

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

*Whistles, Crowds, Free Silver*  
**Election Night – 1896**

*Page 13*

**Fall, 1992**

**Volume 27, Number 3**

The  
Mexican-  
Americans  
and their  
Roots in  
St. Paul's  
Past

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Growing Up  
on The  
East Side

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*Mexican women attending a class in English presented by the St. Paul WPA's adult education department—April 23, 1936.*

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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**Acknowledgements:** The photographs on the front cover and on pages 4, 5, 7, 8, 16 and 24 are from the audio-visual and newspaper collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. The photographs on page 11 are from Thomasa Castillo. The photograph on page 15 is courtesy of the Canal Park Marine Museum, Duluth, Minnesota. The postcards reproduced on pages 18-21 and the back cover are from the author's collection. The snapshots on pages 22-23 are from the author and the photograph on page 27 is from the Ramsey County Historical Society.

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 27, Number 3

Fall, 1992

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Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr., by a contribution from Reuel D. Harmon and by grants from The Saint Paul and F. R. Bigelow Foundations.

## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**his issue of *Ramsey County History* matches in diversity the varied fall colors we now see all around us. Jane McClure writes in fascinating detail about the history of our Mexican American neighbors on the West Side of St. Paul. Tom Buckley reminds us that the presidential election of 1896, matching Republican McKinley with Democrat Bryan, involved in its day as much hoopla, politics and suspense as the election of 1992 appears to have so far.

Two of our regular features—Growing Up in St. Paul and the Historic Site essay—highlight the colorful East Side neighborhood. And finally we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. Peter Claver Catholic Church and its century of service to St. Paul's African American community in A Matter of Time for 1892. The Editorial Board hopes you will enjoy the richness of Ramsey County's history found in this issue.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

# A Matter of Time

## 1852 140 YEARS AGO Back to School

► Like today, the minds of many in the fledgling community of St. Paul were turned toward back-to-school issues in the autumn of 1852, except that there were few schools. In fact, the editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer* gave vent to his frustrations in July of 1852 as he declared that “There is not a building in all St. Paul fit to be called a district school house. The only building known as such is hardly fit for a horse stable. There was another miserable substitute for a school house on Bench street that was sold the other day to satisfy a mortgage of less than \$200.

“All this,” he went on moodily, “in an opulent town swarming with children, little untaught brats, swarming about the streets and along the levee in utter idleness like wharf rats. All this in a town, too, that boasts of half a dozen steepled churches.”

Help was on the way, however. On August 5, 1852, George H. Spencer notified *Pioneer* readers that, “having been for many years engaged in teaching, and now being located in St. Paul for that purpose,” he had determined to open a permanent Institute of Learning in Temperance Hall on August 9.

His school, he announced, would be conducted strictly on the Classification system, “now adopted and so universally approved in most of the eastern and middle states.” There would be morning and afternoon sessions and pupils were expected to be prompt in their attendance and fully prepared for all studies pursued by them, which would, apparently, be determined by their parents. Cost was set at \$4 per quarter. Compositions, declamations and lectures by Spencer himself “or some other gentleman” on some of the



St. Paul in 1851. The frontier town scarcely looked “opulent,” as described a year later by the *Minnesota Pioneer* in agitating for a district school house.

Natural Sciences would be given at 3 p.m. every Friday, with the public invited.

Alas, the *Pioneer* mourned a week later, his school had not yet met with the encouragement it deserved, perhaps due to the fact that not enough people knew it was open, although Spencer had advertised it in the town’s newspapers.

“But if people do not take the papers themselves and have no taste for reading, it is no reason why they should rear their children in ignorance and idleness,” the *Pioneer* scolded. “The matter of sending children to school to be educated only when public schools are open is all wrong. We notice that our near neighbor, Miss Sorin, has ten or fifteen scholars and her school is in a neighborhood which swarms with idle boys and girls.”

Clearly, something had to be done. By mid-October, 1852, the trustees of the two school districts in St. Paul—one in Upper Town around Seven Corners and the other in Lowertown—had decided to open a Union Grammar School and had rented a room in a brick building in

Upper Town. Throwing in his lot with the trustees, Spencer was employed as teacher. As for Lowertown, the district trustees hired Harriet Bishop to teach in a school there. Losing no time, both schools were to open by the end of the month.

In the meantime, the citizens of St. Paul, and “especially those who are interested in the education of the rising generation,” were invited to an examination of the Episcopal Mission School to be held at the Mission House in St. Paul, on October 22.

By November, 1852, a Singing School loomed on the horizon. B. E. Messer announced arrangements to conduct a course of instruction in Vocal Music during the following winter. The first lesson, he noted, would be at 7 p.m. Saturday, November 16. The term would include twenty-one lessons. Cards of admission would cost gentlemen \$3 each, ladies \$4.50.

