



RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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Fall	100 Years Ago at the University	Page 3
1969	The Letters of Samuel Pond, Jr.	Page 8
Volume 6	Kellogg Boulevard: The Story of Old Third Street	Page 14
Number 2	Forgotten Pioneers . . . VIII	Page 16
	Norman Kittson and the Fur Trade	Page 18

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ON THE COVER: Samuel Pond's old mill at Shakopee. After years of service to the Dakota Indians in Minnesota, the pioneer missionary was living here in 1869 when his son, Samuel Pond, Jr., a student at the University of Minnesota, wrote the letters used in this issue. Gideon Pond lived across the Minnesota River in what is now Bloomington.

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The Letters of Samuel Pond, Jr.

Students Cooked Their Food, Built Their Fires

In these letters which Samuel Pond, Jr., wrote home to his father, the famous missionary, and his brother at Shakopee, he describes vividly his life as a university student just 100 years ago, but he also reveals a quality which sometimes seems to be missing among some families today. Threaded through his letters — just a portion of which are published here — is a deep concern for his family, a longing to be home with them, and an unashamed affection for them. The letters are used through the courtesy of Mrs. George A. Pond, 1311 Cleveland Avenue, St. Paul, whose husband was a charter member of the Ramsey County Historical Society, a faculty member of the University of Minnesota, St. Paul Campus, and a son of E. Judson Pond.

State University
Nov. 22, 1869

DEAR Brother Judson: This afternoon after recitations I started for the office having very strong hopes of receiving a letter from home. When about half-way to the office I met Alexander who handed me a letter directed in your well-known hand writing. I sat down on the first lumber pile I came to and read it. I was particularly gratified at hearing no bad news from home, which I had almost feared from not hearing sooner. I will now commence where I left off last Thursday.

Last Friday morning I got up and after eating an apple and putting another in my pocket, I started for Lake Harriet. I should, however, tell you first that school was adjourned from Wednesday noon to Monday morning. Alexander accompanied me over into Minneapolis as far as the P.O. I turned into a watch makers shop and purchased a watch. I trust you will not regard this as a useless piece of extravagance when I inform you that I could not learn the time at any time of the day without going up 2 pairs of stairs, and not with any certainty then. We are also obliged to be at our classes within three minutes after the bell rings or be regarded tardy . . .

I then went on about 3 miles and came to Lake Calhoun. I went around the end of the lake and followed the road through the woods toward Lake Harriet. By a mistake in following the road, I first struck Lake Harriet in the northwest side followed it around to the east side, making a number of inquiries [along] the way for the purpose of ascertaining the [location] of the

Missionary station. The majority of people of whom I inquired did not seem to have any very definite idea as to what class of beings missionaries belonged, one evidently thought they were some species of animals which burrowed in the ground, but even he could not tell me where the holes were. After traveling around until about noon, I sat down on the bank shore of the lake and meditated. I was quite struck with the appearance of the lake and thought it the most beautiful of waters I had ever seen. I then went back to Lake Calhoun visited the "old cellar"* and trudded back toward the city, arriving at my lodging about 4-1/2 P.M. . . .

Saturday I went down to the grocery and purchased some cranberries and sugar as a kind of Sabbath luxury. My roommate also did the same thing. They went over well and were quite cheap also. Alexander has written to his folks that we are living on \$1.50 per week apiece. My bill I think will be less than that, he eats 3 loaves of bread to my one.

I have written I believe 38 pages home. I intend to keep you well posted as to my motions and hope you will not fail to do the same to me.

Your most affectionate brother
S.W.P. Jr.

State University, St. Anthony,
Dec. 3, 1869

Dear Brother: It is nearly time you had finished foddering horses and cattle, getting

*The site of the Pond brothers log cabin.

in wood & C for the night. I am afraid you find it a great deal of work. More than you are able to do. It is very possible I may be there to assist you after Christmas. I have not by any means definitely decided as yet. I am not by any means in a good humor tonight, having been obliged to wait two hours for bread to be baked at the bakery this afternoon, some time when a fellow is fairly *out* of bread and is somewhat hungry.

A student's life is quite an easy one if he has good abilities and has attained a good position in his classes but it is not by any means entirely free from annoyances. Last Friday eve, the Literary society gave a public entertainment which passed off very well and proved fully as much as had been anticipated. I believe Mr. Adams was somewhat unfortunate, having failed to allow himself time to "commit" his piece, and as a natural consequence came to a dead halt before the audience, by a mere chance he was provided with a manuscript from which he read his oration, thereby delivering himself from all awkward position. A certain Prof. Dinton delivering lectures on "Geology" in Minneapolis this week. Many of the students are attending them.

