

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Fall, 1998

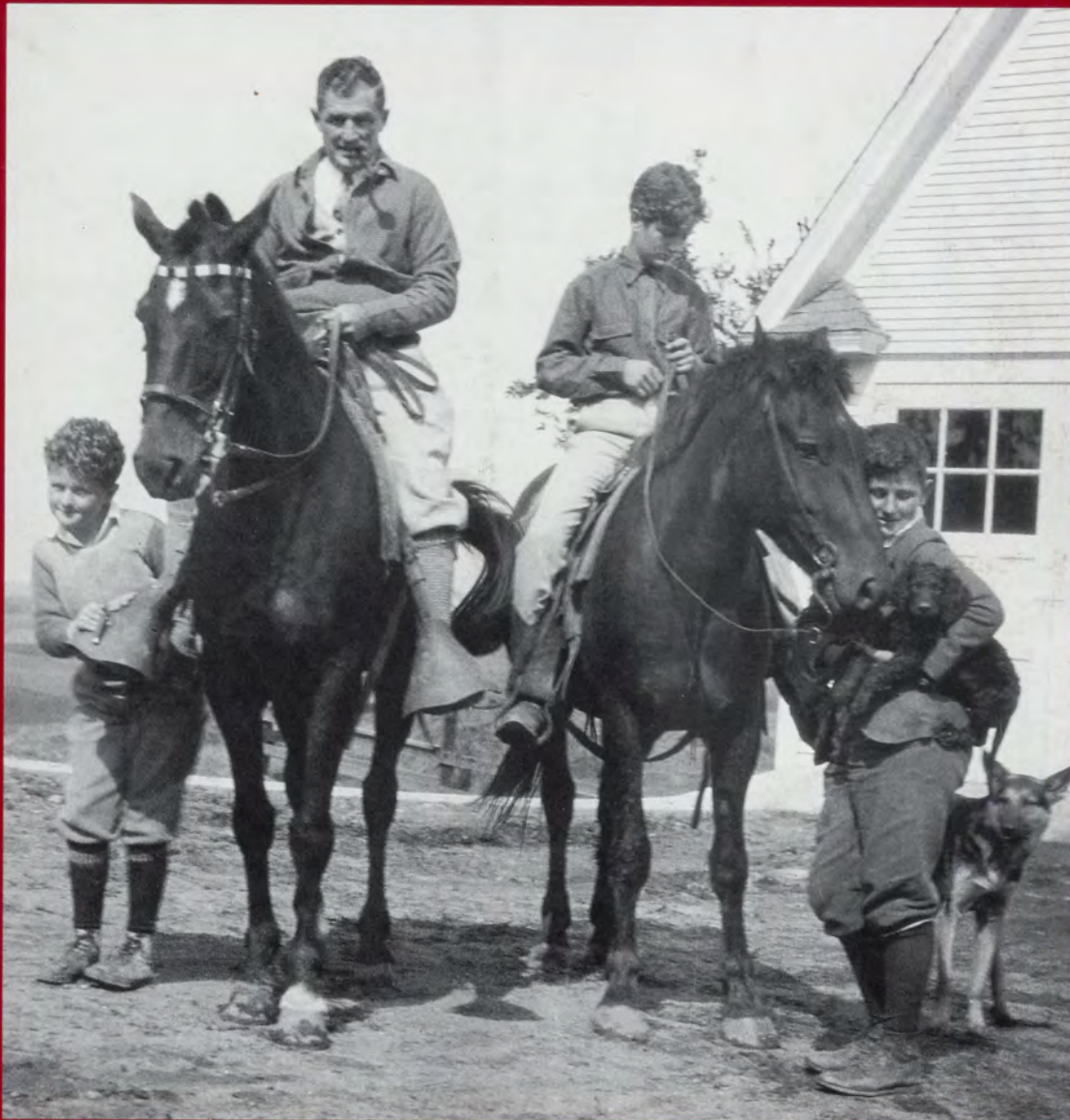
Volume 33, Number 3

Henry Bosse,
Mark Twain And
The Mighty Mississippi

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Richard C. Lilly

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The Lilly family at their Mendota Heights farm. Left to right: David, Richard C. Lilly, Sr., Richard, Jr., and John.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

