RAMSEY COUNTY I S COUNTY A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Field Engineer And His Canadian Travels

Fall, 1997

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The Women's Institute

And How It Revived Downtown St. Paul

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Orchestra and part of the crowd at a Women's Institute gathering in St. Paul in the early 1940s. Photo from the Women's Institute of St. Paul collection, Minnesota Historical Society.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

ew participants in the current discussion of how to rejuvenate downtown St. Paul are likely to know about or recall that a similar debate in 1939 served as the impetus for the founding of the Women's Institute. In the lead article in this issue of *Ramsey County History*, Kathleen Ridder explains how local women, who were leaders in the community launched the Women's Institute and initiated a program in cooperation with the city's political and business leaders that substantially revived downtown retail activity and promoted St. Paul's civic and cultural for thirty-two years.

This issue then moves to Robert Garland's account of his grandfather's experiences as a turn-of-the-century field engineer in western Canada for his St. Paul employer. Next, Rhoda Gilman takes us back to the first decades of this century to examine the role Emily Gilman Noyes played in the struggle for woman's suffrage. The Fall issue concludes with Muriel Mix Hawkins' bittersweet remembrance of growing up at St. Paul's Fish Hatchery in the 1920s and 1930s.

Although these articles span more than a century, and their subject matter ranges from politics, business, civic pride, and social reform to an intensely personal memory, each writer provides powerful evidence for the strength and vitality of the citizens of St. Paul and Ramsey County as they coped with the manifest changes that took place in their community during this time.

John M. Lindley, chair, Editorial Board

19th Century Technology and A Field Engineer's Canadian Travels

Robert F. Garland

he words "If you have any trouble, just *send a telegram* for a service representative!" would sound unusual today.

Complex technology runs our economy, but this really was equally true 100 years ago. Now as then, technology, in the form of machines, power sources, and the like, requires considerable servicing to keep it running. Service representatives or field engineers are those priceless workers who receive a telephone call (a century ago, a telegram), get to the job site right away, perhaps at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon, and make the repairs that get the order out the door on schedule. The fundamental work really has not changed in all those years, but the techniques and working conditions certainly have.

In 1898, one citizen of St. Paul named Rob Garland (the writer's grandfather), was serving the Waterous Engine Works Company as a field engineer, temporarily working out of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He had been born in 1873, the son of Martha and Field Garland, a St. Paul trunk manufacturer. Because his father and his much older uncle had married a daughter and her mother, Rob was in the unusual position of being the nephew of his own grandmother. Rob graduated from St. Paul High School in 1892. He was not new to Waterous in 1898, being listed in Polk's City Directory of St. Paul as "foreman Waterous Engine Works" as early as 1895. Originating in Ontario, Canada, Waterous was a substantial St. Paul company, manufacturing and selling a variety of machinery, including fire fighting equipment. An old photograph in the author's possession shows twenty-eight workmen standing outside a large factory. Rob's main assignment with Waterous in Canada was the servicing of early gasoline engines,



The F. V. Garland home on Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul. Unless otherwise noted, Photographs used with this article are from the author.

which Waterous also sold. His opportunity to do this in that particular location was the result of geology (the rock-hard Canadian Shield formation north of Lake Superior blocked early Canadian railroad construction and gave Minnesotans a head start in serving economic needs in Manitoba) and, evidently, a disinclination to join his family's enterprise in St. Paul. His business correspondence and field notes (perhaps for outgoing telegrams) in the author's possession, tell a story of working and living in Manitoba in the fall of 1898. Compared to such work in 1997, both contrasts and similarities abound.

Catching a Freight

In 1996 the work of most field engineers or service representatives, begins with a telephone call and a relatively brief automobile drive. In a few long distance assignments, air travel is required. In Rob's case, a service call began with a telegram or letter such as: "As soon as you have finished with the elevator at Stockton, drive over to Treesbank or if you can catch a freight go on the freight. You will start an engine there in the Canada North West Elevator Co's elevator." The driving referred to was, of course, by horse and wagon. Sometimes more personal effort was needed. His boss wrote: "It will be necessary for you to get to this as quickly as you possibly can. So as soon as you are through with Summerberry go to Brandon. The Northern Pacific leaves Brandon at 9 o'clock in the morning on Tuesday and Thursday and Saturday. You will go on this train as far as the C.P.R. [Canadian Pacific Railroad] Crossing and will have to get off there



Robert F. Garland and his sister Edith.

and walk down the track a few hundred yards to where the train will stop coming from the west and board the C.P.R. there and go down to Stockton."

