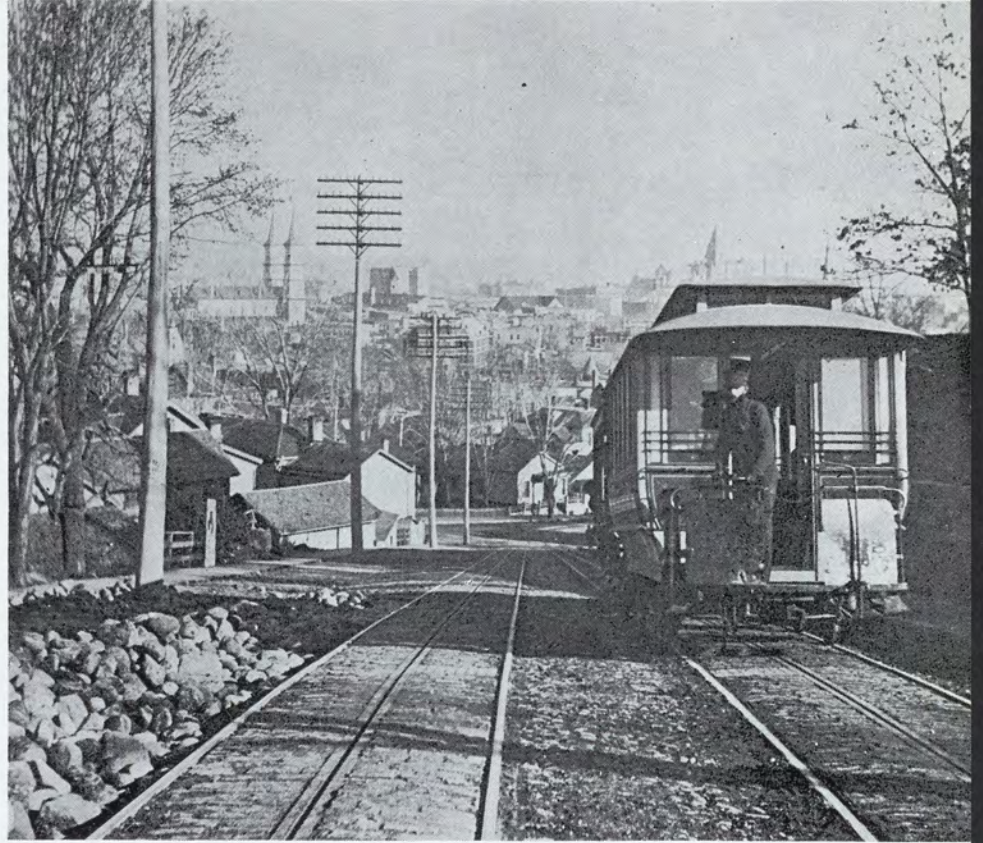
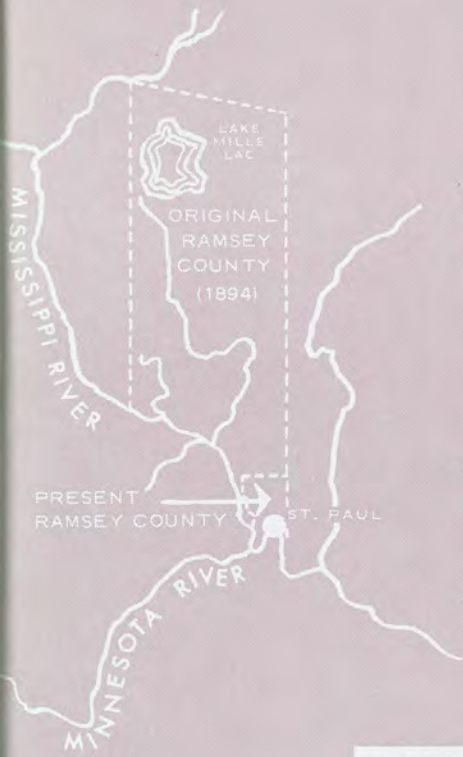


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Fall
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On the Cover: This 1895 photograph shows one of St. Paul's cable cars described in George M. Brack's article beginning on page 3. The car is ascending Selby Hill. This and other pictures illustrating Mr. Brack's reminiscences of a tranquil era are from the Minnesota Historical Society's collection.



Gaslights arched over Third Street, now Kellogg Boulevard, during festive occasions during the 1880's and 1890's, and citizens promenaded under the glow of the lights. This view of Third Street looks east.

