



RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

ALL BABA

OR MORGIANA and the FORTY THIEVES.

AS PERFORMED BY
DAVID HENDERSON
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1. I wonder if dreams come true. A TYPICAL NIGHTMARE 4
 2. I'm a detective. 4
 3. Laughing Song. 4
 4. Walking Telephone. 4
 5. I'm now a Millionaire. 4
 6. Cobbler's Song & Chorus. 5
 7. Happy Rhymes. 4
 8. Papa's pants will soon fit Willie. 3
 9. The Old Time. 4

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Contents...

	Theater in Old St. Paul Frank M. Whiting	Page 3
Fall		
	Charley Pitts' Wandering Skeleton	Page 12
1968		
	Bernheimer Block Memories Linger	Page 13
Volume 5		
	Kohlman's Hotel and the Resort Era Jerome O. Schueler	Page 16
Number 2		
	Forgotten Pioneers . . . VI	Page 19
	Silver Lake Childhood — Revisited	Page 20
	A Pioneer Family's Sunday	Page 21

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ON THE COVER: "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" was one of the musical extravaganzas of the late Nineteenth Century which often depended upon feminine charm for their appeal. Reproduced is a portion of the cover for one of the musical numbers. From the private collection of Kenneth Carley, editor of Minnesota History.

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It was a great success, and was played quite seriously at that time, but through the years, the play was repeated again and again. In an attempt to revive its appeal, whole packs of bloodhounds were introduced and Eliza escaped with her child across whole rivers of frozen ice. Horses and donkeys were common. At St. Paul's Dime Museum, they once did a show called, *The Double Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with two "Eva's," two "Tom's," and two of everything else. The following appeared in *The Globe* on August 30, 1885:

"The bloodhounds of an Uncle Tom Company broke loose recently and killed the donkey. The manager, in dire distress, had the donkey's skin removed and sent an actor on in it to impersonate the part, but the accomplished artist, for the first time in his life, failed to make an ass of himself."

We may smile at the old Nineteenth Century theater of spectacle, thrills, laughter and tears but it had its merits. Students of

our present generation are beginning to find great charm and many values in this old-time theater and its players.

John Steinbeck's words at the funeral of John Henry, an actor who died not many years ago, apply beautifully to most of the old-timers of the theater.

"He was an actor, a member of that incorrigible band to which belonged gypsies, and vagabonds and against whom laws were once made, lest they cause living to be attractive, fear unthinkable, and death dignified, thereby robbing churches and state of their taxes on unhappiness. He was consistent, professional, and responsible. (Please remember the time on stage when he sprained his ankle and played, limping, until the curtain went down) . . . He played larger than life; he played small as a mouse. His profession was himself. We all of us hope to come to our curtain unstained, unstrained, and as worthily as he did."

The Wandering Skeleton of Charley Pitts

The story relating the "Saga of Charley Pitts' Body," published in the Spring, 1967, issue of Ramsey County History, brought two interesting letters from Carl J. Eide of St. Paul, a long-time member of the Ramsey County Historical Society. In a letter dated November 19, 1967, he wrote:

"I read with interest 'The Saga of Charlie Pitts' Body' in *Ramsey County History*.

"You probably are acquainted with the excellent biography, *A Frontier Doctor*, by Dr. Henry F. Hoyt. Dr. Hoyt was born on a farm where the Minnesota State Fairgrounds now are, and was head of the St. Paul Department of Health in the 1880s and 1890s. In the book he tells a story of Charlie Pitts' body that adds detail to that recalled by Mrs. LeVesconte.

"According to his story, Dr. John H. Murphy, Dr. Hoyt's uncle, turned the body over to him (Dr. Hoyt), who recently had returned from Rush Medical College at Chicago, Illinois, and need a skeleton. Dr. Hoyt and one of his brothers sank the box with the body in Lake Como. He then left St. Paul for the West and a series of adventures.

"During his absence, August Robertson discovered the box while hunting muskrats. August's father opened the box and found it contained human bones. This resulted in widespread rumors of foul play. After a good deal of publicity, Dr. Hoyt's brother heard of the incident and explained. The

bones were turned over to Dr. Murphy, who gave them to a young physician in Chicago. "At that time Dr. Hoyt was in Las Vegas, Nevada, and found out about the affair from letters and St. Paul newspapers. The two stories agree in all essential details."

In a second letter, written June 24, 1968, Mr. Eide reports on the further adventures of Charles Pitts' wandering skeleton. It now reposes, said Mr. Eide, at the Stagecoach Museum located on the highway between Shakopee and Savage.

The museum, which also houses one of the finest gun collections in the country, is owned by Osborne Klavestad. In a talk with him on November 10, 1968, the editor of *Ramsey County History* confirmed the fact that the museum is indeed the current repository of Mr. Pitts' skeleton, or what Mr. Klavestad believes to be this peripatetic skeleton. He does not, however, have any reason to doubt its authenticity, he said. The skeleton has not been on display there as yet and the museum is closed for the winter. However, Mr. Klavestad promised to reconstruct, insofar as possible, Mr. Pitts' rather tortuous route to his museum.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota.

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 farm 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. In 1966, the Society moved to its museum property a one-room rural schoolhouse, dating from the 1870's. The white frame school came from near Milan, Minnesota. Now restored to the period of the late 1890's, the school actually is used for classes and meetings. In the basement beneath the school building, the Society has its office, library and collections. In 1968, the Society acquired from the University of Minnesota the use of the white barn adjoining the Society's property. Here is housed a collection of carriages and sleighs which once belonged to James J. Hill.

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.