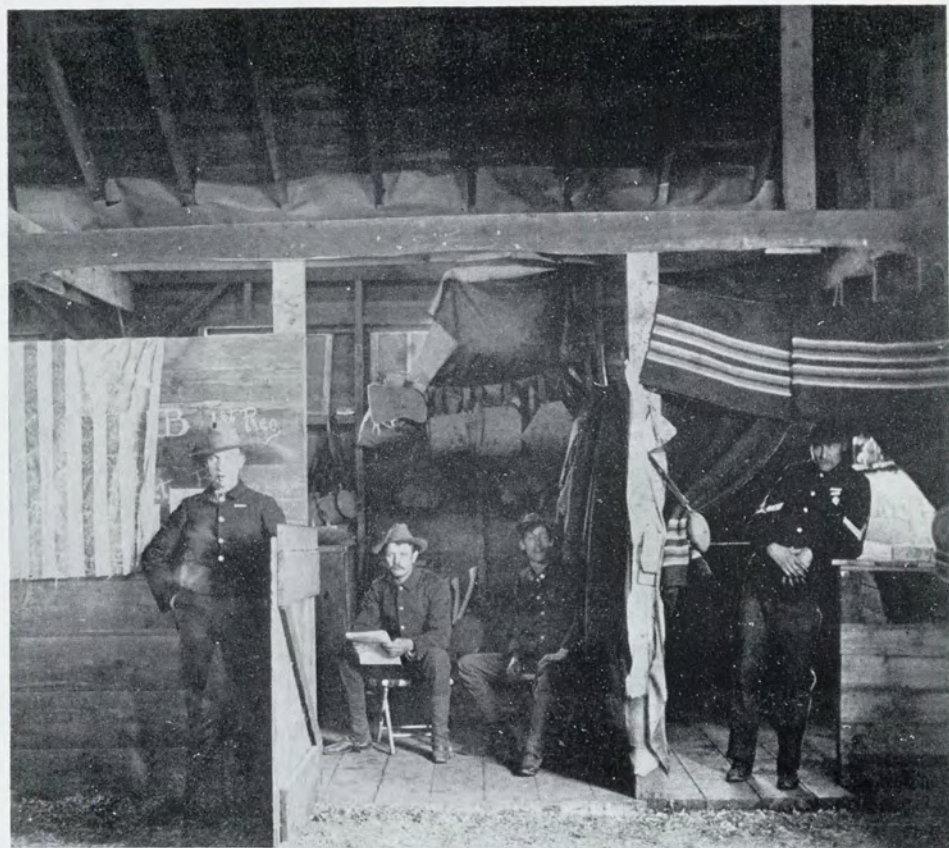
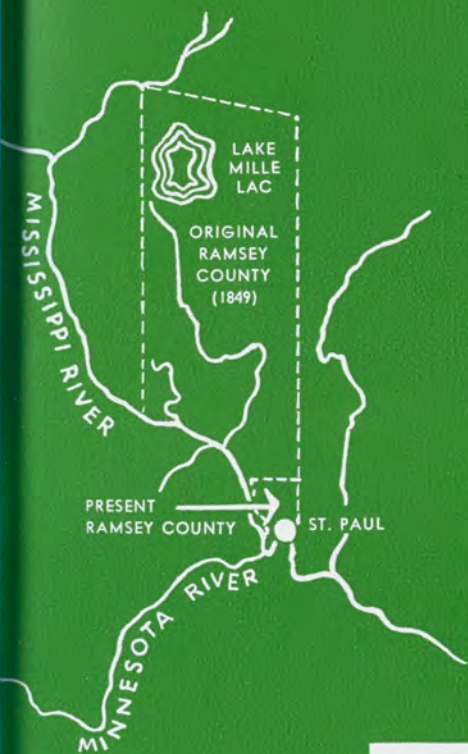


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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ment of the Minnesota Historical Society and the editor is grateful for the assistance of Eugene Becker, picture curator, and Dorothy Gimmestad, his assistant. The picture of Benjamin F. Hoyt is from the Territorial Pioneers' collection and published in the History of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society—1854-1910 by Darwin S. Hall.