Steamboats and Cable Cars —

St. Paul's Gaslight Era

BY GEORGE M. BRACK

VISITORS to St. Paul in the middle 1880's had the choice of arrival by either of two steamboat lines or of one of the nine railroads serving the city. The steamboat lines were the St. Louis and St. Paul Packet Company, with its home office in St. Paul, and the Diamond Jo Line, with its headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri. Both lines traversed the Mississippi River between St. Louis and St. Paul and both discharged their passengers on the levee at the foot of Jackson Street.

The railroad lines and some of the slogans they used in their publicity were the Chicago, Burlington and Northern Railroad; Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul

Railway—"Fast Mail Line to All Points in the Eastern United States and Canada"; Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway—"The Best Line to the Farming and Wheat Lands of Minnesota and Dakota"; St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railroad Company—"Only Line Which Reaches Every Part of the Red River Valley"; Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad Company, Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad—"The Albert Lea Route"; St. Paul and Duluth Railroad—"The Favorite Summer Excursion Route to Lake Superior and Eastern Points via the Great Lakes"; Northern Pacific Railway Company; Wisconsin Central Line—"United States Fast Mail Route and Short Line."

All of these railroads entered the St. Paul Union Depot except the Minneapolis and St. Louis, which had a small station at Fourth Street and Broadway. All had their general offices in St. Paul except the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul and the Wisconsin Central which were in Milwaukee and the Minneapolis and St. Louis which were in Minneapolis.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: George M. Brack is a native Minnesotan who came to St. Paul in 1882 at the age of 2. In the banking and trust business all of his adult life, he was secretary and treasurer of the First Trust Company of St. Paul when he retired in 1945. He is a former president of the Ramsey County Historical Society and now serves on its board of directors. He is a member of the board of directors of Miller Hospital, St. Paul, and has been president and treasurer of the Trust Officers Association of Minnesota.

Subsequently, the Chicago, Burlington and Northern was consolidated with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. The Minneapolis and St. Louis and the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha were merged with the Chicago and Northwestern Railway and their general offices were moved to Chicago.

The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway, with headquarters in Chicago, and the Minneapolis, Saint Paul and Sault Sainte Marie Railroad Company, with general offices in Minneapolis, entered St. Paul at a later period.

THE ST. PAUL UNION DEPOT originally was located on the east side of Sibley Street a block south of Third Street. Some years later, when it was destroyed by fire, the present, much larger structure was erected at Fourth and Sibley Streets. All of the railroads using the station approach it through the valleys of four streams: the Mississippi River, Minnesota River, Trout Brook and Phalen Creek. Trout Brook, coming from a northeasterly direction, flows into Phalen Creek in the depot yards and the latter discharges into the Mississippi.

The depot and yards, being at the mouth of these streams, were only slightly above the level of the Mississippi and at a much lower elevation than the surrounding areas, except to the south. Because of this, some of the roads had rather steep grades the first few miles out of the station. It was asserted that the steepest grade on the Great Northern Railway (the later name of the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba) between St. Paul and the Cascade Mountains was the first mile out of the St. Paul Union Depot. This was alleviated to some extent when the present building was constructed. The level of some of the tracks at the depot was raised about 14 feet above the former level.

As the depot was a terminal point for railroads running both to the east and to the west, many passengers had to change cars here, especially those bound for intermediate points where only local trains stopped. Sometimes travelers had to lay over for a considerable time in order to make connections. For this reason, a spacious station was essential with large waiting rooms and other facilities.

A visitor arriving at the depot or levee and desiring transportation would find ample facilities available. An omnibus of the J. B. Cook and Son Line, drawn by a team of horses, would take him to any downtown hotel or a one-horse hansom cab with a high seat for the driver at the rear would carry him to any desired destination.

IF A VISITOR were bound for a residential district, several lines of horse cars were available. Except for limited areas on the fringe of the downtown business district, these areas were on higher ground and, in some cases, it was necessary to follow circuitous routes to find grades low enough for a team of horses or mules to draw a loaded car up the hills. To illustrate: the Laurel Avenue car line, which served the St. Anthony Hill district, ran out West Fourth Street to Wabasha, then to Tenth, to Rice, to Rondo to Farrington to Laurel and on Laurel to the terminus at Dale Street.

The streetcars were small with seats running lengthwise on each side, accommodating perhaps from 25 to 30 persons. Along one side of each car was a small chute sloping to the front with several slots on the top in which each passenger was expected to drop a nickel which was the fare. Passengers entered and alighted at the rear of the car. No transfers were issued. The driver stood on an open platform at the front to drive the horses or mules. If a passenger neglected to deposit his fare the driver might embarrass him by calling out, "Will the passenger who got on at Western Avenue please deposit his fare?" A turntable at the terminus enabled the driver to turn the car around for the return trip.

