

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Field Engineer
And His Canadian
Travels

Page 12

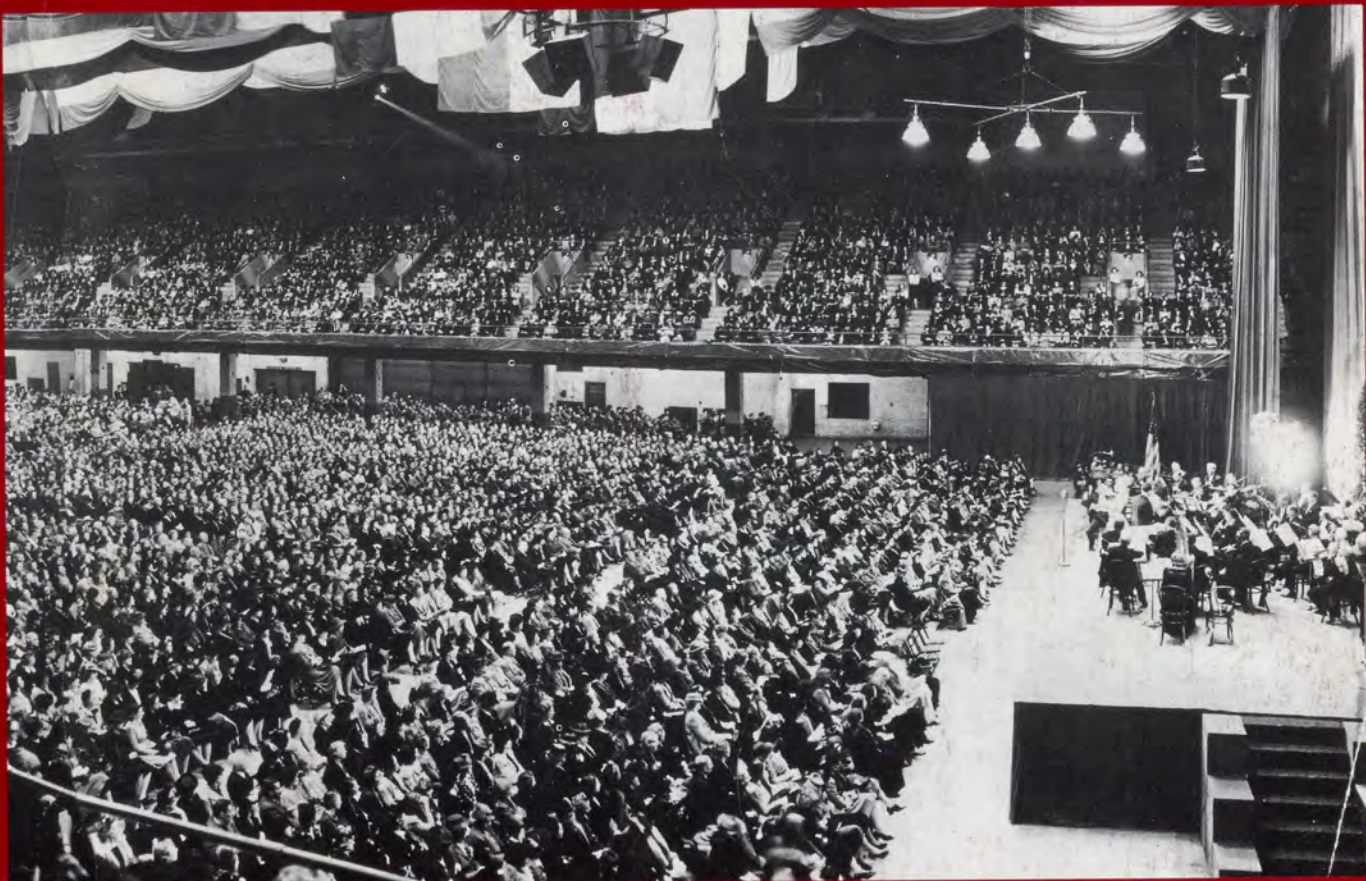
Fall, 1997

Volume 32, Number 3

The Women's Institute

And How It Revived Downtown St. Paul

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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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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 32, Number 3

Fall, 1997

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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

Speakers, Style Shows, and 12,000 Shoppers

The Women's Institute and How It Revived Downtown

Kathleen C. Ridder

Not quite sixty years ago, a remarkable group of women launched, in an eerie echo of today's concerns, a program that rejuvenated downtown St. Paul by luring 12,000 women to shop, dine, and attend programs in the city's core.

