

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Aches and Pains of
Property Owners:
Taxes, Fees, 1856–1904

Page 17

Fall, 2000

Volume 35, Number 3

All the Frailties of Human Nature
The Ramsey County Attorney's Office
and Its Colorful 150-Year History

—Page 4



Pierce Butler, Ramsey County attorney from 1892 to 1896 and future associate justice of the United States Supreme Court, with Henry G. Hardy, left, a clerk, and S. C. Donnelly, right, an assistant county attorney. This photo, from the Ramsey County Attorney's Office, probably was taken when the office was located in the 1880s Ramsey County Courthouse at Fourth and Wabasha in downtown St. Paul. See the article on the history of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

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A Message from the Editorial Board

In 1999 Ramsey County celebrated its sesquicentennial anniversary of its founding. As part of the effort to look back at the county's past 150 years, this issue of our magazine opens with Anne E. Cowie's history of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office. Trained as an attorney and as a historian, Anne Cowie captures the changes that have taken place in this office over the years and highlights some of the flamboyant individuals who have served as Ramsey County attorney. She also focuses on some of the most interesting and important cases, such as the trial of T. Eugene Thompson, handled by the county attorneys since 1849. What emerges from this study is a greater appreciation of how the work of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office has changed since frontier times and how successful those elected to the office of county attorney have been in adjusting to these changes.

In our second article in this issue, Leo J. Harris, attorney, author and historian, writes about the practical operation of the law for two St. Paul property owners, Martin and Sarah Flanagan. The Flanagans owned two small lots on Broadway Street (which no longer exists due to the construction of Interstate I-94) in downtown St. Paul between 1856 and 1904. Harris's perspective is very different from that of Anne Cowie because he analyzes the Flanagan's real and personal property tax receipts and other legal records to determine the financial consequences of St. Paul property laws for a family of modest circumstances. Over time the Flanagan property on Broadway went from being a lot in a frontier town to a homestead in a prosperous city to being part of a St. Paul slum. One of the most fascinating parts of this story is the way in which the Flanagans found their taxes and assessments increased as St. Paul gradually improved its streets with grading, paving and building sidewalks in the late nineteenth century. This is a circumstance many readers of the present century can certainly understand and appreciate. The Flanagans' experience cries out with the feeling of "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

Finally, historian and author Rhoda Gilman unravels the tangled identity of Cloud Man.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Books, Etc.

Environmental Recollections The Story of the Minnesota Parks Foundation (The First Twenty Years, 1967-1988)

Samuel H. Morgan
Published under the direction and auspices of the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota
(64 pages, paper)
Reviewed by Virginia Brainard Kunz

Samuel H. Morgan, lawyer, parks advocate, environmentalist who died in October at the age of eighty-nine, wonders, in this warmly personal account of his lifelong concern for preserving open spaces for future generations, if he inherited a "park gene."

"How did parks become for me first an avocation and eventually a vocation?" he asks. "How did it happen that I, a lawyer with no expertise in forestry or ecology became so involved? Why was it easy for me, with a legal practice and a growing family, to become so immersed in pro bono work around parks?"

He suspects the answer lay in his family background. Morgan writes that Henry Mower Rice, the brother of his great grandmother, Ellen Rice Hollinshead, saw the need for urban "breathing space" when he included room for a public square in his 1849 plat known as "Rice and Irvine's addition to St. Paul." Morgan's great-grandfather, Daniel A. J. Baker, donated to the City of St. Paul the land in the Midway on which stood Baker School, now Baker Center.

"In both instances," he observes, "their public-spirited dedication encompassed less than a full-sized city block, suggesting that their Yankee concern for doing well would not be compromised by doing too much good."

He also assigns his interest in open spaces to childhood years in Duluth where "the family had picnics on nearby Barnes Hill, the beginning of a

wilderness extending almost unbroken to the Arctic." And to summers at Otisville on the St. Croix which "created in me a great love for the St. Croix River valley."

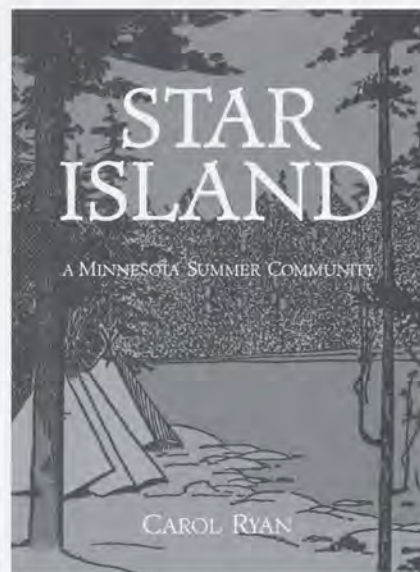
He describes the first steps, in 1956, in the reincarnation of Old Fort Snelling, also outlined in an article he wrote for the Summer, 1993, issue of *Ramsey County History*. Along with this effort was the creation of Fort Snelling State Park, the crucial help offered by Governor Elmer L. Andersen, and the dedication of a lobbyist. "I went back and forth between the Senate gallery and floor as I checked on progress with our Senate supporters." The bill passed, "I physically took the bill to Gov. Andersen's office. So our park at Fort Snelling was born!" There remained the matter of successfully raising \$250,000 for land acquisition, which "may have been the first citizen fundraising for parkland acquisition."