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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

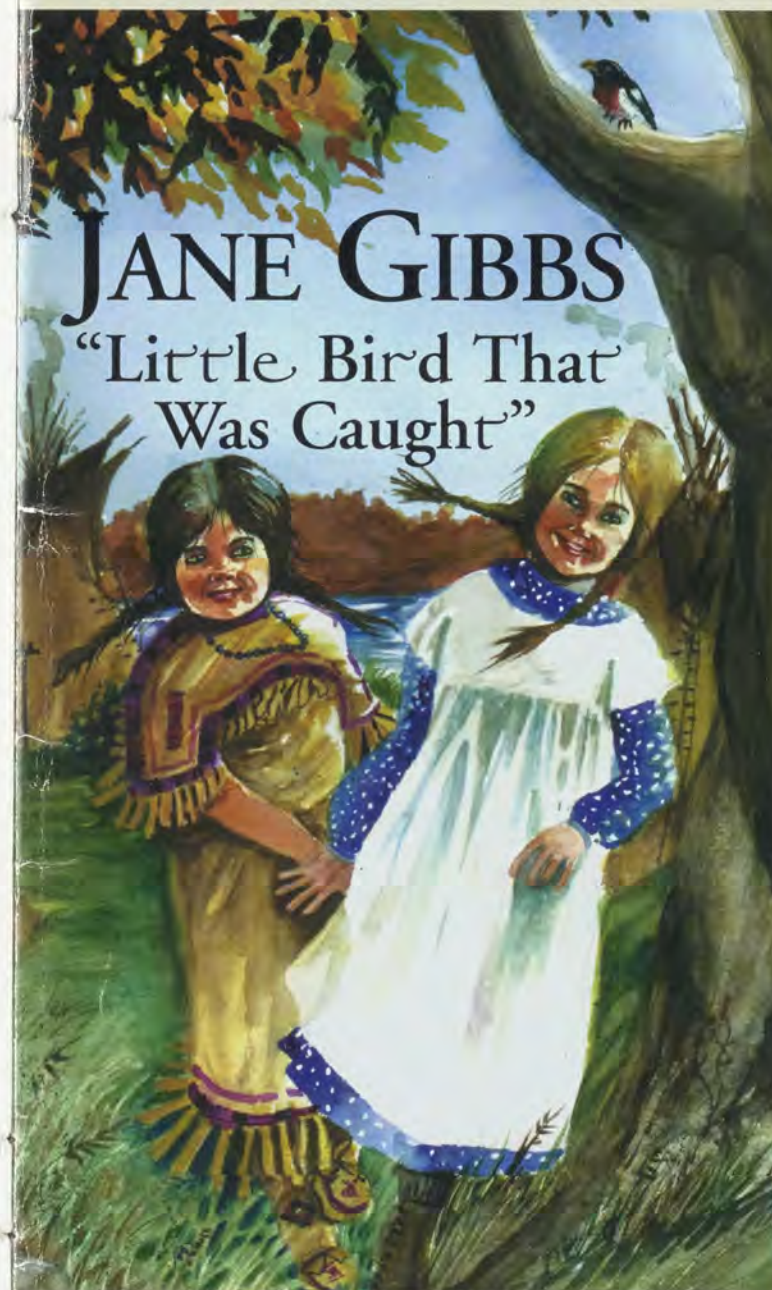
A Message from the Editorial Board

Many long-time residents of Ramsey County have heard of or know about the banking activities and contributions of Richard C. Lilly, a former president of the First National Bank in St. Paul. Lilly had a distinguished banking career that began in 1900, when he was sixteen, and lasted until his retirement from First Bank as president in 1945. Business associates, community leaders, and friends of Lilly who had followed the many twists and turns in his banking career understood that he epitomized the American dream in his rise from very humble beginnings to great business success. Lilly was a self-made man, but as Virginia Brainard Kunz shows in the lead article in this issue, Lilly led two lives; he was also a very giving man whose philanthropy serves as a model of generosity even today. Until his death in 1959, Lilly repeatedly shared his wealth, time, and talents with many schools, churches, and charities that have continued to make Ramsey County a better place to live for its citizens.