The mission of the Women's Institute, created in 1939 and sponsored by the *St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch*, was to generate retail business in St. Paul by actively encouraging women to shop in the city. Although the effort was initiated by B. H. Ridder, one of the three brothers who owned the newspapers, the Institute was entirely a women's effort. It demonstrated dramatically their power and influence in the face of community concerns that, even with the passing of almost sixty years, still exist.

Ridder had arrived in St. Paul in 1938 from California where he was working in the film industry. He planned a short stay. He wanted to learn why the newspapers were not making a satisfactory profit. In fact, the city itself was on the downgrade. A *Fortune* magazine article that year described an economic climate so dispiriting that "if St. Paul fell into the Mississippi it wouldn't make a splash." Knowing that advertising money was the life-blood of a newspaper, Ridder asked the sales force why advertising lineage was so low. He quickly learned that the merchants lacked the money to run ads because St. Paul women were streaming across the Mississippi to shop in Minneapolis where they found a more attractive environment in which to buy. Realizing that the challenge to reverse the newspapers' financial situation required a longer stay, he postponed his departure; in the end, he never left. He remained in St. Paul until he died in 1975.

Ridder's first step was to hire an economist from the University of Minnesota to study St. Paul's actual loss of revenue to its twin city. The report showed that

"ten to fifteen million St. Paul dollars are going to Minneapolis each year. . . . Since a dollar changes hands seventeen times in the area in which it is spent, St. Paul is losing out on approximately \$200,000,000 worth of purchasing power a year."

Ridder next "went to the business men and suggested that we do something to keep this money at home. He knew he 'couldn't run a live newspaper in a dead town.' Most of the men to whom Ridder talked merely shrugged. Hadn't they already tried everything, and failed?" Buy-at-home booster campaigns had been a miserable failure.

Since women spent 85 per cent of the nation's money, the challenge now was how to reverse the exodus to Minneapolis and persuade St. Paul women to shop in their own city. Ridder, who had become obsessed by the idea of re-educating women to the importance of changing their shopping habits, found a sympathetic audience in Agnes Kennedy whom he first met at a social gathering in White Bear Lake (and married in 1944). She spelled out the connection between women, retail sales and entertainment. In answer to Ridder's question, "How do you get women to shop in downtown?" she responded: "If we could give the women an entertainment program which would make them proud of their city, we could also insert an educational program about the importance of shopping in St. Paul. Get the top talent in America, sell it at the right price, and you'll be a success." She added: "It does no good to tell a woman to trade at home. Women don't like to be told. But give us a good reason

for spending our money here, and here is where we'll spend it. Give us a job worth doing, and we'll do it."

Ridder also realized that without the cooperation of the city fathers and well-known women in the city his promotion had no chance of succeeding. And so, as the newspaper reported, "a small group of women—Clara Kellogg, Frances Daniels, Katharine Spear, Josephine McCormack and Agnes Kennedy, all prominent in civic affairs, were invited by the *St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch* to launch the idea." Clara Kellogg was the wife of Frank B. Kellogg, secretary of state in President Calvin Coolidge's cabinet; Frances Daniels' husband was with the Archer, Daniels milling company; Katharine Spear's husband was the newspapers' financial editor; Josephine McCormack was the former president of the St. Paul Junior League; and Agnes Kennedy was a member of St. Paul's Kennedy family. They embraced the concept and accepted leadership positions in the new organization: Clara Kellogg, as honorary chairman; Frances Daniels, general chairman; Agnes Kennedy, treasurer and membership chairman; Katharine Spear, secretary and program chairman.

