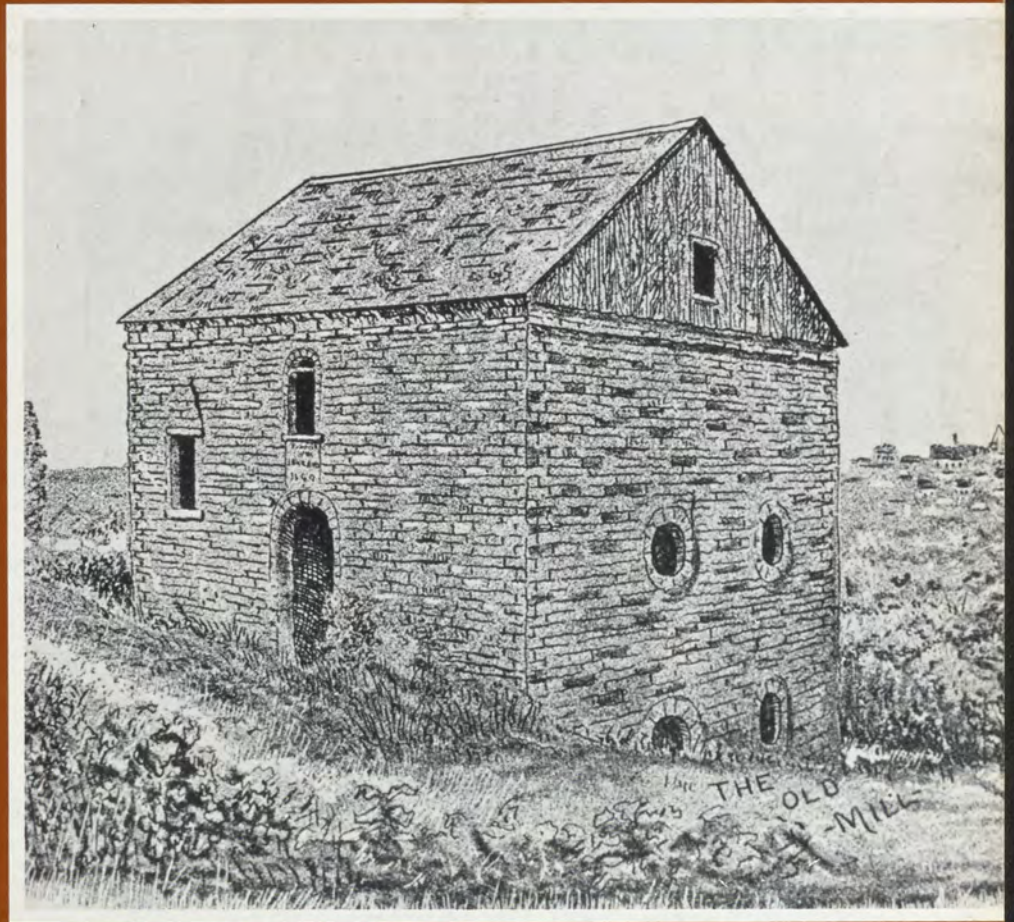


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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ON THE COVER: Drawing of Ayd's Mill, published July 12, 1889, in St. Anthony Hill Graphic. This is the only illustration of the mill known to the author of the article beginning on page 3.

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

John Ayd's Grist Mill--And Reserve Township History

By Donald Empson

When you drive up the Jefferson Avenue hill in St. Paul from Victoria Street to Lexington Parkway, look off to your right at that undeveloped piece of land now bisected with the construction of Highway 35E. Here in 1860, John Ayd built the first and only grist mill in Reserve Township.

