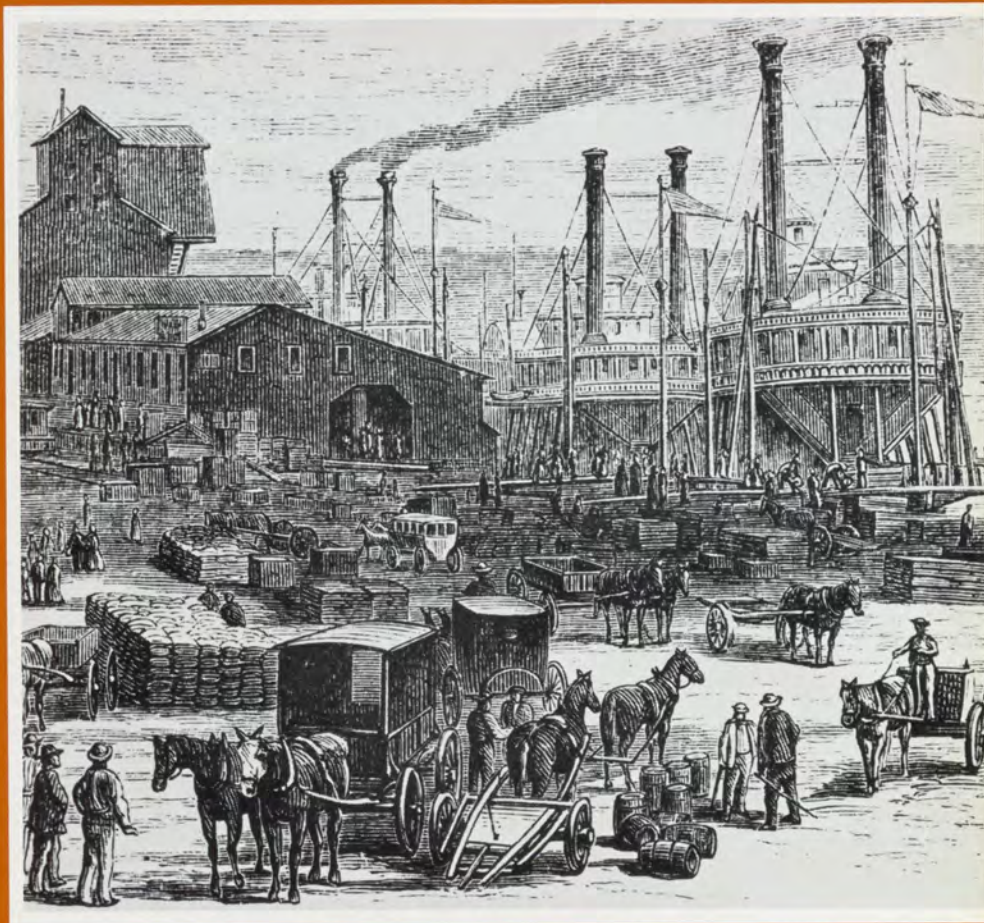
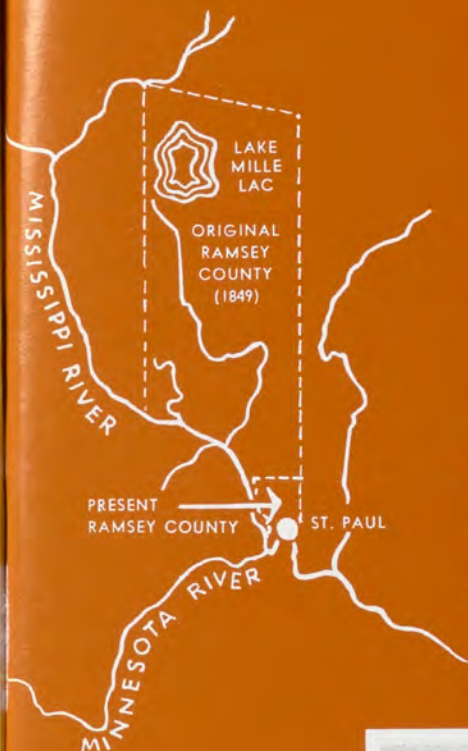


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Fall

1971

Volume 8

Number 2

# Ramsey County History

Published by the RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Editor: Virginia Brainard Kunz