Agnes Kennedy eventually would become the Institute's executive director. The membership fee, which entitled a women to attend all its programs, was set at \$2.40 and it remained unchanged throughout the thirty-two years of the Institute's existence.

By May of 1939, organizational activity had culminated in a full-page ad in the first section of the Sunday, May 14, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. It was headlined, "Announcing the Women's Institute of St. Paul. . . . an organization devoted to furthering the social, civic and cultural

St. Paul

progress of this community." The ad included a letter from St. Paul Mayor William H. Fallon officially appointing the honorary chairman and the general chairman. Listed were entertainment attractions that already were signed-up and came with membership in the Institute:

- September 20: June Hamilton Rhodes, Style Impresario, and Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the President;

- October 20: Margery Wilson, Leading Exponent of Charm and Personality, and Elsa Maxwell, Mistress of the Unceremonious;

- November 21: Dorothy Draper, Nationally Known Interior Decorator, and Osa Johnson, America's Ace Woman Explorer;

- January 24, 1940: Fannie Hurst, Great Woman Novelist.

The attraction for February was to be announced later. The program was assembled by Katharine Spear and the cost underwritten by the newspapers. In the same edition, the front page of the Women's Section carried a story on the formation of the Women's Institute, with photographs of some of the women who had assumed chairmanships of the eighteen committees.

The chairmen also had enlisted 200 other St. Paul women to constitute a general committee. To present the concept of the Women's Institute, this committee organized a public luncheon that took place in the Continental Room of the St. Paul Hotel on May 16. Some 1,000 people attended, including many from well-known women's organizations, to hear how St. Paul was to get back on its feet.

Chairman Frances Daniels, and her Executive Committee established the precedent for a working board. They organized the eighteen committees and their 600 members and focused on the job of bringing business to St. Paul. One



Women lining up outside the St. Paul Auditorium for admission to a Women's Institute program. Memberships were capped at 5,000, later increased to 7,000, while seating in the auditorium was expanded to 12,500. All photographs used with this article are from scrapbooks in the Women's Institute of St. Paul collection at the Minnesota Historical Society.

committee ran a competition to chose a logo for the Institute. Mrs. John S. Dalton's design, chosen from fifty drawings, was awarded the \$50 prize. As head of the Membership Committee, Agnes Kennedy oversaw the membership drive. Membership ads in the newspapers announced the cost of the series as \$2. (The actual cost was \$25, but the deficit was underwritten by the newspapers.) Each member had the privilege of inviting a guest, free of charge, from outside the metropolitan area. No memberships were sold to Minneapolis women. By the end of the first month of the drive, 4,000 memberships had been purchased. Memberships had been capped at 5,000 to enable the remaining seats in the St. Paul auditorium to be held for out-of town guests. When the goal was reached in July, Agnes Kennedy asked Ed Furni, the auditorium manager, if it would be possible to increase the seating, and by August the auditorium had added another 1,000 seats. Eventually, the total seating reached 12,500, and memberships were limited to 7,000.

Every woman who enrolled received a

membership card with a coupon to exchange on or after September 6 for tickets at the Field-Schlick ticket office. As the tickets were alloted on a first-come basis, women started lining up the night before ticket-exchange day, and by the crack of dawn they surrounded the block where the Field-Schlick ticket office was located. With time, the coupons were exchanged in a more orderly fashion at the newspaper's offices.

