

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Field Engineer
And His Canadian
Travels

Page 12

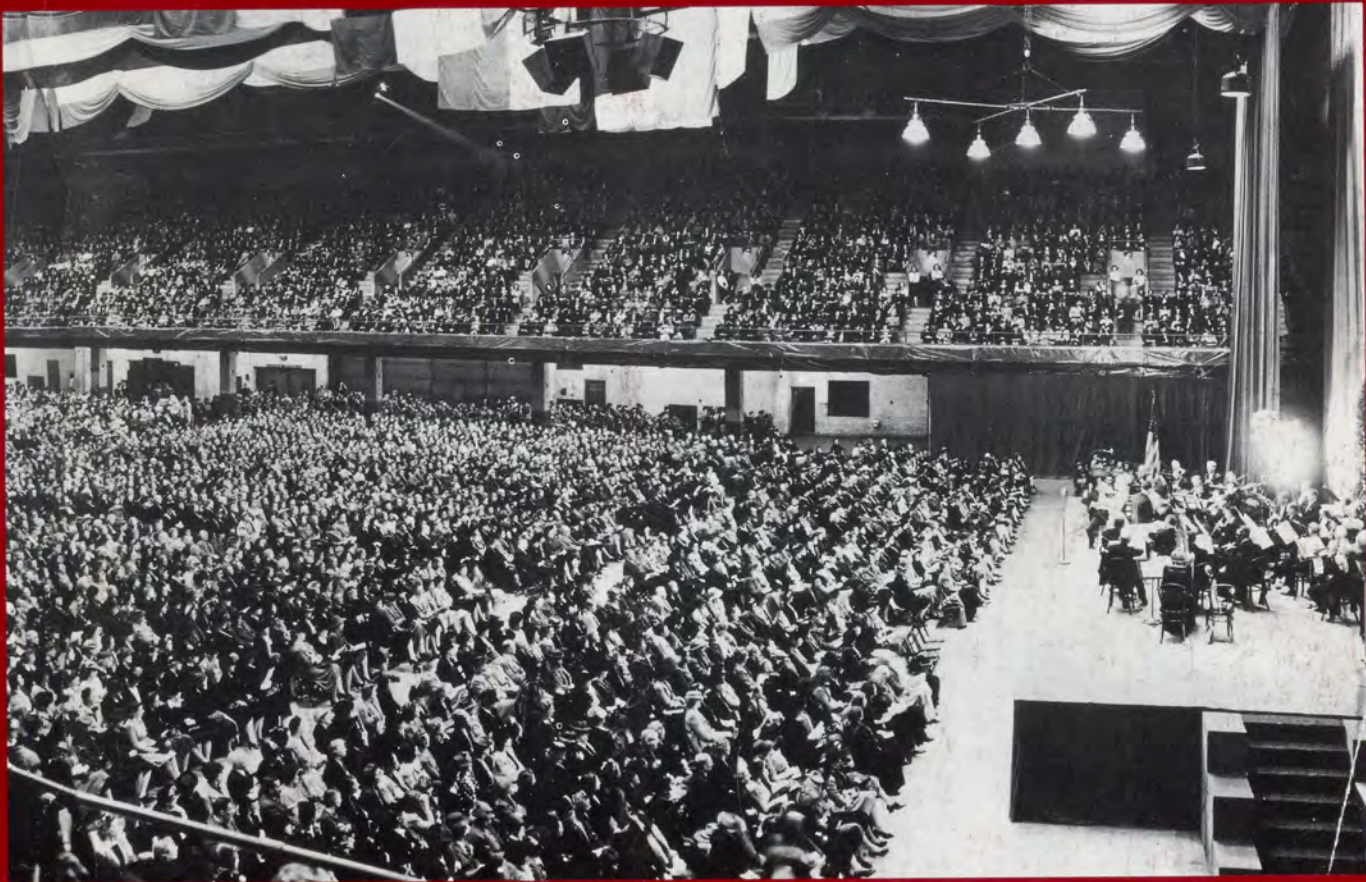
Fall, 1997

Volume 32, Number 3

The Women's Institute

And How It Revived Downtown St. Paul

Page 4



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.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Editor

Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John M. Lindley

Chair

Laurie Zenner

President

Howard M. Guthmann

First Vice President

Evangeline Schroeder

Second Vice President

Charles H. Williams, Jr.

