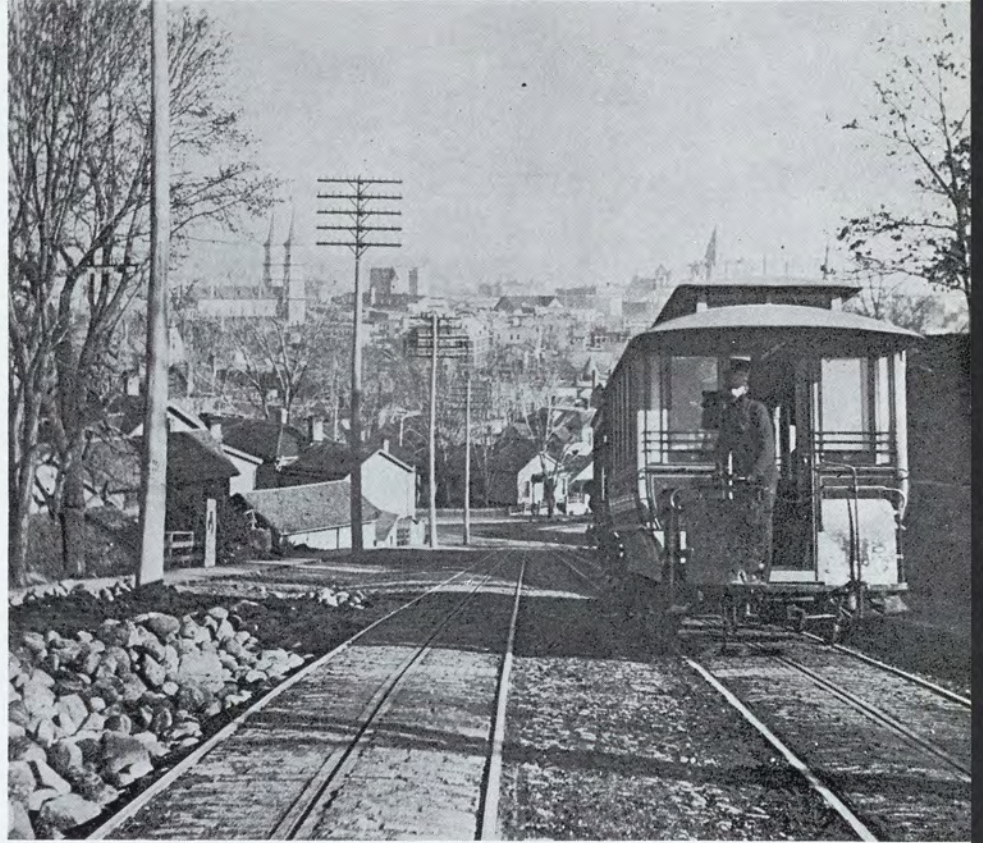
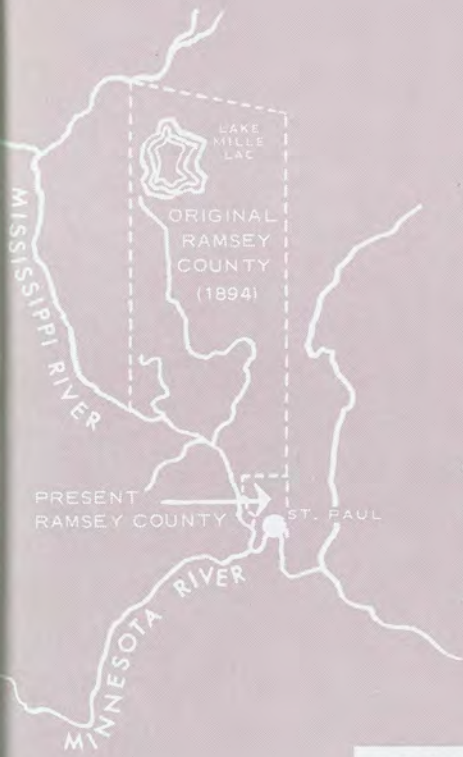


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Fall  
1964

Volume 1  
Number 2



# Ramsey County History

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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.*

## *Village In the Wilderness*

# Little Canada— Heritage from the French

BY MARGARET WHITNEY WALL

MINNESOTA'S HERITAGE today is most often thought of as Scandinavian. True, there were others who came to stay, among them the Germans and Irish. But those who first explored here, those who were the colorful voyageurs, and those who were Minnesota's first permanent settlers were the French from the Canadian region.