The initial 5,000 members became active participants in the city's revitalization when they each were sent questionnaires relating to store merchandise, personnel, and service. There was no better way to learn why women did not shop in St. Paul than to survey such a large list of interested women. The questionnaire asked what stores lacked certain brand names in men's, women's, and children's apparel; what department store provided the best sales personnel; what store had the best phone-order service, the best delivery service, the best women's fashions. At the same time, teams of women visited stores to inspect their physical layouts. Did the store front need paint-



B. H. Ridder



Agnes Kennedy Ridder



Mrs. Thomas L. Daniels

ing? Did the counters inside appear old-fashioned? How was the merchandise displayed? Derogatory responses from both surveys were presented to the merchants to stir them into action. An estimated \$16 million was spent to renovate the stores and improve the merchandise.

The Hotel Committee of twenty women interviewed diners-out and tourists to learn how well the hotels and restaurants served them. Was the food good? Was it attractively served? Were the hotel accommodations up-to-date? The answers aroused the owners; new items appeared on menus and hotel rooms were renovated. The Ryan Hotel spent \$25,000 on refurbishings.

Stories, usually written by reporter "Sally Forth," constantly appeared in the newspapers under Women's Institute News. A June 4, 1940, column announced that Eve Curie would be the final speaker on that year's program. In early July, Sally Forth described the "smart little publication called *This Week in St. Paul*" put out by the Institute. She wrote that information about "points of interest, shops, public buildings, theaters, and churches is presented in compact form. Weekly the magazine will present information about current events and entertainment attractions."

An objective of the Institute, in addition to its program, was to bring other outstanding events to the city. The Music

Committee, chaired by Mrs. John G. Ordway and assisted by Mrs. Webb Raubenbush, planned a spring musical festival for 1940. Although their initial invitation to the Metropolitan Opera was turned down by Edward Johnson, general manager, because of scheduling difficulties, the committee still hoped that there might be a change in the Met's plans. An equally ambitious initiative focused on bringing the famous Rockettes of New York's Radio City to St. Paul for an en-

agement in cooperation with the local theater moguls. Sadly, nothing ever came of these two ideas.

To promote merchandise in the retail stores, the Institute sponsored a series of newspaper ads. One ad ran the names of stores where well-known brands of foundation garments could be found; another listed the stores that carried the best names in hosiery; a third identified stores where particular lines of women's clothing could be found, and another listed

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION WOMEN'S INSTITUTE OF ST. PAUL

302 Dispatch Building

I will become a member of the Women's Institute and am enclosing \$2 which will entitle me to attend the afternoon and evening performances of the five institute days. (September 20, October 20, November 22, January 24, February 21.)

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone No. _____

As my out of town guest, I would like to invite:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Application for membership in the Women's Institute. Fee listed here was \$2, but it was set at \$2.40 and the cost remained unchanged throughout the thirty-two years of the Institute's existence.



Mrs. Josephine McCormack



Mrs. Frank B. Kellogg



Mrs. Katharine Spear

stores carrying famous lines of men's suits and coats. Well-known brands of furniture carried by certain merchants were featured in a September 1939 ad.

The headline in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* of September 21, 1939, read: "12,000 Attend Initial Evening Event of Women's Institute." Among them were Sonnie Dawson, who sold blouses at Schueneman-Mannheimer; Gerry Seldon, a young bride from Detroit whose husband was starting his own business, Seldon Watts Feed and Grain Co., and Helga McNair, a new graduate of Vassar College. Recently, the three women, building on each other's memories, reconstructed for this writer the impact they felt the Women's Institute had on St. Paul.

"Think what it would be like now to have 12,000 women descend five times a year on the city," said Sonnie Dawson, now the owner of Sonnies, a women's apparel shop.

"Can you imagine," said Helga McNair, "how much it meant to women of all economic strata to be able to purchase a ticket for \$2.40 and see and hear well-known speakers and artists about whom people had only read or heard on the radio." Sonnie Dawson recalled that she made only \$8 a week at that time and that Schueneman's gave her the ticket as a bonus for good sales.

She also remembered that downtown

St. Paul was alive with activity on opening day. The streetcars were so crowded bringing people to downtown that women waited and waited to board. Parking lots were filled to capacity. Once downtown, women admired the shop windows, decorated especially for the first of many Institute Days, and they swarmed into the stores to see the style shows.