I heard Prof. Brooks preach last night. He preached a good sermon nothing very superior. He is said to be inferior to Prof. Campbell as a preacher. He had a large congregation, the building being of the capacity nearly equal to that of the Methodist Church at [Shakopee]. I should judge it was entirely filled.

Examination commences one week from today, there is considerable apprehension on the part of some individuals concerning the result and if it is to be nearly so severe as the representation of the Profs. would indicate I should think such apprehensions were very well grounded. It seems to me that I never saw a duller set of students get together than compose the classes in which I recite here.

There are certain young men here from good respectable families not usually regarded as particularly dull whom it would require a very lengthy and particular demonstration to convince that two and two made four, and then they would very quietly inform you that they could not see how you could obtain that result . . .

As I have a Latin lesson and a lesson in English grammar to get to tonight I shall content myself with filling one sheet.

Much love to all from your brother Sammy.



The old pavilion which stood for many years on the site of the Pond brothers' log cabin on the east side of Lake Calhoun.

State University
Dec. 17th, 1869

Dear Brother: I received letters from Father, William and yourself on last Wednesday. I was, of course, glad to get them. Examination commenced this morning. The English grammar classes were examined from 9 A.M. to 10:50, Latin grammar from 10:50 to 12:30 P.M. The examinations were all in writing, the Prof having the questions written on the blackboard and the students writing the answers on a sheet of paper. The English Grammar I answered one question incorrectly, the proper answer not occurring to me until the papers were handed in. In Latin my answers were all correct but may not be so graded on account of my misunderstanding as to the manner of filling up the sheet . . .

The examination in C. Algebra (my class) will take place Monday forenoon, but I do not expect to be able to leave for home before Thursday morning . . . There were 23 questions proposed in English grammar and 10 in Latin; some of the latter, however, required pretty long answers . . .

About the yarn, you can inform Mother I shall get it if I can find any of that description. It seems as if I had been gone a long while from home but I hope to see you all soon. I have but little to write this evening and will close.

Goodnight
S.W.P. Jr.

State University
Jan. 4th, 1870, 1:40 P.M.

Dear Father.

I arrived at this place about half an hour ago and found things in a prosperous condition. The only mishap which I had on the cars was that of loosing my comforter at Mendota. I suppose I left it in my seat when I changed cars at that station.

Alexander seems to have been getting along well and comfortably, his "meat" is still bread cranberries and apples. He has been so fortunate as to obtain some furniture from one of the vacant rooms which gives the room a much neater, pleasanter and more comfortable appearance. Said furniture consists of a table, bookcase, and woodbox . . .

. . . The horse cars passed me as I came down first street in Minneapolis, the horses were moving at a slow trot and seemed to experience no difficulty in drawing the vehicle which might perhaps be accounted for by the fact that the passengers were very near minus.

I have succeeded in writing much more of a letter, that is a much longer one than I had proposed, my only object being to inform you of my safe arrival.

Your Aff. Son
S.W.P. Jr.

St. Anthony — Jan 8th 1870

Dear Brother — It seems almost like several weeks since I bade you farewell at the Shakopee Depot, and yet it is not 5 days so time passes or seems to pass when viewed from one standpoint, how differently when viewed from another. I wrote home last Tuesday after my arrival. On Wednesday studies commenced . . .

It was intended by the president that we should take up Geometry the present term under the instructions of General Johnson, but on account of some blunder in forwarding the books ordered, they failed to arrive in season and we shall continue to study algebra during the present term . . .

Yesterday my room mate bought a load of dry Maple wood the price paid \$6.08 per cord, we find it made much better wood than we have been burning heretofore . . .

. . . I think you will be assured of the full recovery of my leg when I inform you that in company with my roommate [I] walked out to Minnehaha Falls today, a distance of

about 12 miles the way we went there and back. We found the falls pretty nearly frozen up and a rather insignificant affair "in winter," notwithstanding their world-wide celebrity.

Alexander pronounced himself stiff all over, except one elbow when he got home, in my opinion he will not be able to make even that exception in the morning. We ate our dinner in the open station house at Minnehaha.

On our return home we stopped at the P.O., and to my great satisfaction found there a letter from you. I am extremely obliged to you for your very necessary cautions and have only to express my sincere regret that the one with reference to freezing came a few hours too late. My right ear became so much affected by the cold this morning that it attempted to imitate the conduct of the "frog in the fable" and has consequently developed itself so rapidly as to leave its mate of more moderate pretensions far behind . . .