Other successes (and some failures) followed. "I was swimming with the tide. Nearly all the parks I helped create were first conceived by others." The list is formidable. He describes how, in the 1960s, he led the effort to acquire the 400 acres along the St. Croix that became Afton State Park; Justice Clarence R. Magny and the many meetings and strategy sessions that culminated in the establishment of the Minnesota Council of State Parks and the birth of the Minnesota Parks Foundation which Morgan would serve as president. Emotions sometimes ran deep. Morgan remembered that as he was celebrating one victory at a meeting of the St. Croix River Association in Stillwater, he was being burned in effigy in a nearby township.

In May, 2000, Morgan was honored by the Metropolitan Council with its Regional Leadership Award for his foresight and determination "in creating a regional system of parks, park re-

serves and trails that is renowned across the nation." In his book Morgan, who received his law degree from Harvard Law School in 1936 and practiced with Briggs and Morgan in St. Paul until he retired in 1981, tells the reader something of how he and his colleagues did it. The book is available at the office of the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, #100, 26 East Exchange Street, St. Paul, MN., 55101.

Virginia Brainard Kunz is editor of Ramsey County History.



Star Island, a Minnesota Summer Community

Carol Ryan
St. Paul: Pogo Press
222 pages, index, \$19.95 (paper)
Reviewed by Jane Angrist

This book is the story of a summer community on northern Minnesota's Cass Lake, the fourth largest lake in the state and located just eighty miles from the Canadian border. Written to help the resort industry of the region, the book is based on oral histories illustrating, first hand, the summer life of a vacation spot,

including why people chose that lake, that place, and why they returned year after year. It also reflects an era that has disappeared in the onslaught of luxurious resorts, a time when city-dwellers vacationed without electricity and indoor plumbing.

The earliest occupants of the region, the book notes, were present at least 1,500 years ago and probably were the Woodland people. Some of their artifacts were found near the site of a village established by the Ojibwa who lived there into the 1890s. Star Island was private property until it was included within the boundaries of a forest reserve created by the Congress with the passage of the Morris Act in 1902. In 1908 the entire part area became the first national forest in the country.

The history of the summer colony begins with reminiscences dating back to 1907 and the accounts of four families from the town of Cass Lake and six families from Kansas City and Lincoln, Nebraska, all of whom built cabins on the island. By the end of the 1930s, more and



The "true replica of a pagoda" built by Dr. C.B. Christenson of Starbuck, Minnesota. Minnesota Historical Society photographs from the book.

more families had cabins there. Dr. C. B. Christenson of Starbuck, Minnesota, built his summer home on the island as "a true replica of a Chinese pagoda" and declared that it was "the most practical, convenient and ideal structure for a summer's outing on this fairy island." In 1927 the house became the "Minnesota Summer White House" when Governor Theodore Christianson and his wife stayed there.

Other summer residents included such people as William Wentworth who describes himself as "the only survivor who was a householder for nearly fifty years." Then there was John Ruckmick, an exploration geologist from Evergreen, Colorado, whose parents discovered Star Island in 1926. Ruckmick remembered Chief Little White Cloud "who claimed he was chief of the Chippewa tribe . . . and . . . taught us Indian lore and how to make bows and arrows."

The development of the island and its community life is described by the cabin-dwellers themselves. While the activities of the young people centered around the recreation hall and the lake, those of their elders helped to forge lasting friendships that carried over into the winters months back home. As Carol Ryan notes in her Introduction, "Residents of the summer community believe that life on Star Island hasn't changed much over time except for the advent of electricity and improved boats. The sense of sameness is a major reason why they like to return."

Star Island will be of great interest to those families who spent their summers on the island. The number of oral histories in the book and the contributors' varying styles of writing or otherwise recording their memories make for some uneven prose, but the book will have a special appeal for anyone who has spent magical summers "up north" in the days when mothers were at home and fathers had more than two-week vacations. They will remember those idyllic times with joy and nostalgia.

Jane Angrist is a history researcher and a frequent reviewer for these pages.



Chief Little White Cloud who "taught us Indian lore and how to make bows and arrows."



Deepwater Point, ca. 1930.

Oliver's Town

More Columns of Oliver Towne

Gareth Hiebert

St. Paul: Pogo Press

205 pages, index, \$15.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Thomas J. Kelley

Gareth Hiebert, a native of New Ulm, assumed a new identity on November 1, 1954, when he started writing a column for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* using the name Oliver Towne. For the next thirty years, his agile mind and pen opened up a new world for his readers introducing them to people and sights in St. Paul. Later he wrote of other cities as far away as Paris and Athens.