Things did not always work out as planned. Because field engineers in those days were more dependent on public transportation, they were therefore at the mercy of others. On October 15, 1898, Rob wrote his mother at their family home at 846 Fairmount Avenue in St. Paul: "That freight I intended to take to Winnipeg never stopped here, so I must stay until tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock. It is very tiresome waiting a day and a half in a little town like this with nothing to do."

Travel by road was not easy, and would dismay today's service reps. "Friday afternoon," he wrote a month later, "I left Winnipeg for Lowe Farm, returning today on a freight at 12:30, so you can see I am on the go most of the time. I had to drive 10 miles from Lowe Farm to Morris last night to get a train there. The roads are very rough and frozen solid and I made the trip on a board on top of the box of a large grain wagon-you can imagine that I was shaken up considerable." Warmer weather wasn't necessarily helpful either. "I very nearly got stuck in the mud going to Wascana. The mud out there is very sticky and it clogs the

wheels up and gathers like snow on a snow ball until the wheels get so heavy it is almost impossible to get along. It took over two hours to go nine miles and the horse was covered with foam when I reached there."

Booming Western Canada

What we would now call "the agribusiness" was booming in Western Canada in the 1890s. Rob wrote: "The last town I stopped at has about 1,200 people and there are six elevators in it with a total capacity of about 180,000 bushels, and last year they handled over 600,000 bushels of wheat, so you can judge what a wheat raising place Manitoba is getting to be." Labor was in short supply. Rob wrote his mother from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan: "Men are very scarce out here and everybody is looking for help. A carpenter with only a saw and hammer is getting \$3.00 a day on the elevator at Boharm, and this is a fair sample of wages paid. The elevator man here told me he offered two Indians 25 cents an hour to load cars and they laughed at him."

A New Technology

Gasoline engines, such as those sold by Waterous Canada, provided internal combustion machine power. This must have been perceived as a most welcome improvement by those in small-town Canada 100 years ago. Practical electric motors were not widely available, even had local electric power service been offered. Steam engines were large, required special water supplies, and were sometimes dangerous. Gasoline engines were better, but not always by much. They were not easy to service, and the service work had to be done in a nineteenth century environment, both physically, and as to management styles. It seems that for those new on the job, it was distinctly "sink or swim." Rob didn't always receive what now would be called "positive feedback". His boss in Winnipeg wrote in September 1898: "This is the first engine you are starting and it certainly means that if you are going to take as long with all the engines as you are taking with this one, you will never cover the ground this year."

Field engineers also were expected to be part of the sales effort. Optimistically, Frank Waterous, one of the St. Paulbased executives, wrote Rob, "I sincerely hope that you will succeed in getting every engine in thorough running order, for it is almost a case of our making or loosing [sic] our reputation in that country. If the first lot of engines that we turn out give good satisfaction, you can depend on it that we will get a lot [of] new business from it. P.S. I wish you would get testimonials from the different engines as you deliver them." Cooler heads, however, prevailed. On the letter was a handwritten note. "Do not ask anyone for a testimonial, I will get these when all are running satisfactorily."

Then, as now, those back at headquarters did not always understand how things looked in the field. From Waterous, Canada, came: "Why our engines should not start with the sparker the same as the F-M. engines, is beyond my ability to solve, but I can see no earthly reason why the engines will not start when the batteries are properly hooked up, the new spark coil and the sparker properly put together."

A reading of nineteenth-century handbooks shows the breadth of knowledge and skill expected of field engineers. It definitely was not just a matter of wires and replacement components, and must

have required considerable ingenuity and the use of local materials and resources. For example: "[I]f you can, take one of the extra heads which we send with each engine and temper it in the following manner: First take and heat the head to a nice red hot (not too bright) then plunge it in water, which of course will make it very hard. The next operation is to heat the head in a sand bath of a sufficient temperature to draw temper down to a dark straw [dark yellow], just running it into the blue. The foregoing operation is the substance of the letter I received from the Crescent Steel Company and the method of tempering is the one we use here; it seems to make a very nice job of it."