Here and there, in small communities, the descendants of these earliest settlers still live. A striking example can be found right here in Ramsey County—the 120-year-old settlement named, appropriately, Little Canada.

Little Canada today is a village lying about seven miles north of St. Paul and covering approximately three square miles, much of it touching the shores of Lake Gervais. Like many other suburbs, Little Canada has tree-lined streets, attractive homes, modern schools, light industry, a few stores, some farms and truck gardens.

It also has rows of mailboxes bearing the proud French Canadian names of Gervais, Nadeau, Ducharme, Donais, Bibeau, Auge,

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Margaret Whitney Wall is a native of St. Paul who attended Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass., and graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1947 with a bachelor's degree in education. Five years ago, she and her husband, Dr. James O. Wall, a St. Paul obstetrician, and their family built a home on Lake Gervais in Little Canada and thus began her interest in the old French settlement.*



The Catholic Church of St. John the Evangelist of Little Canada is the fourth oldest Catholic church in Minnesota and the second oldest Catholic church to exist on the same plot of ground and under the same name as the original church. The building pictured above, the old brick church, was a landmark in northern Ramsey county for many years—from the 1870's, when it replaced the original log structure erected in 1851, until 1956 when it was razed to make way for the new, Roman-style church. The site, however, will be marked as an historic site by the Ramsey County Historical Society. Picture from the Minnesota Historical Society.

Garceau, Tereau, Melancon and many others. For these are the descendants of the French Canadian pioneers who in great part were responsible for settling some of the earliest communities in Minnesota—St. Paul, St. Anthony and Little Canada, which according to the census of 1849, recorded 322 residents, compared with St. Anthony's 248.<sup>1</sup>

BENJAMIN GERVAIS was one of those pioneers. He was the first white man to claim land in Little Canada. Born in Riviere du Loup, French Canada (now Quebec), on July 15, 1786, he moved, at the age of 17, to the Red River area near Pembina, now in North Dakota. Already established in the area were the French employees of



the North West Company. Here he worked in the fur trade until 1812. At this time, the first group of families who were to begin the Selkirk colony arrived at the Red River site near Pembina where Lord Selkirk had claimed a large area. His purpose was to set up some sort of "Utopia" for his settlers, chiefly a group of homeless Scottish Highlanders. It turned out far differently. Since Selkirk owned approximately 40 per cent of the Hudson's Bay Company stock, the partners of the North West Company resented the intrusion. There followed a long succession of incidents, including the burning of crops and of homes, designed to discourage the settlement. There also were other natural hazards for the colony in the form of grasshopper plagues and floods so that, even though immigrants were arriving yearly, they also were leaving with almost as much regularity. Many of them moved south to Fort Snelling.<sup>2</sup>

IN 1823, Bishop Provencher, one of two Catholic missionaries brought to his settlement by Selkirk, married Benjamin Gervais to Genevieve Larans. The Gervais farmed near St. Boniface where three children were born to them. But the hardships proved to be too much for them, also, and in 1827 they moved to the Fort Snelling area, perhaps in one of the slow, creaking Red River carts.<sup>3</sup>

Fort Snelling was a predictable choice for Benjamin because, in 1826, his brother, Pierre, had moved to Mendota. The brothers took up adjoining claims on the east side of the Mississippi river near Fountain Cave, the present-day site of old Ancker Hospital. On September 4, 1839, Basil Gervais was born to Benjamin and Genevieve, the first white baby to be born in what was later to become St. Paul.<sup>4</sup>

The Gervais families were surrounded by other French Canadian settlers, including Pierre Bottineau, Joseph Rondeau, Abraham Perry and Vitale Guerin, who was married to Perry's daughter. There also was Pig's Eye Parrant, a former Voyageur who was operating an illegal liquor business selling watered-down whiskey to Indians, settlers and soldiers, an enterprise which eventually irked the authorities at Fort Snelling. At that time, the Fort Snelling military reservation extended as far east as what is now Seven Corners in St. Paul



Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Lambert were pioneer settlers of Little Canada. From a tintype in the possession of the Right Reverend Monsignor Arthur H. Durand, pastor of St. John's Church, Little Canada.