"But without Ben Ridder and the newspapers," Gerry Seldon observed, "there would have been no Institute. He was the originator of the idea and, fortunately, women leaders in St. Paul enthusiastically supported this new promotion of their city."

The motivation of the women who adopted Ridder's idea so wholeheartedly and volunteered untold hours to build a program that promoted the city for thirty-two years was due to several factors: Tickets were cheap. Civic pride was involved. The women knew the downtown retail area was suffering. There was guilt. The women knew they had been shopping in Minneapolis. And they were grasping for new ideas. Bringing well-known attractions to the city was big-time stuff. It became a cooperative effort, a working relationship among the city, the women, and the newspaper. Here was an opportunity for women to display their leadership abilities.

Helga McNair pointed out that one of

the women on the Executive Committee was Adelaide M. Enright, the first woman president of a United States milling company, and a company, Old Fashioned Millers, Inc., that was located in St. Paul. Helga remembered "how exciting it was to attend a tea that Adelaide gave for Eleanor Roosevelt. The First Lady was so charming—just as people said she was. Adelaide knew Eleanor Roosevelt so well that when she went to Washington she stayed at the White House. Little did I think at the time that I would end up as the chair of the Institute in 1950-51 and introduce to the large Institute audience the celebrities of my year."

"Agnes Ridder had a great ability to draw people to work on Institute programs. And women were very loyal. Pat Cammack kept the Institute board minutes for years," Gerry Seldon, Institute chairman from 1954 to 1955, added.

The energy released by the women during the Institute's first months was remarkable. Mrs. George Benz and her committee began in early June to plan noon buffets held at the Casino in the St. Paul Hotel and the Lowry Hotel ballroom and featuring speakers and style shows for out-of-town guests. Luncheon topics covered a wide range of women's interests; approaches were made to local experts in such fields as Americana, old English silver, or jewels. Before the

opening program on September 20, 1939, the Style Show Committee members held many meetings with staffs of the St. Paul stores to decide on the theme for each store's presentation, whether in their stores or the hotels. They agreed the styles must "be wearable and suitable to the many different activities of the average woman's life." Sonnie Dawson remembered that on Institute Day the English Tea Room at Schueneman-Mannheimer was filled to capacity with women who were there to see the style show.

A window display competition, run by the Institute, was another store promotion. The first displays were created by the stores and displayed their new styles. An Institute committee judged them "on style appeal, merchandise arrangement, artistic viewpoint, and most advantageous display of the Women's Institute emblem." The Emporium department store won the award. Later the windows were designed by members of various St. Paul organizations and then judged. "This brought members downtown to see how their organization had fared. I did the windows for Hope Furs as a representative from the Inter-club Council," Gerry Seldon recalled.

The most important element of Institute Days apparently was the program. As Sonnie Dawson remembered it, "Here I was the little kid from the farm, and I could see and hear women who had received public acclaim. The women were famous. Up till then, the speakers in my life were all males—ministers, professors, politicians."

Speakers obviously had flair and were appropriate for their time, and the opening program bore that out. A general complaint by the women had been that clothes the stores carried lacked style. To counteract that, the afternoon program on September 20, 1939, opened with a gala style show. A special forty-foot runway was constructed for the show, which was emceed by June Hamilton Rhodes, a well-known stylist from the East. She selected clothes from St. Paul stores. Styles modeled had been chosen from the August Paris collections by American buyers and by Grand Duchess Marie, a cousin of the late Czar Nicholas II of



Holm & Olson's window, designed by an Institute member, October 26, 1944.

Russia, and copied by American manufactures. The Grand Duchess did the commentary and the clothes were worn by professional models and young Institute members, including Helen Moles, Winifred McConville, Virginia Binger, Eunice Brewster, Barbara Wolff, Elizabeth Russell, Barbara White, Bonnie Fobes, Josephine Okes, Jeanne Girard, and Geraldine O'Brien. Jewelry valued at \$500,000 was brought to St. Paul from New York by Bullard Bros. and Bockstruck. Georgia Carroll, a familiar face from the fashion magazines, wore the jewels as she walked up and down the runway to background music.