The story of this early mill began 175 years ago, in December of 1799, when John Kaydon Ayd was born in the parish of Ersingen, Baden, Germany. One of eight children of John Leonard and Thecla Ayd, he was reared in Ersingen. His father was a well-to-do tavernkeeper.¹

Around 1840, by then wealthy in his own right, Ayd emigrated to the United States. He settled first in Piopolis, Hamilton County, Illinois about sixty miles west of Evansville, Indiana, where he purchased property and lived for eleven years. In 1851, he and his brothers, Theodore and Edward, journeyed by steamer down the Ohio River to Cairo, Illinois, then up the Mississippi to St. Paul.²

Theodore Ayd settled on what is now Como Park, built a log cabin and, with a team of horses brought from St. Louis, Missouri, began to clear the land. His children were later to marry into the pioneer Robertson and Larpenteur families, and to change the spelling of their name to "Ayde."³

John Ayd, and his wife, Clementina, settled down on a quarter section — 160 acres — between present-day Randolph and St. Clair Avenues, Victoria Street and Lexington Parkway. They were "squatters," without title to the land, probably because it still was part of the Fort Snelling military reservation. However, it was common know-

ledge that the land was soon to be sold, and the squatters assumed, correctly, that they would have first claim. On September 11, 1854, at a land auction in Stillwater, John Ayd purchased that quarter section from the United States government for \$1.25 an acre.⁴

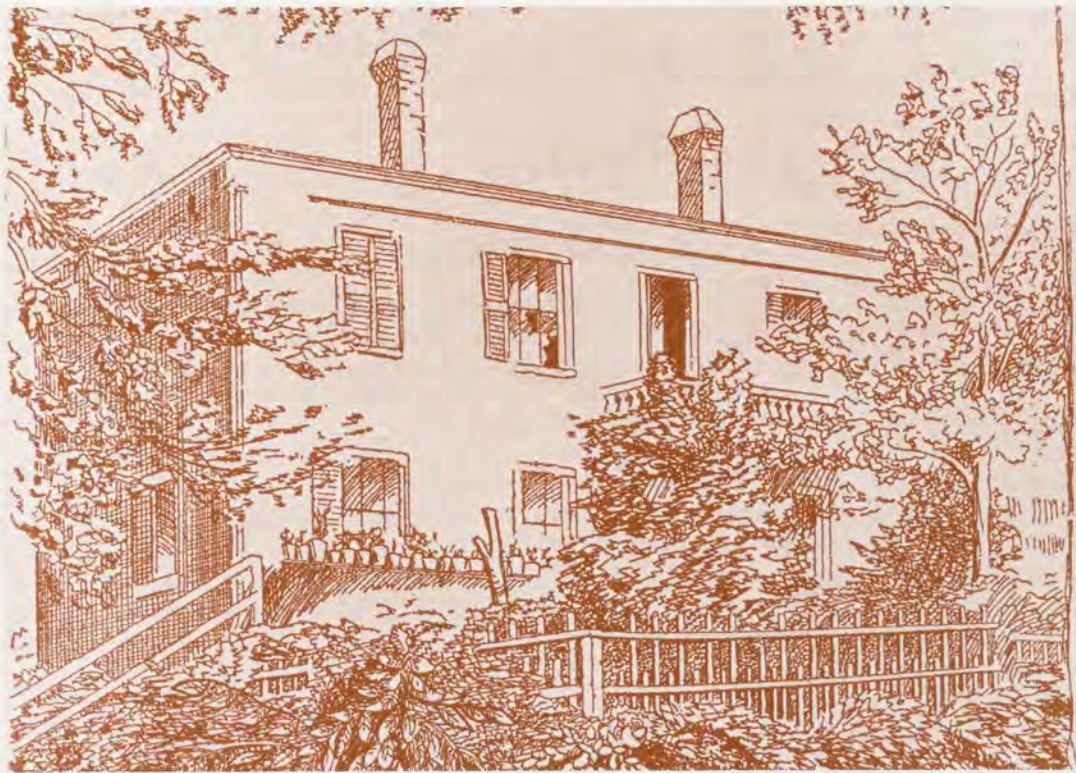
THE SAME MONTH, John Ayd and his son, Leonard, are recorded as traveling up the north fork of the Crow River. In Frankfort Township, Wright County, he staked a claim for himself, his sons, and his brother, Edward. Soon after, he invested in a claim at the mouth of the Crow River, opposite the village of Dayton, where he laid out Ayd's Town (for some reason, the name was spelled "Aydt" in Wright County). This trip marked the beginning of a 109-year relationship between the dual residence of the Ayd brothers at St. Michael in Wright County, and St. Paul in Ramsey County.⁵