and this section of the reservation actually fell within the boundaries of the Wisconsin territory.<sup>5</sup> But the settlers were squatting, in effect, on the military reservation and the activities of Parrant and a number of other similar frontier entrepreneurs, brought about the eviction of the civilians, one and all, from the reservation.<sup>6</sup>

Parrant simply moved his claim downriver and set up his shanty on the site of the old St. Paul Union Depot at about Sibley Street and Kellogg Boulevard. His claim extended approximately from what is now Minnesota Street to Jackson Street, and from the river probably back to a bluff at about Eighth Street.<sup>7</sup> Thus he became St. Paul's first settler and, briefly, lent his name, "Pig's Eye," to the new community. When the Gervais were evicted in 1840, they bought Parrant's claim for \$10.<sup>8</sup> The Guerins settled on adjacent property just to the west along the river.

Father Lucien Galtier, who then was at Mendota, began to cross the river to minister to the new settlement and during the summer of 1841, he said Mass in the homes of these French Catholics. In the fall of that year, Benjamin Gervais and Vitale Guerin gave Father Galtier the land for his first log cabin church there, the church



which the priest named for the Apostle St. Paul.<sup>9</sup>

DURING 1842, many new settlers arrived, among them Henry Jackson from Galena, Ill., who bought a piece of the Gervais property. He gave his name to Jackson Street and, at about Kellogg boulevard and Jackson Street, set up the first store in St. Paul. Gervais sold other pieces of his land to Pierre Bottineau and to the new settlers who were arriving. Finally, in 1844, he sold the last portion of his claim to A. R. McLeod and Louis Robert.

Benjamin Gervais evidently was a true pioneer. During trips into the wilderness north of the tiny community of St. Paul, he had come upon a beautiful lake, and in this year of 1844, he determined upon a new adventure. At the then relatively advanced age of 55, he pre-empted a quarter-section north and west of the lake which now bears his name. Since there were no roads into the area at that time, Gervais followed old Indian trails to his new claim.<sup>10</sup>

He built a large log cabin on the north side of a healthy stream which flowed from what is now Lake Vadnais to Lake Gervais. Here he established a grist mill which ground corn meal—the first grist mill in Minnesota that was not operated by the government.<sup>11</sup> The first buhrs or millstones which he used for grinding the corn were only seven inches thick and made of granite, but three years later he imported a better pair from St. Louis, Mo.<sup>o</sup>

Gervais obviously was a leader. He must have been both personable and well-liked, for after 1844, the French Canadians began to gather around him again, and it was thus that Little Canada was born.

ALEXANDER DUCHARME was Little Canada's second settler. He had married Rose Angelique Lambert in St. Boniface, Canada, November 26, 1844. Alexander's father had died when he was a boy and Bishop Provencher reared him and took him on many of his travels as a missionary bishop. Although Alexander was one of seven children, only he and his sister, Julie, came to the United States. Alexander and his wife, Rose, brought along Rose's mother and father, Abraham and Angelique De-

<sup>o</sup>These first millstones are in the possession of the Ducharme family in Little Canada.

Mers Lambert and their children.<sup>12</sup> The families acquired most of the land along the south shore of Lake Gervais. The Ducharmes built a log cabin that year on a beautiful hill on the south shore. Today, Alexander's grandson, Achille (Archie), lives on approximately the same site, and his granddaughter, Anna, lives close by on more of the original claim.

As was true of a number of other early settlers, the Ducharmes acquired part of their original claim under an 1847 Act of Congress granting warrants for 160 acres of public lands to Mexican War veterans. These warrants were transferable and frequently were sold by soldiers, who did not want them, to settlers who did. The rest of their land the Ducharmes bought from Louis Robert. Perhaps he, too, once had thought of joining Benjamin Gervais in Little Canada.

THESE FIRST PIONEERS were a tough, stubborn lot. When the Catholic church of St. John the Evangelist was built in Little Canada in 1852, pew rent was charged to help fill the coffers. Abraham Lambert objected to paying it but, not wanting to miss Mass, he built himself a folding chair and every Sunday carried it to church, set it up, then carried it home again.<sup>13</sup>

In 1846, Jean Garceau and Jean Vadnais, who were married to the Gingras sisters, came from Quebec, French Canada, and settled north of Benjamin Gervais on the east shore of the lake that later bore the Vadnais name. It was on this property that the first school house in the district was built.<sup>14</sup> In 1850, the French settlers formed an organization to establish a school. Its first teacher was Eliza La Barre, whose father and two uncles also had come to Little Canada in 1846. Instruction was in French. Three years later, in order to draw public funds, the school became part of a regular school district and an English-speaking teacher was hired.<sup>15</sup> Miss La Barre, whose maiden name has been misspelled and Anglicized to Laboré, married Joseph Belanger who had come to Mendota in 1836 as a trader with the American Fur Company. He visited Little Canada often and, in 1852, moved there to become a grocer.