Secretary

Robert F. Garland

Treasurer

Arthur H. Baumeister, Jr., Alexandra Bjorklund, W. Andrew Boss, Mark Eisenschenk, Joanne A. Englund, John M. Harens, Marshall R. Hatfield, Judith Frost Lewis, George A. Mairs, Margaret M. Marrinan, J. S. Micallef, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Thomond O'Brien, Bob Olsen, Marvin J. Pertzik, Fred Perez, James A. Russell, Vicenta D. Scarlett, Richard A. Wilhoit, Anne Cowie Wilson.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Pat Hart, Laurie M. Murphy, Vicenta Scarlett.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, Otis Godfrey, Jr., Ronald Hachey, Robert S. Hess, Fred T. Lanners, Jr., D. W. "Don" Larson, George Latimer, Frank Marzitelli, Joseph S. Micallef, Robert Mirick, Samuel Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome Plunkett, James Reagan, Solly Robins, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Susan Haigh, chairman
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Dino Guerin
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt
Commissioner Janice Rettman
Commissioner Jan Wiessner

Terry Schutten, manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102 (612-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1997, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 32, Number 3

Fall, 1997

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 The Women's Institute and How It Revived Downtown St. Paul
Kathleen C. Ridder
- 12 19th Century Technology and a Field Engineer's Travels in Canada
Robert F. Garland
- 17 Life in 1937's 'Home of Tomorrow'
Brian McMahon
- 18 'A Beautiful, High-Minded Woman'—
Emily Gilman Noyes
Rhoda R. Gilman
- 21 Growing Up in St. Paul
A Childhood Revisited: The State Fish Hatchery and a Collision of the Past with the Present
Muriel Mix Hawkins
- 24 Books

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. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

Few 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' bitter-sweet 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

Growing Up in St. Paul

A Childhood Revisited: The State Fish Hatchery And a Collision of the Past with the Present

Muriel Mix Hawkins

As recently as 1995 there still remained on the city map of St. Paul the notation, "State Fish Hatchery." This was the place we called home from the time we were infants until our father retired after forty-eight years with what was then the Minnesota Conservation Department.

The hatchery was also known as the Willow Brook hatchery for a small stream that flowed through the property, which dates back to 1878. It is located on the outer fringe of St. Paul, below the southern edge of Dayton's Bluff and near the tracks of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad line where fish could be shipped out. The three of us, Donald, Norma, and I, were the children of Oliver W. and Elsie M. Mix. After his graduation from high school in 1914, our father went to work for the State Fish Hatchery at Detroit Lakes, but he soon was transferred to St. Paul where he was first the hatchery foreman/superintendent, then area supervisor and regional manager. We all lived in a house on the hatchery grounds.

In 1987 my brother Don and I took a step back in time to walk through the hatchery grounds we had known as we grew up, and we saw that the familiar physical appearance of the area might soon be lost. Over the years, new roads built to handle changing traffic needs have erased the landmarks we remembered as children. We looked for all the remembered areas that would take us down the hill to home. The blacktop path that led down from Mounds Park, past the old Burlington Railroad Hotel, was in a bad state of repair. The path was overgrown with weeds, the stairway decaying, railings rusted or missing. Signs identifying the original winding road down into the area were all but missing. We once could see into the woods, but



St. Paul's Willow Brook Fish Hatchery about 1900. This postcard view is from the private collection of Robert J. Stumm, who wrote an earlier account of the fish hatchery for the spring, 1992, issue of Ramsey County History.

undergrowth has erased almost all signs of the road and it was difficult to see the hilly areas that had provided us with good sledding, skiing, and tobogganing.

The shape and size of the two old reservoir ponds had changed before we left the hatchery and little remains of the well that furnished water for the fish ponds or "runs" in the area we called "the lot." At one time, the lot had been fenced and its two connecting reservoir ponds had been our own private skating rink. Keeping the skating area cleared was our project. We loaded our sleds with wood to build a warming fire. A kerosene lantern provided light. A tent with a potbellied stove would be set on the ice for us to use after the hatchery workers had finished "stripping" the trout brood stock of their eggs.

Not a sign remains of any of the animal cages and their cement floors; there

were only the crumbling remnants of the bear den. At one time, many visitors came to see not only the fish in the outdoor pools but also the strange array of native birds and animals.

A walk to the "springs" was more than a little unfamiliar. New construction over Warner Road was underway for the benefit of bikers. We remembered a wooden toboggan run that also passed over Warner Road. The area we walked used to be the outer edge of a bog or swamp where a whisper of smoke would rise from a peat fire that resisted any attempt to extinguish it. The springs once were clear of brush and fenced in. Now weeds and brush have taken over the spot and the fence was long gone.

Only one house, our home, remained of the three originally on the grounds and its future was tenuous. As work at the hatchery changed, the need for people to



Muriel Mix Hawkins in 1943. All other photos with this article are from the author.

live there disappeared. The road that encircled the houses has shrunk to a small stretch. Ours is no longer the large white house with green trim of our childhood. It's now covered with brown shingles and has dark brown trim. The big screened front porch is gone, along with the distinctive round pillars at its corners.

However, visiting inside for the first time in more than twenty years, we saw that much of what we remembered was still there: hardwood floors, stained glass windows, the large doors installed during World War II between the dining room and a room that might be called a family room today. This enabled us to turn off the heat in some places to reduce the use of heating oil. It was in the "family room" that we set up a fresh-cut Christmas tree, trimmed it with carefully hung tinsel, lights, and baubles, and placed white cotton underneath to resemble snow.