ON THE COVER: *Minnesota's National Guard regiments mustered into federal service in 1898, at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, were encamped at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds, renamed Camp Ramsey. Quarters, of course, were makeshift, with most of the troops bedding down in the stock barns. Pictured on the cover are men from Company B of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Regiment.*

Reminiscences of a Lady in the Vicinity of St. Paul'

A Sioux Medicine Dance And a Perilous Journey

BY ELLEN RICE HOLLINSHEAD

In the summer of 1848 the event of most importance among the "first families," the Indians of Mendota, was a Medicine dance. Great preparations were made for it, and it lasted three days and nights. It was held on the hill [in Mendota] just back of the Catholic church, of which the noble Father Augustine Ravoux had charge. Long poles were driven in the ground and canvas was stretched across from one pole to the other, forming a roof. Gay-colored calico was used for some of the decorations.

THE SIOUX INDIANS assembled from the plains in great numbers—men, women and children took part in it. Many of the braves were naked, wearing nothing except a loin cloth. Their bodies were painted a pale green; their faces vermilion and yellow. Their hair was parted, Indian fashion, in the middle, and the seam painted red, and feathers in their hair completed their dress.

The squaws were more modest and simple in their costumes. They wore their ordinary dress, but were painted, of course, and were ornamented with much jewelry. In their ears were silver ear bobs, and some of them had the entire rims of their ears pierced and filled with ear ornaments.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ellen Rice Hollinshead was the daughter of Edmund Rice and the niece of Henry M. Rice, both distinguished Minnesota pioneers. Henry M. Rice, a fur trader and real estate dealer, served in the United States Senate from 1858-1864. Ellen Rice married William Hollinshead, a St. Paul attorney and partner in her father's law firm. In May, 1892, she set down some of her memories of Minnesota's territorial years. This manuscript is published here with the permission of her great-grandson, Samuel Morgan, a St. Paul attorney.



Ellen Rice Hollinshead

Some wore so many that the weight tore their ears in the most shocking manner. Their necks were laden with many strings of wampum, so heavy that they must have been uncomfortable.

The usual Indian music was furnished. It might have been classical, for ought I know, but it was certainly hideous. The Indians always sang in low, guttural tones when they danced, and with their tom-toms accompanied themselves. They danced from morning until night and from night until morning. The sick they brought there to be healed, and as they danced around in a circle they would thrust their medicine bags in the faces of their patients, and the sick ones would fall prostrate on



Little Crow's Village at Kaposia, a site near South St. Paul. This was one of a number of Sioux villages south of St. Paul and the Indians were among those who took part in the Medicine Dance Mrs. Hollinshead describes.

the ground, where they would remain for some time. Then they would rise and others would go through the same performance.

OCCASIONALLY the dancing would cease and all would sit upon the ground, and then the medicine men would pass around some kind of cake made of flour and water, and the others would take it and eat it with bowed heads. This seemed to be a sacrament with them, and was, indeed, a solemn sight. I know it was with them a religious festival.

This dance was in the heat of summer, but they manifested no signs of weariness. There were so many of them that some rested while others danced, and in that way they kept the ball rolling. I was an observer every day and a weary listener every night. They were so near my house that sleep was impossible. After the dance was over, the Sioux from the plains returned to their homes.

I have no doubt that at this dance the young squaws made many conquests among the young bucks. The Indian girls are very pretty when they are in their teens. . . .

Often the Indians would have begging dances in front of the warehouses where the supplies were kept. Then only the men danced. After the dance was over they expected presents and always received

them. Many a time great numbers of Indians, with bells around their ponies' necks, would ride furiously past our houses, giving the war whoop. Their wild yelling was deafening, and their still wilder looks infernal. They were almost naked, and their war paint and feathers added to their hideous appearance.

