

# 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:<br>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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# *Student Protests, Marches*

## 100 Years Ago at the University

BY EDWARD J. LETTERMANN

IN this era of student protest, public marches, and general discontent of portions of the academic world, it may be reassuring to realize that "it was ever thus." The early years of the University of Minnesota are a case in point.

There were subtle attempts at molding administration practice during the 1868-1870 terms, (and the students got their way), but one peak of student dissatisfaction was reached in the early 1880's. James Gray, in his book, *The University of Minnesota, 1851-1951*, described the results of the later campaign of "a group of students" who "decided that the democratic principle entitled them to control university affairs" as a "succession of low-comedy scenes, involving cruelty as well as buffoonery."

Having touched upon an attempt to discredit the Establishment by forcing President Folwell's horse, "docked of mane and tail," up the four flights of stairs into the chapel, and piling all his neighbors' gates into Folwell's front yard one night, Gray continued:

"The climax of this restlessness was reached on a night in May, 1882, . . ." when a number of students "put on Ku Klux Klan costumes" and gathered outside the president's home. In the ensuing demonstration, Professor Pike, who had come to Folwell's aid, "inadvertently shot a student in the leg."

"It was scarcely an exaggeration to speak of a widespread humiliation [for the university]. The national press, going on the assumption that when a professor shoots a student — that is news, carried the story far across the country."<sup>1</sup>

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Edward J. Lettermann is curator of the Gibbs Farm Museum which is maintained by the Ramsey County Historical Society. He is the author of a number of other articles in Ramsey County History and of the book, Farming in Early Minnesota, published in 1966 by the Ramsey Historical Society.*

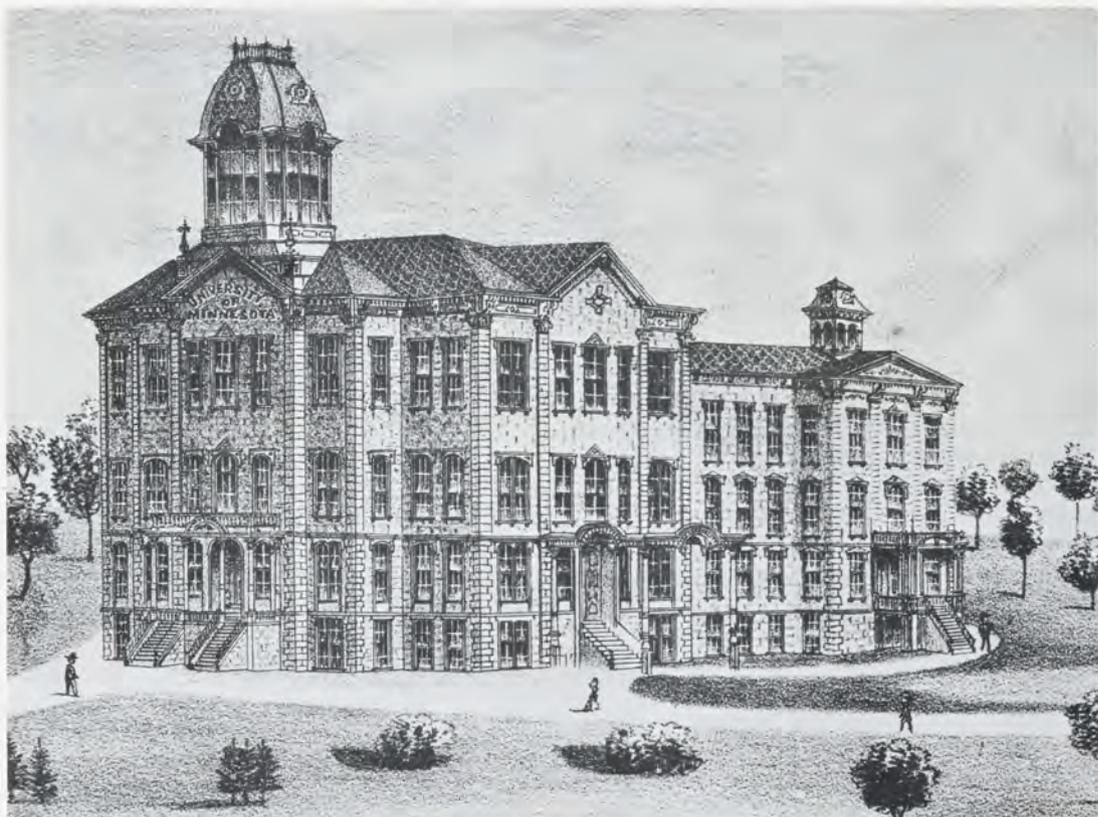
Samuel W. Pond, Jr., son of the famous missionary to the Dakota Indians, in a series of letters recently loaned to the Ramsey County Historical Society by Mrs. George A. Pond of St. Paul, gave his family, living in Shakopee, an insight into another method of changing administration policy — a more peaceful method, to be sure, but just as effective.