► The vexing problem of liquor on the frontier also occupied the community. An alternative to the ubiquitous saloon

was offered by the *Minnesota Pioneer*:

"There ought to be immediately built, handsomely opened and well kept in St. Paul a magnificent Soda Saloon, furnished with sofas and divans and recesses and mirrors, for all the world to see its face and provided with cigars of all qualities and with candies, ice cream, fruits, strawberries and raspberries in cream, in their season, files of newspapers, a smoking room, a barbers room, everything in short to make a comfortable place for ladies and gentlemen, no matter what their religious scruples may be, the whole establishment to be conducted upon principles of strict temperance, morality and good breeding. One such Saloon at the middle of town, or even one at each end, would pay well and would do more for the cause of Temperance, intelligence and the cultivation of refined manners than any other institution."

Lot Moffet had a more practical idea. This early settler who came up the Mississippi from Galena opened the St. Paul Temperance House, so-named because no liquor was served there. His boarding house was located on Jackson Street near Third Street and on the edge of a deep ravine which ran along Jackson.

It was an era of temperance crusades and marches and parades and rallies, of efforts to enlist the territorial government in legislation that would deal with the problem by banning liquor altogether. A Temperance Convention had been held early in 1852, largely attended and earnest in feeling.

The Legislature did in fact pass a stringent "Maine Liquor Law." The manufacture, sale or possession of liquor was made a penal offense to be severely punished. The law passed, 853 to 662, but, as the editor of the *Minnesotian* had noted, enforcement was everything and on this the system broke down. In Stillwater, saloons were closed down but in Ramsey County, the commissioners interpreted the law to suit themselves, issued licenses as before and the liquor traffic went on as usual. Later in the year, on the basis of a test case brought before the territorial Supreme Court, the law was declared null and void.

## 1892 100 YEARS AGO *St. Peter Claver's History*

► St. Peter Claver Catholic Church erected a new building for its congregation at Aurora and Farrington Avenues in the Fall of 1892. Its history as a congregation, however, really began in 1888 when Archbishop John Ireland established St. Peter Claver Mission primarily for St. Paul's African-American Catholics. The mission was located first on Market Street, between Fourth and Fifth Streets, in a church established originally as the Market Street Methodist Church and used later by a succession of early congregations.\* It had the distinction of being the first place of worship in St. Paul to have electric lights.

Ireland appointed Bishop John Shanley as St. Peter Claver's first pastor. In less than a year, one member of its congregation, Frederick L. McGhee, the first black criminal lawyer west of the Mississippi and a convert to Catholicism, remarked publicly that, "It is mainly owing to Bishop Shanley and St. Peter Claver that the rights of my people are coming to be recognized in this city . . ."

In 1890 Father Augustus Tolton, who had been ordained in Rome in 1886, visited in St. Paul. He was one of only two black priests in the United States, the other being Bishop James Healy, who had been consecrated by Pope Pius IX in 1875 to the archdiocese of Portland, Maine. Father Tolton was invited to speak at a meeting on interracial matters and was introduced by Archbishop Ireland.

In 1892, when St. Peter Claver became a parish and the church was built, Father Harrison was assigned to replace Bishop Shanley. He continued a policy of presenting programs of enlightenment on racial matters, including a lecture series on false racial theories given by Father Gmeiner from the College of St. Thomas. At that time, St. Thomas was one of only two Catholic colleges in the United

\*James Thompson, an African-American who was among the first settlers of St. Paul, helped to build the Market Street Church in 1849.

States which admitted African-Americans. Father Harrison also wrote a weekly newsletter which appeared in *The Appeal*, the weekly newspaper published in St. Paul for black citizens but circulated, at its peak, in nine other American cities.

On one occasion, the column exhorted the owner of the Harris Theatre to cease discriminating against its African-American patrons. On another occasion, Father Harrison exposed the policy of the Rockaway Restaurant, on Seventh and Jackson Streets, of ordering its waiters to spice the food of black patrons with red pepper.

St. Peter Claver Mission was served by the Reverend John Andrzejewski until Archbishop Ireland discovered a young black lawyer-journalist, Stephen Theobald, around 1905 in Montreal and encouraged him to enter St. Paul Seminary. After a brilliant record at the seminary, Theobald was ordained by the archbishop on June 8, 1910. He served as Ireland's canon lawyer for the archdiocese before being assigned to assist Father Printon in his parish duties.

It was Father Printon who built St. Peter Claver's church on Aurora and Farrington as well as the rectory. It was also Father Printon who raised the money to equip the new sanctuary with three white marble altars and a large mural over the center altar depicting St. Peter Claver in his apostolate. He was a Spanish priest who became a missionary to black Catholics, Protestant captives of the Spanish and prisoners of the Inquisition in Columbia, South America.

Later, Father Theobald donated a thousand dollars toward a new organ for the church. Theobald, who served the congregation for twenty-two years, felt a particular affinity for St. Peter Claver, as his labors had been carried out largely near Cartagena, Columbia, not far from Theobald's home.