Gasoline engine technology was in its infancy in the 1890s, and even the experts were not sure what would work. From Waterous St. Paul on November 7, 1898: "Yours of the 30th ult. received and I was pleased to hear that the Gasoline Engines are giving good satisfaction, and that steamer for Winnipeg shows up very well; [sic] However, I regret to say that I noticed in your letter of recent date to the company, that the sparkers on the Gasoline Engines were giving considerable trouble and that the prospects were good for your staying in Winnipeg for some time to come. No doubt by the time you receive this, you will have seen Mr. Fred Waterous bearing a blue print of the new sparker which we have just fitted up. We have one of them finished and are using a steel disc in place of a platinum one as we intend using in the permanent rig. I think however, the steel will answer sufficiently well to experiment with."

Power transmission was not just a matter (as today) of having an appropriate electric motor attached to each machine. In those years power was transmitted from a single source by way of leather belting, overhead shafts, pulleys and more belting. These also gave trouble. Rob noted: "This elevator has settled 5 to 6 inches and shaft is out of line which makes it run very hard."

People Problems

Operating conditions in the elevators were less than ideal and the engines were new to most elevator employees. Rob



Grain elevators at Indian Head, Northwest Territories, a reflection of the booming grain business Garland noted in his travels through Canada. Photograph from the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

had to put both right. "Found tooth broken out of large gear wheel," he noted on September 6, 1898 in Carman, Manitoba, "they had the engine covered with mortar and in a bad condition. Had gear repaired. Also broke rocker arm. Had it repaired in order to run until a new one arrived. Engine started and ran all right. Man had some trouble starting it at first but when I left he understood it thoroughly."

At Indian Head, Northwest Territory, Rob noted: "Back here again by order of Bready Love & Tryon. Found dirt had gotten into gasoline pump valves and

One of the gasoline engines Rob Garland serviced.

pump did not work right. No strainer in pipe when engine was set up." Sometimes he had to improvise. "Also found one of the battery jars broken. I made circuit without this jar (using 11 jars) and engineer started engine all right." Repairs often were necessary. At Orv Appelle, Manitoba, "the engine did not run right yesterday. It slowed down owing to missed explosions. Man in charge thought pump was giving trouble and tried to find trouble. In so doing they broke rocker-arm and loosened set screw in pump. I put in new rocker-arm and had screw soldered."

When things did work well, there is a note of understandable satisfaction. At Arnard, Manitoba, Rob wrote in his notes: "Came here to take engine apart and take cylinder to Winnipeg to have plug fixed in bottom. Before taking apart I started the engine and the man in charge elevated and cleaned a load of wheat, running the machinery its full capacity and the engine carried the load without any variation of speed and ran all right, being the leak in bottom of cylinder."

Field engineers of 1898 were, in a way, leading the way to the industry of the twentieth century. Patience and training were required. Elevator employees undoubtedly knew farming, horses, and



A line-up of the Waterous Company's fire fighting equipment.

belt and shaft transmission systems. Gasoline engines confronted them with strange new technologies, providing frustration for Rob. "When I arrived at Winnipeg from Carman I found a wire there calling me back here. Found the man in charge had gotten rattled and did not know what to do. The engine failed to start with batteries and I found sparker a little dirty and packing damp. Everything else all right. These things were thoroughly explained to elevator man when I was here before."

At times Rob's patience wore a bit thin. "Gasoline pump would not work. Poor pipe fitting—suction pipes leaked. Man in charge had a great deal of trouble learning to start engine, but he got along first rate before I left him. He seemed to have very little sand." Rob needed to understand that the engines were very new to people. "Called back [to Carman, Manitoba] by wire from Bready Love & Tryon. Found nothing whatever wrong with engine. Engineer lost his head and could not start engine, and he was afraid something was radically wrong."

Sometimes something definitely was wrong. "Here I find four teeth broken out of large gear wheel after running a few minutes. On examination I find there is a piece of mortar or brick wedged into the pinion. They did not cover the engine properly when building the house." From the vantage point of the late twentieth century, it might be thought that a horse, possibly the previous source of power, would have known enough to get out of the way of falling bricks. The gasoline engine did not!

