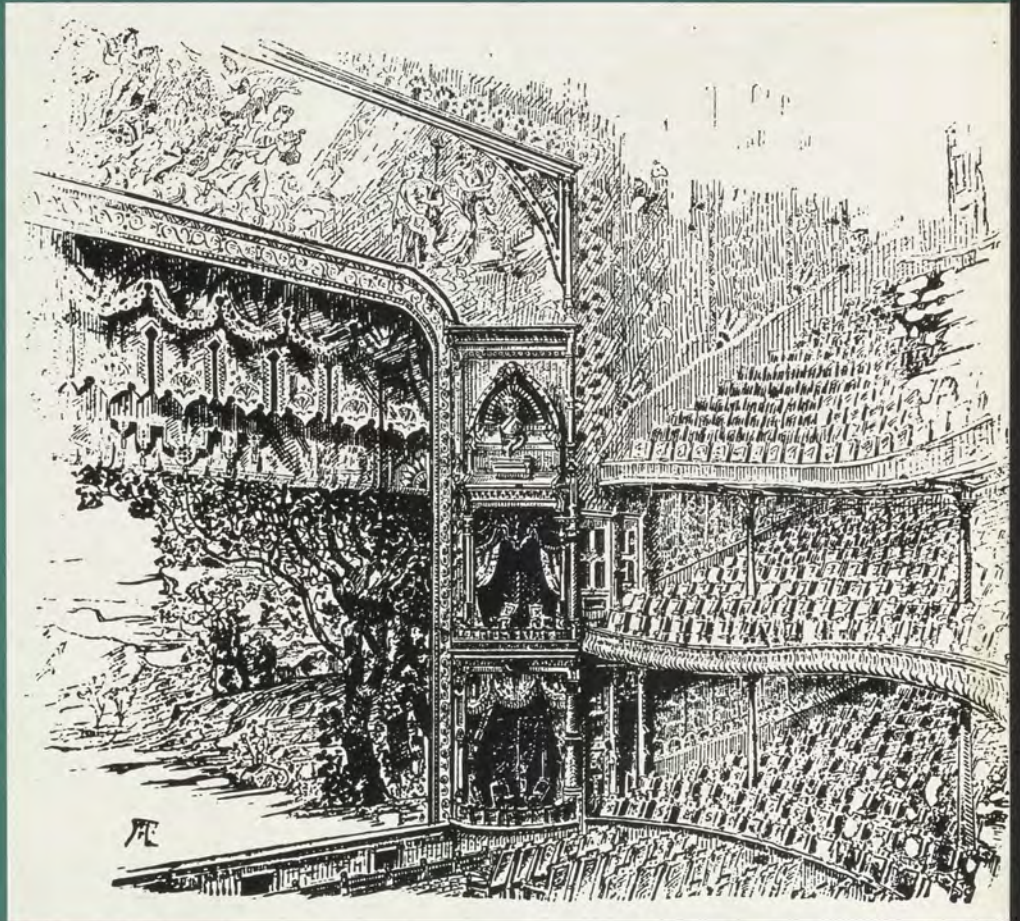


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Fall

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# Ramsey County History

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*ON THE COVER: Interior view of the Grand Opera House, St. Paul.*

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: All pictures used in this issue are from the audio-visual department of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.*

# Schubert Club History Reflects Romance of Music in St. Paul

By Bruce Carlson

The history of music in St. Paul began as a unique blend of the songs of Indian, soldier, explorer, pioneer. And it developed into the more formal orchestral, operatic and recital music which came to a growing city whose leaders, both men and women, sought the culture and refinements of civilization.

During the years before 1850, music was much more a part of life in the wilderness and the early settlements than perhaps is realized today: Indian women singing lullabies to their children; French voyageurs singing as they paddled their canoes; soldiers at Fort Snelling staging their own entertainments; early settlers singing folk songs of their native lands.

Much of the Indian music has been preserved and passed on down to us. Around 1900, Mrs. Frances Densmore of Red Wing, Minnesota, recorded thousands of Indian songs, using a wax cylinder device. Some of these songs since have been issued as records and they are quite beautiful. Usually sung in a minor key with a limited melodic range, and an Oriental tone, the songs led the late John Sherman, Minneapolis drama and music critic, to suggest in his book on music and the theater in Minnesota history, that this points to evidence that the early Indians did, indeed, migrate from Asia to America by crossing the Bering Straits, then a land bridge between the two continents.

