

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

*St. Gaudens' New York Eagle:  
Rescue and Restoration  
of a St. Paul Icon*

Page 12

Fall, 2002

Volume 37, Number 3

*Lost Neighborhood*

**Borup's Addition and the Prosperous  
African Americans Who Lived There**

—Page 4



*A duplex at 555–561 in one of St. Paul's Lost Neighborhoods. This and other houses in the long-since razed Borup's Addition were the homes of pioneer African Americans who came to St. Paul after the Civil War. See article beginning on page 4. Photo by Camera Shop, Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 37, Number 3

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

In February 1998 the Board of Directors of the Ramsey County Historical Society reviewed the Society's Mission Statement and reaffirmed and adopted the following statement:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve, communicate and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship of this history.

This issue of our quarterly magazine once again carries out the Society's goal of discovering and communicating Ramsey County's past. Historian David Riehle gives us a fascinating look at another of St. Paul's "Lost Neighborhoods," known as "Borup's Addition" in the late nineteenth century when this area was home to prosperous African Americans. Next, Christine Podas-Larson describes the construction of the ten-story New York Life Insurance Building, completed in 1889 at Sixth and Minnesota, and the creation of its magnificent sculpture, the *New York Eagle*, by the renowned Augustus St. Gaudens and his brother Louis. Although the building was torn down in 1967, the *Eagle* has survived and soon will soar again over St. Paul at Summit Overlook Park.

Long-time Society member and family historian Joanne Englund's "Growing Up in St. Paul" essay focuses on her grandmother Minda's experiences in spiritualism while living in the Midway district. Included is a remarkable photograph of Minda and the other women who worked at the Bohn Refrigerator Company about the time of World War I. Finally, *Ramsey County History* returns to an earlier era in state and local history with an account of the life and times of the colorful fur trader and entrepreneur. Norman W. Kittson.

*John M. Lindley*, Chair, Editorial Board

# St. Gaudens' New York Eagle: Rescue and Restoration of St. Paul's First Outdoor Sculpture, Icon of Its Past

Christine Podas-Larson

*Editor's Note: This is the story of an almost forgotten landmark of St. Paul's Golden Age, the years between 1880 and 1895. Here Christine Podas-Larson, president of Public Art Saint Paul, traces the history of the New York Eagle and its sculptor and the efforts of Public Art Saint Paul and SOS! to rescue the Eagle from its perch in downtown St. Paul, restore it, and create a new setting for it.*

The New York Life Building was built and its *New York Eagle* installed in 1890, at the height of St. Paul's late nineteenth century commercial development. Only seventy years earlier, in 1819, the government of the United States first ventured into this mid-continental wilderness, building Fort Snelling at the junction of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, upstream from the site that would later become the City of St. Paul. In 1823, the first steamboat ascended the river, a portent of what would become the basis for St. Paul's economic strength as a transportation hub. A treaty with the Dakota Indians in 1837 opened the lands now occupied by the city for settlement. From that time forward St. Paul's growth was constant. The Territory of Minnesota was established in 1849, with St. Paul as its capital and statehood was achieved in 1858.

With its situation at the head of navigation on the greatest river system in North America, St. Paul attracted settlers interested in the healthy river trade and the state's rich farm lands. Following the Civic War, the city boomed with a steady stream of new residents, the multiplication of new commercial enterprises, and the erection of grand buildings. The first railroad built in Minnesota was completed in 1862 and, under the leadership of James J. Hill, the city quickly grew to become one of the greatest railway centers in America. In 1865, the city's population was 12,976; by 1890, it had reached more than 120,000.

This was the bustling transportation hub in the center of the country that at-



The New York Eagle beside William Davidson's parking ramp at Fourth Street and Jackson. Photo from Public Art Saint Paul.

tracted the New York Life Insurance Company in its westward expansion. In 1887, the company embarked on the development of branches in St. Paul, Omaha, and Kansas City. Known as one of the country's first true life insurance companies, it prided itself on its "artistic" New York headquarters building and was determined to carry that distinction to its new buildings on the frontier. The company commissioned the celebrated Stanford White to design its Kansas City and Omaha branches and the New York firm of Babb, Cook and Willard to design its building in St. Paul. As he developed designs for the other two cities, White con-

tacted his friend and frequent collaborator, Augustus St. Gaudens, to create a series of bronze eagles to crown the main entries of all three new buildings.

St. Paul's beautiful ten-story New York Life Building's main entrance faced one of the most vital streetscapes in the center of downtown: the southwest corner of Sixth and Minnesota Streets. The entrance was three stories high and capped by the magnificent *New York Eagle*. The sculpture is an allegory of protection, with the majestic bird poised on a ledge of rock, its wings spread as a shelter over its nest of eaglets. The ruler of the air has perfect command of the situation, but not until after a struggle. Its talons firmly grasp a serpent that has threatened its young.

