

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**

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**Fall, 1994**

Volume 29, Number 3



*Chamber and Community*  
**The Midway and Its Colorful History—Page 4**



*University and Snelling Avenues around 1916. Streetcars were in their heyday and their barns occupied the entire corner. See article beginning on page 4. Minnesota Historical Society photo.*



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**his issue of *Ramsey County History* focuses exclusively on the Midway area of St. Paul. We have done this because the Midway Chamber of Commerce is celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary in October. As you will find in reading this issue, the story of the Midway area is rich and varied, ranging from the early days of settlement and statehood to the present period of industrial, commercial and residential vitality. The Editorial Board thanks the Midway Chamber of Commerce for its help in producing this issue of our magazine and congratulates the Chamber on its many contributions to the Midway area over the past seventy-five years.

*John M. Lindley,*  
chairman, Editorial Board



# Books, Etc.

## *Books Tell the Story of Midway's Vitality*

*Andy Boss*

The vitality and diversity of the Midway area's neighborhoods are reflected in the history of its people, businesses, institutions and communities.

The list of books and other sources that follows is limited to those that either are in print or are readily available. Older histories usually can be found in libraries or at the Minnesota History Center and the Ramsey County Historical Society library in Landmark Center.

This is true, also, of many corporate, church and institutional histories that haven't been widely distributed. These include accounts of the history of the H. B. Fuller Company, Concordia College, Hamline University and St. Mark's Catholic Church. The St. Mark's book includes a fine summary of the early history of Merriam Park.

A marvelous account of the history of the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus can still be found at area libraries, the Minnesota History Center and the campus itself. Titled *The History of the School of Agriculture, 1851-1960*, it was written by Professor Emeritus Ralph E. Miller and contains many photographs and countless points of interest for anyone interested in neighborhood and Midway area history.

Two older histories of St. Paul have recently been republished by the Minnesota Historical Society and both contain references to early residents of the Midway district and incidents in Mid-



*The University's School of Agriculture's "Home Building," built in 1888 on the St. Paul campus. Photo from St. Paul campus archives.*

way history. They are J. Fletcher Williams's *History of the City of St. Paul* and William Watts Folwell's four volume *A History of Minnesota*.

Past issues of *Ramsey County History*, the now-quarterly magazine published since 1965 by the Ramsey County Historical Society, contain many references to Midway history, including accounts of neighborhoods, businesses, institutions and people. Copies of the magazine are available at the Ramsey County Historical Society offices in Landmark Center and at the Roseville Branch Library, the downtown St. Paul Public Library and its branches and the Minnesota History Center.

A number of books are dedicated to the history of a particular neighborhood in the Midway area. Two of them, *The History of St. Anthony Park* by David

Lanegran and *St. Paul's Historic Neighborhood* by Lanegran and Ernest Sandeen, are from the Living Historical Museum at Macalester College and also can be purchased locally. The St. Anthony Park book is especially detailed, with many photographs of old South and North St. Anthony Park's homes, schools, businesses and industries. The Summit Avenue book focuses on the mansions, churches and other unique buildings lining the historic avenue.

A third neighborhood history is James Vogt's *Desnoyer Park*. This interesting and concise account of Desnoyer Park gives an excellent overview of the neighborhood's development. There is a lot of good information on Edward Brewer, the Desnoyer Park resident and artist whose advertising art is still remembered today, and on the Brewer house.



Other sources that touch upon Midway history include:

*James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest* by Albro Martin, which was republished by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1991. Martin has done a commendable job of describing Hill's life and times, the growth of the railroad industry in St. Paul and how the industry shaped the settlement of much of the rest of the Northwest.

In *Lost Twin Cities*, (MHS Press, 1992) Larry Millett, architecture writer for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, gives his readers a historical overview of many of the once-proud buildings in St. Paul. Although few were in the Midway area, Millett does provide a wonderful summary of the life and times of Norman Kittson and his massively ugly Summit Avenue mansion. KTCA has produced a public television special based on this book.

Three histories of St. Paul by Virginia Brainard Kunz include historical information on the Midway area. *St. Paul: The First 150 Years*, published by The Saint Paul Foundation in 1991 to commemorate the anniversary of the naming of the city, is now in its second printing. It's a good overview of city history. There is a strong focus on neighborhoods and ethnic groups, including those in the Midway. *St. Paul*

—*A Modern Renaissance*, (Windsor Publications, Northridge, California, 1986) is essentially a history of St. Paul businesses and industries and includes H. B. Fuller, Cray Research and Northwest Airlines, among others. *St. Paul—Saga of an American City* (Windsor, 1977) has numerous references to Midway and its neighborhoods and many interesting photos.

Kunz's latest book, *Where the Doors Never Close—A History of St. Paul's Union Gospel Mission*, published in 1993, touches on some Midway history in its description of the Mission's Ober Boys' Club in the Thomas-Dale neighborhood.

*The Days of Rondo* by Evelyn Fairbanks (MHS Press) is one woman's story of growing up in St. Paul's old Rondo neighborhood. This is not a definitive history of the city's African American community, but it's an interesting and sometimes poignant memoir.

*Discover St. Paul: A Short History of Seven St. Paul Neighborhoods* by Peggy Korsmo Kennon was published in 1979 by the Ramsey County Historical Society and includes histories of Frogtown and the North End. These accounts are concise but do contain considerable information about each neighborhood, along with maps and photographs. Now out of print, the booklet is available at li-

braries, including the Ramsey County Historical Society library.

*They Chose Minnesota* by numerous authors and published by the Minnesota Historical Society, has a chapter on every ethnic group that ever settled in Minnesota. Its excellent maps, footnotes, index and photographs help the reader to see the groups that shaped the state and, in some cases, the Midway area.

*Minnesota In a Century of Change*, edited by Clifford E. Clark, Jr., (MHS Press) is a detailed and interesting book. A statewide history, it includes references to the Midway area. What's especially worthwhile about this book is how it outlines the dramatic changes the state has seen during the twentieth century in manufacturing, agriculture, transportation and urban development.

Many other histories of institutions associated with the Midway area have been published. Among those that come to mind are histories of the College (now University) of St. Thomas, and the Cathedral of St. Paul and the centennial booklet of St. Peter Claver Church. One hopes there will be more.

*Andy Boss is president of the St. Anthony State Bank and chairs the Midway Chamber's Seventy-fifth Anniversary Task Force.*

## A Thank You to Supporters

These members of the Midway Chamber of Commerce have supported the publication of this issue of *Ramsey County History*. Their generosity is most appreciated.

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*Hamline Park Playground candidates for one of the Midway's Winter Carnivals, probably 1929 or 1930. Can anyone identified these young women? Midway Chamber of Commerce photo. See article beginning on Page 4.*

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

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