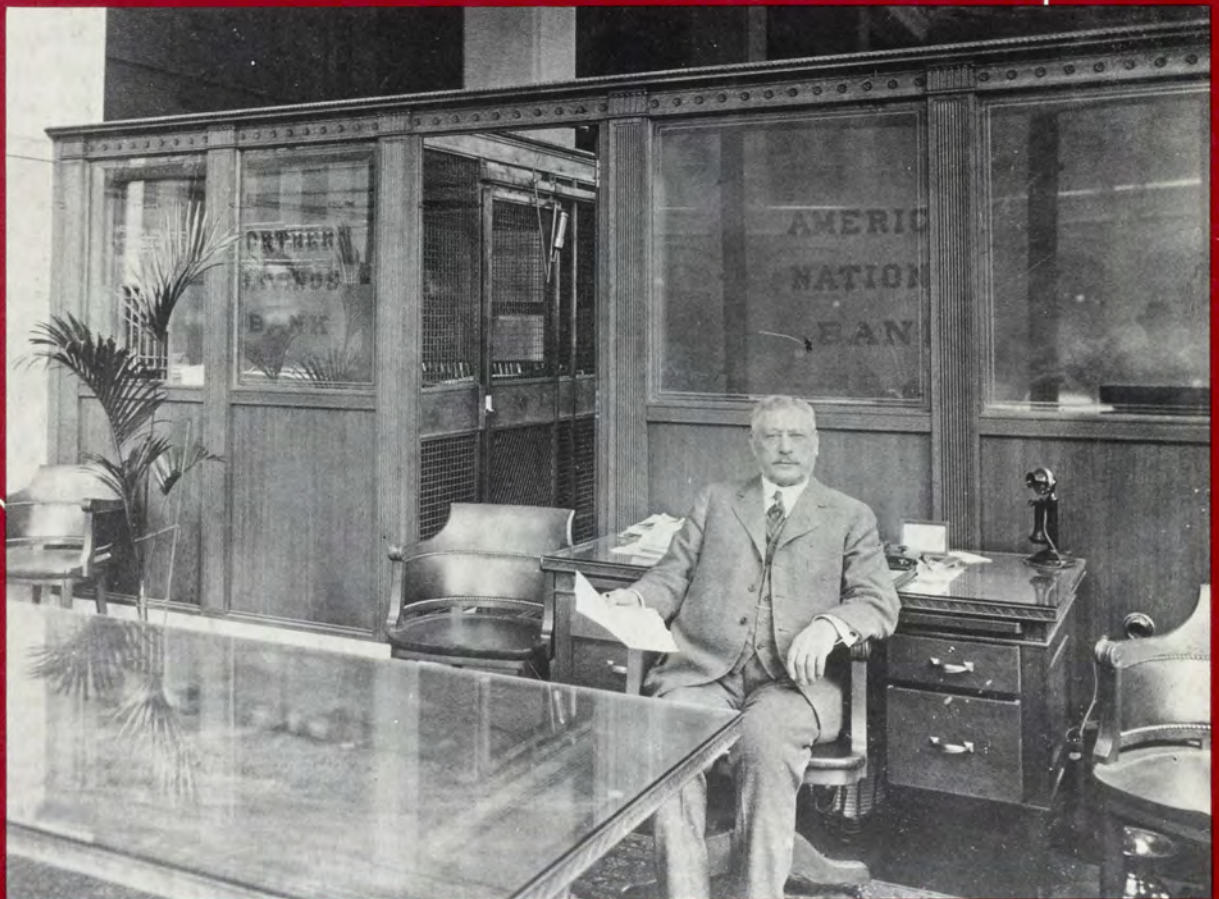


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Ramsey County Historical Society

## The American National Bank and the Bremer Brothers

Volume 23  
Number 1





# Ramsey County History

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ON THE COVER: Benjamin Baer's office in the American National Bank was typical of banking in that period just after the turn-of-the-century. The Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company (small photograph) was linked with the bank through much of the bank's history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: All photographs used in this issue of Ramsey County History are from the Audio-visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.





*Guild of Catholic Women's garden party at Mrs. Louis Branca's home, 28 N. Mississippi River Boulevard, 1933. Left to right, standing: Mrs. Paul R. Bohen, president; Mrs. A.W. Cannon; Margaret Marrinan; Mrs. Henry M. Walsh; Katherine Meagher. Seated: Mrs. Frank Van Valkenburg, Mrs. Branca, Mrs. Gerhard F. Nicolin.*

## **The Guild of Catholic Women And Their 'Constant Effort to Brighten Lives...'**

**By Virginia Brainard Kunz**

The founding of the Guild of Catholic Women in St. Paul in 1906 was part of a movement that was going on throughout the country at that time.