OF THE FOLK SONGS of the early settlers, the late historian, Theodore Blegen, wrote of the Norwegians that, "They could not embark on a popular movement without

singing about it in one way or another."

This early music was quite different from what might be called the "cultivated tradition" which began during the 1850's and lasted to the end of the 19th century. This is the music we know today — the public music which could be bought and enjoyed by the ticket-holders who listened but did not take part. Chiefly, this concert music included opera, symphony, and recital — and these forms still dominate St. Paul's musical life today.

Nineteenth century St. Paul residents were, according to one source, a special type of people, and this seems to have influenced the type of music performed. In an article in *Minnesota History*, "St. Paul, The Personality of a City," Grace Flandrau wrote that St. Paul took its stamp from privilege rather than underprivilege, and that the greatest single factor was the impact on St. Paul of America's oldest and most aristocratic enterprise — the fur trade.

Any many of St. Paul's early leaders had begun their careers as Hudson's Bay or American Fur Company officials. They included Henry H. Sibley and Henry Rice, Dr. Charles W. W. Borup and Charles Oakes — who became the city's first bankers, Norman W. Kittson (later a partner of James J. Hill), Martin McLeod, and Alexander Ramsey were Easterners with fur trade connections.

FUR-TRADING originally was royal in origin, but these men formed a natural, not an artificial aristocracy, Miss Flandrau believed. They were men who had to use personal ascendancy to establish leadership over the hard-working but independent voyageurs and others who sold them furs. And they also had to establish some sort of civilization in the wilderness.

Then, too, St. Paul was the state capital. In addition to the politics of an area that was the gateway to the Northwest, its businessmen also were concerned with transportation — both water and overland. These

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Bruce Carlson has been executive director of the Schubert Club since 1968. He is an attorney, a graduate of the University of Minnesota where he also earned a master's degree in philosophy. This article is based on a paper he presented at the April, 1972, meeting of the Ramsey County Historical Society.*



were people of ability and experience, and they were interested in the arts and in music.

By mid-century, there were sputterings of rising interest in music in this area. It was common for St. Paul newspapers to advertise the availability of music lessons. An ad

**Grand Opera House (left), St. Paul, about 1867. This is the east side of Wabasha, between Third (Kellogg Boulevard) and Fourth Streets.**

from an 1854 paper reads, "Mr. Hovitz respectfully announces to the citizens of St. Paul that he has made this place his residence and is desirous of giving lessons on the piano,



**Frank Danz, Sr.**

melodeon, and organ, and instruction in thorough bass. Mr. Hovitz is confident that his experience in teaching music in Germany, France, and this country will enable him to give satisfaction."

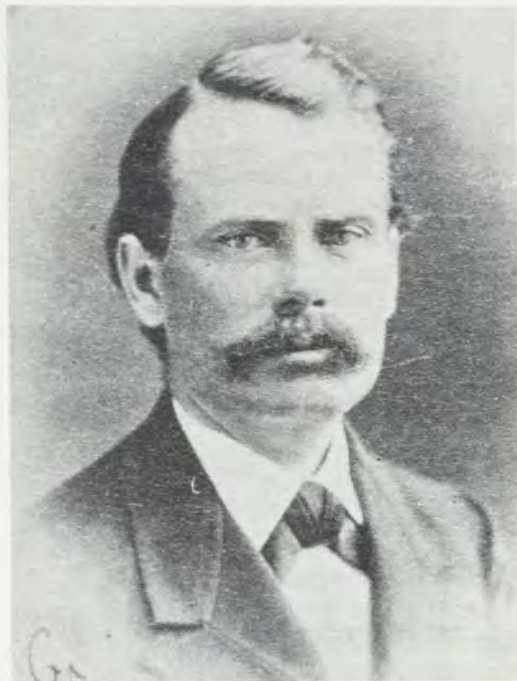
Then there was the traveling singing family. In 1854, the Riley Family came to St. Paul with violin, guitar and cello. In 1851, the Baker family played at Mazurka Hall, and in 1855, the Hutchinsons were in town, charging 50 cents a ticket. They were one of the most famous of the singing families and may have founded Hutchinson, Minnesota.

SINGING SOCIETIES were organizing, too. The German Singing Society, formed in 1853, was one of the best. Later, it worked with the local orchestra. The Liederkrantz Society, the Beethoven Society, and the Arlen Society were other singing groups. Pianos were being shipped up the river and melodeons were coming in by cart or steamboat. By the 1860's, pianos were being made in St. Paul.

