

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

Minnesota Gardens:  
An Illustrated History  
...And More Books

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**Fall, 1996**

Volume 31, Number 3

*Fires, Hurricanes, Diamonds, Elephants*  
St. Paul Companies' Colorful History

*Page 3*



*Shadowed by an approaching thunderstorm, this is the pioneer community of St. Paul as it looked in 1853. The painting is a portion of the St. Paul Companies' panorama that has been reproduced for the insert in this issue. Designed for the company's entrance hall by Twin Cities artist Ken Moylan and painted by muralist Mike Bolen, it was photographed for Ramsey County History by George Heinrich. For a new history of the company, see page 3.*



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 31, Number 3

Fall, 1996

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*The Rotary Club of Saint Paul, 1910-1995*

by John M. Turcotte

*The French Pioneers of Minnesota* by Henry Scholberg.

*The Grand Portage Story* by Carolyn Gilman,

with research by Alan Woolworth

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**hanks to the suggestion of Ramsey County Historical Society board member Thomond O'Brien, this issue of *Ramsey County History* carries a most unusual feature: a full-color fold-out reproduction of the mural in the entrance hall of The St. Paul Companies. This mural depicts St. Paul and the surrounding area in 1853, the year when the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company opened for business.

The panoramic reproduction accompanies a fascinating history of The St. Paul Companies from its origins in 1853 to the present day, which has been written by Virginia Brainard Kunz. This history shows the complex interaction between the people who led The St. Paul Companies, the local community, and the wider world of American business over the past 140 some years.

With the Fall issue we hope our readers will not only enjoy learning more about St. Paul's oldest business corporation, but also tear out the mural from the center of this magazine and display it as a keepsake of an earlier time in our local history. In November RCHS will open a photo exhibit tracing The St. Paul Companies' history in our exhibit area on the first floor of Landmark Center.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*



## Books, Etc.

### *Minnesota Gardens: An Illustrated History*

Susan Davis Price  
Afton Historical Society Press  
168 pages \$49 (cloth)

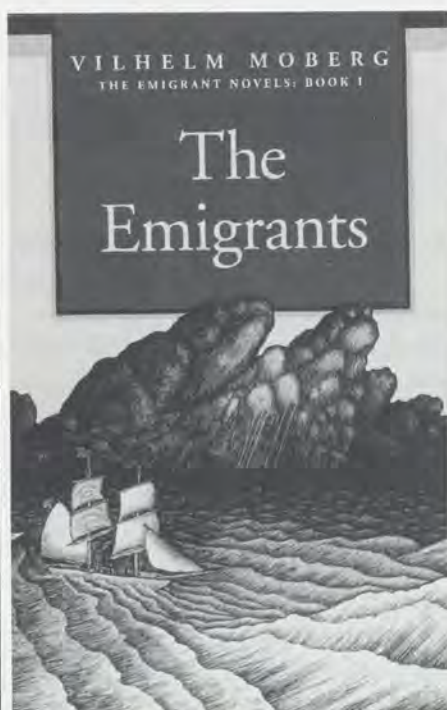
Beautifully written, designed, and illustrated with 100 color and duotone photographs, Susan Davis Price's history of gardening in Minnesota is a book that would be an especially welcome Christmas gift as we face a long and probably dark winter.

More than that, as the late Sally MacMillan tells us in a Foreword that reveals her own love of gardening, this is the first comprehensive gardening history of Minnesota. As such, it creates an important record of the vital role gardening has played in the lives of those of us who dwell in the north country

"When the first pioneer gardener planted the first window-box on the Minnesota prairie sometime in the 1840s, prospects for the state's horticulture were grim," Price writes. She quotes an East Coast writer who asked, "What can be raised away up there in Siberia?"

"In the following century and a half," she observes, "Minnesota answered such early doomsayers with estate gardens rivaling those of Italy and England, public landscapes among the best in the country, hundreds of new plant varieties, a flourishing seed industry, and countless thousands of flower beds that bring life and color to every part of Minnesota."

The book is divided into seven chapters, beginning with "Settlers & Early Statehood 1840s-1870," in which the author points out that while the pioneers planted gardens of fruit and vegetables



*The Emigrants, the first of Vilhelm Moberg's four novels that have been reprinted to mark the 150th anniversary of the beginning of Swedish mass immigration to America.*

to survive, they also planted trees and flowers to beautify their first rude homes.