The Ramsey County Historical Society has recently remounted an exhibit of Henry Peter Bosse's unusual cyanotype photos of the Mississippi River that Bosse took in the 1880s and 1890s. In honor of the reopening of this exhibit, our magazine includes an insightful and persuasive article by Michael Connor, who originally discovered many of the Bosse prints in 1991. Connor's article demonstrates the definite influence of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) on certain aspects of Bosse's photographic work. The similarities and parallels that Connor identifies between many of Bosse's photos and Twain's descriptions of the Mississippi are remarkable and shed new light on our understanding of Bosse's achievements as a visual artist.

John M. Lindley,
Chair, Editorial Board

An Exciting New Book for Young Readers



Based on a true story about real people
and events that happened.

PUBLISHED BY THE RAMSEY COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Books, Etc.

MacMillan—The American Grain Family

Duncan MacMillan with
Patricia Condon Johnston

Introduction and Epilogue by
John Steele Gordon

Afton, Minnesota: Afton Historical
Society Press

350 pages, 325 photographs (\$30 cloth)

Reviewed by G. Richard Slade

The Afton Historical Society Press is an important contributor to our region's quality of life as it continues to publish a wide range of interesting, educational, and esthetically attractive books. The Press—and we—are fortunate to have a competent and discriminating editor in Patricia Condon Johnston and an affirmatively supportive patron in William Duncan MacMillan. The combination has brought us books about regional history, architectural style, life at Fort Snelling in the nineteenth century, gardens, and other interesting visual topics.

In *MacMillan—The American Grain Family*, the latest product of the Afton Press, Duncan MacMillan gives us a narrative that includes some of all these perspectives. John Steele Gordon, an economic historian, provides bookends, a Foreward and Epilogue, that set the stage for MacMillan's saga and provide both a framework and an *en voi*, an appraisal of the years since the death of John MacMillan, Jr.

Duncan MacMillan was born in 1930 into the midst of the MacMillan clan, and grew up among what seems a vast crowd of MacMillans, McMillans, and Cargills—siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, parents and grandparents, and great aunts and great uncles. Grand-



W. Duncan MacMillan

father John Hugh MacMillan (John, Sr.) and his brothers inserted the additional "a" into their family name; as that generation was the first of the McMillans to enter the grain business, it serves as a good delimitation of the "Grain Family." While the book provides a family tree, it is (a) complex and (b) incomplete, leaving the reader totally at sea about the Cargill families who were and continue to be players in the corporate and social milieu. (The challenge to the innocent reader is made more complex by the fact that both the McMillans and Cargills used repetitive first names; one must watch the middle initials and the generations carefully.)

The book begins with John McMillan, a tenant farmer from Glen Nevis, Scotland, whose two claims to fame were a stint in the British army that included the great battle on the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec City in September, 1759; and fathering Duncan

Ban McMillan in 1783. The latter emigrated to Canada and sired eleven children, one of whom, Duncan D. MacMillan, became a successful banker in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and the father of the aforementioned John H. MacMillan (and six siblings).

In his passionate enthusiasm for family history, Duncan, the author, has visited sites of his forebears' homes and taken pictures of surviving buildings and relevant tombstones. The book is enriched by these and dozens of other images from family archives and personal collections. His history of John McMillan is taken from army records rather than more personal documents, but the lives of succeeding generations are amply illustrated by citations from correspondence and journals, which have been carefully researched and maintained. Letters from grandfathers to young grandsons are not broadly informative of the capacities of the elder man but they do illustrate deep family concern and affection.