John's whereabouts during the next six years is uncertain, for he is not listed in the 1857 statehood census. By 1860, he is listed as a farmer, living with his wife, sons Edward and Rudolf, and a daughter, Catherine, in Reserve Township, the southwestern part of St. Paul. John owned \$10,000 in real estate, the result of steady investment in property. Living in the same area, but to the west and closer to the river, were Conrad Ayd and his wife, Elizabeth, who may have been relatives of John.⁶

In 1860, John Ayd also built the house and grist mill on his Jefferson Avenue property. Over the door, he carefully placed a stone slab bearing the inscription, "Erbant von Joh. K. Ayd, Anno Domino 1860."

The capacity of the new mill, with its water-powered wheel, was twenty-two sacks of corn per day. Water came from a mill pond up the hill and descended to the mill on an open flume.⁷ The stream supplying the mill pond had its source near the present-day intersection of Randolph and Hamline

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Avenues on property owned by F. Ayd, most likely John's nephew. The brook ran along the east side of Hamline, then north past St. Clair, where it dropped into the ravine running southeast. Railroad tracks later followed the ravine.⁸

THE MILL was reached by a recently-completed wagon road which descended the hill from St. Clair Avenue. This was the first township road of Reserve Township and it served nearby farmers such as Wes-singer, Herrn, Knapheide, Peters, and Stoltz.⁹

By 1864, Ayd had sold the south sixty acres of his farm (between Pleasant and Randolph Avenues, Victoria Street and Lexington Parkway) to Michael and Catherine Kuhn, whose descendents remained on the land for the next century.¹⁰ The remaining one-hundred acres were subdivided among the children in August, 1864. The two sons, Edward and Leonard Ayd, and two sons-in-law, John Zachman and Peter Schmitz, each received twenty-two acres. A third son, Rudolf Ayd, was given ten acres, including the mill and house.¹¹ After this division of his property, John Ayd returned to Wright County where he died. He was buried October 15, 1867, at St. Michael.¹²

The Mill House in 1889, also from the St. Anthony Hill Graphic of July 12, 1889. Compare this sketch with the picture on the opposite page.

In 1866, Rudolf Ayd sold the mill and house to Charles Kramerath and his wife, Maria.¹³ With this sale, the Ayd family gave up control of the mill and house, although they continued to own adjacent land for many years. The family alternated between St. Michael and St. Paul until the 1880's when many of them came to live permanently in the West Seventh Street area, near Jefferson and Randolph Avenues. The Ayd Hall at 1033 West Seventh Street remains as a brick testimonial to the three pioneer brothers and the forty or more of their descendants living in St. Paul today.¹⁴

Charles Kramerath, the new owner of the mill, was a Prussian-born miller, aged 44; his wife, Maria, 38, was from Luxembourg. Both had migrated from New York state to Minnesota around 1860.¹⁵

Upon acquiring the mill, the Krameraths began to improve it, taking out \$1,600 worth of mortgages in the next several years.¹⁶ The grounds had been laid out in the manner of an old German country house; to this charm Mrs. Kramerath added 300 salmon trout to

the mill pond so sportsmen could come and fish, turning it into a favorite country resort for many St. Paul people. Mr. Kramerath overhauled the mill and added new machinery, but their efforts were not profitable.

ONE REASON for their lack of success was that the lower part of the property, around the mill, contained several springs that often turned the ground into a swampy mire, making it difficult for the heavily laden teams to get to the mill.¹⁷ Unfortunately, this ground water was supplemented by seepage from additional springs in the surrounding hillsides.¹⁸ This swamp was to linger for over a century and to hinder the construction of a later road, Highway 35E.¹⁹

In 1874, Kramerath, in the midst of more financial difficulties, took out a \$1,000 mortgage at 12 percent interest, but he was unable to pay the principal and interest. The mill property was sold for \$1,900 at a mortgage foreclosure sale held on the courthouse steps at 10:00 a.m. September 2, 1878.²⁰