The beginning of opera in St. Paul is inextricably tied up with the efforts of one dedicated man, Professor Philip Rohr. From the quality of his programs, it is obvious that Rohr was not using the title of "professor" in the charlatan sense so common to



**The Beethoven String Quartet, a traveling musical group, was in St. Paul during 1890-91, then disbanded, although its members, particularly Emil Oberhoffer (standing, center), became prominent in other city musical organizations. Others in the group are, from left, Emil Straka, Louis Milch and Louis Von Guetzen.**



**George Siebert**

many flim flam itinerants of the west. He came to St. Paul in 1858 from Philadelphia where he had been conductor of the Handel and Haydn Societies.

He began with the inevitable ad in the paper announcing music lessons. Although he originally planned to stay just a short while and then move on to St. Louis, Rohr liked St. Paul, and he soon was organizing and presenting concerts and operas with great energy. By September 2, 1859, Rohr was able to advertise in the *Pioneer* that,

"The second and last subscription concert of Mr. Philip Rohr will take place this evening at the Melodeon (Irvine's Hall). In addition to the performances of Messrs. Rohr and Staab in concert, there will be performed under the direction of Mr. Staab, Donizetti's beautiful comic opera, 'The Love Spell,' in which the favorite danseuse, Mademoiselle Azlene Allen will appear in the ballet and Mr. Rohr in his great character of Dr. Dulcamara. Three subscription tickets for \$1.00, single tickets, 50¢."

THIS WAS NOT the last of Rohr's concerts or operas. On September 9 he presented an act from Verdi's "Il Trovatore," a contemporary opera then only six years old. This was translated into English, with Staab directing and Azlene Allen starring. Miss Allen's parents, the Van Liews, had made an heroic (and eventually unsuccessful) attempt in 1859 to establish a permanent theater but creditors' suits and the burning of the theater ruined them. They moved to South Dakota, but their daughter remained behind as quite a popular favorite.

Rohr's ad in the St. Paul *Pioneer* on November 19, 1859, promised a full season. It read: "Opera in St. Paul. Whilst New York has the opera but a part of the season and Philadelphia and Boston but once in a while, we are promised by Mr. Rohr to have this elegant entertainment the entire winter."

The record of performances is incomplete, but "Daughter of the Regiment," the role created in St. Paul by Azlene Allen, was given three times in late November and early December. This, too, was a "contemporary" opera. Its European premier had been in Paris in 1840.

DURING 1860 several new operas were added to the repertoire. The *Times* encouraged these performances. It wrote, "They

are free from the objections many urge against the drama and certainly tend to elevate and enoble." This point of view was common in 19th century criticism.

Rohr's second season had out-of-town warm-ups in Janesville, Prairie du Chien, Winona, Red Wing, and Hastings, and two new professional stars from London. "Bohemian Girl," "Cinderella," "Norma," "La Traviata," and "Il Trovatore" were among the works performed — sometimes in whole, sometimes in part.

Rohr's return to Germany in 1862 was a serious loss to the musical life of St. Paul. Performances dwindled. The attention of the people was focused on the Civil War, and brass band concerts were more suitable to the times.

But a change was coming which would alter the entire pattern for all the performing arts. This was the railroad. After a small beginning in Minnesota in 1862, a rail connection had been made with Chicago by 1867. The trip took about 30 hours, but it made travel by touring artists and companies much faster and easier than by stagecoach or steamboat.

One of the first companies which presumably took advantage of this new access to St. Paul was the Signor Lotti Grand German Opera Company. It began a four-night stand on October 22, 1867, and presented on successive nights "Der Freischutz," "Faust," "Martha," and "Stradella." The box office "take" for the four St. Paul performances was \$2,400, while, as the St. Paul papers smugly pointed out, the "take" for Signor Lotti's one Minneapolis performance was a paltry \$347.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR the company performed for seven consecutive nights in St. Paul's new Opera House. Built in 1867 on the east side of Wabasha, between Third and Fourth Streets, this impressive structure was 100 feet long, 70 feet wide, and 50 feet high.

Traveling by rail, several other companies came to St. Paul during the next few seasons. The Redpath English Opera Company and the Richings-Bernard troupe were among them. But not until January 2, 1878, when the Hess English Opera Company made its first appearance, were really impressive performances mounted in St. Paul. The Hess



returned eight times during the next five years.