IT CONSISTED of what might be termed "purposeful apathy," and was indulged in not only by the student body, but by the agricultural community as well, instigating "a long history of hostility between the university and the farm community that was to plague the administration for fifty years."<sup>2</sup>

Under the Morrill Act, passed by the Congress in 1862, Minnesota was entitled to receive 120,000 acres of federal land for the support of a state university. This land transfer was completed in 1867. By that time, Regent John S. Pillsbury had succeeded in freeing the erstwhile moribund territorial university of an enormous debt and placing it on a better financial footing than it had enjoyed since it opened its doors on November 26, 1852.

The university then was housed in a new three-story building on land belonging to Franklin Steele. However, it passed through a number of stormy years that involved, for its sponsors, a change of site, a much too expensive building, and many sleepless nights. After the financial disaster of 1857, the school had been forced to close in the middle of the 1858 term.

FROM 1858 to 1867, Old Main stood empty, "a refuge for squatters and small boys." It was used for a time as a turkey barn and for storage of hay, but on October 7, 1867, refurbished and "with all signs of its bucolic



interlude swept, scrubbed, and polished away,"<sup>3</sup> the preparatory school was reopened with about thirty students in attendance.

The first work at college level was begun September 15, 1869, when Samuel Pond, Jr., reported "a promiscuous collection of 175 pupils," forty of them girls. The faculty for the year was composed of William Watts Folwell, president, and eight professors. Total attendance for the re-organized university's third year eventually reached 230.<sup>4</sup>

Because they had accepted the land offered the state under the Morrill Act, the regents were obligated to offer courses in which "agriculture was taught as a science." Since the act which established a state agricultural college at Glencoe in 1858 had required the acquisition of an experimental farm, the regents secured a tract of 120 acres near the university and appointed a professor to teach agricultural courses.

THE PROPOSED college at Glencoe never came into being, mainly because of financial difficulties, so it was merged in 1858

The old main building at the University of Minnesota. College level work began in 1869 with 175 students, forty of them girls.

with the struggling young university. Edward H. Twining joined the faculty, not as a professor of agriculture, but "to give permanence to the department [of agriculture] and to take charge of applied chemistry and such natural sciences as are closely connected with the agricultural course."<sup>5</sup>

But no students were attracted to the agricultural course and the next term Professor Twining was transferred to the professorship of chemistry and instructorship of French.

Indications are that some students, at least, were considering the question of education in agricultural pursuits, but negatively. On November 22, 1869, Samuel Pond, Jr., wrote to his brother, E. Judson:

"Friday we attended the Lyceum in the Chapel, about forty of the students are members of the society. The debate was on the question: Resolve: that Agriculture offers stronger inducements to young men than do the learned professions.

"H. Williamson on the negative made the best speech in my opinion."

Henry Martyn Williamson, incidentally, was the son of Dr. Thomas A. Williamson, another well-known missionary to the Dakota Indians. Henry Williamson was one of the two members constituting the entire graduating class of 1873, the first since the school's re-organization. The other graduate was Warren Clark Eustis, a member of a well-known family from the village of St. Anthony.<sup>6</sup>

In their *Report, 1869*, the regents stated, that Colonel Daniel Robertson of St. Paul had been appointed professor of agriculture, the first in the history of the university. Andrew Boss summarized his qualifications for the office:

"STRONGLY interested in agricultural affairs, he was a frequent contributor to the agricultural press and newspapers of the time. He was one of the charter members of the State Horticultural Society organized in 1866 under the name of Minnesota Fruit Growers' Association, and served as its first president. He also was actively identified with the Grange movement and was well-known as a friend of the farmers."<sup>7</sup>

Typical of many of the early pioneers of Minnesota, Robertson had a mixed profes-



Daniel Robertson

sional background. He was:

"... a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, of Highland Scotch descent. He was admitted to the practice of law in New York in 1839, shortly afterwards removed to Ohio, where he engaged in journalism, being editor of the Cincinnati *Enquirer*. He afterwards removed to Mount Vernon, Ohio, and edited the Mount Vernon *Banner*; he was a member of the constitutional convention of Ohio. He resigned the office of United States Marshal of that State on his coming to St. Paul in the fall of 1850, where he established the *Minnesota Democrat*. He was mayor of St. Paul in 1860."<sup>8</sup>

Robertson also had served as a member of the state legislature in 1859 and 1860, as sheriff of Ramsey County, as a member of the city board of education, and as director of the public library. A public-minded citizen, he was a member of the Minnesota Historical Society and was largely responsible for the purchase of property for the construction of the society's proposed first building. On June 24, 1856, the cornerstone was laid "with great ceremony," Williams related, but the building never "progressed beyond a partial foundation,"<sup>9</sup> probably because of the financial panic of 1857.