—Arthur C. Mc Watt

► More than 18,000 pupils began the new school year on September 6. An ongoing argument concerning church and school heated up as Archbishop Ireland contended that church and home training can be combined safely with a public

secular education. The editor of a church newspaper in St. Louis, Missouri, disagreed, declaring that unsupervised secular education sapped the foundations of religion and paved the way to atheism. ▶The city had its own problems. The Ramsey County Medical Society was taking preventive measures against the possible influx of cholera by creating community awareness and guidelines for the city to follow.

## 1917 75 YEARS AGO

▶A Liberty Loan drive began in New York on October 1, 1917, with Secretary McAdoo expressing the federal government's hopes that subscriptions would total \$5 million. Each subscriber would receive a "badge of honor" button. The loans, which McAdoo said the government would repay in full, were to be used to equip American soldiers for the fight against Germany.

▶German raiders appeared over England on September 30 and dropped bombs on Kent, London and Essex. It was an evening raid and, despite the bright moonlit night, mists ensured that the raiders were invisible to persons on the streets. Official tolls listed eleven killed and eighty-two injured.

▶Minnesota's 151st Field Artillery arrived in New York in mid-September. Newspapers called them "a fine bunch of men" and quoted their commander as saying that, "Every man in my command is ready and willing to do his bit for Uncle Sam." Fort Snelling was to be transformed into a camp hospital for the war wounded and was expected to be one of the largest such hospitals in the country, according to Secretary of War Newton Baker.

▶Back in Minnesota, University of Minnesota regents ratified an agreement on September 13 that would transfer ownership of the Mayo Foundation in Rochester to the University. Price tag for the move was expected to be more than \$1,650,000.

▶As many as 200 bars in Minneapolis and St. Paul faced closing as a new federal tax took effect. The tax would force bars to raise their prices to ten cents for beer and twenty-five cents for whisky.

# Books, Etc.

## *Murder in Minnesota*

Walter Trenerry  
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society

We always are on the look-out for new books that will provide us with interesting insights into the history of Minnesota. However, we must be careful not to neglect those books—those great books—that have been around for awhile. Walter Trenerry's *Murder in Minnesota* is such a book.

I purchased a copy four years ago at a used book store soon after I moved to Minnesota. I must state in all honesty that I bought it because of its intriguing title. However, because it was written in 1962, I simply placed it on my bookshelf for future reading and turned to more current publications. When I finally read it, I enjoyed one of the most pleasant literary surprises in some time.

*Murder in Minnesota* recounts some of the rough and tumble—and all too often fatally violent—history of Minnesota. Originally, the wide open nature of Minnesota territory threatened the prospect of statehood and deterred business investments in the area. Thus, government officials treated vigilantes as severely, if not more severely, than those who committed the murders in the first place.

Such was the case that gave rise to the "war" in Wright County in 1858 and 1859 when Governor Henry H. Sibley ordered the state militia to bring order to the county. The governor's immediate objective was thwarted by the disorganization and poor discipline of the militia. However, as Trenerry writes, "the Wright County War, semiludicrous as it was, served notice that anarchy and rebellion would not be tolerated in Minnesota."

Trenerry describes the murder of Stanislaus Bilansky in St. Paul in 1859. This is a ghoulish tale of jealousy, adultery and poison. Thus, it is fascinating reading and serves to highlight efforts by early Minnesotans to outlaw capital punishment.

*Murder in Minnesota* also recounts the violent and fatal bank robbery in Northfield in 1876 by the James gang. This account includes a poignant description of Joseph L. Heywood, the courageous Northfield bank cashier who sacrificed his own life to thwart the robbery.

Then, of course, there is the murder of Louis Arbogast that occurred in St. Paul. During the early morning hours of May 13, 1909, the city was awakened by a grisly event. Trenerry describes it:

A few minutes after 4:00 a.m., the agonized screams of women in the Arbogast house jolted the neighborhood awake. People living nearby ran to help, and they were soon joined by policemen and firemen. Those who arrived first found Louis Arbogast lying cross-wise on a burning bed, naked, and covered with blood and feathers. The back of his skull had been completely smashed. He was still gasping, alive, but clearly beyond help. The bed was in flames, having been drenched with gasoline, the fumes of which were apparent in the room. Rescuers smothered the flames and rushed the man to the nearest hospital. He died en route.

Despite the fact that the Arbogast home was locked and there was no sign of entry by an intruder, none of the family members within the home at the time of the attack ever divulged the identity of the murderer.

Walter Trenerry's *Murder in Minnesota* is fascinating reading. I would recommend it highly.

—Thomas H. Boyd



*Saint Paul, Minn. Public Baths, Beach and Bathers, Harriet Island*

*The public baths, beaches and bathers at Harriet Island. Views of St. Paul's parks, as well as the city's vibrant downtown, were popular with postcard publishers, Robert J. Stumm observes in his article beginning on page 18.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society  
323 Landmark Center  
75 West Fifth Street  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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