I partially descended that hill at Minnehaha down which we went a little more than three years ago, when out there today. I could not help thinking of that occasion . . . Owing to the amount of ice formed from vapor on the trees and bank around the falls [they] can not be fully seen and if anyone wants a good view of the "laughing-water" I would advise them to select a pleasanter day at least, if not a more clement season. With reference to the value of your letter I trust you will have the goodness to let me decide and I shall grant you the same privilege with reference to Mine.

S. W. Pond Jr.

St. Anthony Jan. 14, 1870

Dear Brother: I looked for a letter from you today but it failed to arrive. I shall however look for another (or the same one as the case may be) to-morrow . . .

The President proposes forming the students who are willing to work into what he calls a "Voluntary Labor Corps" where he proposes to advertise their service to whoever wants them "singly or in lots to suit the purchaser." As for myself I should a little rather know what kind of work I was expected to do and what the wages would be, before binding myself.

We are living on much the same kind of food as last term. Night before last Alexan-

der cooked a mess of *mush* if cooked it can be called. I do not think the water boiled at all. We pronounced it a first rate article "only a little raw" that was all. Last night it was my turn. I was tolerably successful, at least if it was not good it could be eaten. The stuff which we buy for bread at the bakery has become of so questionable a character of late, we should be almost at a loss what to call it were we to bestow a name from the principal ingredients. There is almost too much meat in it for bread and too little for hash, among other ingredients carpet tacks, pine shavings, cock roaches and various other similar articles [figure] largely. A fellow who was down here last night gravely asserted that potato bugs had become much too frequent in it to be a rarity. I trust you will pardon a little extravagance just here — the nature of the subject justifies it, I think . . .

It has been snowing here all day to-day. We have fine sleighing now which I suppose you are improving. I imagine the sheep's backs are pretty wet tonight if they have been out all day.

Have you used up all the wood between the house yet? The geese, are they disposed of yet?

I suppose you have commenced to feed the cattle stalks. Do they come out easily?

Do you make any explorations this winter or are you too busy? I sometimes travel out to see what is beyond the horizon but it is

difficult to get beyond the prairie here. There is one point within visiting distance toward St. Paul, the one I mentioned when at home. I sometimes go there. I hope to hear from *home* soon . . .

From Your Aff. Broth.
S.W.P. Jr.

St. Anthony
January 18th, 1870

My Dear Brother. I received your most interesting and comprehensive letter last Saturday. I read your account of your trip to St. Paul with a great deal of interest, many times . . .

I went to meeting twice Sunday, found it pretty hard walking. In the evening hoped to hear Elder Chaffee but he was not fool enough to come over for the purpose of preaching to such a congregation as would get together on such an evening.

I suppose the storm was much the same at Shakopee as here. I am afraid it will make it very difficult foddering from the shocks the rest of the winter. If Father went to Bloomington last Saturday, as you intimated he might, I am afraid he had a pretty hard time getting home again . . .

A boarding club has been organized in this institution — held the first meeting last

Minnehaha Station, where the two students ate their dinner.



[Friday]. Saturday I was not present but was informed that they appointed committee to draw up articles of agreement on rules & C to apply to the Pres. for assistance to procure furniture and make other necessary preparations.

The President is very much in favor of the project and will, I believe, afford some assistance [in the] way of providing kitchen furniture and so forth.

I have been expecting a letter from Father ever since I came back but have as yet received none. Hope he will write soon.

The present term will last but 12 weeks instead of 14 as was impression [when I was] home, two are gone already . . .

Write soon to your brother
S.W.P. Jr.

St. Anthony Jan. 24, 1870

My Dear Father: — Study hours have arrived and as writing home seems to be about as improving an employment as any of the rest of my exercises I will employ a part of it in this manner.

We have just escaped from under the eyes of the Professor and at such times we do not usually feel very much like entering immediately upon our studies.

It has been very cold here for the past day or two especially yesterday when I was informed the mercury stood at 23 degrees below zero. Today the sun shines very brightly and it is quite pleasant but cold. Mr. Alexander, the old gentleman, came here Friday noon expecting to leave for Hutchinson on Saturday. But one of the trains running on that road became blockaded during the storm of Monday and trains run but once in two days, and he was obliged to remain here until today. We were rather crowded and uncomfortable during his stay, especially nights. Alexander wishes or advises me to inform you that I froze two nights and melted one. This is not strictly true but it is partially so, and of the three nights the one on which I melted was by far the most uncomfortable. I got up at 3 o'clock and much the rest I had was taken setting in a chair by the fire.

Yesterday the room was converted into a carpenters shop, Mr. A. being engaged in making a cupboard for his son. I escaped from the bustle and confusion as soon as possible and remained away until it was over. I heard Prof Brooks D.D. preach and

attended Prof. C's class in the afternoon. The Professor's lecture was exceedingly metaphysical yesterday surpassing in abstractions anything which I ever read in Dr. Brown's or anywhere else.