This line was succeeded by the Selby Avenue Cable Line operated from a steam powerhouse at the corner of Selby Avenue and Dale Street. When the line was first put in operation, the western terminus was at Selby and St. Albans Street, but it later was extended to Merriam Park. Eastward from the powerhouse the line followed Selby Avenue and Third Street to Seven Corners and ran along Fourth Street to its eastern terminus at Broadway.

TRAINS CONSISTED of two cars: a grip car and a trailer. The grip car was equipped with a device which enabled it



Two boats dock at the Lower Levee, or Jackson's Landing at the foot of Jackson Street. The long, low shed at the right houses the ticket office of the Diamond Jo Line. At right is the old Market House with stalls for produce stretching along the front.

to grasp or "grip" the cable moving on pulleys in a small tunnel beneath the tracks, and thus be drawn along by the cable. The only other cable line in St. Paul was on East Seventh Street.

The first car line in St. Paul to be operated by electric power was on Grand Avenue and the horsecar lines (and eventually the cable lines) soon became electrified also.

A problem was confronted when the Selby Avenue line was converted to electricity. The hill on Selby Avenue from Third Street to Summit Avenue was too steep to be ascended in safety by electric cars. The problem was solved by the installation of a counter-weight car running on another track to offset the weight of the electric car. As the streetcar descended the hill, it pulled the counterweight up the hill. When the streetcar ascended the hill, the counterweight running down helped pull it up. This method continued in operation until the construction of a tunnel under Summit Avenue, from Nina Avenue to Third Street, reduced the grade of Selby Avenue to a point where the electric cars could operate safely.

RIVER TRANSPORTATION was the chief reason for the founding of a city at the site of St. Paul, and the Mississippi continued to be the city's means of contact with the country south and east. St. Anthony Falls, only 10 miles away, was an impassable barrier to further passage upstream. In St. Paul, the low bank and a



substantial level area on the east side of the river afforded a suitable landing place and ample space which was utilized for the "upper landing" at the foot of Chestnut Street and the "lower landing" at the foot of Jackson Street. Access could be had from both landings to the plateau on which the early structures, both residential and business, were built.

When the townsite was platted, numbered streets were laid out, starting at the river. First Street has disappeared under the railroad tracks; Second Street, originally named Bench Street, still climbs the sandstone bluff on a shelf or "bench" from Jackson Street to Wabasha Street; Third Street, now Kellogg Boulevard and the first street on the plateau, became the site of both residences and business houses. Probably on account of its proximity to the levee, Third Street soon became the principal business street and maintained that status for many years. Residences which at first were interspersed among the business houses gradually were replaced by more business houses.

The City Market was a two-story, block-long building on the north side of Seventh

Street between Wabasha and St. Peter Streets. It was two blocks south of the original state capitol, which was built in 1853 and enlarged and practically rebuilt in 1873. On the evening of March 4, 1881, the legislature was in session when a fire broke out and the capitol building was destroyed. The market house recently had been completed and was ready for occupancy. The city authorities offered it to the state to serve as a temporary capitol until the new capitol could be built. The offer was accepted and for two years the building was occupied for this purpose by the state.

THE FIRST FLOOR of the market was divided into stalls where farmers and gardeners could display and sell their produce. At the rear of the building was an open air hay market where farmers parked their hay racks until the load was sold. Along the front of the market was a row of stalls under a shed roof affording additional display and sales space. When this space no longer was sufficient a similar row of stalls was erected on the south side of Third Street at Franklin Street.

During the period when Third Street was the location of retail business, it was also the favored street for circus, winter carnival and other parades. After gas lights had succeeded kerosene lights for street illumination, the city for many years celebrated State Fair Week each year by erecting at intervals along Third Street from Wabasha Street to Sibley Street arches of gas pipe extending from curb to curb, each arch fitted with a number of gas jets.

As it became dark, the gas jets were lighted and thousands of residents and visitors promenaded under the flickering lights. With the shift of the retail district to Sixth Street and the surrounding area, Sixth Street became the parade route.

While some of the wholesale houses continued to be jobbers of merchandise, others installed machinery and became manufacturers of at least part of the products they sold.

AN 1886 LIST of the articles produced or distributed by the manufacturers and jobbers in St. Paul includes the following, as listed in William's *History of Saint Paul*:

Agricultural implements, carriages, sleighs, wagons, furniture, metal sundries, woven wire and grills, bedding, boots and shoes, boxes and crates, brushes, drugs, produce, cans, cigars, cement blocks, barrels, crackers, dry goods, flour, gloves and mittens, hardware, harness, horse nets, notions, iron and steel, dry goods, linseed oil, paint, paper boxes, plows, plumbing supplies, law books, pumps, saddlery, sash, doors and blinds, rubber goods.

