

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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Minnesota Gardens: An Illustrated History

Susan Davis Price

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The Rotary Club of Saint Paul, 1910-1995

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with research by Alan Woolworth

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Thanks 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



St. Paul in 1853

St. Paul in 1853, the year the St. Paul Companies was founded as the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company, the oldest business corporation in Minnesota. Photographed by George Heinrich for *Ramsey County History*, this panorama of the pioneer community was designed by the Twin Cities artist Ken Moylan and painted by muralist Mike Bolen. It was commissioned for the St. Paul Companies by Shelly Ross Art Consultancy, Inc., through Thomas Barry Fine Arts in Minneapolis.

The mural ranges from Fort Snelling at the confluence of the Mississippi and the Minnesota rivers to St. Paul itself, where the company's first headquarters stood at the west end of the city. Measuring fourteen feet in height and ninety-five feet in length, the painting is more symbolic and interpretive than strictly representational. Moylan consulted maps, diaries of early explorers, and drawings and paintings by frontier artists and incorporated into his design such symbols of the region's history as the Faribault and Sibley houses at Mendota; Pike Island where Lieutenant Zebulon Pike negotiated with the Dakota people for the land on which Fort Snelling was built; the Indian encampment on the river's flood plain, a foreshadowing of the tragic Dakota Conflict of 1862; and the first Capitol of the Territory and state.

A distant thunderstorm was, for Moylan, a symbol of the pioneers' attitudes toward the West. They saw it, he believes, "as a big, wild, threatening place, whereas in our own day and age, we look to the West as a sanctuary of life. The cities have become threatening. We've reversed roles on that."

Faint, illegible text visible in the bottom right corner of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.



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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