Another notable date was March 18, 1879, when Gilbert and Sullivan's "H.M.S. Pinafore" played St. Paul. This durable classic was performed again and again. The Gale Leib Opera Company, the Chicago Church Choir Company, Haverly's New York Juvenile Company, and others also appeared in St. Paul. At least 20 performances were given during 1879 alone.

Mention should be made of what perhaps was the best and the most popular of all the companies, the Boston Ideals. They performed in St. Paul every year, sometimes twice a year, during the 1880's and early 1890's. They were chosen to open the Metropolitan Theater, on Sixth Street between

**First violin section of Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1903, first year of orchestra's existence. Frank Danz, Jr., is center, seated; with Claude Madden, left, and Fred Will, right. In back row are, left to right, Arthur Bergh, Olaf Hale (next two men unidentified), Al Rudd, and Fred Albrecht.**

Robert and Minnesota, in December of 1890 with the opera, "Robin Hood." They averaged more than \$1,000 a night at the box office, which is a good night even today.

The December 28, 1884, *Pioneer Press* commented: "St. Paul occupies a place in the affections of the Boston Ideals second only to their own beloved foster city, a regard natural enough in view of their phenomenal popularity here."

DURING THE 20TH century, the New York Metropolitan Opera Company came



to St. Paul four times in the first decade — then interrupted its visits until 1944. The Chicago Lyric Opera Company made several visits. The St. Paul Opera Company was formed about 39 years ago. It puts on four operas each summer.

The formation of a St. Paul orchestra was an impressive achievement which pre-dated the establishment of an orchestra in Minneapolis. With it came, again in St. Paul, the development of the concert band, and the orchestras' growth and history in both St. Paul and in Minneapolis parallels the history of the great concert bands.

As early as 1852, an advertisement was placed in the *St. Anthony Express Weekly* concerning formation of a band in Minnesota Territory. This probably was the first band that was not entirely a military band. In St. Paul, the first ad for a band appeared in 1856. On August 6 of that year, the *Daily Minnesotian* commented that,

"It is an institution this thing of a brass band that St. Paul has been behind in organ-

**Academy of Music, Washington and Hennepin, Minneapolis, dedicated in 1871 with a concert by the St. Paul Musical Society's orchestra.**

izing. Therefore, we should all feel thankful that Professor Ingalls and his pupils have come to the rescue of the musical reputation of our city." Soon after he formed his band, Ingalls announced, "a grand vocal and instrumental concert at the First Presbyterian Church." Five vocalists and a violinist were promised; tickets were 50 cents.

THE BEGINNINGS of orchestral music appeared in 1858 when four St. Paul string players organized a quartet. One player was to become a major force in the musical life of Minnesota. His name was George Siebert. Within five years, this quartet had grown into the St. Paul Musical Society. On December 28, 1863, its small orchestra played its first concert, Haydn's Symphony Number 2. The concert was in Ingersoll Hall. Admission was 50 cents.





Emil Oberhoffer

Subsequent concerts featured Beethoven, Schubert, Verdi, Mendelssohn. Almost all their programs are in the manuscript room at the Minnesota Historical Society. There seem to have been 64 programs over a period of 15 to 20 years. Arias and songs sometimes appear on the programs with the performer described as "... a lady amateur" or, "... a gentleman amateur." Indeed, the group did list more than 200 "passive" members. What "passive" meant is difficult to determine, but the point is that the orchestra had a core of professional musicians who worked with the non-professional musicians of the area.

Siebert, who was to become president of the St. Paul Musical Society, also organized the Great Western Band. This group occasionally was listed on the Society's programs as playing overtures and similar numbers.

The name of Frank Danz, Jr., stands out on these programs. He began as a third chair violin, was listed as a solo performer in 1867, and then disappeared. This was the Frank Danz, Jr., who went to the New York Philharmonic, then under Theodore Thomas, and became concertmaster.

Frank Danz, Sr., Siebert's brother-in-law,

was leader of the Fort Snelling Band. At Siebert's instigation, Danz established a Great Western Band in Minneapolis, and offered his son a Stradivarius violin if he would come back to Minneapolis and take over the band, later the Danz Orchestra. That orchestra was to become the real root of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra which was founded in 1903.

IN 1867, the St. Paul Music Society moved its concerts to the new Opera House. On December 17, 1870, the Society presented an all-Beethoven concert in honor of the composer's birth. (This event was widely celebrated again in 1970 as the bicentennial, with another outpouring of Beethoven concerts.) The 1870 Beethoven concert included the First Symphony, First Piano Concerto, and the overture to "Fidelio."