The Victorian gardens of 1870 to 1910 were "Places of Delight," as in William LeDuc's home in Hastings with its magnificent trees and climbing roses; they were "Pleasure Grounds," as was the Dorilus Morrison home on the site today of the Minneapolis Art Institute; and they also were "Gardens of the Dead," where, as historian Henry Castle wrote, "... the homes of our dead are given as attractive surroundings as the homes of the living."

Chapters follow on "Great Estates & Passionate Gardeners" of the early

twentieth century; "Home Ground," the 1930s and 1940s, with outdoor living rooms and the effort to keep cities beautiful during the dark days of war; and "The Trade," which records the growth of nurseries, seed companies, and the experimental plantings that resulted in such triumphs as Peter Gideon's Wealthy apple.

Price's description of the nursery business will be of particular interest to Ramsey County Historical Society members. Frank Gibbs, the son of Jane and Heman Gibbs who established the farm that is now the Society's Gibbs Farm Museum, turned to growing "ornamentals" and flowers in a flourishing nursery after ending his market gardening operation.

In her chapter on the "Gardening Renaissance of 1970 to the 1990s," Price traces the renewed interest in gardens of the past: "Herb plots, knot gardens, hardy perennials and old-fashioned roses began to reappear..." and trellises, benches, ponds and arbors have once more become standard items in today's gardens.

Many magnificent color photos of Minnesota homes and gardens grace this book. So do fascinating black-and-white historic photographs. They range from the grand-scale garden of George F. Lindsey on St. Paul's Summit Avenue, photographed about 1922 with its statuary, privacy wall, and pool, to the simple log home of settlers in Morrison County.

Susan Davis Price has lived and gardened in Minnesota for more than twenty years. She is a graduate of the Louisiana State University. She holds master's degrees from the University of Minnesota and Hamline University and currently is reference librarian at the



University of St. Thomas in St. Paul.

In a Publishers Note, Patricia Condon Johnston of Afton Press writes that *Minnesota Gardens* came into being because of the support and enthusiasm of Duncan MacMillan, president of the Afton Historical Society Press, and his wife, Sarah (Sally) Stevens MacMillan, both of them dedicated gardeners. Sadly, Sally MacMillan did not live to see its publication. She died in May, 1995, when, as Johnston writes, "her spring garden was at its best, and her beloved peonies in full bloom..."

### Also in Print

The four-volume saga of daily life for early Swedish pioneers in America, and specifically in Minnesota, by Vilhelm Moberg has been reprinted by the Minnesota Historical Society as part of its Borealis Book series, and just in time for the Swedish Immigration Jubilee, the 150th anniversary of the beginning of Swedish mass immigration to North America.

Moberg is considered one of Sweden's greatest twentieth century writers. He created Karl Oskar and Kristina Nilsson as a means of telling the story of a group of humble people who fled poverty, religious persecution, and social oppression in Sweden in 1850 to build a new life in a new world.

The first in the series, *The Emigrants*, follows Karl Oskar and Kristina, their three children, and a party of eleven other resolute Swedes from Småland to New York City. In *Unto a Good Land*, the Nilssons leave New York for a new home in Minnesota Territory where they acquire 160 acres and begin farming. *The Settlers* describes their struggle to prosper and Kristina's longing for Sweden as she tries to adapt to a new world. As more Swedes arrive, the Nilssons build a church, move into their new house and plant a small flower garden. Finally, in *The Last Letter Home*, Karl Oskar and Kristina do prosper in the midst of Minnesota's growing Swedish community of the 1860s to 1890s.

The books first appeared in English

editions between 1951 and 1961. The saga was filmed as *The Emigrants* (1971) and *The New Land* (1972).

The second of the two movies is of special interest to the Ramsey County Historical Society. This reviewer remembers a beautiful autumn week-end in the early 1970s when Max von Sydow (Karl Oskar), Liv Ullman (Kristina), and other cast members and crew, filmed scenes for *The New Land* at the Gibbs Farm Musuem. Totally professional in their work, charming and gracious, Von Sydow, Ullman and their colleagues were a pleasure to watch.

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*Rotary Club of Saint Paul, 1910-1995* by John W. Turcotte is an important record of one of St. Paul's premier organizations. Founded in 1910, the club was among the first ten "in the Rotary world," as Elmer L. Andersen, past president (1948-49) and district governor (1954-55) points out in a Preface.

Turcotte, a second generation Rotarian who has been a member since 1952, writes that his task as author was "a labor of love." He notes that "I had already discovered that in many ways the history of the Rotary club mirrored the history of St. Paul. Many (I am tempted to say most) of the city's leaders were club members at some time during the club's first eighty-five years."

