

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

Alfred Adler and his 1937  
Lecture at the St. Paul  
Women's City Club

Page 11

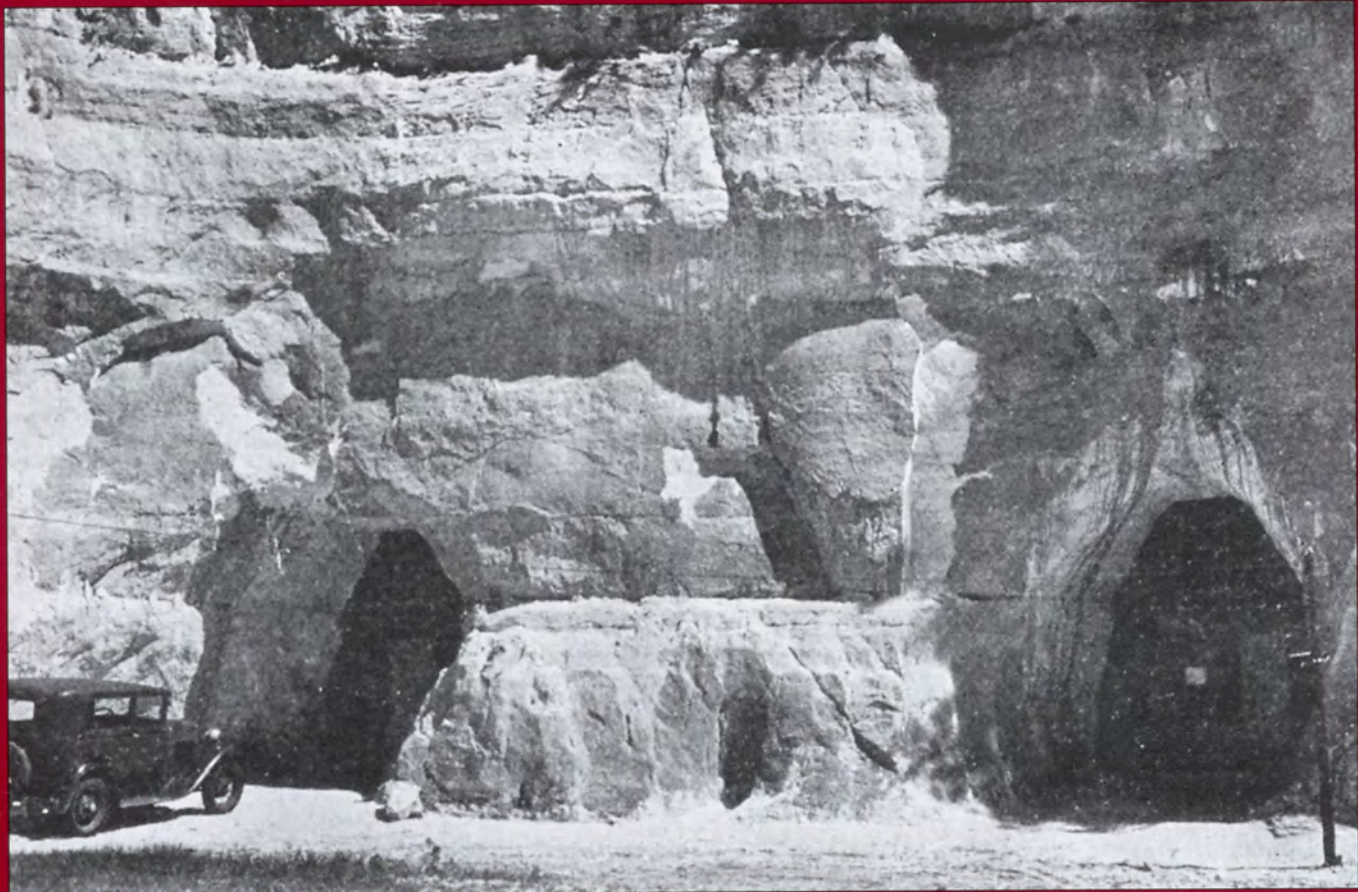
Fall, 2003

Volume 38, Number 3

*St. Paul Underground*

The University Farm Experimental Cave and  
St. Paul as the Blue Cheese Capital of the World

—Page 4



Caves like these in the Twin Cities bluffs along the Mississippi River were used for ripening the Roquefort-like cheese that almost caused an international incident with France. See article about Minnesota's Blue Cheese beginning on page 4. Photo from the National Butter and Cheese Journal, January 10, 1935.