Also in 1846, Pierre Gervais took up a



claim next to his brother and the next year Louis and Paul Bibeau, Pierre Tirroux, Michael Auge and John Baptist Morrisette all came from Canada to live near the Gervais brothers.<sup>16</sup> Morrisette, who settled on the south shore of Lake Vadnais, was married twice. He and his first wife had 10 children and his second marriage produced 11. Large families were not unusual among these hardy pioneers, but still it seems almost unbelievable that in 1951, 105 years after the Garceau family first came to Little Canada, one Garceau descendant reported 1,234 other direct descendants, while the Vadnais family then numbered 1,008.<sup>17</sup>

OTHER EARLY SETTLERS were the brothers Augustin and Pierre Paul who arrived in 1848 and claimed land on the Kettle River Road, one of the original roads in the area. It followed the approximate route of the Little Canada Road. Joseph De Lonais, whose name eventually was shortened to Donais, came in the same year and bought land from Benjamin Gervais, also on the Kettle River Road. Other newcomers for the years 1849 and 1850 included Frances Langelier, John Baptist Demers, Louis Gervais, Joseph La Barre, Antoine Beauvier, and Moses Le Fevre. By 1850, the arrival of Charles Sampson, Francis Dupre, Eugene LaPierre, Narcisse LaFortune, Charles Belinski, Xavier DeMarais and Jean LaVigne brought the settlement to 28 families. By 1851, there were 40.<sup>16</sup>

AS WITH MANY pioneer settlements, community life revolved around the church so that, in the early days, at least, the history of church and community are closely intertwined. So it was with Little Canada whose church, St. John the Evangelist, is today one of Ramsey county's historic sites. It is the fourth oldest Catholic church in Minnesota but the second oldest Catholic church to exist on the same plot of ground and under the same name as the original church.

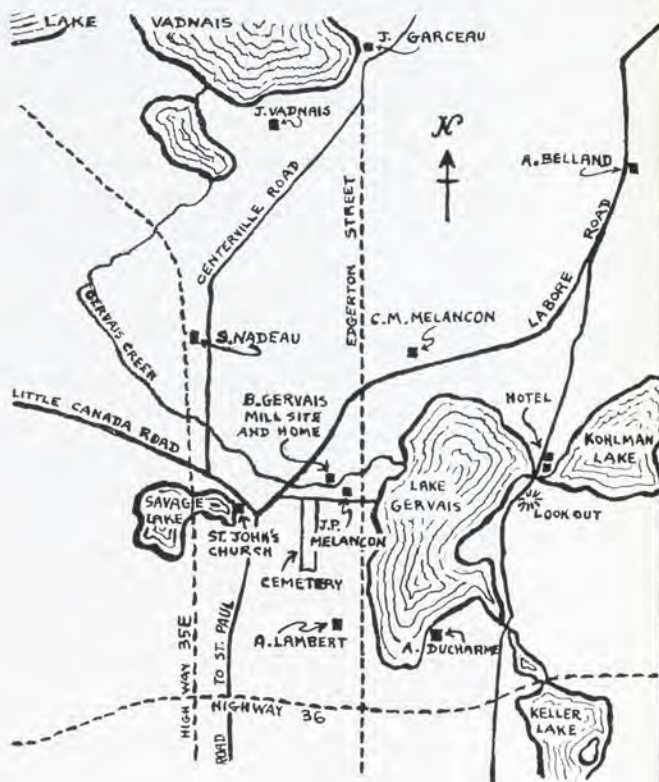
Father Galtier left St. Paul in 1844 and Father Augustin Ravoux was the only

Map of Little Canada, showing the location, as nearly as can be determined, of the homes of the early settlers. Solid lines mark the old trails and roads through the area while dotted lines show the new highways. Drawn for Ramsey County History by Edward J. Lettermann.

priest in the area for hundreds of miles around. From 1844 to 1851, the Little Canada settlers had to travel on horseback or on foot the seven miles to St. Paul for baptisms, weddings and Mass. The Garceau family notes that two of Jean Garceau's children, Marie Celina and Joseph, were baptised by Father Ravoux in the Galtier log chapel. But Father Ravoux also visited his missions throughout his vast area and often said Mass in the home of Benjamin Gervais, who had the largest living room. Still it was crowded—the settlers all brought their children because there were so many Indians in the area.