A separate settlement called West St. Paul had grown up on the west bank of the Mississippi opposite St. Paul. In 1860 St. Paul authorized the operation of a ferry running from the lower landing to West St. Paul and, a short time later, another ferry running from the upper landing. Both of these ferries continued to operate until 1868. In that year a bridge known as the St. Paul Bridge was completed and it operated as a toll bridge until 1874. In that year, West St. Paul was annexed to the City of St. Paul and the span was made a free bridge. This was the first bridge across the river at St. Paul and it continued in use until succeeded by a new bridge in 1886. The annexation of West St. Paul was the first addition to St. Paul.

WHEN MINNESOTA was organized as a territory in 1849 and St. Paul became its capital, the population of St. Paul was 840. Almost nine years later, in the fall of 1857 just before the territory became a state, St. Paul had a population of 9,973. Succeeding censuses disclosed a steady rate of growth to 41,473 in 1880. The next five years was the period of the city's greatest extended expansion. The figure in 1885 was 111,397, a gain of 62.7 per cent. This remarkable growth was the occasion of great rejoicing to the citizens, who confidently expected that the same rate of growth would continue.

In the same year, a survey of all the cities in the United States having a population of 100,000 or more showed that St. Paul, with a figure of 12.08 deaths per thousand, had the lowest death rate of all the cities in that class. While it has not continued to list such a low figure, the city consistently has made a satisfactory showing. The Chamber of Commerce then and since has made the most of that fact in its



publicity and its efforts to attract new residents and business concerns.

In 1884, Lexington Avenue was the western limits of the city. There were a few houses just west of that avenue and there was some scattered building beyond in the Macalester, Merriam Park and Hamline areas and a little later in St. Anthony Park. About this time, all the land west of Lexington Avenue to the present city limits was added to the city.

THE INFLUX of new residents continued through the 1880's and the early years of the 1890's. The large area recently added to the city began to build up. In the older sections of St. Paul which were not yet built on, multiple housing came more into use. More double houses (side-by-side dwellings) appeared all over the city. A little later, duplex houses (up-and-down dwellings) were introduced, practically to the exclusion of double houses. Apartment houses, both frame and brick, came into existence in sections where they had not been built before. On the fringes of the downtown area and extending into what once was considered single house districts, apartment hotels were constructed. Among these were the Aberdeen at Dayton and Virginia; the Albion at Selby and Western; the Dacotah, at Selby and Western; the Barteau at Smith and West Ninth; the Buckingham at 148 West Summit; the Colnade at Tenth and St. Peter, and the Portland Block on Broadway between Eighth and Ninth. This was a row of stores a block long with apartments above them.

Another type of dwelling, the row house, made its appearance. In the section between St. Peter and College Avenue, there still are many examples of brick attached houses in rows of three to six or more. The outstanding example is a block long and it

A row of hansom cabs, with their drivers perched on the high seats at the rear, stretches out in front of the old Union Depot, waiting, no doubt, for passengers.

is located on Central Avenue between St. Albans and Grotto Streets.

At this time there were no streetcars to the suburban areas and residents were dependent on the railroads for public transportation. The Milwaukee Road had its stations between the Union Depot and its bridge over the Mississippi at St. Anthony Avenue: Chestnut Street, Murray Hill at Oneida Street, Ridgewood Park at Victoria Street, Macalester at Snelling Avenue, Merriam Park at Prior Avenue, and Desnoyer Park near Cromwell Street.

The Omaha Railway, West Division, had stations at Chestnut Street and Western Avenue. The East Division had stations called East St. Paul at Payne Avenue and East Seventh Street at Earl Street.

The Chicago Great Western Railroad's stations were West St. Paul at Fairfield Street, Custer Street, Delos Street, Bancroft Avenue, Concord Street, South Park, South St. Paul and Inver Grove.

The Chicago, Burlington and Northern had stations at Dayton's Bluff, Oakland, Highwood, Red Rock, Newport and two at St. Paul Park; Broadway and Pullman Avenue.

The Great Northern had stations at Como Avenue, Hamline and St. Anthony Park.

The Northern Pacific had stations at Como Avenue, Warrendale, Hamline and St. Anthony Park.

Then came people, more people, more houses and we have St. Paul as we know it today.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue W., St. Paul, Minn.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958 the Society erected a barn, behind the house, which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey county will be preserved for future generations.