THE BRAVES never bore the burdens of life, but left every kind of labor for the squaws to perform. The men hunted and fished, played cards and ball and seemed to lead a life free from all care. Women cooked and sewed, washed their clothes in the river, and carried burdens on their backs that bent them almost to the ground. . . .

We had no market at Mendota and could only get fresh meat once a week at Fort Snelling, and if we were friendly with the captains of the steamboats, we could sometimes get fresh vegetables from the boats. Gen. [Henry Hastings] Sibley was a great sportsman, and whenever he hunted prairie chickens he took his wife in the only vehicle there was at Mendota and her sister and I

accompanied them on horseback.

Many a mile we rode over the prairie, and were always rewarded with an abundance of game. We bought fish and game of the Indians and berries from the squaws. We never paid them in money, but in calico and unbleached muslin. As we could not make change we gave an Indian cloth enough for a shirt in payment for whatever we bought, and gave a squaw enough calico for a short gown. Their petticoats were always of broadcloth.

THE INDIAN WOMEN were very fond of all kinds of finery. I once gave them some artificial flowers, and they wore them in their hair for weeks. It seemed strange, as they loved ornaments, that they never wore feathers. It may have been that their lords and masters would not allow it, and so monopolized all the feathers and were, indeed, plumed knights.

The braves always wore the front of their hair cut short and hanging over their foreheads, which was probably the introduction of "bangs" so popular with white women of this period. The Indians neglect their old people, and I have known them to leave an old woman for two days alone in her teepee to take care of herself.

This fierce-looking gentleman is the famous Winnebago chief, Winneshiek.



The Indian children were happy and playful. They would often follow me when I was on horseback and catch hold of my horse's tail—they enjoyed the fun more than I did.

Life at Mendota was not dull for me. Almost every steamboat brought some visitors, and as there was no hotel in the place, hospitality was the law strictly kept and enjoyed. There were pleasant people at Fort Snelling whom we invited, and among them Reverend Father [Lucian] Galtier, a saint in deeds and an old Roman in looks.

ONE DAY Capt. Seth Eastman, who was commander at Fort Snelling, sent a messenger to the women at Mendota to tell them that he had news that a party of Chippewa Indians were going to make an attack upon the Sioux, and that we must come to Fort Snelling for protection, and the men of Mendota must arm themselves for battle. There were only twenty men and a less number of guns. When the time came for the Indians to arrive there came in their stead a terrific storm. Cyclones were not the fashion then; if they had been, we should have been more afraid of the storm than of the Indians, but the latter never appeared.

One evening a distinguished Winnebago Indian Chief, Winneshiek, who had the bearing and manners of a gentleman, took tea with us. Around his head he wore a band of white fur. His dress was *décolleté*, or free and he had "rings on his fingers," but not "bells on his toes." They were on his ankles instead, and when he moved his feet the music was quite agreeable. I was familiar enough with his language to understand what he said. The Indian language is so meager that it does not take long to learn a sufficient number of words to converse.

During the summer the officers and soldiers returned from Mexico, the war being over. Among them was Gen. [Richard W.] Johnson, a handsome young lieutenant at that time; also Col. [Anderson D.] Nelson, then a captain. It was an occasion for great rejoicing, and as I had two brothers who were in the war, I was glad with those who were glad although I did not see them for months.

A storehouse in Mendota. The Sioux, Mrs. Hollinshead recalled, often had "begging dances" in front of warehouses where supplies were kept. Only the men took part in these dances.



In the fall of 1848 Gen. Sibley was elected to Congress.^o The campaign was not exciting, so there was no bitter feeling. As the time drew near for his departure for Washington great anxiety was felt by him, as it was necessary to start before the river froze over. I was to accompany him and his family as far as Michigan.

THE DAY WAS FIXED for starting but the expected steamboat did not arrive. We waited several days and at last we decided not to wait longer, as the ice was forming in the river and we had given up all hope of another boat.