After Mass, the priest would baptise the babies and visit with the families. And he buried their dead. First to go was Antoine Beauvier who died January 19, 1849, at the age of 68, just a few months after settling in Little Canada. He was buried in an Indian burial ground but his remains later were reburied in the church cemetery across the road. His death is the first to be recorded in the church's original record book. Another early entry in that book was the marriage of Moses Le Fevre, a bachelor 44 years old.<sup>16</sup>

BY THIS TIME, Little Canada had a





church of its own. When Bishop Cretin arrived in St. Paul in 1851 to take charge of the newly-created diocese, Father Ravoux recommended that a church be established in Little Canada. Father Fayolle, who had come to Minnesota with the bishop, arrived on September 1 of that year. He stayed with Benjamin Gervais and on October 7, 1851, the first Mass was said in the newly organized church—a church without a building, however.<sup>15</sup> The first service must have been an exciting and fulfilling event for the Catholic French-Canadian settlers of Little Canada. The very next day, Joseph Donais donated land for a church site on "Lac au Sauvages," or Savage Lake, a small lake about half a mile west of Lake Gervais. Also on the same day, Moses Le Fevre donated 20 more acres for the site and Abraham Lambert gave another 20 acres for the church's cemetery.<sup>16</sup> This cemetery, which still serves St. John's church, was the second to be established in the state.<sup>18</sup> Its northern boundary lies along Little Canada Road, although the property originally ran to the middle of the road which, in those days, had been widened from an Indian trail into a cart road. Even then, "progress" was swallowing up beloved sites, for, some years later, when it was decided to widen the road again, it seemed inevitable that a portion of the graveyard would have to be disturbed.

The authorities came, moved the fence to the south and decided that graves would have to be moved also. However, many of these early graves were babies' graves. Others were those of some of the first settlers to be buried there. The markers often were wooden and many had rotted beyond recognition. Besides this, moving graves was illegal. When the workers returned the following morning, they found the fence had been moved again during the night and was standing where it always had been, and where it still stands today.<sup>18</sup> The graves are still there, too, along with those of Benjamin Gervais, clearly marked "Benjamin Gervais, the first settler of St. Paul"; the stubborn Abraham Lambert; John Baptist Morrisette, and many others born during the late 1700's.

AFTER THE FIRST MASS said in the Gervais home, Father Fayolle baptised

Jean Baptist LaPierre, child of Eugene LaPierre and Margaret Forcier, and recorded the act in his book. This record book is an interesting document in itself. It is a child's school copy book of the period and contains about 60 pages. It is interesting to note that in the beginning of the book, Father Fayolle records marriages at great length, including the age of the bride and groom, where they lived, who their parents were and from whence they came.

Later on, when marriages were more frequent, the entries were confined to who was joined to whom, on what day and who the witnesses were.

NATURALLY ENOUGH, the first church building was a log structure, erected at a total cost of \$500. Construction began in the late fall of 1851. The timbers came mostly from the Lambert property, the large logs hauled by sleighs over the snow and the smaller ones carried or dragged along by the men and boys of the parish. Father Fayolle himself carried many bundles of saplings the quarter-mile to the church site.<sup>16</sup>

The parishioners were the laborers. They were skilled in the art of log construction. In the fall of 1852, as the church neared completion, a bell was donated by Bishop Cretin for the little belfry. The first Mass was said there on October 7, 1852, exactly one year from the date of the organization of the congregation.<sup>16</sup>

DURING THE EARLY 1850's, Little Canada continued to grow, its numbers swelled by other French Canadians, many of them relatives of the earlier settlers. In 1851, Jean Baptiste DeMers came from St. Nicolas, French Canada (now Quebec), to open a rooming house. In the same year, Sylvan Nadeau came to St. Paul, where he was a butcher and drayman. Later, he, too, moved to Little Canada where he opened a store. After three years, he began to deal in real estate and at one time owned more than 500 acres in the area. In 1858, he married Elizabeth DeMers, the innkeeper's daughter. Nadeau was greatly interested in horses and owned many thoroughbreds which won blue ribbons at the Minnesota State Fair. He won so often, as a matter of fact, that eventually he was presented with a lifetime pass to the fair for his entire



family.<sup>19</sup> His grandson, Roy P. Nadeau, is today a Ramsey County Commissioner.