Three individuals emerge from the careful cataloguing of MacMillans. First is John Hugh MacMillan (1869–1944), who came to Minneapolis as general manager of the Cargill Elevator Company in the fall of 1903; Cargill Elevator was owned by Will Cargill, John's father-in-law. Second is John Hugh MacMillan, Jr., (1896–1960), who became president of Cargill, Inc., in 1936, and who, with his brother Cargill, took the company international. Third is Duncan himself. Although his narrative stops at his father's death in 1960, there are plenty of glimpses of him in later years, as he contributed to the many ventures of the corporation and the family.

Reading the book is much like look-

ing at someone's family photo album while the curator of the album looks over your shoulder and provides illuminating embellishment. You look at a picture of a stately house in LaCrosse and learn that it is a remodeled version of a home built by the McMillans but lost in bankruptcy to the Cargills, that the house fell into disrepair and was leveled, but that Duncan was able to save much of the woodwork and has installed it in the Waycrosse offices (the family business suite). You learn that John, Jr., and Marion loved to vacation in Jamaica, that they stayed in a number of lovely places, and that their children also enjoyed that island.

The book is neither a biography nor an autobiography; it is not a comprehensive history of a family tree, although it covers certain branches thoroughly. It lacks enough of the history of Cargill, Inc., so that the reader has little sense of the dramatic success of this Grain Family in building that enterprise. We know that John, Senior and Junior, worked very hard and that their health suffered as a result. We know that John, Jr., was more than willing to follow new ideas in personal health and diet, and that he had substantial thoughts about the characteristics of a managing elite. We know that the families enjoyed extensive vacations and trips on whatever generation of the *Carmac* (yacht) was available. (Availability of jet aircraft has reduced the travel time of present generation MacMillans but not the interest in travel.) We do not know anything about other "grain families"—mostly European—who once were globally superior to the Cargill group and who have largely disappeared.

What we do know, however, is that the book is an interesting read about an amazingly successful family business; it is primarily interesting because the author cared about family lore, did the research, and kept the documentation. His voice is on every page.

G. Richard Slade is a retired St. Paul banker and a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Editorial Board.

Shaping My Feminist Life— A Memoir

Kathleen C. Ridder

Foreword by Jill Ker Conway

St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press

202 pages (cloth \$24.95, paper \$15.95)

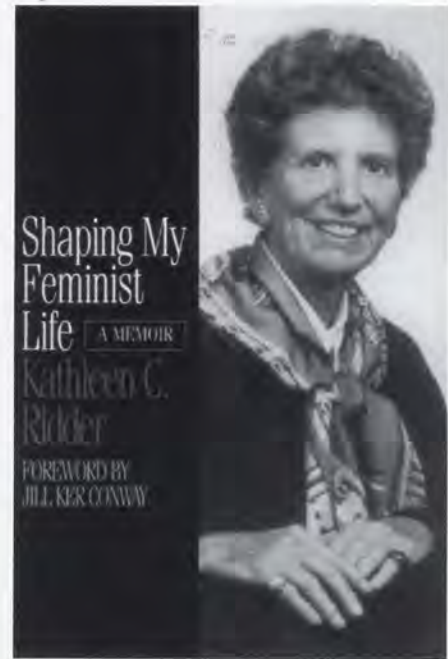
In 1943, Kathleen Ridder arrived in Duluth where her husband, Robert Blair Ridder, was working for two family-owned newspapers, the *Duluth Herald* and the *Duluth News-Tribune*. She was twenty years old, a newly-acquired daughter-in-law of the wealthy and socially prominent Ridder family, a native of New York City, and not exactly unprepared for life in the upper strata of her new community.

Her mother, Muriel MacGuire Culman, managed a well-known women's dress shop housed in a renovated brownstone on East Sixtieth Street in New York. Her father was a stockbroker who had made "a great deal of money" during the free-wheeling 1920s. When he was devastated by the Stock Market Crash of 1929, her mother's income became essential to maintaining the family's way of life until he had recovered financially.