The climate of Western Canada in November, provided other dangers. In November, 1898, when he was at Kerkella, Manitoba, Rob noted: "Found water jacket around cylinder cracked with frost. Man in charge said he left the engine room last Saturday night and did not drain the engine, when he returned Monday morning found it cracked. He also said he has never yet drained the engine as he did not think it would freeze."

Just as now, people did not at first tell Rob the whole story. "Came here to look over gasoline engine in Bready Love & Tryon's Elev. Elevator man said everything was all right. I asked him if he started with the batteries. He said they never worked. I found they had broken one of the studs holding the igniter on head of engine and in order to get a hold

of thread with nut they substituted a piece of thin asbestos for one of insulators, this did not properly insulate. I put in a double thickness of asbestos to answer until a new stud could be sent them. Also found some screws loose on batteries. The engine was covered with dirt and grease and when questioned the engineer said he could not get any rags or waste to clean it with. After remedying above faults the engine started all right with batteries. I had previously instructed this man at Fleming."

Elevator workers were having to learn about both internal combustion engines and electricity. Neither was obvious, as Rob quickly discovered. "Went to Fleming to examine engine there in Bready Love & Tryon's elevator, found them trying to start and could not. On examination I found one of the battery poles entirely disconnected. Man in charge said he thought that it did not make any difference. He had put in a new cell to replace a broken one and did not know enough to connect it."

The cumulative effect of such experiences produced an unfortunate tirade (with a grain of truth) in a letter home. "I am perfectly disgusted with some of the men who are running these engines. When I got to Wascana I found nothing wrong whatever except what the man in charge of the engine is supposed to know how to fix, but no they don't know enough to do the first thing, but as soon as they have a little trouble they wire Winnipeg for me. I think the sooner I get out of this country the sooner they will learn to handle their engines."

No Super 8's or Motel Sixes

Rob had other reasons for thinking of his comfortable home in St. Paul. Rural Manitoba was different. From Stockton Rob wrote to his mother: "There is only one train every two days from here to Winnipeg. The people here are very pleasant and accommodating, but some are very dirty and careless about their houses. This town is about 110 miles west of Winnipeg." Things got even worse farther west. "The first hotel I went to here they gave me a dirty little 6 x 8 room with one small window and a bed without any sheets or pillow cases, and

when I asked the rates they told me \$2.00 per day, so I hunted up this place which is much better and sent after my grips. The worst class of people here seem to be English and in the hotel or boarding house business."

Rob clearly would have welcomed modern North American hotel chains, and today's field engineers would not tolerate what he found next. Rob wrote the following on stationery provided by the Windsor Hotel, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, which claimed to be "First Class in Every Respect". "You will notice what they have printed at the top of this sheet, but it is one of the dirtiest hotels I have ever been in. I think I have seen more flies in Canada since I have been here. than I ever saw at home." The food, also, was not what he was used to. "Yes I get all kinds of bread,-brown, black, white, corn and dirty bread, soup—I wish this paper was large enough to name all the kinds of soup I have had. I have oatmeal porridge seasoned with flies wherever I go." The insect theme continued in following letters, too. "This hotel [the Seymore House is a dollar a day house and I believe it is almost as good as the Leland which charges two dollars. The last time I ate at the Leland I found a number of cock roaches [sic] running around my plate on the table and that had rather a bad effect on my mind in regard to the cleanness of the place."

If conditions in Manitoba didn't keep Rob thinking of home, there were other forces in the field. St. Paul was still in many ways a "small town," and if Rob didn't write home often enough, there could be a reminder. Frank Waterous wrote: "Your Father called at my house last Sunday to know if we had heard from you. No doubt you have written him by this time."

The Fire Engine Trials

Although Rob's main assignment was the gasoline engines, he also supported Waterous' important efforts to market their steam fire engines to the City of Winnipeg. The Waterous Engine Works Co. letterhead shows the company made and sold steam fire engines, hook and ladder trucks, hose carts and hose wagons, hose and fire department supplies,

and fire hydrants, as well as gasoline engines. As for fire engines, technology was not yet totally clear. One of Rob's colleagues wrote him: "You asked how the City engine is getting along: We had the first conference today; what I mean by that is the two Mr. Waterous, Mr. Gibson, and myself arguing as to whether the machine should be made heavy or light—I am afraid they may get on the light side of the fence again and have no end of trouble, similar to the engines we have in the City at present. Of course, this is just a mere guess at present. [Handwritten] Keep this to yourself."