Paul Millette came to Mendota from Canada in 1847 and was employed in the fur trade by Henry H. Sibley until 1853. The next year, he married Sophie Paul in Little Canada. He was a versatile man, as were many of his contemporaries. After his marriage, he became a river pilot, working at this until 1871, when he opened a saloon in Little Canada.<sup>20</sup>

Alexis Belland and his wife, Marie Aurore Vincent, settled on Labore Road in 1853. With them came Mrs. Belland's parents, the Vincents, who took land adjacent to the Bellands.<sup>21</sup> Their son, Benjamin Belland, married Emma Guerin in 1894. Mrs. Belland, who still is living on the original Belland land, told the author that she is the daughter of Vital Guerin. Her grandfather, Vitale Guerin, married his first wife in French Canada. She died giving birth to young Vital, who was reared by his godparents in Sherrington county, French Canada. Vitale Guerin, the father, came to Fort Snelling in 1827 and lived with Benjamin Gervais and Abraham Perry. He later married Perry's daughter.

Vitale Guerin and Benjamin Gervais were among St. Paul's first philanthropists. Together they gave Father Galtier the land for his log chapel. In 1850 Guerin gave to the city the site of the old courthouse which stood on the block bounded by Fourth and Fifth Streets and Minnesota and Wabasha. Later, he also donated the site for the first cathedral, at Sixth and St. Peter Streets. Vital Guerin, the younger, came to St. Paul with his wife, Marie Boyer, in 1863. They moved to Little Canada in 1882.

LATE IN 1854, two brothers, Joseph Placid and Charles Moses Melancon, arrived from Canada. The latter, known as Moses, settled along Labore Road, north of Lake Gervais, while Joseph took up land on the western shore of the lake. Moses became a successful grower of fruits and berries. Joseph ran a blacksmith shop. He was well-educated in law and according to his grand-nephew, Louis Melancon, had studied in Paris.<sup>22</sup>

Joseph Melancon was instrumental in forming the Little Canada area into a town-

ship in May of 1858. The township was named New Canada, however, and the more populated area near the church was called St. John's City for a time. Although these names were put on maps and on records, the inhabitants always have referred to the area either as Little Canada or, perhaps more often, Petit Canada. The township area was very large at first and has varied in size through the years.

In October of 1953, more than 100 years after its settlement, Little Canada finally was incorporated as a village. Appropriately enough, Louis Melancon was its first mayor.

The priests who served the parish frequently were as colorful, as adventurous and as rugged as the settlers. After all, the men of the cloth were pioneers themselves. Father Goiffon, who came to St. John's church from Pembina, in 1861, already had had considerable experience with pushing himself to the limits of his endurance in making his pastoral rounds—rounds which, incidentally, included Little Canada, Mounds View, Hugo, Withrow, Centerville, Stillwater and, sometimes, even Hudson and Somerset, Wisconsin. The winter of 1860, he was returning alone to Pembina, traveling the Red River cart trail, when he was caught in a blizzard. He had with him only his horse and a buffalo robe, but he managed to live through four grueling days and nights in the swirling, blinding snowstorm.<sup>2</sup> He lost a leg as the result of that terrible experience, but he came to Little Canada and carried out all of his pastoral duties, including inspiring his parishioners to begin building a new church.

WORK on the second church, to replace the log cabin structure, began in the 1870's. This was to be a brick building and, once again, the parishioners provided much of the manual labor. They made the bricks for the building in a clay pit on Sylvan Nadeau's property. Actual construction of the church did not begin until 1880, when all the bricks had been made and hauled to the site. The church was completed and blessed on June 11, 1881, by Bishop Grace.<sup>16</sup>

This brick church, which stood on the same site as the log cabin structure, was replaced in 1956 by a new, Roman-style church, but the bell which was installed in the old brick church was moved to the





belfry of the new church and still rings the Angelus.

French, of course, was the language of the area in the beginning and, to some extent, still is spoken there. Mrs. Lillian Linden, granddaughter of Sylvan Nadeau, told the author that, as nearly as she can remember, the sermons at the church were in French until about 1922. Even today, she said, the older parishioners can be heard conversing in French as they leave the church on Sundays.