During St. Paul's pioneer period, loneliness and boredom often enveloped the lives of many of the brave women who had exchanged the settled life of the East for the uncertainties of the frontier. They worked long hours at bone-wearying labor made more difficult by primitive conditions.

However, by 1900 St. Paul was a settled and sophisticated midwestern city that was the Gateway to the Northwest and a major railroad center. St. Paul's women had more time, more resources and more opportunities. They frequently were bright, articulate, concerned citizens, and well-educated.

*Virginia Brainard Kunz is executive director of the Ramsey County Historical Society and author of ten books on state, local and American history. This article is adapted from a talk she gave in May, 1987, to the Guild of Catholic Women on the organization's history. Some of this material is based on a paper on the Guild's history which was written by Mary B. Johnson, Guild president from 1982 to 1984.*

THE 20TH CENTURY'S great social movements—suffrage, social service, prohibition and temperance—were reflected in the work of St. Paul's women, including those in the newly-founded Guild of Catholic Women. In 1867 twelve St. Paul women had established a Home for the Friendless, which gave temporary shelter to poor immigrants crowding into the city, and particularly to women and children. Out of this grew the oldest home for the aged in Minnesota.

As the years passed, the women of the city organized Children's Health Days, opened milk stations in schools to provide children with free milk, taught Americanization classes, established more than thirty public drinking fountains throughout the city, and organized classes to teach the needy to sew their own clothing. Some of their activities were surprisingly contemporary. A *Who's Who of Minnesota Women*, published in 1924, revealed in some detail the interests and concerns of 550 Minnesota women, including 143 from St. Paul. Their biographical sketches showed them working for prison reform and freedom for political prisoners; promoting the beautification of the city through the planting of



trees and shrubbery; protesting the high cost of living and seeking solutions for it; working for highway improvements; opposing the death penalty; supporting indeterminate sentencing, and backing a Duluth-St. Lawrence Seaway, all before 1920.

The Guild of Catholic Women came into being as part of this rich ferment when a band of some thirty women was formed in St. Luke's parish by Caroline Beaumont, later Mrs. Henry J. O'Brien, and Mrs. J.W. Bishop.

AT FIRST Guild members busied themselves with making and distributing clothing and food baskets and visiting the sick and the poor. Soon language and catechism classes were organized. By 1908 the Guild had opened a Travelers Aid Bureau to meet Catholic immigrants arriving in St. Paul and provide temporary shelter, loans of money, and help for those who could not speak English. In 1911 one of the Guild's most significant pioneering efforts began. This was their work with counseling and providing direction for wayward young women who were turning up in juvenile court. Judge Grier M. Orr asked members to do what they could to find work and homes for these young women. That year, alone, Guild members found jobs for 173 young women.

The next year, 1912, the St. Paul Y.W.C.A. asked the Guild to help other young Catholic working women, especially those from out-of-town. The Guild found a house at 574 St. Peter and with \$2,000 and much painting, scrubbing, and furnishing, some of it by women who never scrubbed a floor at home, the home opened in March. By the end of the year it was filled to its capacity of thirty women and it had a waiting list. A housemother managed the home and a cook provided "good, wholesome meals."

That year, also, the Guild incorporated and became a charter member of the Women's National Federation of Catholic Societies, the forerunner of the National Council of Catholic Women.

IN 1914, the Guild bought a house at 215 Nelson Avenue (now Marshall) as a home that would provide board and room, home care and comforts amid pleasant surroundings, for young working women living away from home. At the same time, foreseeing expansion of their work, they acquired the sixty-foot lot next door. A second project captured their time and resources that year. The Guild established the Catholic Infant Home (later Seton House) in a residence at Dale and Rondo which Archbishop John Ireland had purchased. The Infant Home was a responsibility the Guild shared with the League of Catholic Women in Minneapolis. This was a partnership that continued until 1922 when the Sisters of St. Joseph assumed control. Seton House is now operated by Catholic Charities, an

organization the Guild helped found in 1920 as the Bureau of Catholic Charities.

The Guild's fund-raiser, the Guild of Catholic Women Charity Ball, was inaugurated in 1917 and held at the St. Paul Hotel. It was the city's first benefit ball and it has continued to this day, with the exception of several years during World Wars I and II when it was not held.

Yearbooks and historians' reports for each year since 1906 have preserved and documented these and other events in the Guild's eighty-two-year history. Those of 1915, as the Guild approached its 10th anniversary, are examples of an expanding agenda. Historian Daisy Flynn noted in her report that Catholic women from all over America were writing the Guild for information on starting their own organizations. The work of the Guild in 1915 cost \$2,114.31, she reported, and the time and effort of a large number of its 585 members. The Needlework Department under Mrs. E.J. Clasen met almost weekly, made and distributed 1,761 articles of clothing and also made garments for the Children's Preventorium, an institution for youngsters with tuberculosis. The St. Vincent de Paul Society had joined with the Guild in renting a room at 260 W. Third Street where old clothes could be received and distributed.