While the foreclosure proceedings were in process, Charles Kramerath died. The following year his wife, Maria, redeemed the property, less the right-of-way for the Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul Railway (Short Line). Their tracks were laid up the ravine, following the more gradual grade of the old mill stream bed.²¹

The railroad brought disaster to the mill, for it cut off the water power from the mill stream, ruined the mill pond, and killed the trout.²²

In 1883, the mill, house, and adjacent property were sold to Adam Kidd, a partner with Warren Carpenter in the Eureka Stone Company.²³ Carpenter was well-known for his "Lookout" at the top of Ramsey Hill, the site of today's Summit Outlook Park. He and Kidd built a second viewpoint, called "Ridgewood Lookout," on the hill north of the old Ayd mill. It had a lemonade and band stand, with water pipes and fountains.²⁴ One writer later suggested that the "Jefferson-Lexington-Pleasant estates might have become another mineral spring oasis."²⁵

THE "RIDGEWOOD LOOKOUT" did not last long, however, for Warren Carpenter died in 1886.²⁶ The following year, the area was divided into building lots and named "Ridgewood Park Addition."²⁷

In 1887, in anticipation of the growth of the Ridgewood Park community at the top of the hill, John Zachman, Ayd's son-in-law, gave the Short Line half an acre to build a railroad station.²⁸ The station, named Ridge-

Kramerath's Grist Mill (originally Ayd's Mill) as the building looked in 1959. Photograph by John Doroughy, of the Minnesota Historical Society. The house number was 987 Jefferson Avenue.



wood Park, was constructed soon afterwards at the foot of Benhill Road where Victoria Street crosses the railroad tracks. Thus it became one of the commuter stations on the line that served Macalester, Hamline, Merriam Park, and other suburban St. Paul communities.²⁹

That same year, the newly-established St. Paul Board of Park Commissioners picked the mill site as a potential public park, and began to acquire the property. The park was to be between Milton and Oxford Streets, and the railroad tracks and Pleasant Avenue; a location which included water, hills, trees, ready access to public transportation, the old mill and mill house.³⁰ Mr. Waters, an English consultant, prepared a plan for beautifying the grounds, including a suggestion for turning the mill into a picturesque ruined castle.³¹

The neighborhood newspaper thought little of this idea: "The ruins of an old mill which ground meal and flour for the pioneers will always be interesting. On the other hand a ruined castle would testify that a fool had been in control of the park long enough to do irreparable damage."³²

UNFORTUNATELY for the future of the park, the orders for condemnation of the land were rescinded in 1894 as a result of the depression of 1893, the depreciation of real estate, and the objections of neighbors who did not wish to be assessed for the park. Although compelled by public opinion to abide by their decision, the Park Commissioners were loath to do so for, in their words, the mill site "comprised an assemblage of admirable features which would have made it one of the finest parks of its class in the country."³³

Meanwhile, Adam Kidd, the owner of the mill property, had returned to his native New York City in 1890, where he died in September, and his will went into probate.³⁴ Perhaps it was in his absence that the mill itself was demolished, since it had been described as a picturesque ruin in 1889³⁵ and was not marked on an 1892 atlas.³⁶ Such was the ignominious end of the Ayd mill, a victim of swamp, railroad, and urban development.

When the Ridgewood Park railroad station was abandoned around 1910,³⁷ the area took on its present appearance. Some sand