• • •

WHILE THE FIRST settlers were arriving in Little Canada, William Kohlmann and his wife were crossing the ocean, emigrating to the New World from the Harz Mountain country of Germany. About 1862, Kohlmann bought property in Little Canada and lived in a house on Labore Road and Arcade Street, just north of Lake Gervais. He and his wife had nine children. In March of 1872, he acquired an additional 16 acres on the east side of Lake Gervais, purchasing the land from Henry H. Sibley. His property then almost surrounded a small lake known first as Fitzhugh Lake and later as Kohlmann Lake. A small stream connects the lake with Lake Gervais.

About 1870, Kohlmann and his family built a hotel on the strip of land between Kohlmann and Gervais lakes. It grew into an exclusive resort hotel which was immensely popular during the late 1880's and the 1890's. Many people came to the hotel from St. Louis, Missouri, and one patron even had his bed shipped up from St. Louis so he could be comfortable while staying at the hotel. A Kohlmann descendant still has that bed.<sup>24</sup>

This "chance shot" of the Lake Gervais cyclone was taken about 5 p.m., July 13, 1890, by an enterprising photographer named William F. Koester who had mounted his camera on a West St. Paul bluff near Cherokee Avenue and Ohio Street. He reported that he was six miles south of where the funnel touched down. Picture from the Ramsey County Historical Society files.

Most of the hotel's business, however, came from St. Paul's elite who found that the lake was an easy day's journey, out in the morning and back at night, whether in a buggy or on horseback. The food was a great attraction because the Kohlmann daughters took pride in their cooking and people felt it was well worth the drive for a Kohlmann meal.

REMI DUCHARME, son of the second settler, Alexander Ducharme, also saw possibilities in the resort business. He built a steam-powered boat about 40 feet long and 10 feet wide to take Kohlmann guests out on the lake. Cost for a boat ride was 25 cents a couple, and if someone brought along an accordion, they could dance on the boat and spend the entire day on the lake.

Perhaps a day on the lake was what three or four couples had in mind one Sunday in 1890. July 13 was a lovely summer day, and Ducharme had taken the group out onto the lake. By 3:30 in the afternoon, the weather had changed. It was stormy and the sky was dark and menacing. Ducharme hurried his guests back to the hotel. About 5 p.m. a huge funnel appeared which, according to all reports, seemed to be heading directly for each and every settler in Little Canada. Actually, the famous Lake Gervais Cyclone, as it later was called,



came from the northwest. The tornado hit the Moses Melancon home and carried it along. The storm completely destroyed everything on the west side of the lake. Not a tree or a house was left standing.<sup>23</sup>

Several persons were killed and many, of course, were injured. Kohlmann hitched his team to a wagon and drove to the other end of the lake to carry back victims. The hotel dining room was turned into an emergency hospital and the Kohlmans dragged in mattresses from their hotel beds and tore up their sheets to bandage the wounded. Sylvan Nadeau's house was used as a hospital, too, as were many others.<sup>24</sup>

MEANWHILE, after the funnel passed, Ducharme put out from shore to try to cross the lake from the resort to his home. He later told his daughter that the lake was writhing and twisting, as he never had seen it do before. The boat would be floundering on sand one minute and the next instant would be enclosed by walls of water. Although he had less than a mile to travel, he did not reach home until 10 that night.<sup>25</sup>

Lake Gervais is a deep lake, but those who saw the storm swore that they could see the bottom of the lake at times and the fish flopping about on the sand. Several reports also have mentioned fish jumping about on Labore Road, more than two blocks away from the lake, immediately after the storm.

Ducharme sold his boat shortly after the tornado. He felt that the lake had been ruined, that it had lost so much water as a result of the storm that it no longer had much appeal for sightseers.

But Little Canada today has much the same appeal for its residents as it had for its original settlers. Lake Gervais, despite the tornado, is just as beautiful as it ever was, in the eyes of both old and new residents of the area. And if one squints his eyes just a bit, in the early morning hours when wisps of fog lie on the water here and there, one can imagine Indian canoes gliding silently across the lake, as they did before the white men came.

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A major source of information for this article was the Right Reverend Monsignor Arthur Durand, pastor of St. John's the Evangelist Catholic Church of Little Canada. This article could not have been written without his files, his notes, the records of the church, his own history of the parish and his time. These sources and others are listed below.

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#### 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.