Fall	A Teacher Looks Back	
<b>1971</b>	Fifty Years	Page 3
Volume 8	Merriam's Vision: Rural Village Between Cities	Page 10
Number 2	And So Merriam Park Prospered	Pages 12-13
	Boats, Carts, Rails, Roads — The Trailways of History	Page 15
	Forgotten Pioneers . . . XI	Page 19
	Rice Park — How It Changed!	Page 21
	New Book Traces 115-Year History of Church Cooperation	Page 22

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY is published semi-annually and copyrighted, 1971, by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota. Membership in the Society carries with it a subscription to Ramsey County History. Single issues sell for \$1.00. Correspondence concerning contributions should be addressed to the editor. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Manuscripts and other editorial material are welcomed but no payment can be made for contributions. All articles and other editorial material submitted will be carefully read and published, if accepted, as space permits.

*ON THE COVER:* This steel engraving of St. Paul's Lower Landing as it looked in 1853 shows the bustling river front during the boom years of steamboat travel on the Upper Mississippi. See story beginning on page 15.

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:* Pictures illustrating the story which begins on page 3 are from the author's scrapbook, except for the pictures of Battle Creek and the little railroad station. All other pictures used in this issue are from the audio-visual library of the Minnesota Historical Society. The editor is indebted to Eugene Becker and Dorothy Gimmestad, of the state historical society's audio-visual staff, for their help.



## The Trailways of History

St. Paul has been a transportation center — water, cart, rail, and truck — since the early 1840's when a cluster of huts huddled together near the present site of the Union Depot and, significantly, up on the bluff above the Lower Steamboat Landing.

The early years of water and overland travel are now being commemorated in a series of three Historic Site markers which are being erected in St. Paul by the Ramsey County Historical Society. The first marker, on Kellogg Boulevard near Jackson, already is in place. The other two markers will go up in the spring.

The marker legends are necessarily brief. Here, *Ramsey County History* publishes a longer account, researched and written by Edward J. Lettermann, curator of the Society's Gibbs Farm Museum, of the historical background and significance of each marker.

### THE LOWER LANDING

St. Paul was to all intents and purposes, the head of navigation on the Upper Mississippi until the 1880's when the railroad virtually put the packet lines out of business. Thus the transportation of goods by water and overland contributed greatly to the economic life of St. Paul.

Originally the town was served by two landings, the Upper and the Lower Landings. Built on the top of the bluff sixty to ninety feet above the Mississippi, the growing city stretched along the river for about half a mile. At each end of town the bluff sloped in a moderate grade to the river. The Upper

Landing was located near the foot of present-day Chestnut Street. Down-river, near the foot of Jackson Street, was the Lower Landing.

In an editorial in the *St. Paul Pioneer* of January 15, 1852, James M. Goodhue wrote: "This separation of the steamboat business is rather an unfortunate feature of our town. It begets an unpleasant spirit of rivalry and prevents that centralization of business which is to be desired; and is moreover attended with much needless expense to steamboats, which have to get up steam expressly to run from one landing to the other."

In general, as steamboat traffic increased, the Minnesota River boats made their landings at the Upper Landing and the Mississippi steamers docked primarily at the Lower Landing — also called Lambert's Landing or the Jackson Street Landing.

THE FUR-TRADING frontier was dependent on the steamboat for transportation of supplies and produce, and the American Fur Company had a heavy financial interest in steamboat lines serving the Upper Mississippi. In a way, the Lower Landing became the terminus of the Red River Ox Cart Trails. Heavily laden with the spoils

St. Paul in 1853, when the Upper Landing (left center) and the Lower Landing (far right, at end of bluff) served steamboats on both the Mississippi and the Minnesota Rivers. This view is from the bluffs of what is now West St. Paul, with Harriet Island in the foreground, and Navy Island at right. The Upper Landing, long since disappeared, was at the foot of Chestnut Street.







The famed Red River Ox Cart. Drivers unloaded their furs at warehouses in downtown St. Paul, and from there they were hauled to the Lower Landing for shipment downriver.

of the buffalo chase, long caravans of ox carts jolted southward each spring to St. Paul where they awaited the arrival of supplies on Upper Mississippi steamboats.

Navigation of the Upper Mississippi did not reach any degree of regularity until 1847 when the Galena Packet Company was established. From 1850 to 1858, the rush of immigration was particularly heavy; several hundred new settlers arrived on each boat. From fifteen arrivals at St. Paul in 1826 and forty-one in 1844, the number had risen to 1,068 in 1858. It was not unusual to see fifteen to twenty boats moored at the Lower Landing at the same time.