The book bears him out. Organized into brief biographical sketches of the club's presidents and short descriptions of the major events during their terms of office, the book presents an important look at the city's leaders throughout Rotary's years in St. Paul.

The history of women in Rotary is necessarily short since women were not admitted to active membership until 1987. St. Paul Rotary, however, had voted earlier and overwhelmingly to replace references to "men" and "male" with "person" in its Articles and By-laws. In 1994 Carolyn Brusseau became St. Paul Rotary's first woman president.

It is interesting to note, however, that another woman's photograph graces the pages of the book. Florence MacBeth, a

Mankato native, was an honorary member from 1915 to 1931. Prima donna of the Chicago Civic Opera, she often sang at St. Paul Rotary events.

Appendices include lists of Rotary Club officers, local and international; Paul Harris Fellows; and a five-page index.

The book has been a cooperative project of club members, with David R. Fesler as project coordinator. The committee he created to see the project through included Howard M. Guthmann, Bill Oehler, Frederick M. Owens, Gerald A. Meigs, Bruce Hutchins, and librarian Sheila A. Meyer. Carolyn Brusseau, executive secretary Sherry Howe, and editor/designer Ellen B. Green served as ex officio committee members.

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*The French Pioneers of Minnesota* by Henry Scholberg is an interesting account of the impact of the French, and more especially the French Canadians, on Minnesota and its history.

In nine chapters, including a chronology and bibliography, Scholberg essentially tells the Minnesota story in terms of the French. Beginning with Radisson and Groseilliers, he moves through Du Luth, the French in the fur trade of the Upper Mississippi valley, the Louisiana Purchase and the French pioneers in territorial Minnesota.

He also includes fascinating information on the plethora of French names in Minnesota, their origins, and translations. He describes how Minnesota acquired its French motto, discusses French landmarks, and evaluates the French influence on the state.

The French, he point out, gave us "Lac qui Parle, Le Sueur, Nicollet, Faribault, Mille Lacs, Grand Marais, and Roseau." Then there were the changes as French names were translated or mispronounced into English. Prairie Island was *Ile Pelée*, (Bald Island); Lake Pepin was *Lac des Pleurs* (Lake of Tears); and the Mississippi was *Riviere Colbert* on Hennepin's map of *Louisiane*.

The author has included short biographical sketches of early French set-



tlers in Minnesota, including a number who figured prominently in St. Paul history: Joseph Rolette, Louis Robert, Joseph Rondo, Benjamin Gervais, Edmund Brissette, and the unforgettable Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant.

Henry Scholberg was born in India of missionary parents and has spent the greater part of his academic career in South Asia. He has bachelor degrees from the Universities of Illinois and Minnesota and a master's degree in library science from the University of Minnesota. The book is available through North Star Publications, 195 Windsor Lane, New Brighton.

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First published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press in 1992, *The Grand Portage Story* by Carolyn Gilman is a vivid history of 300 years of

trade and tradition on Lake Superior's North Shore.

With research by Alan R. Woolworth, the book is a compelling history of the legendary fur-trade crossroads in northern Minnesota. Here is where Indian and European cultures competed with and accomodated each other for nearly three centuries.

Gilman, historian and former Minnesota Historical Society exhibits curator, describes Grand Portage as "one of the busiest places west of the Appalachians" 200 years ago. In the 1600s French explorers and traders quickly adopted the trail they called the Grand Portage as the vital route to the vast fur-rich regions in the northern interior of the continent.

At Grand Portage Bay, near Indian settlements, the British North West

Company built the headquarters from which it dominated the North American fur trade in the late 1700s. Today Grand Portage National Monument, which embraces the portage route and the fur trade sites on the bay, lies within the boundaries of the Grand Portage Reservation of the Minnesota Chippewa tribe.

Carolyn Gilman also is the author of *Where Two Worlds Meet: The Great Lakes Fur Trade*, published in 1982, and *The Way to Independence: Memoirs of a Hidatsa Indian Family*, published in 1987. Alan Woolworth is a research fellow at the Minnesota Historical Society. His work at Grand Portage as archeologist and consultant has extended over thirty years.

V.B.K.



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-Invitations to exhibits, lectures, programs, events

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Warren E. Burger  
Chief Justice of U.S. Supreme  
Court 1969-1986

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*Fort Snelling in 1853, from the St. Paul Companies' panorama reproduced in this issue. The citadel on its bluff is framed by an approaching storm. See article beginning on page 3.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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