In 1871, the St. Paul Musical Society's orchestra was invited to Minneapolis where it introduced Beethoven's Second Symphony at a program dedicating the Academy of Music on Hennepin Avenue. This was the beginning of an orchestral give-and-take between St. Paul and Minneapolis.

The 22-man St. Paul orchestra, with its \$1,500 annual budget (mostly from ticket sales) was the major orchestra in the state during the last half of the 19th century, and it provided orchestral music for Minneapolitans, as well as St. Paul residents. Minneapolis attempted to start a musical society, but it was short-lived. The St. Paul group lasted until almost the end of the century.

In 1903, the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (later the Minnesota Orchestra) was founded and, for a while, it competed with a new St. Paul Orchestra, a group formed in 1906. After eight years, however, the St. Paul Orchestra disbanded. In 1914, the Minneapolis Orchestra began a series of concerts in St. Paul. These were to last for 15 years; now they have resumed at the new O'Shaughnessy Auditorium.

The involvement of Minneapolis and St. Paul, their orchestras and their audiences, was not limited to concerts. St. Paul, and particularly the Schubert Club, gave the Minneapolis Orchestra its first conductor, Emil Oberhoffer.

OTHER ST. PAUL musical groups should be mentioned. One was the St. Paul Philharmonic Society. Its first concert, the ora-

torio, "Daniel," was presented December 14, 1858, in the First Presbyterian Church, with the "best soprano in the northwest as Queen, and Doctor Pride of Prescott, Wisconsin, as King." The society was still in existence on November 12, 1859, and may have lasted some time beyond that.

The St. Paul Musical Society flourished during the Civil War, and George Siebert, its director, also advertised his Great Western Band, with the promise of "music and calling." Newspapers carried announcements of band concerts in Rice Park, and reported that scores of carriages were in attendance.

Thus, while the major 19th century musical group in St. Paul and, indeed, Minnesota, was the St. Paul Musical Society under Siebert, the 20th century saw the ascendancy of what is now the Minnesota Orchestra. To this there must be added the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Schubert Club, both members of the St. Paul Council of Arts and Science. The Chamber Orchestra is a professional group of 22 musicians which has been in existence for the past few years and is a well-managed orchestra.

\* \* \*

THE THIRD TYPE of music to develop in St. Paul was recital music — "recital" meaning either a solo performer, a duo, a trio, possibly a quartet, but most often a soloist. This is the large area of music, ranging from the piano sonata to the German art song, in which the Schubert Club is operating almost exclusively today.

Music historians believe that the first such recital was given in England in 1672, and that it was organized by John Banister, who had been chief violinist for Charles II. He and other performers built a platform at Banister's house and charged one shilling admission. The first solo piano performance also was presented in England, by Johann Sebastian Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian Bach, on June 2, 1768. An extraordinary amount, a guinea, was the admission fee.

In the 19th century in America, many recitals and piano recitals were presented, but they often were curious affairs, with a mixture of artists and instruments. One of the first solo recitals in St. Paul was given on July 12, 1856. A newspaper ad announced:

"On the corner of Robert and 3rd, Alf

Howard, the greatest American violinist living, will have the honor of appearing presenting to the ladies and gentlemen of St. Paul a magnificent painting of the city of New York, and Mr. Howard will execute on the violin some of the most complicated difficulties performing solos and familiar airs, giving imitations of post horn, flute, human voices, and three violins."

Apparently this was an outdoor concert, and there is no record of admission being charged. Perhaps they just threw money in a hat.

THREE DAYS LATER, Ole Bull, a great touring artist of the 19th century, first came to St. Paul where he gave a concert in the house of representatives at the state capitol. With him was the 13-year-old soprano, Adeline Patti. Most of the long review in the newspaper was devoted to a glowing description of her accomplishments and beautiful voice. She sang, "Home, Sweet Home," and Jenny Lind's "Echo Song."

When Ole Bull returned to St. Paul in 1869, he did not have Miss Patti in tow; she was a star in her own right by that time. Patti developed into one of the great touring sopranos of the 19th century.

Interest in the touring recitalist was responsible for the founding of the Schubert Club. It began as a series of informal meetings in St. Paul homes during the 1850's and 1860's. People interested in music would gather around a piano, or discuss serious music. Dr. Charles Borup was a leader in these early gatherings. Both men and women attended, and these were held in the evening. As time went by, meetings were changed to afternoons, the women began to take over, and the process of formal organization began.