I do not think that many of his classes were very much edified by his sublime abstractions . . .

The President requires this term an extra dollar from each student for "incidentals" such as fire, sweeping halls, and so forth . . . It has been proposed by the Pres and is being carried into practice by a few students to form a club for the purpose of hiring a cook and procuring board at cost. I have intended to go into this enterprise but I at present am undecided as it will increase my expenses somewhat and may not afford me any more satisfactory board than I am at present obtaining.

It will be quite an improvement for those students who are paying \$14.00 per week for board, but for those who are paying but \$1.00 a week for board the advantage is not great.

I suppose you are having a good deal to do just now. The late heavy snow must add greatly to the labor of foddering.

How are the sheep doing? . . . As I have my lessons to prepare for to-morrow recitations I will close with much love to all.

From your most affectionate son,
S. W. Pond Jr.

St. Anthony Feb. 1, 1870

Dear Brother: I believe my next letter is due to you and will so direct it.

There is one thing I forgot to mention in my last, it is with reference to my expenses, I left a blank space intending to fill it but forgot to upon sealing the letter.

I received a letter to-day from Father, it stated that you might come down if nothing hindered. I need not say that I would be very glad to see you. I would suggest that if convenient it might be pleasanter for you if you came Friday than at any other time.

I very much regret that the storm prevented Father and Uncle Gideon from paying me a visit, but so it was.

Father's advice as to the club came a little too late, as you will learn from some of my letters. My reasons for joining into commencement were, 1st, the difficulty of getting it started made it necessary that some, at least, should go in, 2nd, We had ample guar-

antee from the character of the move and the pledged assistance of the President that it would be conducted properly and if patronized by students it would be successful, and, 3rd, the stock was limited and all but 3 shares were taken. Thus far it promises well. The cook seems to be a neat experienced and skillful person and the management of it in good hands.

Last Sunday morning went over to the Minneapolis Cong. Church of which Henry Stimson is pastor. Saw Mr. Cunningham there. He invited me to go home with him and remain until evening [but I] did not accept the invitation. Listened to the first pipe organ which I ever heard. It was about 18 or 20 ft in height and about 15 square I should judge, sounded quite grand.

Mr. Williams, a young stranger, preached. I staid to Sunday School, 33 [were] present. In the evening attended the Baptist Church . . . It is a handsome edifice somewhat resembling the Me. E. Church, Shakopee. Heated by a furnace in the basement. Directly over the register the air feels as if it came from the furnace but in all other parts of the room it is decidedly cool. The Chaplain of the senate or legislature preached.

I visited the scene of the tunnel disaster* last Monday. A force of 35 or 40 men are engaged in digging out preparatory to putting in a bulkhead in order to shut out the water. They blast out the rocks and then raise them out with a horse and haul them away. I descended into the mouth of the cavern and took the following notice, the tunnel is about 3 rods in width, it's roof is about 14 ft. below the surface of rock and is as smooth as a floor. [The roof] is about 6 or 8 feet in height and the bottom is sand or sandstone not much removed from sand. I could see to the distance of 15 or 18 rods underground, the hole being about the same size all of the distance. The workmen are engaged in digging a hole through the rock over the tunnel

*This refers to an attempt by William W. Eastman, owner of Nicollet Island, to build a tunnel under St. Anthony Falls and thus tap some of the power generated by the swiftly flowing water. In October, 1869, part of the falls gave way because the bed of soft sandstone underneath the limestone edge of the falls had become wet in the tunneling process. Hasty action saved the falls. The tunnel later was filled up and a concrete dike built across the river. Heavy crib work, with stone as ballast, was built to protect the crest of the falls.



The "tunnel disaster" — St. Anthony Falls after an attempt to build a tunnel underneath failed.

about 6 rods long and the width of the tunnel.

I've got to the end of my paper and will close from your affectionate brother.

S. W. Pond Jr.

Enclosed I will send a paper which I obtained this day from the President giving my standing at examinations. He told me in addition that I stood best in my class in Algebra at that time. He said I came clear up in Latin. It is written in Folwell's [own] hand. 1st Term 1869-70 Grades.

Pond — Examination Marks

Algebra 40

Latin 50

On Scale of
52

English 45

Very creditable

W.W.F.

(William Watts Folwell)

Thus, Samuel Pond, Jr., completed the first semester of 1869-70 at the University of Minnesota and journeyed home to Shakopee for a brief visit with his family.



Photo by Henry Hall

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.