Governor Harold Stassen introduced Eleanor Roosevelt at the evening program, after lauding the work of the Institute. Mrs. Roosevelt's talk, "Responsibility of the Individual to his Community," affirmed the mission of the Institute for the sell-out audience, mainly of women. She urged them "to study your own community—not only the city of St. Paul but the surrounding community, because a city depends upon the environment; it depends upon a great many factors outside the city itself." She stressed the importance of housing in defining the life and appearance of a city. Looking to the future, she asked: "What will the women of

America plan for the peace that is to come after the war is over?" Her enthusiastic support of the Women's Institute reverberated through her "My Day" newspaper columns of September 23 and 24.

After the successful inauguration of the Institute program, its activities continued unabated. The first of many outside attractions sponsored by the Institute arrived two days after the opening program. Benny Goodman came to town to play at the Orpheum Theater in the program that had captivated the New York audience at Carnegie Hall. He brought with him legendary musicians Lionel Hampton, Ziggy Elman, Chris Griffin, and Fletcher Henderson. Later through the fall and winter the Institute was to sponsor six plays, beginning with the Theater Guild production of "The Philadelphia Story," starring Katharine Hepburn.

In the second program, Elsa Maxwell opened her talk, "Science of Laughter," by asking that the auditorium lights be dimmed and that the audience don the black mustaches that had been given to them with their programs. When the lights were turned up, the audience burst into laughter. Using anecdotes and suggestions for party giving, she enthralled the evening audience.



Eleanor Roosevelt speaking to the Women's Institute, September 20, 1939.

To maintain and emphasize the Institute's mission, a contest was run for the best answer to the following question: "What outstanding developments and improvements have taken place this year . . . in retail sales . . . in amusement enterprises . . . in hotel facilities . . . in downtown parking?" The contest ended November 29. The winners of the contest were announced in the newspaper in early January. Ruth Hazelwood won the prize (a trip to California) offered to women of St. Paul and vicinity. Gladys Nissen of Anoka received the award for women outside of the St. Paul area.

The members had a full plate for the November Institute day. In the afternoon Dorothy Draper used slides to describe how to decorate your home. Irene Castle showed the clothes that Ginger Rogers wore in the movie, "Vernon and Irene Castle," to illustrate her talk on fashion. The Trapp Family sang at the evening program and explorer Osa Johnson did a commentary on the movie, "Jungle Calling," which she had made with her deceased husband.

The Christmas Choral Pageant on December 23 brought the 1939 Institute activities to a close. Mrs. W. Homer Sweney and her committee spent endless

hours organizing this city-wide event. Some 10,000 people gathered on the steps of the State Capitol on a cold winter's night to watch a tableau of five nativity scenes and listen to 2,200 singers from choirs throughout the city. The celebration reached a climax when everyone participated in singing Christmas carols.

The following year the pageant moved into the St. Paul auditorium where more than 12,000 people would turn out for the holiday event. It had such great success because the Institute co-sponsored the performance and the newspapers subsidized the cost. Through the years Geisen's costume company supplied its most prized outfits for the tableaux. Pat Lowenberg, chairman from 1960-61, played an angel in a nativity scene during her 1940-1941 senior year at St. Joseph's Academy. She held her arms in an upright position for twenty minutes—no greater sacrifice for the Institute.

The Institute's momentum did not slacken as the committees prepared for the January and February programs. Speakers and style shows put on by stores at hotel luncheons were planned. Fashion continued to be a theme of Institute programs; it stimulated buying. Renee Lang, a nationally known stylist, used twin models to illustrate wrong and right ways of dressing. Olga Samoroff, a music authority, urged the women to take a more active role in culture by telling them it was "the duty of American women to keep music alive, in as much as cultural advancement in Europe has been halted by the war." Author Fannie Hurst warned the women not to let Eastern book critics decide their reading material by "goose-stepping to the tune set by Eastern critics."