W. W. Folwell





Samuel Pond, Sr.



Gideon Pond

HIS ACTIVITY in the organization of the Grange probably was Robertson's chief qualification for the job of professor of agriculture. The first active grange in Minnesota was the North Star Grange, organized in St. Paul on September 2, 1868. Robertson was the leader in this grange.<sup>10</sup> In his *Pen Pictures* published in 1886, T. M. Newson gave a personal glimpse of this "earnest lover of literature in all its departments":

"I remember visiting his rooms years ago when the question of scientific agriculture was exercising the public mind, and such an array of documents, papers, books, writing material, never met my vision before, even in an editor's office. Literary pursuits seem to be a part of the Colonel's existence, and if there is anything he enjoys in life, it is the pleasure derived from books."<sup>11</sup>

In a letter from Samuel Pond, Jr., to his brother, dated January 8, 1870, he reported that "On Wednesday," after the Christmas holiday,

"studies commenced. There were many new faces visible in the Chapel, among the rest Col. Robertson of St. Paul, Professor of the sublime science of Agriculture. He looks as though he might make an energetic practical farmer. He made an address to the students, is evidently disposed to magnify his office.

"It is proposed to have an agricultural lecture of fifteen minutes duration each morning between second and third hours at which all the students are expected to be present."

A statement by Gray that "the student body made no effort to conceal its sullen resentment at being forced to attend" these lectures was hinted at in a Pond letter of March 8:

"Professor Robertson is now absent, consequently we are not under the necessity of spending a quarter of an hour each day listening to an uninteresting 'agricultural' lecture."

On January 14, the second week of the lectures, the time allotted to the professor was reduced.

"ON FRIDAYS," Pond wrote, "the quarter hour usually occupied by Prof. R. will be devoted to rhetoric exercises by the freshman class. Today the first of these exercises took place."

Coupled with the fact that no classes were held on Mondays during those early years, "for fear the dilatory might be tempted to violate the Sabbath with attention to secular matters,"<sup>12</sup> few of these lectures, indeed, were given.

That winter the weather also seemed to conspire against the old pioneer journalist-turned-teacher: "The Professor of Agriculture is absent, he having been detained in St. Paul by the severe storm of Sunday," Samuel Pond informed his brother in a letter written January 18.

Ridicule, too, entered the picture:

"An implement arrived day before yesterday for the agricultural department which looks something like business. A brand new crossplow with which students are expected to make their first experiments in farming. It is reported that the *Freshman Class* will draw the plough and the Professor of Agriculture hold it, an arrangement which affords a good deal of amusement for the rest of the students."<sup>13</sup>

ROBERTSON resigned before the end of the year and the chair of agriculture remained vacant for a number of years. When it was filled in 1874, few students could be recruited, even after a last-ditch appeal to the community with an offer of free professional instruction, free lectures open to all comers with "no conditions put upon admissions except registration and a general pledge to punctual attendance."<sup>14</sup>

In 1880, after six years of patiently wooing the agricultural community which only "turned silently away," Professor Charles Y. Lacey, the university's second professor of agriculture, also resigned, "deeply discour-

aged over his failure to attract students."<sup>15</sup>

It wasn't until the decade of 1910 to 1920 that the College of Agriculture really came into its own, the School of Agriculture of the 1880's having shown the way, and enjoyed continued successful growth in esteem among the agricultural community.

### Footnotes

1. James Gray, *The University of Minnesota, 1851-1951*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951. Page 72.
2. *Ibid.* Page 33.
3. *Ibid.* Page 31.
4. John B. Gilfillan, "History of the University of Minnesota," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Volume XII, 1908, Page 69.
5. Andrew Boss, *The Early History and Background of the School of Agriculture at University Farm, St. Paul*, University of Minnesota, 1941, Page 20, quoting Board of Regents, *Report, 1868*, Page 9.
6. Gilfillan, *op. cit.* Page 69.
7. Boss, *op. cit.*, Page 22.
8. Return I. Holcombe and Others, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, The Publishing Society of Minnesota, 1908, Volume III, page 84.
9. J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of St. Paul and the County of Ramsey*, Minnesota Historical Society, 1876, Page 363.
10. Henry A. Castle, *Minnesota, Its Story and Biography*, The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915, Volume 1, page 303.
11. T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Biographical Sketches of Old Settlers*, St. Paul, Minn., 1886. Page 218.
12. Gray, *op. cit.*, Page 47.
13. Letter, Samuel W. Pond, Jr. to E. Judson Pond, January 14, 1870.
14. Boss, *op. cit.*, Page 23.
15. Gray, *op. cit.*, Page 58.

The farm of Samuel Pond, Sr., at Shakopee.





*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.