Throughout the 1860's and the early 1870's the enormous passenger traffic continued; it began to decline only when the railroads became a speedier and more dependable means of year-round transportation. By the 1870's, however, the grain trade had grown to immense proportions, and steamboat lines began to reap golden harvests by towing barges of grain to Upper Mississippi railroad elevators, as well as to St. Louis and New Orleans.

THE 1870's, the last decade of peak upper river steamboat transportation were dominated by two major lines, Joseph Reynold's *Diamond Jo Line*, and William F. Davidson's *White Collar Line*, so-called because the boats had white collars around their smokestacks.

By 1873 Commodore Davidson, who had begun his steamboat career in 1855 with a Minnesota River packet line, had absorbed

all Upper Mississippi companies except for the *Diamond Jo Line*. Some of the better known of his more than twenty packets were the famous "*Eagles*," chief of which was the "*War Eagle*," followed by the "*Golden Eagle*," the "*White Eagle*," and the "*Flying Eagle*."

## EARLY CROSSROADS

Near what are now Snelling and University Avenues, two of Ramsey County's earliest routes of overland travel met: the Red River Ox Cart Trail and the Old Military Road, later to be known as Snelling Avenue. Rivers and streams were the earliest routes of travel. After the founding of Fort Snelling in 1820, land trails began to radiate in all directions from this important military post which was also the territory's first center of trade, of hunting and wood-gathering excursions, and of pleasure excursions. Military and scientific expeditions also left from the Fort on exploration trips into the wilderness.

Snelling Avenue possibly originated as an Indian trail. As the Old Military Road, it ran almost due north from the Fort. It is probable that the road predated the Red River Ox Cart Trail which followed approximately today's St. Anthony Avenue and the freeway.

The increasing numbers of pioneer farmers settling in Ramsey County found a ready market for their produce at the Fort, as well as in the growing towns of St. Paul and St. Anthony. The Old Military Road was designated Road District Number 1 when Rose Township was organized in 1858. When the Fort Snelling Military Reservation was reduced in size by Act of Congress in August, 1852, Snelling Avenue formed part of the east boundary of the reservation until November, 1853, when the size of the reservation was again reduced.

A FAMILIAR SIGHT at the junction of Snelling Avenue and St. Anthony Road was the passage of the Red River Ox Carts on their way to St. Paul where their picturesque drivers disposed of their cargoes of buffalo robes, raw hides, buffalo tongues and steaks, tallow and pemmican — dried buffalo meat pounded into shreds and stuffed into a bag of buffalo hide. Melted tallow was then poured into the bag, forming one solid mass.

Pemmican became an important export of the Red River country. Orders came in from





throughout the British and American fur producing regions, from the East Coast, and from Germany (which found it an excellent food for its armies), and from other nations of Northern Europe.

From its beginnings in 1844 until 1867, when the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad was completed as far as St. Cloud, the annual ox cart trade between the Red River settlements and St. Paul contributed millions of dollars to the economy of the young city. While the caravans were in the St. Paul area, disposing of produce and making purchases, the carts were encamped for some days on the prairie northwest of town, near what are now Dale and University avenues.

THE FAME of these picturesque camps drew hundreds of tourists who came up the Mississippi on steamboats. They filled to overflowing the hastily erected hotels and boarding houses and crowded, as customers, into the fur shops, contributing also to the economy of St. Paul.

## RED RIVER OX CART TRAIL

From Pembina, now in North Dakota, and the settlements along the Red River, there were three trailways along which the ox-drawn two-wheeled Red River carts traveled to and from St. Paul: the West Plains Trail, the East Plains Trail, and the

Red River caravans, photographed here by W.H. Illingworth, camped on the open prairie near what are now University and Dale Avenues. Through this wide stretch of prairie also ran the Old Military Road, later Snelling Avenue.

Woods Trail. The West Plains Trail ran south, to the west of the Red River, then followed the Minnesota River to St. Paul. The East Plains and the Woods Trails joined at the mouth of the Sauk River at St. Cloud and continued on down the east side of the Mississippi River. At a point on the river's east bank a few miles south of St. Anthony, the Trail left the river and curved toward St. Paul, along what once was the St. Anthony Road between today's University and Marshall avenues. Cart train routes were actually not trails, but trailways. Where the open prairie allowed it, the carts spread out, but when conditions were such that they had to travel in a long line, the trailway became a three-line track; parallel ruts on each side of the path of the ox, or the Indian pony used by some drivers.