THE HOSPITAL COMMITTEE, headed by Sarah M. Walsh, had made weekly visits to Ancker hospital, the city and county hospital, in "a constant effort to brighten the lives of those whom sickness condemns to suffering or at least monotony." To this end, a picnic was given in July of 1915 for fifty-one patients there and thirty-two children from the Crippled Children's Hospital, at that time a part of Ancker.

In November a party was given in the Women's Tuberculosis Ward at Ancker for six young women whose birthdays fell within that month. And at Christmas, Daisy Flynn noted, a personal gift went to each of the 300 patients at the hospital, to sixty children at the House of the Good Shepherd, and to twenty women at the Ramsey County Poor Farm.

In 1915 the Guild completed the purchase of their home at 215 Nelson Avenue and the deed was handed over to the Guild's president, Mrs. W.J. O'Toole. During these early years the Guild maintained an office in the Wilder Building in downtown St. Paul. Mrs. D.J. Sullivan, who was in charge of the office, reported that in a single month in 1915 eighty-seven applications for work and forty-four calls from employers had been received; twenty young women had been placed in permanent positions and day work had been found for twenty-two.

The Guild's work with the juvenile court system had grown substantially since its first efforts four years earlier. By 1915 the Guild's Juvenile Court Department had under its supervision not only young women who



needed help but troubled families as well. That year the department, under its chairman, Mrs. M.J. McFadden, had 157 families under its care; it had found homes for thirty-six young women and work for sixty-two. Committee members had handed out 193 old garments and eighty-two new ones. They had had seven children committed to the State School at Owatonna, eight to the Jean Martin home, nine babies to the German Catholic Orphan Asylum, and twenty-five young women to the House of the Good Shepherd. This work had required 420 visits to Juvenile Court sessions and 600 visits to homes.

The Department of Arts and Letters under Mrs. P.M. Hennessy studied church history and put on concerts, and the Social Committee, with Mrs. J.M. Schwartz as chairman, gave parties and teas as fund-raisers to help support the Guild's work. At the end of her administration, President O'Toole submitted a petition to the proper authorities asking that the Guild's property be exempted from taxation, a request that was granted.

DURING WORLD WAR I, Guild members, like other women throughout the country, sold Liberty bonds. They worked for the Red Cross and assisted veterans housed in the Aberdeen Hotel. A poignant note creeps into the records of these years. At the close of the war, a committee of women was appointed to meet trains bearing the bodies of soldiers who had died in service and help and comfort relatives and friends accompanying the bodies. They arranged for burial in Calvary Cemetery for those who were Catholic and in Elmhurst for those who were Protestant, rather than having them buried in Potters Field.

In the 1920s Guild members were represented on the State Penitentiary Board, the University of Minnesota Board of Regents, and the board of the new Women's Reformatory at Shakopee. They exerted enough influence to have a woman physician named to the State Board of Health. By 1923 the Guild's membership had grown from its first thirty members to more than 800. By 1925 the need for a larger building to house young working women had become apparent. After five years of work, on February 14, 1930, the first Guild Hall was opened for forty-eight young women on the sixty-foot lot next door to 215 Nelson Avenue.

By this time the Guild had passed its 20th anniversary. Among the women who led it through its first two decades were the following:

EMILY FRANKLIN LOGUE, who organized St. Theresa's Club for Girls in 1923 while she was Guild president. She had been a teacher for five years and had studied piano and voice. She also was president of the Lower Town Mothers' Club and chairman of a com-



*Catholic Guild Hall, 215 Marshall Avenue, around 1916. This was the former Louis Goodkind home. C.P. Gibson photo.*

mittee formed by clubs in the fourth district to work for a new city library, an effort that was successful. She also worked for the abolition of carnivals on the state capitol's grounds.

MARGARET BISHELL MCFADDEN, who was Guild president from 1908 to 1913 and president of the Catholic Infants Home. She was a delegate to the National Conference of Catholic Charities. Active in the American Legion Auxiliary after World War I, she became president of the first women's auxiliary for Post No. 8. She was instrumental in changing the name of the Poor Farm to the Ramsey County Home.

ANNE TOWEY O'TOOLE, who was a teacher for almost thirty years before taking up public welfare work. She served three terms as Guild president. She was president in 1918 of the State Federation of Catholic Women. In 1920 she was among the group of women who met in Washington to form a national organization of Catholic women. She was a member of the Board of Women Visitors for the Women's Reformatory at Shakopee and the Home School for Girls at Sauk Centre and Governor Jacob Preus appointed her to the State Crime Commission.