## Augustus and Louis St. Gaudens

Augustus St. Gaudens and his brother, Louis, often worked together to create some of the nation's greatest works of sculpture. Augustus was a giant of American sculpture, creating the *Shaw Memorial* in Boston, *Abraham Lincoln* in Chicago, the *Sherman Memorial* at the entrance to New York's Central Park, and the *Adams Monument* in Washington. Louis was lesser known, but also remarkably talented and highly regarded, creating the *Lions* for the Boston Public Library, the figure of *Pan* in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the monumental figures for the Union Station in Washington.

Research shows that Stanford White commissioned Augustus to create the *New York Eagle*, and that it was designed by Augustus, but actually modeled (in marble) by Louis. Mrs. Louis St. Gaudens noted that "... the first sketch was made by Augustus St. Gaudens, the commission being his, and my husband

modeled the composition." Augustus' son, Homer, concurred: "It came from my father's studio. The address on the correspondence was that of my father's studio, but my uncle worked there a great deal." Homer St. Gaudens also noted the similarity of the *New York Eagle* to Augustus's famous *Amor Caritas* in Paris, noting that, "I immediately thought that the formalized design of the feathers, and especially the larger ones in the spread of the wings, had very much the character of the feathers and the wings of the angel in *Amor Caritas*."

Clearly, the sculpture is significant: it emanated from the studio of Augustus St. Gaudens; its form is drawn from his concept and sketch; its details are similar to those of one of his greatest works. It was modeled by Louis St. Gaudens, who was known as one of the finest marble sculptors in America. That the work was commissioned through the eminent architect Stanford White is also significant; his long collaboration with Augustus produced some of America's greatest works. White designed frames for St. Gaudens's reliefs and pedestals for the *Farragut Monument*; the *Puritan*; *Abraham Lincoln*; and the *Adams Memorial*. St. Gaudens also designed works for other White buildings, including *Diana* for Madison Square Garden, and he collaborated with Louis on another White project: decorative works for the Villard House on New York's Madison Avenue (1881). The *New York Eagle* was created at a time of Augustus's most intense activity. It would seem natural for him to turn to Louis to carry through the commission.

Louis St. Gaudens was born in New York in 1854, six years after the family had emigrated from Ireland. His father, Bernard, was a French bootmaker and his mother, Mary McGuiness, was Irish. Articles in the *Boston Transcript* following Louis's death noted that his light was almost completely—and willingly—eclipsed by his brother. His loyalty and devotion to Augustus, however, was the deepest influence in Louis's life. Like his older brother, he trained as a cameo cutter and joined Augustus in Europe, going first to Rome, then London, and finally to Paris in 1878, where he studied at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*. He returned to



The New York Life Insurance Company Building, which stood at the southwest corner of Sixth and Minnesota until it was torn down in 1967. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.



The Eagle protecting its nest. Not a "natural" eagle, the sculpture is associated with an allegorical protectiveness. Photo from Public Art Saint Paul.

New York with Augustus in the early 1880s and helped him with his work for most of the rest of his life. The *Boston Transcript* of March 10, 1913, noted that "he best understood and could translate into model form his brother's ideas" and had a hand in virtually all of Augustus's commissions. Following his death, he

began to be acknowledged as a first rate sculptor in his own right.

Other works attributed to Louis include: two angels bearing a chalice for the Church of the Ascension, New York (1887-88); seals over the doorway and two marble lions at the stairway of the Boston Public Library (1889-90); the

*Figure of Homer* in the rotunda of the Library of Congress (1896); two eagles and six allegorical figures for the exterior of the Union Station in Washington, D. C. and three versions of Roman soldiers, representing states of the Union, for the station interior (1906-13). He was awarded the silver medal at the Pan American Exhibition in 1901 for his work *Piping Pan*, which is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1900 he moved to Cornish, a half mile from Augustus's famed studio. He was part of his brother's "Cornish Colony" that also included painter Maxfield Parrish and sculptors Paul Manship, Daniel Chester French, Frederic Remington, and many others. Louis St. Gaudens died in 1913, at the age of fifty-nine, and just after completion of his great work for Union Station.

### The Eagle is Salvaged

From the time of its installation in 1890 until 1967, the *New York Eagle* occupied a central position in the life of the City of St. Paul. The sculpture is an allegorical, not a "natural eagle." St. Gaudens and the New York Life Building had placed the *Eagle* some thirty-four feet above the sidewalk in an architectural wall that evoked a cliff and an eagle's nest. It was a familiar landmark, associated perhaps with the intended allegory of protection, but also with the city's position on the Mississippi River, where bald eagles abounded in the river bluffs. Another association with the imagery was seen by William Davidson, who ultimately became the owner of the New York Life Building and its *New York Eagle*. The *Eagle* reminded Davidson of the busy steamboat days of the mid-eighteenth century when St. Paul and its Jackson Street levee bustled with passenger and cargo traffic. A good share of the traffic between here and St. Louis was handled by the St. Louis & St. Paul Packet Co., which was owned by his grandfather, Commodore William F. Davidson. The fleet's pride was the *War Eagle*.