Eve Curie, biographer of her parents, Marie and Pierre Curie, discovers of radium, closed the Institute series on the evening of February 20, 1940. Chicly dressed, she brought the war closer to home with her talk on "French Women and the War." The women of France, she said, were occupying 500,000 positions that had been vacated by officers and soldiers who were at the front—activities that were in direct contrast to American women as described by other speakers such as Greta Palmer who lectured on

"Defending the Women of Leisure," and Sidone Gruenberg who challenged the women to keep the family together in her lecture on "The Challenge of Present Day Parenthood."

Looking back, Gerry Seldon said recently: "St. Paul was in the economic doldrums and the Women's Institute turned the tide. I thought that the Institute was so important to the economic life of the city that I eagerly joined the board when asked in 1948." Helga McNair remembered that "everyone talked about the new positive feeling in the city." Sonnie Dawson spoke of how the Institute was the talk of her co-workers. "I can't say what it meant to the city's economy but it certainly gave the life of the city a lift."

The Foreword to the Institute's first-year scrapbook, titled "Promoting a City," reported St. Paul's economic gains in 1939, over 1938: "Retail store sales are up from 5 to 14 percent over the corresponding period in 1938, each month. Wages paid in St. Paul in 1939 exceeded those paid in 1938 by eleven million dollars. Bank deposits for the year 1939 increased by 4.1 percent from the same figure for 1938, rising from \$1,879,028,000 to \$1,958,139,000." No source is given



Elsa Maxwell and the black mustache that launched her "Science of Laughter" talk.

A Christmas Choral Pageant is presented on the steps of the State Capitol --- 2500 choristers participate --- an audience of 10,000 from St. Paul and surrounding area attends.

The WOMEN'S INSTITUTE OF SAINT PAUL
Presents the



CHRISTMAS CHORAL PAGEANT

Yule Pageant Will Attract Thousands
Choirs to Sing on Capitol Steps This Evening

5 SCENES FROM NATIVITY— Pageant Plans Told

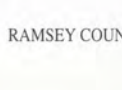
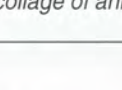
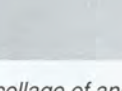
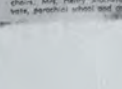
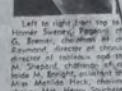
By SALLY FORTH
Five scenes from the Nativity will be presented at the Christmas Choral Pageant on the steps of the State Capitol on the eve of December 23.

Northwest Bid to Outdoor Christmas Pageant in St. Paul

By SALLY FORTH
THE ENTIRE NORTHWEST IS INVITED TO ATTEND THE Christmas Choral Pageant of the Women's Institute on the steps of the State Capitol at 6:30 P. M. Saturday, December 23.

Five scenes from the Nativity will be presented at the Christmas Choral Pageant on the steps of the State Capitol on the eve of December 23. The pageant will begin playing and the choir will begin singing at 6:30 P. M.

1,509 Register to Sing In Christmas Pageant
By SALLY FORTH
The Christmas Choral Pageant of the Women's Institute on the steps of the State Capitol on the eve of December 23 will attract thousands of choristers and an audience of 10,000.

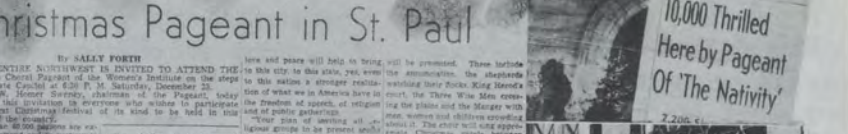


Be Sure to Attend the
CHRISTMAS CHORAL PAGEANT
TOMORROW
DEC. 23
6:30 P. M. to 7:30 P. M.
ON THE STATE CAPITOL STEPS

3,000 VOICES IN CHRISTMAS SONG
A GORGEOUS LIVING PICTURE
The most elaborate presentation of Christmas in the Northwest
IT'S ALL FREE



10,000 HEAR MASSES CHOIR SING OF NATIVITY



10,000 Thrilled Here by Pageant Of 'The Nativity'



A collage of announcements for one of the famed Christmas Choral Pageants the Institute presented.