The Waterous Company had strong competition and was not popular with local officials in Winnipeg. Extensive demonstration tests were required. These included the time required to raise steam and to fill a 41,000 gallon water tank. A further test involved projecting a vertical stream of water, as high as the top of the city hall tower. Rob wrote his mother on October 27, 1898: "The grand test of the Winnipeg steamer is to take place Saturday and we expect to have a big time then." Unfortunately, things did not go smoothly. Rob noted: "Steamed the fire engine in the morning and blew out joint on top head of pump. Paper joint. Examined pump joints and found all the bolts loose."

The Waterous people tried to solve the mechanical problems. Rob noted: "Took pumps apart. Found water piston nuts loose. Took out plungers and scraped them down. Engine turned over easy after this. Found most of the nuts on yokes and con-rods loose." Other problems weren't so easy. "We are having a fight up here over the steamer and Mr. Waterous is expected here Sunday. The Fire Chief opposes the engine strongly and is doing all he can to down us, but his say won't last much longer and I think we will come out all right."

Rob was wrong. From St. Paul came bad news. "This morning we received a copy of a Winnipeg paper giving the steamer a rich brown roast and will say that is just about what I expected we would get, judging from what I hear, however, this is more of a political deal than any fault of the engine, although I cannot understand why the engine did not

do better work when throwing water into the tank on Wednesday." The Waterous people in Winnipeg evidently kept at it. "We are still at the fire engine business, I have been in Winnipeg now since the 28th of last month. I did not go on the trip last week as I intended to. The chief of the fire department is fighting us here and we are having a great time. The St. Paul office had sent reinforcements. "Mr. Waterous arrived Sunday at noon, we were all at the depot to meet him. He is getting fatter every day."

They kept trying. "We had another test today of the steamer and had to stop in the middle of it—the engine lost its water. I think this is the last of it. We took the pumps of the steamer apart this evening to find the trouble and tomorrow morning we have to put them together again."

Rob's field notes do show technical progress, however. "Winnipeg Steamer Test. Capacity. 4 lines 21/2" Hose, each 200 ft. long, each 11/4" Sin. nozzle. Pumped 2694 gal. in 30 min or 898 gal per min. Average lift about 10 ft. Water Pressure 40 lbs. Steam Pressure 65 to 125 lbs. High throwing. 2 lines 21/2" hose 200 ft each-siamesed into 50 ft 11/2" Ring Nozzle. Stream over flag staff of city hall 135 ft. Steamer Test at Winnipeg. Threw 11/2" Stream with Ring Nozzle-40 ft above Flag Staff on City Hall. Capacity test putting water in Sewer out of tank-4 lines hose—each 200 ft long. 11/4" S. B. Nozzles, after running 11 minutes engine lost her water." The stream of water arching over city hall must have been a fine sight to see. However, Rob's field notes do not say whether or not the tests were considered successful, either by Waterous or by the City of Winnipeg.

There was obviously continuing uncertainty, and the field engineer was expected to keep the St. Paul office current on the political consequences of fire engines. Waterous wrote on December 12, 1898: "Tell George to keep me posted about the fire engine matter if anything new turns up. I would also like to know the result of the elections when they take place."

Understandably Homesick

After several months, Rob's enthusiasm for the assignment in Manitoba, which he

must have understood to be temporary, seemed to be wearing thin. He was missing family and friends. "I guess you have nearly forgotten me by this time, or have you been watching the depot for me returning. You see I am still under queen's protection and I am likely to be so for a while yet. If possible I will help you eat your Thanksgiving turkey at home, but I am not going to make any more promises. Now that the flies have all turned up their toes, the grub is a little more eatable[sic]."

The approach of winter, although positive as to the lack of flies, brought further difficulties. "Up to the first of this month, the street cars have stopped at 10 o'clock in the evening. Now they are running them to 11 o'clock, but they charge 10 cents from 10 to 11,-P.M. How is that for street car accommodations. Since I have been up here I have only bought a cap, a pair of mitts, a pair of rubbers and a suit of underwear—about 3 sizes too large."