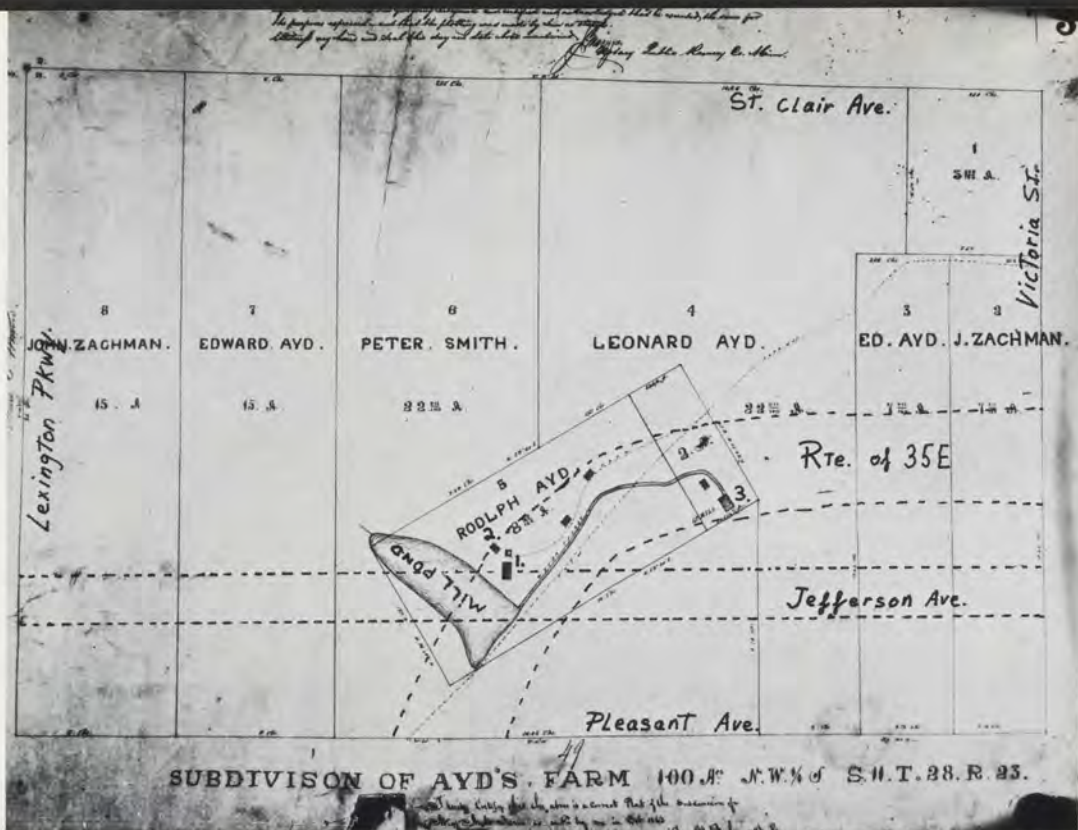
was taken from the hills; the Zachman family, now moved from St. Michael to St. Paul, walked down the railroad tracks from their greenhouses on Grand Avenue to do vegetable gardening on the hillside. There was some interest in the property when Cretin High School, faced with relocation, wanted to buy land on the northeast corner of Lexington Parkway and Jefferson Avenue. Negotiations, however, broke down, and they bought, instead, at Randolph and Hamline Avenues. In 1925 the Zachman family let their property go because of rising taxes resulting from growth in the area.³⁸

Through all these years the old mill house remained. In 1930, when Jefferson Avenue was cut through the Ayd property, a brief article was published in the local newspaper.³⁹ A few years later, another St. Paul area paper pondered over the early history of the mill;⁴⁰ and in 1963, Gareth Hiebert, "Oliver Towne" columnist for the St. Paul Dispatch, wrote a brief description of the Ayd house, with some facts about the mill itself.⁴¹ For the most part, however, it was neglected and ignored as an important historic site.

The final owners of the mill house were the Otto Leitners, another old German family from the West Seventh Street area. In 1966, without opposition or publicity, the 106-year-old mill house, with its eighteen-inch-thick stone walls and the adjacent barn were torn down for the impending Highway 35E.⁴²

Footnotes

1. From an authoritative unpublished genealogy of the Ayd family compiled by Mrs. Diane Schenz, Rte. 4, Box 2211, Lakeland, Florida 33803, and Mrs. Frances Wallraff, 955 St. Clair Avenue, St. Paul.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *History of Wright County, Minnesota*. Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr. & Co. 1915. Vol. 1, p. 427. Robertson and Larpenteur family connections are indicated in *St. Paul Dispatch*, March 26, 1946, p. 4.
4. There is a list of the original land owners in 35th Congress, 1 Session *House of Representatives Report* No. 351 (Serial 965) p. 431-32. For background on the sale of the Fort Snelling Reservation, see *History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul*. Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Co. 1881, p. 195-98.
5. Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 719.
6. U. S. 1860 Census of Population. Ramsey County. Reserve Township. Volume paging 309, 313. From