Downtown St. Paul lighted up for the holidays. The Institute sponsored an effort to make St. Paul "The Christmas City" and also sponsored a home lighting contest with \$1,000 in prizes.

for these figures, but in a letter from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Ron Grunevald, public affairs officer, stated that St. Paul bank deposits were \$169.8 million in 1939 and rose to \$201.9 in 1940. Even though the figures and years are not the same, the statement can be construed to indicate the city's improved economic status following the establishment of the Institute.

With the end of the 1939-40 season, retailers, wholesalers, and politicians were invited to comment on the Institute. The letters of congratulation came from a wide range of people, beginning with Governor Harold Stassen and including Mayor Fallon, and department store executives. Howard Seesel, president of Field-Schlick, wrote:

"It is impossible for us to give you the exact percentage or the exact dollars, as our records are kept in such a way that this division cannot be made. However, we can say that on the day of each meeting of the Institute our business was from 25% to 35% ahead of the same day the previous year, and we have noticed an ever increasing number of out-of-town visitors in the store."

Bullard Brothers' E. W. Hohlsact wrote that "the Institute had not only aroused the women to the fact that St. Paul is the best market to shop—but it has also awakened the merchants and spurred them on to greater efforts to merit and hold this patronage. The tremendous results have been very apparent . . ."

The Institute continued to promote St. Paul with its high caliber annual programs. Well-known opera stars such as Robert Merrill, Rise Stevens, Geraldine Farrar, Jan Struther, and Roberta Peters appeared on the evening programs. Fred Waring and The Pennsylvanians, Tito Guizar and Company, and Guy Lombardo & His Royal Canadians also performed. Individual stars, nationally and internationally famous—Victor Borge, Liberace, Roger Williams, and George Feyer—appeared several times for Institute audiences. Writers, correspondents, fashion experts, and commentators spoke on various subjects.

And the members of the Institute board sustained through the years their vital interest in the civic and social life of St. Paul. A later article reported that during the war "the Institute involvement

runs to a staggering 73 items." At one performance, 30,000 pounds of metal was deposited at the civic auditorium. The Institute's Beautification Committee, formed in 1939, never wavered in its goal of improving the city. The members campaigned for improved downtown parking, removal of over-hanging street signs, and up-grading of local parks. Under the Institute's leadership, a Social Code for St. Paul was developed in 1954 "as a guide to parents and their teenage sons and daughters." This was a collaborative effort with students, school administrators, principals from public, private, and parochial schools, the judicial system and community organizations working together to write the code.

In Rice Park, on the stone base of the fountain, is a plaque which reads, "The Women's Institute of St. Paul dedicates this beautification of Rice Park to the pioneer spirit depicting the source of cultural, political, educational and natural resources of our area." The renovation of Rice Park, a three-year project, was a project that recognized the efforts of St. Paul women to beautify their city. At its dedication in 1965, Mayor George Vavoulis turned to the Beautification Committee, chaired by Gerry Seldon, and saluted the Institute's contribution to the city with the words, "What the power of organized women in our community can accomplish." After twenty-five years the Institute was still a recognized power in the city.

The thirty-two-year history of the Institute's entertainment program ended in the spring of 1971. The evening's star, Robert Merrill, brought down the curtain as he and the audience sang "Auld Lang Syne." It was a fitting finale for a women's organization that had contributed so much to the vitality of the city of St. Paul.

Kathleen Ridder is married to Robert Blair Ridder, the nephew of B. H. Ridder. She served on the Institute board for many years and participated in its activities. She has used the knowledge she gained from this organization of strong women in her work in the women's movement.



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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