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ON THE COVER:

Red River ox carts lined up on Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) in front of Cheritree and Farwell's Hardware store in 1859. Charles William Wulff Borup, as agent for the American Fur Company, arranged for carts to haul furs for traders.

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Charles Borup
Fur Trader,
Banker
Lumberman,

And Minnesota's First Danish Consul

BY NANCY L. WOOLWORTH

"AMONG THE names that have been intimately associated with the important phases of business and civic affairs in St. Paul, that of Borup will be readily distinguished as deserving of special mention and has been known and respected both for personal worth and business achievement."¹

T. M. Newson's description of Charles William Wulff Borup was by no means wide of the mark. Borup lived in St. Paul for just 11 years but during that brief time, marking the passage of a wilderness into a territory and then a state, the amazing career of this versatile man spanned the major businesses upon which St. Paul was founded—fur trading, lumbering, transportation and banking.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Nancy L. Woolworth, editorial assistant for Ramsey County History, is a 1954 graduate of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She received a master's degree from the University in 1959. This is her twelfth published article. Others have appeared in such publications as Minnesota History and The Beaver, publication of the Hudson's Bay Company. She currently is editing a book for the University of Oklahoma Press and writing a history of White Bear Lake for the White Bear Lake Chamber of Commerce.

Borup was among the very first of the Scandinavian immigrants to settle in St. Paul. "He is described as a man of short and thick-set stature, fair complexion and blue eyes. He was quick in speech and motion, decided and stern when the occasion demanded it and possessed a remarkable executive ability and a strong will power."²

Charles William Wulff Borup was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, December 10, 1806. He was the son of a prominent family, "with a high social position and intimate relations with officials of exalted rank and station." He was educated in the best schools of Europe, studied medicine, received his diploma but decided, at that time, not to practice his profession.

LIKE HIS seafaring ancestors, Borup was afflicted with a love of adventure and so, when he was 21, he set off for the Danish island of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. Later that year—1827—he visited New York City and decided to remain in America.

He lived in New York for two years. In 1829, John Jacob Astor gave him a letter

to Robert Stuart, chief trader of the American Fur Company at Mackinac, Michigan, giving Borup a job as a clerk in the Northern Outfit, as the company called its northern branch.

Upon Borup's arrival at Mackinac, he was placed in charge of the Rainy River Country Post. Historian and author, Grace Lee Nute, has described his arrival there:

"About 1830, a colorful character arrived in the Rainy Lake region, an American Fur Company rival of which the diarists at Fort Francis have much to recount. This was the well-educated Danish physician, Dr. Charles William Wulff Borup, later a prosperous banker in St. Paul. . . ."³

While Borup was enlarging the American Fur Company's hold on the Rainy River post, he decided to become an American citizen. On July 20, 1830, he was naturalized at Michilimackinac.⁴

Each summer, Borup returned to Mackinac to meet with Stuart on fur trade business. While there in the summer of 1832, he married Elizabeth Beaulieu, daughter of Bazil Beaulieu, a French-Canadian fur trader, and a Chippewa woman.⁵

About 1835, Borup moved his base of operations to La Pointe, Wisconsin. Here he became the chief agent on Lake Superior for the American Fur Company.⁶ Borup spent more than 12 years at La Pointe. Not only was he the chief trader there—and a good trader, at that—but he also was for many years the only trained physician west of Sault Sainte Marie and north of Fort Snelling.

HE ORDERED many drugs and medical appliances from New York for his patients. One order, for example, was dated February 28, 1835. A partial listing from that order includes "1 good Toothdrawer," "1 dz bougies^o in set," "1 lb Camphor," "2 ounces Quicksilver," "½ ounce oleum Cargophyl," "1 Bottle Carpenters Compound Syrup of Liverwort," "2 Gross vials assorted Corks" and other similar items.⁷

In 1848, Borup moved to St. Paul and formed a business connection with the old

fur trading firm of Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company of St. Louis, Missouri, the western branch of the American Fur Company. In 1853, Borup still was agent for the Western Outfit or branch and was able to procure Pembina carts for the fur traders whose route took them to the Red River of the North.⁸

In 1849, he bought the Borup Block in St. Paul. The block's boundaries today would include Ninth, Tenth and Wacouta Streets,⁹ across the street from where the First Baptist Church now stands. On this site he built his villa, a house which was then out in the country.