Young Kathleen was educated in elite Catholic schools, followed by two years at Smith College. Even so, she writes candidly, she was somewhat naïve as she determined to be a model wife, coped with her new home, and "immediately saw how differently people were treated within Duluth's upper-class setting." The Kitchi Gammi Club, a men's club, not only had a separate entrance for women but also a women's dining room.

After four years in Duluth, where she completed her college degree, she moved with her husband and young daughter (the first of four children) to St. Paul. There Kathleen Ridder's sense of fairness was soon tested once again as she saw the disparity between the economic plight of the people who lived near the city's center and the living standard of her own social and economic group.

Ahead of her lay fifty-some years of

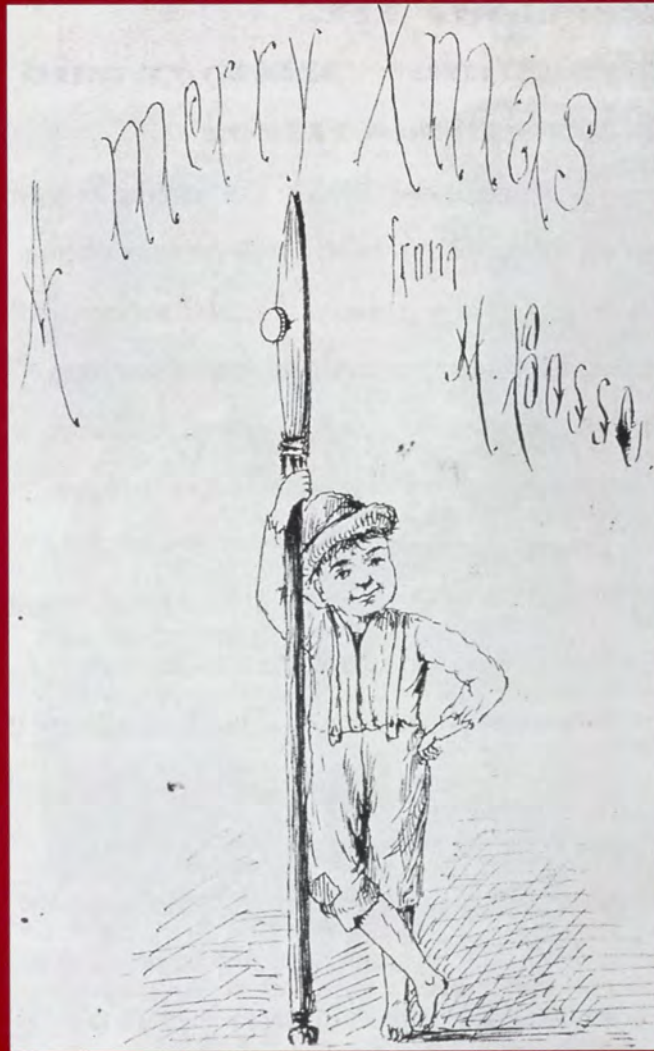


blending her private with her public life as she sought to be her own person and to make a difference. Community service and personal accomplishments comingled as she worked on behalf of the Independent-Republican party, the Urban League, the emerging civil rights movement, alternative education, Twin Cities regional government, feminist organizations, and the women's athletic program at the University of Minnesota.

Her story is laced with the names of many other Minnesota women like herself who made important contributions to their communities as they moved with her through the minefields of public policy that all-too-often by-passed the concerns of women and children, not to mention common sense. Unifying her narrative is her conviction that privilege and position bring with them a sense of *noblesse oblige*, an obligation to work toward the social good of the community.

This is a book that should appeal to thousands of women, those who lived through the perilous decades of the 1920s and 1930s, and the daughters who followed them as young wives into the 1940s and 1950s.

V.B.K.



Henry Bosse's whimsical Christmas card, another Huck Finn-like boy holding a drafting pen. This sketch is from Michael Connor's collection and reproduced here with his permission. See the article about Henry Bosse and Mark Twain beginning on page 18.

R.C.H.S.

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

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