Since the meetings had by this time grown too large to be held in private homes, they were shifted to the hall behind the Ford Music store, on Third Street, between Minnesota and Robert. This was the German-American Bank Building. There was a social aspect to these early matinees, even as there is today. Prominent women, wearing white gloves, drove up in their carriages for an afternoon of culture.

Finally, on a wintery afternoon in 1882, some of the women met at the home of Mrs. Charles McIlrath, at 221 Summit Avenue,

BACH

# FORD MUSIC HALL

BEETHOVEN

MOZART

RECITAL BY

**Mr. Wm. H. Sherwood,**  
Director Piano Department Chicago Conservatory.

Assisted by

**Mr. Claude Madden, Violinist.**

Saturday Afternoon, April 15, 1893.

BRAHMS

GREED & STEM ARCH'TS

and organized the Ladies Musicale. A few years later, the name was changed to the Schubert Club.

John Sherman wrote that "the most significant (musical) incident in the nineteenth century in St. Paul was the founding of the Schubert Club." Mrs. McIlrath was the club's first president, and the second was Mrs. Harcourt Horn. The third president, Mrs. Charles Elliot Furness, daughter of Governor Ramsey, served from 1886 to 1887.

The club was not as parochial as one might expect. In 1887, the Schubert Club participated in the National Organization of Women's Clubs and received an award for the high standards it had maintained during its first five years. The club also sent delegates to various conferences. Its secretary, Mrs. Lindeke, went to Washington, D.C., and a delegation was sent to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. When an artists' loan fund was established that year, one of the first recipients used the money to study piano in Vienna.

MOST OF THE Schubert Club's concerts were given by local artists who were members. Some were presented in the Mozart Hall at Sixth and Franklin; others in the Grand Opera House, the Ford Music Hall, Conover Hall, Raudenbush Hall, Summit Hall (which is still standing at 512 Laurel Avenue), the Aberdeen Hotel, the Ryan Hotel, the Windsor Hotel, and several churches — Park Congregational, Central Presbyterian, and, later, the Peoples Church on Pleasant Avenue.

The Schubert Club program was not limited to recitals. Walter Damrosch lectured on German opera; Henry Krehbiel, a famous New York music critic and author, made a number of appearances; Frances Densmore, the collector of Indian songs, gave a lecture in the 1890's. A student program was begun, a loan and scholarship program, a chorus, an orchestra, and a school, which lasted for 50 years. Benefits were held for World War I servicemen. Board members helped raise money for the St. Paul Library.

Of course, the club's central activity was the major recital series. Among the artists who appeared during the early years under Schubert Club auspices was Josef Hofman, the great pianist, who appeared in 1898 for a fee of \$750. Emil Paur, Moriz Rosenthal,



Ole Bull

Xaver Scharwenka, and Eugene Ysaye, all gave recitals. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, under Theodore Thomas, was presented twice in 1900. Ossip Gabrilowitsch, the pianist, and Jan Kubelik, the violinist, both were here.

IT IS INTERESTING that the Schubert Club, as mentioned previously, produced the first conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra — now the Minnesota Orchestra — Emil Oberhoffer. A German-born violinist, pianist, and conductor, Oberhoffer was stranded in St. Paul during the early 1890's when the group he was traveling with disbanded. He was befriended by Schubert Club members who used him as a lecturer and accompanist.

In 1897, the club hired him to direct the Ladies' Chorus and the newly-formed orchestra at a salary of \$50 a month. When the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra was formed in 1903, he was hired as its first conductor. This still is a source of pride for Schubert Club members, this important, almost paternalistic, role in the founding of the orchestra.

Today the Schubert Club carries on about 10 projects, including five series of recitals, a film program, a music instruction school in two underprivileged neighborhoods, and a boys' choir.



### THE GIBBS HOUSE

*at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County and Saint Paul Historical Society as a restored farm home of the mid-nineteenth century period.*

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.

Headquarters of the Ramsey County and Saint Paul Historical Society are located in the Old Federal Courts Building in downtown St. Paul, an historic building of neo-Romanesque architecture which the Society, with other groups, fought to save from demolition. The Society also maintains a museum office in the basement of the schoolhouse on the Gibbs Farm property. The Society is active in identification of historic sites in the city and county, and conducts an educational program which includes the teaching and demonstration of old arts and crafts. It is one of the few county historical societies in the country to engage in an extensive publishing program in local history.