*. Minnesota Transfer Railway, © 1982.
3. J. A. Corrigan, *The History of St. Marks and the Midway District*. Self published by the author and the parish of St. Mark, 1939, p. 48.
4. J. M. Stottlemeyer, *The First Hundred Years - A History of the Minnesota Transfer Railway*. Minnesota Transfer Railway, © 1982.
5. *St. Paul City Directory*, 1898.
6. *Ibid*, 1800 to 1905.
7. T. C. Blegen, *History of Minnesota*. University of Minnesota Press, 1963, p. 342.
8. *St. Paul Daily News*, July 23, 1922.
9. *St. Paul City Directory* 1893.
10. *St. Paul Daily News*, July 23, 1922.
11. Virginia Brainard Kunz, *St. Paul, Saga of an American City*. Windsor Publications, Inc. 1977, p. 67-69.
12. Interview with R. C. Blumberg, partner and general manager, Zimmerman Realty and grandson of Moses Zimmerman.
13. *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 21, 1929.
14. Interview with R. C. Blumberg.
15. *St. Paul City Directory* 1910.
16. J. M. Stottlemeyer, *The First Hundred Years - A History of the Minnesota Transfer Railway*. Minnesota Transfer Railway, © 1982.
17. C. F. Schmid, *Social Saga of Two Cities - An Ecological & Statistical Study of Minneapolis and St. Paul Social Trends*. Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies, 1937.

Ramsey County History
 published by
 the Ramsey County Historical Society
 323 Landmark Center
 75 West Fifth Street
 St. Paul, Minn. 55102

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.



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 St. Paul, MN
 Permit #3989