Gen. Sibley fitted up a barge with bedding and a good supply of provisions and on the morning of the 5th of November we

started on a sled, seated upon our trunks, and drawn by a yoke of oxen, for the barge. The snow was quite deep and the weather was cold.

The party consisted of Col. [Hercules] Dousman, Alex. Bailey, Dr. Potts and wife, two children and nurse, and myself. We had ten strong Frenchmen to row the boat. We started in good spirits, expecting to travel in that way as far as Prairie du Chien [Wisconsin].

The day passed quickly enough. We amused ourselves playing cards and telling stories to keep our courage up. We could hear the paddles strike the ice, and knew only too well that the river would soon be frozen over. We could not stand erect in the barge, and sitting became very tiresome.

In the evening we reached the mouth of the St. Croix and heard the whistle of a steamboat. We hailed her and were taken on board, and sent the men back to Mendota with the barge and all the good things we had provided for our comfort.

THE BOAT was the "Dr. Franklin" and as she had freight to discharge at St. Paul, we had the pleasure of returning to this

^oThe territory west of the St. Croix River and east of the Mississippi was part of the Territory of Wisconsin until Wisconsin became a state in 1848. Its western boundary was fixed at the St. Croix River. The land lying between the St. Croix and the Mississippi, however, retained its legal territorial status and was known as the "rump" Territory of Wisconsin. Sibley was accepted as its delegate even though his legal residence at Mendota lay west of the Mississippi. The area became part of the Territory of Minnesota in 1849.



This steamboat "Alex Mitchell" was much like the "Dr. Franklin" which Sibley hailed near the mouth of the St. Croix River.

city. As soon as possible we were steaming down the river. The water was low and after a time we stranded upon a sand bar. There we remained for so long that our wood was almost gone and the crew struck for higher wages, and if we were not "between the devil and the dark blue sea" we were in almost as bad a condition.

After a great struggle we were started once more, and at last reached the mouth of Fever River and found it frozen so that we could go no farther by boat.

We sent to Galena [Illinois] for carriages to take our party there. After we started the mud was so deep in many places that we were obliged to walk. At last we reached Galena in a rain storm.

Gen. Sibley chartered a stage and we left for Chicago. We traveled all day and stopped at the poor little taverns at night, glad enough for their shelter. The prairies were burning in Illinois, and as we rode over them with fire on both sides of us we witnessed a grand sight never to be forgotten. As far as we could see there was fire and smoke. The mud was deep and our journeying necessarily slow.

AT LAST WE REACHED Chicago, then a small city in the mud. We crossed Lake Michigan in a steamer, and landed at St. Joseph, or St. Jo, as some called it. We intended taking a stagecoach for Niles,

[Michigan] but were informed it would be impossible to get there that way as the mud was so deep, and we were advised to go on a freight boat [up] the [St. Joseph] River as the safest and quickest way.

We left in the morning on a little boat, and were there until evening without food, and only a piece of newspaper to read. In the evening a gentleman, a stranger to us, asked us to walk out to supper. We followed him to another part of the boat and found spread on the heads of barrels boiled sweet potatoes and boiled mackerel. He had discovered them on the boat and took the liberty of cooking them and feasting the hungry passengers.

WE WERE TRULY thankful for his hospitality, and I am sure I never ate such good sweet potatoes. We remained all night at Niles, and the next morning left in the cars. I parted with many regrets from my kind friends, Gen. and Mrs. Sibley, at Kalamazoo, and they journeyed on to Washington.

I enjoyed every part of my trip, and I love to think of it now after so many years have passed, and I would not exchange that experience for all the luxuries we have at the present day in traveling. My only regret was that I was to be separated from my pleasant friends and should not see Minnesota again, as I did not expect to return.

Mrs. Henry Sibley was one of the four pioneer women who shared the perils and discomforts of her husband's trip to Washington.





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.