In 1967, the beautiful New York Life Building was razed to make room for new urban development. This occurred before the organization of the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission, or the building surely would have been

placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A group of citizens did, however, make the case for preserving the *New York Eagle* from the building's demolition, and headlines of the day asked, "Anybody for a Genuine Homeless Green Eagle?" It was purchased from the demolition contract by Davidson and installed outside one of his other downtown holdings at Fourth Street and Jackson. Sadly, however, the site chosen was next to his building's 1960s parking ramp, on a low pedestal on a street corner somewhat removed from the city's center and pedestrian traffic. The *New York Eagle* was saved from melt down but lost its magnificently prominent perch, and appeared somewhat like a deflating helium balloon, sinking ever lower to the earth.

### Public Art Saint Paul

The poor condition of the sculpture's surface and the work's vulnerability to the same fate that befell the New York Life Building testified to the urgent need for conservation. From 1967 until 1999, the *New York Eagle* has been the property of whoever owned the parking ramp. For twenty years, there had been only two owners, both of them local real estate developers. However, within the last five

years, the property has changed hands twice and is about to again.

Fearing that this important piece of St. Paul history would be forgotten, discarded in a real estate transaction, or removed from the property to some private residence or far away office building, Public Art Saint Paul approached the current building owner, Dynex Corporation, asking for title to the sculpture. Dynex generously agreed, and Public Art Saint Paul secured legal title to the work in April, 1999. Its intention is to retain title until completion of the conservation treatment and relocation of the work, and then to transfer title to the City of St. Paul.

Under the terms of the agreement with Dynex, Public Art Saint Paul removed the sculpture from its thirty-year perch at Fourth and Jackson and has been in storage at the city's Como Park storage warehouse since the beginning of conservation treatment early in 2000. Conservator was Kristen Cheronis. Plans call for the *Eagle* to be installed in the fall of 2003 at Summit Overlook Park. The Ramsey Hill Association currently is seeking financial support from public and private sources to prepare the park site and increase its amenities. The restoration is sponsored by the New York Life Foundation and

the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*.

Public Art Saint Paul was the Twin Cities and Minnesota Coordinator of Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!), a national program of the Smithsonian Institution to survey, assess condition, and promote awareness of America's public art collection. As a result of its role in SOS!, Public Art Saint Paul led the conservation treatment of Summit Avenue's *Indian Hunter and His Dog* by Paulanship and *Nathan Hale* by William Ordway Partridge. Like the *New York Eagle*, both works were among those identified as being at highest risk in the SOS! survey. Some \$40,000 was raised in the community to cover costs associated with the conservation treatment and public awareness campaign.

SOS! also "found" a bronze bust of playwright Henrik Ibsen by Jacob Fjelde, that had been stolen from Como Park and was discovered by an SOS! volunteer in a suburban video store. The work was formally declared recovered stolen property by the city; an improved site at Como Park was prepared, and the sculpture was cleaned and restored for re-installation in Como Park. The goal is to clean and restore all of the St. Paul's historic outdoor sculptures.

## Restoring the *Eagle*

Restoration of the 112-year-old *New York Eagle* is a complex process, as indicated by conservator Kristin Cheronis in the following digest of her progress report to Public Art Saint Paul dated August 19, 2002:

1. We have completed the larger section of the patina, and that has been viewed and approved by Public Art Saint Paul directors.

2. Additional weep holes were added, one in the lower edge of the *Eagle*'s left wing, another added to the bottom of the snake's tail and still another to the snake's head. Both of the last two were filled with water and sediment from the original molds.

3. We worked lead into several seams, one under the *Eagle*'s tail in back; two on the feet to the rock attachment, and another where the center of the snake joins the rock.

4. We found more dark gray crusty accre-

tions behind the left eaglet on the back rock wall. A large, extremely hard area was removed by scraping it down with a scalpel.

5. We have worked steadily on the patina, using cupric nitrate to lighten dark areas and opacify areas of corroded metal and sulphurated potash to darken light and etched areas and accentuate shadows.

6. The bottom edge of the rock has many severe undercuts where it is difficult to apply patina. The metal must be sufficiently heated or the patina won't take. Any missed areas can be finished when the sculpture is installed.

7. This week (August 19) we will be doing the final coatings. Inralac would be the most protective but waxing is more attractive—first a hot wax on torch-heated metal, then a second coat of wax on cool

metal, and both coats polished well. However, waxing requires a scrupulous, unwavering commitment to annual washing and waxing, maintenance that might best be done by a conservator.

8. The sculpture will remain brown overall, but some lighter-in-value reds and greens will be used to create a saturated, dark appearance—a rich, variegated red brown to dark brown with some green peeking through. The base and the eaglets will be left as they are now.

The report also explains that such a large, complex sculpture "has a great deal of surface area" and that its on-going maintenance will require access by using either a scaffold or a cherry-picker/snorkel lift/boom truck. In the meantime, work on the restoration and conservation of the *Eagle* proceeds.



*Minda was a Spiritualist and apparently subscribed to the Spiritual Science Magazine, copies of which were found among her belongings after her death. See Growing Up in St. Paul article on page 17.*

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

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