In 1999 Hiebert and Pogo Press published a collection of his columns that focused on St. Paul called *City on Seven Hills*. Now he has followed that success with this sequel, *More Columns of Oliver Towne*. In this book, Hiebert has included some outstanding pieces about people and places, which collectively tell much about the history of St. Paul and Minnesota's cities and towns.

But it is in his columns about people that the author best puts us in touch with the past. For example, there is his account of a reunion of queens since the 1916 St. Paul Winter Carnival; his recollection of lunch with Gentile Yarusso who describes seventy years of Italian history on Payne Avenue; and his interview with Tiger Jack who was a serious entrepreneur operating out of a little shack on Dale Street, next to Interstate 94.

In his first column, Oliver Towne pledged: "We will write about these things, examining the byways, the cranies, touching here on history, there on the future, but more often on the present. We will try to put together little by little the pieces of the puzzle called 'any town'." Now, forty-six years later, he declares: "The city I knew then exists only in fragments. Old neighborhoods are gone—the West Side Flats, the old 13th Street Neighborhood, the Italian Upper Levee, Swede Hollow, the Cental Park place below the Capitol. I roamed and wrote about them all."

Towne's book is organized on a pebble-in-a-pool pattern. The first section describes places and people in St. Paul and then radiates outward. The middle section of the book, which he calls "More Minnesota Memories," presents his experiences in towns throughout the state. He tells of Minnesota's own little Scandinavia in Chisago and Lindstrom and his experiences with German culture at a restaurant in Stillwater and a church in New Trier. Nothing escaped his attention; he even found a bed-and-breakfast in the old Taylors Falls jail. It is a natural progression that takes Towne from Minnesota to Europe, and the final section of his book is devoted to exploring Europe with his late wife.

This book about towns and people is laced with descriptions of food. When he visits a restaurant or attends a dinner, the reader is served up a complete description of the menu. Twice he dined with Julia Child, once in southern France and then in Minneapolis. It was hard to read this book without envying Towne his assignment, which gave him a free hand to write about anything that caught his interest. Apparently there was little that did not.

Thomas J. Kelley, former Ramsey County auditor, city administrator for St. Paul, and director of Community Services, is a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Editorial Board and a frequent contributor to this publication.

Also In Print

A Home Becomes a College by Annabelle Raiche, CSJ, tells the story of how James J. Hill's Summit Avenue mansion became the Diocesan Teachers College after the death of Hill's wife, Mary, in 1921.

At the time of his death in 1916, Hill had been working on a will but had not signed it, the author writes, and Mary herself had made no decisions about their mansion when she died five years later. The author carefully describes the subsequent fate of the house and the dilemma posed for the Hills' heirs as each of them inherited a portion of the house.

"As early as 1924," Sister Annabelle notes, "lawyers for the Hill heirs began

discussions with St. Paul's Archbishop Dowling regarding the transfer of the Hill property to the archdiocese for use as an educational institution." A year later, five of the heirs purchased the house, valued at \$189,000, for \$90,300 and presented it to the archdiocese. Out of this gift came the Archdiocesan Normal Institute, established to provide formal training for Sisters who taught in the archdiocese's parochial schools.

Sister Annabelle traces the beginning of parochial teacher education before the advent of the Diocesan Teachers College, then describes how it became the college with faculty, courses offered, changes in curricula to meet changing times. For almost twenty years after opening its doors in 1927, the college functioned as a part-time institution to accommodate Sisters who taught in their own classrooms during the week. The school became full-time with the beginning of the academic year 1946–1947.

Sister Annabelle Raiche prepared for her own role as an elementary school teacher at the Diocesan Teachers College. She also is co-author with Sister Ann Marie Biermaier, OSB, of *They Came to Teach*, the story of Sisters who taught in the parochial schools of Minnesota. Published by Good Ground Press, Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, *A Home Becomes a College* is available at the James J. Hill House, 240 Summit Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota.

V.B.K.

No. 431 FA

City Treasurer's Office,

St. Paul, Sept 15 1886

Received of Martin Flanagan the sum of \$487.25 Dollars payment in full for the following assessments made by the Board of Public Works on the hereinafter described property, situated in the City of St. Paul, to-wit:

Name of Improvement.	DESCRIPTION.	LOT	BLK.	ADDITION	Original Assessment.	INTEREST.	TOTAL.
Broadway Sewing	Shop	3		S. C. Dayton's Improvement	10.00		
"	"	6		do	130.00		
"	"	7		do	130.00		\$360.00
Iron Store	"	3		do	40.75		
"	"	6		do	40.75		
"	"	7		do	40.75		
							\$122.25
							\$487.25

George Rep City Treasurer.
Per [Signature] Deputy.

Martin Flanagan's receipt for his 1886 Public Works assessments. Flanagan family papers. See article beginning on page 17.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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