MARY HOWARD BREEN QUINLAN, who was a charter member of the Guild and its second president. She was the first woman appointed to the St. Paul City Planning Commission. She organized the Christ Child Society and started its social settlement work.



MARGARET MCMANUS WALSH, who was Guild president during the World War I years. A charter member of the Ramsey County Child Welfare Board, she also was the first president of the National Union of Catholic Women's Associations.

ELLEN DONOVAN CONROY, who served as state president of the Ladies Auxiliary, Ancient Order of Hibernians, an organization of Catholic women of Irish ancestry. At the time she was state president in 1921, the order had 9,000 members. She was also state vice president of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic, a reflection of the impact of international political events on St. Paul.

MARY HANDRAN HURLEY, who was the first woman to serve on St. Paul's Board of Control, the overseer for Ancker Hospital. She arranged monthly programs at Ancker's tuberculosis pavilion and worked successfully for a chapel-auditorium at the hospital.

ELLEN KENNEDY JONES, who was a trained nurse but took up wireless telegraphy and helped with government recruiting during World War I. Elected in 1922 as national commander of the Auxiliary to the Disabled War Veterans of the World War, she went to Washington to decorate the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington, the second woman in the country to perform this ceremony.

MARGARET WALSH KELLY, who was one of the first policewomen in St. Paul and served in that post for ten years. She drew up an ordinance regulating public dancing and was for many years president of the Sacred Thirst Total Abstinence Society. She was elected to the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America.

JEANETTE ROBERT LAMPREY, who was the first president of the Catholic Infants Home and an honorary member of the River Men's Association, the only woman admitted. His father was the renowned fur trader and steamboat owner, Captain Louis Robert, for whom Robert Street was named.

KATHERINE LOUISE DUNN SLATER, another former teacher who took over her husband's insurance business when he was called into service with the National Guard on the Mexican border in 1916 and again during World War I. She was secretary of the first Minnesota State Parent-Teacher Association.

Many of these women were active into the 1930s when the Guild took on a new responsibility, the plight of some 600 Mexicans living on St. Paul's West Side who needed help. Mary B. Johnson, Guild president from 1982 to 1984, described the mission in a paper on the Guild's history.

"The Guild opened a refuge in a vacant store on

South Wabasha Street," she wrote. "The owner . . . agreed to a lease of \$25 a month, or improvements up to a value of \$300 on the property. The latter terms were agreed to and the lease was signed in the name of the Guild. This dingy grocery store was transformed into a chapel. Within six weeks \$1,400 had been donated, along with an organ given to the mission by the Polish church . . ."

During the early years of the Depression, the Guild organized Girl Scout troops at the two Catholic orphanages in St. Paul, St. Joseph's and St. Paul's. They were active in the Community Chest, the Red Cross, House of the Good Shepherd, Little Sisters of the Poor and the Ramsey County Home for Girls. They organized study clubs in parishes.

IN 1964 THE Guild's property on Marshall Avenue was needed as the site for the new St. Paul Vocational School, and so it was sold. A building drive was organized, a new site purchased and a new building built at 286 Marshall, across the street from the old. By the early 1970s it had become apparent that the service Guild Hall had offered for so many years — supervised living quarters for young working women — was no longer needed by liberated young women. After providing housing for elderly women for a time, the Guild moved to fill another community need, that of providing board and care for men and women who were mentally ill.

A fourteen-unit apartment building at 268 Marshall Avenue was purchased. There the Guild operates professionally-supervised living quarters for mentally ill young adults. They are encouraged to learn or relearn the skills that will help them become independent.

The magnitude of the social changes since World War II can be seen in changes in the Guild's services. In the 1940s, the young women who lived at Guild Hall tended to be from rural areas or small towns and from families who thought they should remain at home until they married. The women themselves preferred work in the city as waitresses or housemaids in the big homes. There were few runaways in those days, Guild members recall as they look back. They remember, also, the holiday seasons when they baked thousands of Christmas cookies, when they bought candy wholesale, weighed it, packed it in little bags and delivered it to families who were too poor to come in to get it.

The years of such intensive volunteer work may be vanishing as women in St. Paul and around the country find it increasingly difficult to commit time and resources to what used to be thought of as charity work, and as charity work itself has become more sophisticated, more professionalized. Still, it is well to remember just what it was in the first place that brought women out of their homes and into the public arena.



*Guild of Catholic Women's garden party. See pages 13-16.*



*Otto Bremer. See pages 3-12.*

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*Lexington Ball Park. See pages 21-22.*



*Fritz Woost's grocery. See pages 17-20.*

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



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