THE FIRST six-cart train arrived in St. Paul in 1844. Brought south by Norman W. Kittson, trader for the American Fur Company at Pembina, it carried \$1,400 in pelts, and left some \$12,000 spent for supplies, in the tills of local businessmen. Within twenty years, cart trains were hauling each year more than \$250,000 in raw pelts, pemmican, buffalo robes, foodstuffs, and other goods to St. Paul. Profits on these, combined with the Red Riverite's lavish buying each year,





COUREUR DU BOIS

AFTER FREDERIC REMINGTON

The Red River traders — called *bois brules* or, sometimes, *coureur du bois* (literally, runner in the woods) — dressed colorfully, with bright sashes, Indian moccasins.

represented more than a million dollars for St. Paul's merchants. In 1851, 102 carts came to St. Paul; in 1857, 500, and in 1858, 600 arrived.

When the caravans reached St. Paul, the furs and other produce were unloaded at the companies' warehouses. There they were overhauled, arranged, repacked, shipped by steamer down the Mississippi to St. Louis and other railroad terminals, and thence to the East and to Europe. As St. Paul grew, local furriers began to manufacture salable articles of clothing, fur pieces, and muffs, from the Red River pelts.

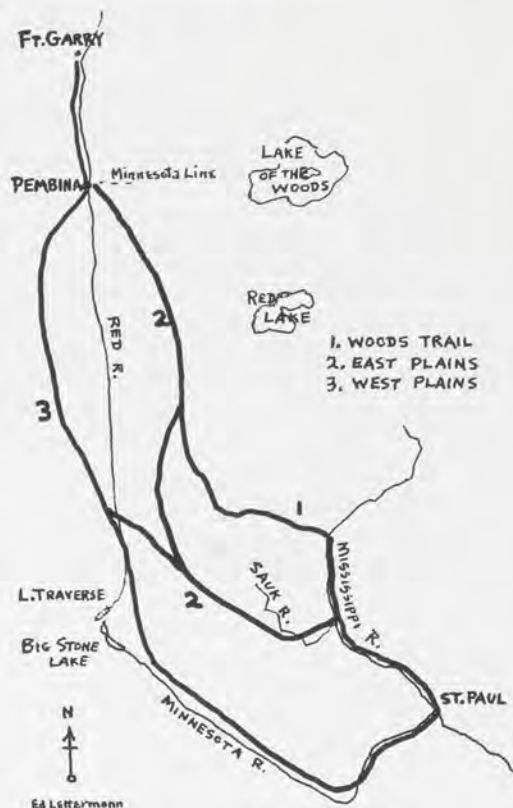
STURDINESS and simplicity of construction were the chief requisites of the Red River carts. Their round-trip to St. Paul involved a nine-hundred-mile journey through the wilderness at an average rate of twenty miles per day. Repairs had to be made from materials found along the way. An ax and an auger were the only tools needed to build the carts. Made entirely of wood and capable of carrying 800 pounds of freight, the carts had six-to-seven-foot spoked wheels held together by wooden pegs and rawhide from buffalo hides. They were cumbersome and lumbered along ungreased, setting up an incessant squeal which could be heard for miles.

Two or three carts were strung together end-to-end and their drivers trudged along just ahead of the carts. Called *bois brules*, the drivers were Cree and Chippewa, with often some Scotch, English, or French ancestry. They wore coarse blue cloth with a profusion of brass buttons, a red sash around their waists, beadwork caps, and Indian moccasins. In addition to a gun and knife, each man wore fancy pouches to hold powder and shot, tobacco and kinnikinnick, (a mixture of dried leaves and bark, with tobacco sometimes added, smoked by the *bois brules* as well as by many pioneer settlers), fire steel and flints.

CARAVANS generally left the Red River settlements early in June, as soon as there was sufficient pasturage for the cattle, and arrived in St. Paul thirty to forty days later — early in July.

After a week or two in St. Paul, the *bois brules* reloaded their carts with groceries, drugs, hardware, liquors, tobacco, dry goods, and notions to supply their families for another year in their far away homes, and then started home again on the well-worn trails to the northwest.

Three major Red River trails led south from Fort Garry and Pembina to St. Paul.







### 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.