There was an old upright piano that never seemed to hold a tune. That piano wasn't one of those popular at that time—the old brown oak variety piano. Instead, it was large and shiny black—an upright with some fancy cut-out wood spots on it. I have no real knowledge where it came from, other than that it had been in a fire at one time. When my parents left the fish hatchery, the piano was

donated to a small church. I think someone suggested placing a jar of water inside the piano to keep it in tune and prevent the wood from drying out. So we filled an old canning jar with water to add humidity.

My Dad would sit and play. I don't think he'd ever had lessons, but music had been an important part of his family life. Mother had a few lessons as a young woman and she would sit down, pick at the piano, and sing, although she couldn't carry a tune. The room had a library table; book shelves that held a set of encyclopedias added to week after week following an excursion to the movie theater on premium "give-away" night. The first large radio we owned had a single-play phonograph on its top. My dad didn't let us use it. Likely thought we'd break it. The first phonograph we had that would play more than one record automatically was a small one my sister bought in the 1940s. It took three records to play all of "Rhapsody in Blue." The radios were upgraded gradually until finally we had a floor model Philco; we listened to Little Orphan Annie, Jack Armstrong, Tom Mix, Fibber McGee and Molly. Saturday football games featured the Golden Gophers of coach Bernie Bierman, and there was the well-established habit of listening to the news with Cedric Adams at 10 p.m. on WCCO. On

December 7, 1941, the radio was on, we heard the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and after that all newscasts and speeches took on new meaning for the next several years. We read our books and newspapers there and, in time to come, that's where shower and wedding gifts were displayed.

The kitchen had been remodeled shortly after our parents moved. Gone was the clothes chute, a feature much enjoyed by us as children and by our children as well. What fun to drop messages and holler into. As small children, we also enjoyed the room arrangement that allowed us to ride round and round on a tricycle without needing to turn around. The radiators that spread heat around the house had disappeared. What would children do now for a place to dry out soggy mittens and dump school books after school? We remembered when the big old furnace burned coal, the sound of that coal rattling down a chute into the coal bin, the first sound on cold mornings of our father vigorously shaking down the furnace. Later the furnace was converted to oil and the empty coal bin held the tank with hundreds of gallons of fuel oil. During World War II, when fuel oil was rationed, the house had to be kept so cold that mother became ill.

Breakfast in those days included a bowl of oatmeal, toast, homemade jelly



A house is a home at the State Fish Hatchery. This photo was taken around 1940.

Scooping fish out of hatchery ponds (right), an activity that once was a favorite with visitors. Below, raceways and the superintendent's house. These postcard views also are from Stumm's collection.



address was "Foot of the Reserve." We collected our mail up on the hill at a confectionary near Mounds Park Hospital. A long flight of wooden stairs ran down the steep bluff and near the bottom was a tiny booth-like construction that was labeled Reserve Street.

In much earlier days, two long oblong pools were constructed out in the swamp area. To visit that part of the swamp as children was not usual, but the area had a quietness to it, and the railroad and hatchery seemed a long way away. In the spring we would pick marsh marigolds or "cowslips," as we called them, in the area of the pond. Lovely long-stemmed purple violets could be found on the bouncy tufts of ground in the swamp. Ah! There were frogs and, in the overflow pool, "shiners" to net and now and again small game fish that had escaped their tanks in the hatchery.

Transient and ephemeral, perhaps, are our relationships to a time and place.

Miriam Mix Hawkins graduated from Harding High School in St. Paul in 1941 and attended Mills Art College, a small commercial art school then on Kellogg Boulevard. She and her husband, O. D. Hawkins, now live in West Des Moines, Iowa.

and juice, real butter, and pasteurized milk. On really cold mornings, the milk in the glass bottles delivered by the milkman would be frozen and the cream would rise up out of the bottle into a strange looking long neck, with the round, flat cardboard seal sitting on top.

In the 1930s, with WPA labor, the old barn, shop building, storage garage, wooden ice house and other buildings had been removed and the hatchery replaced with a new building designed so that extra floors could be added. The garage filled the top floor and the basement contained some round pools, the familiar metal row tanks for raising small fish, and an area to store large cakes of ice. An ice house! Imagine our amaze-

ment, on our journey back in 1987, to see it converted into office space and the lower level also changed and filled with offices where young women worked. In our time, between seventeen and twenty men worked there and certainly no women. We shared the telephone line and number with the hatchery; one of us frequently took phone messages and whoever was available would run out and deliver the message or find someone to pick up the phone. We accepted after-hours business calls, too. April Fool's Day was fun because that was when we children answered all those calls for "Mr. Trout" or "Mr. Fish."

Before a newer, second road was built into the hatchery and railroad area, our



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.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989