All in all, the job of an 1890s field engineer was taking its toll. Finally, there must have been an ultimatum. "Mr. Waterous left for home today. I told Mr. Waterous before he left that he'll see me in St. Paul on the 15th (of December) or soon after and he must get someone to take my place before that or stand the consequence. He says he will have a man up here before that."

Rob's notes and letters end at this point. He continued with Waterous for a while, then performed similar work for the C. A. Stickney Company, another St. Paul gasoline engine manufacturer. However, he did not have long to live. After marrying in 1900, and starting one of St. Paul's early automobile dealerships, Rob died in December, 1905, of cerebral meningitis, leaving his widow and an infant son.

Robert F. Garland, a retired financial executive, is a lifelong resident of the Ramsey County area. His previous writings have appeared in various technical journals and in the Journal of Irreproducible Results. Derflinger, a novel, was published in 1978.

Life in 1937's 'Home of Tomorrow'

Brian McMahon

With its gabled roof line and vinyl siding, the house at 1345 East Minnehaha Street, St. Paul, fits in nicely with its neighbors. But when it was built in 1937 by Cemstone Products Company as a demonstration concrete house, it was described as "the most unusual home built in the Twin Cities this year." People lined up and paid 10 cents admission to see the "Home of Tomorrow." Sixty years ago the house had flat roofs, open decks, and a glass brick bay window, but a succession of owners and changing architectural styles have obscured the interesting history and appearance of this concept house.

Cemstone Products Company, Inc, was a small concrete block company founded by H. T. Becken in the garage of his home at 1603 Minnehaha Avenue. To promote the use of its products he designed and built this demonstration house, a popular means of educating the public about building innovations. Over the years, St. Paul has had a number of concept houses built by product manufacturers, including an "all steel" prefabricated house built in 1935, and a "New American Home" which grew out of a competition sponsored by General Electric, also built in 1935.

The Cemstone House, in a press release promoting the opening of the "Home of Tomorrow", described it as "...built entirely of concrete,...patterned after a model shown at the Chicago Exposition (in 1934), and designed to show the superior features of cement as regards economy and practicability." It utilized "perfected cemstone building units" which were "...accurate in size and texture, and because of pressure in manufacture and the use of the latest and best machinery obtainable they are a harder and better unit with edges as smooth as cut stone."

Norma Entenmann was a young Cemstone employee in 1937 and was responsible for collecting the dimes from the approximately 200 people who lined up to see the house. "I was a secretary at Cemstone and had to work that Sunday. I

didn't get paid for it," she says, "but I did wind up with a husband." Vic Mohrlant stood in line and paid a dime to meet her, she recalls. After the opening, the building was occupied by the family of Mark English. Their son Earl remembers it as a "beautiful house which was very original in design." His parents had visited the Chicago Exposition of Progress, and had very "fashionable tastes." Because of ongoing problems with water leakage from the flat roofs, their occupancy was relatively short, and the house eventually was occupied by its builders from 1938 to 1945.

In the winter of that year, John Schulte was eight years old when his family bought the house. He fondly remembers his first holiday season and being able to plug in the lights of their first full size Christmas tree into an outlet in the fireplace mantle. Previously, John had been living with his parents and two older sisters in a refurbished garage in Maplewood.

The Schulte family history, with their determination to build for the future, reflected in many ways the forward looking nature of their new home. Before the family moved out of their garage home, they had managed to find the resources to send their oldest daughter Shirley to Macalaster College. In 1939, John's father, Clifford, took the bold step, during the depression years, of cashing in his life insurance policy to purchase the equipment needed to found the Modernistic Die Cutting Company. This family business is still thriving in St. Paul

The Becken family also has prospered, as the third generation is now managing the family business. The company, which started in a garage, has now grown to over 700 employees, and is celebrating its seventieth anniversary. Becken and Schulte were hockey teammates from Harding High School.

Brian McMahon is an architectural historian, who recently organized the "Bungalows of the Twin Cities" exhibit sponsored by the Ramsey County Historical Society.



Logo of the Women's Institute of St. Paul, designed by Mrs. John S. Dalton. Photograph from the Women's Institute of St. Paul collection, Minnesota Historical Society.

R.C.H.S.

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