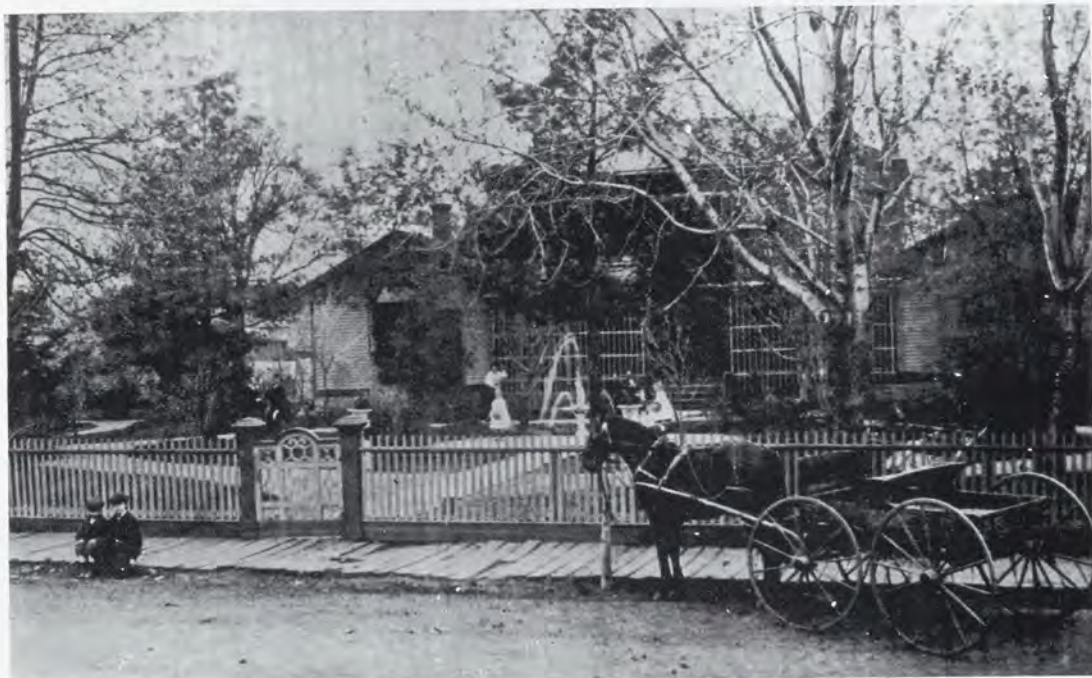
In 1851, a visitor to St. Paul from Sweden, Fredrika Bremer, described the Borups and their home:

"I have become acquainted with a Danish merchant, resident here, who has made a considerable fortune in a few years in fur trade with the Indians, and who has built himself a large and handsome country house at some little distance from the city. His wife, who is the daughter of an Indian woman by a white man, has the dark Indian eyes, and features not unlike those of the Feather-cloud woman (a Sioux woman). In other respects she is as much a gentlewoman as any agreeable white lady. I promised this kind Dane, who retains the perfect Danish characteristics in the midst of Americans, that I would, on my return, in passing through Copenhagen, pay a visit to his old mother, and convey to her his greeting."¹⁰

AS EARLY AS May 1, 1851, Charles Borup began dealing in bills of exchange and drafts on all parts of the United States, a financial operation similar to lending agencies of today. His office was in the building which housed the men working for the American Fur Company—the Minnesota Outfit, St. Paul. In January, 1852, Charles H. Oakes, who was Borup's brother-in-law and who also worked for the fur company, began advertising that the men had money to loan. The following June, Borup and Oakes formed a partnership and established the first legitimate banking-house in St. Paul.¹¹

The Bank of Borup and Oakes was first located in a building which stood opposite the Merchants Hotel. In December of

^oAn instrument used in obstetrics. The Borups had 11 children and undoubtedly the doctor also was called upon by the wives of fur traders and Indians.



1852, T. M. Newson called on the bank for the first money he had earned "in the Territory as a writer on the *Pioneer*—amount \$150—when I was told they did not have funds enough in the bank to pay, but they would have some in a day or two, I waited and was paid. And this was banking in the early days. Then their banking increased and they moved to a room under the Merchants Hotel."¹²

Borup became widely known for his integrity, honesty, and upright character. Newson describes him as friendly and generous, too, and tells the following story:

"Late one afternoon, a then prominent dry goods merchant and an intimate friend of Mr. Borup, rushed into the bank while a crowd of men were standing about the paying clerk's desk, and told Mr. Borup he wanted \$3,000 to send to New York.

'Have you two endorsers?' inquired Mr. Borup.