- the handwritten copy in the Manuscript Department, Minnesota Historical Society.
7. *St. Anthony Hill Graphic*, July 12, 1889, Vol. 1, No. 36, p. 5.
 8. L. G. Bennett, *Map of Ramsey County, Minnesota 1867* (atlas). Chicago: Chas. Shober & Co. 1867, T28 R23.
 9. *St. Anthony Hill Graphic*, *op. cit.* Access to the mill through Lot 4 is mentioned as a condition of the mill's sale in Book EE of Deeds, p. 225, in the Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse.
 10. L. G. Bennett, *op. cit.*, lists Kuhn as the owner.
 11. "Subdivision of Ayd's Farm, 100 Acres NW 1/4 of Section 11, T28 R23," plat in the Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse. Town Plats, Book H, Plat 3.
 12. Ayd genealogy (see footnote 1).
 13. Book JJ of Deeds, p. 357. Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse.
 14. Information from Henry L. Ayd, 1866 Wellesley Avenue, St. Paul, who was born in the apartments above the Ayd Hall.
 15. U. S. 1870 Census of Population. Ramsey County. Reserve Township. Volume paging 885. From the handwritten copy in the Manuscript Department, Minnesota Historical Society.
 16. Book W of Mortgages, p. 62, 221. Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse.
 17. *St. Anthony Hill Graphic*, *op. cit.* St. Paul Department of Public Works, Sewer Engineer, has records on these springs.
 18. *St. Paul Dispatch*, February 9, 1971. Second section, p. 1.
 19. Conversation with Paul Bergman, District 9, Minnesota Highway Department, an engineer for construction of Highway 35E.
 20. Book 32 of Mortgages, p. 490. Notice of foreclosure sale published in *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 20, 29, August 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, 1878.
 21. Book 92 of Deeds, p. 31. Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse.
 22. *St. Anthony Hill Graphic*, *op. cit.*
 23. Book 116 of Deeds, p. 660. Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse.
 24. *St. Anthony Hill Graphic*, *op. cit.*
 25. *St. Paul Dispatch*, December 5, 1963, p. 18. "Oliver Towne" column.
 26. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Dec. 30, 1886, p. 5.
 27. "Ridgewood Park Addition." Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse. Town Plats, Book 8, No. 19.
 28. Copy of deed in possession of Arnold Zachman, 1262 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, grandson of John Zachman, Ayd's son-in-law.
 29. R. L. Polk & Co. *St. Paul City Directory*, 1891-92. Also in *Donnelley's Atlas of the City of St. Paul, Minnesota*. St. Paul: Reuben H. Donnelley, 1892. Vol. II, p. 10.
 30. "Ridgewood Park." Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse, Park Plats, Book 1, No. 11. Platted July 12, 1889, 19 & 44/100 acres.
 31. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 25, 1889, p. 5.
 32. *St. Anthony Hill Graphic*, July 26, 1889 (Vol. 1, No. 38) p. 4.
 33. Board of Park Commissioners of the City of St. Paul. *Fourth Annual Report for the year ending Mar. 1, A.D. 1895*. p. 6-7.
 34. Book 30, Misc. p. 369 relating to the last will and testament of Adam C. Kidd. Registrar of Deeds, Ramsey County Courthouse.
 35. *St. Anthony Hill Graphic*, July 12, 1889, *op. cit.*
 36. *Donnelley's Atlas*, *op. cit.*
 37. R. L. Polk & Co. *St. Paul City Directory*, 1910.
 38. Arnold Zachman (see footnote 28).
 39. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 7, 1930, p. 12.
 40. *St. Paul Shopper*, Oct. 29, 1942, p. 2.
 41. *St. Paul Dispatch*, December 5, 1963, p. 18. "Oliver Towne" column.
 42. Mrs. Otto Leitner, 1068 Pleasant Avenue, St. Paul, supplied recent information about the house and property.



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.