'Why,—no—Mr. Borup. You know—'

'Can't help it.'

'Mr. Borup,' expostulated the merchant, 'if I don't get this aid, I am ruined.'

'I can't help it sir; you must have two endorsers, sir; that is our rule, sir, and we can't deviate in your case.'

"THE MEN in the crowd looked at each other and Borup went on with his business. The merchant retired to his private room, and sinking into a chair, exclaimed

The villa built by Charles William Wulff Borup was once at some distance from the city but its location, in the Borup block, bounded by Ninth, Tenth and Wacouta Streets and across the street from where the First Baptist Church now stands, would today be in the heart of downtown St. Paul.

—'I am lost!' when a gentle tap was heard at the door and a boy handed him a note reading: 'Your \$3,000 has been sent. Never again ask for accommodations in a crowd without being ready to comply with our rules. See me privately. Yours, B.'¹³

The firm of Borup and Oakes furnished supplies to many of the early lumbermen and took logs in payment. They did so much business with the lumbering companies in the early 1850's that in 1855 they applied for a special brand or mark to designate their logs. In 1856, they rafted logs to St. Louis, Missouri, for sale to southern manufacturers.¹⁴

The bank had financial difficulties during the Panic of 1857 and closed its doors on October 2, 1857. The bank had suffered heavy losses because of the failure of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company and other eastern businesses in which the bank had invested.¹⁵ After a few months of reorganization, the bank paid back every cent owed, and Oakes and Borup reopened its doors for business. The bank remained in operation under this name until 1866.¹⁶

Charles E. Flandrau recalled that in



1858, Borup's house was one of the principal houses for parties on New Year's Day. Everyone prominent in St. Paul enjoyed making the New Year's round to the Ramseys, Gormans, Oakes, Borups, Warrens, Coxes, Robertsons, and the Rices.¹⁷

IN ONE biographical sketch, Borup was described as a "great lover of music and its refining influence, and did all to cultivate its sciences in others, especially his children."¹⁸

Flandrau wrote that "Dr. Borup was a Dane; he was a fine musician, he had a charming family and he erected a spacious and elegant mansion and entertained profusely. I attended musical soirees at his house, led by himself with the violin, accompanied by two grand pianos played by

Early lumbermen were furnished supplies by Borup's banking firm and paid for the supplies with logs. This engraving of a loggers' camp was published in *Harpers' Weekly* at a later date—1870.

members of his family."¹⁹

In 1853, Borup donated a lot, located on Temperance Street in St. Paul, to the Swedish Methodist organization on condition that a Scandinavian Church be built there. This was the first Swedish church organization in Minnesota. A year later, the Swedish Lutheran Church was organized.²⁰

BORUP ALSO WAS interested in free masonry. On May 14, 1852, he initiated the Cataract Lodge, Upper Degree, in St.

Ramsey County History Wins Award

A CERTIFICATE of commendation for the excellence of its magazine, *Ramsey County History*, was awarded the Ramsey County Historical Society by the American Association for State and Local History during the Association's annual convention at Toronto, Canada, in August.

Russell W. Fridley, director of the Minnesota Historical Society and president of the American Association for State and Local History, presented the certificate to President Margaret W. Wall at the Ramsey County Historical Society's fall dinner and membership meeting in November.

In making the presentation, he told the Society members that the award is inter-

national in scope, that only eight awards had been made to local county societies at this year's convention and that the Ramsey Society received the only award for a county historical society magazine. He added:

"Those most deserving the award are the editor, who conceived the magazine and developed it with great skill and imagination; the members of the Editorial Board, who have maintained the high standards which are the hallmarks of the magazine, and the members of the Society's Board of Directors who have vigorously supported this innovating type of magazine which is relatively rare in the field of county history magazines."

Paul. He was crafted and raised on June 15, 1852. In 1854, he affiliated with the St. Paul Lodge No. 3. Interested in the early organizations in the Territory of Minnesota, he helped found the Minnesota Historical Society in 1849.²²

As an American citizen, Borup was an ardent republican and delighted in contrasting the United States with European governments.²³ However, he remained fond of his homeland. On April 9, 1859, he was appointed the first Vice Consul for Denmark in St. Paul. His appointment marked the establishment of the first Scandinavian consulate in Minnesota.²⁴

Three months later, on July 7, 1859, Charles Borup died of a heart attack.²⁵ He left behind a comfortably large estate for his wife, Elizabeth, and their nine surviving children. At the time of his death, Borup was described as the "wealthiest man in St. Paul."

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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.