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 36, Number 3

Fall, 2001

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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

This issue of *Ramsey County History* opens with Greg Brick's absorbing examination of how and why agricultural researchers at the University of Minnesota produced a Roquefort-like blue cheese in the caves on St. Paul's West Side from the 1930s to the 1950s. Many local people know that in the days before modern refrigeration, St. Paul's pioneer brewers had taken advantage of the constant cool temperatures in the caves to store beer, and some people knew the caves had been used for raising mushrooms, but author Brick introduces us to the little-known world of blue cheese production in these caves.

Additional articles in this issue present Roger A. Ballou's account of a 1937 lecture by the famous psychologist Alfred Adler at the Women's City Club and Susan C. Dowd's research into the mysterious 1902 death of an unidentified, beautiful young woman near the railway station at Dayton's Bluff.

Fall is always a great time for apples. To honor this year's apple season, Ralph Thrane, the resident horticulturalist at the Society's Gibbs Museum in Falcon Heights, contributes a summary of his work in choosing and growing the Heritage apple varieties that have been planted at the Museum. This issue closes with author DeAnne Cherry adding another piece to our ongoing series, "Growing Up in St. Paul," with her recollections of her teenage years living on St. Paul's Avenue in the 1950s.

The Editorial Board of this magazine also wants its readers to be aware that Paul Nelson's article about St. Paul's smallpox epidemic of 1924 that appeared in the Summer issue has caught the eye of a present-day researcher at the Medical School of the University of Minnesota and is being used in conjunction with contemporary studies of this dread disease. Our thanks to Paul for his timely work that may, in a small way, contribute to the future betterment of all.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*



## 'Laid at Rest by Strangers' Hands'

# Death in the Railroad Yards: The Century-old Mystery of a Beautiful Young Woman

*Susan C. Dowd*

Her face stopped me—the eyes were closed—and I felt compelled to read the caption that accompanied her picture in the newspaper. I was working at the Minnesota Historical Society's library, watching microfilm whiz by as I searched the film for a photograph I had been asked to find. The microfilm contained issues of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* from 1902, one hundred years ago. I had the machine's speed set so that I could make out just enough detail to spot the photograph that so far had eluded me. Suddenly, the tranquil face of a young woman flew by, and I felt curious enough to stop the film and back it up even, though this was not the photo I was searching for. A longer look revealed that "tranquil" was a bit of an understatement for this lovely young lady. She was dead.

She was beautiful as she lay in the morgue, with her eyes shut and her hair curling softly around her face. She might have been sleeping except for the odd cloth that covered her mouth, neck, and upper torso. The headline above the photograph cried, "Girl's Death a Mystery." I had to stop and read, and the story that unfolded over the next two weeks was a poignant one.

The young woman had been hit and killed by a freight train just west of the railway station at Dayton's Bluff late in the evening of March 12, 1902. She died without any identification. Her picture—the photograph that made me stop and look—was splashed across the newspaper page, and a heartfelt plea went out to the public—Did anyone recognize her? Was there was anything familiar in the "still handsome forehead and nose, the finely curved upper lip, the long fair hair upon the slab?" People were asked to come to the morgue to look at her, and dozens filed silently past to gaze at the

face above the cloth bandages that covered the wounds. Day after day they came. Some thought they recognized her . . . but no, the clothes were all wrong. Others hoped one of their own lost loved one's fate might finally be known . . . but the girl was a stranger.

Newspapers of that era spared no ink when it came to details. Her physical attributes were carefully chronicled: "Her waist is small, her arms plump and delicately moulded. The wrists are slender, the hands small and shapely. They are soft and nowhere calloused. The nails have been carefully manicured. The teeth, white and regular, are sound throughout and evince a careful toilet." Further, an autopsy revealed her to be "in sound health" and "an unmarried girl of absolutely irreproachable character," a reference, presumably, to her virginity. The physician who performed the autopsy, Dr. J.M. Finnell, estimated her age at "not more than twenty-two years" and her ancestry as Scandinavian. Her height (4 feet 9 inches) and weight (135 pounds) were duly recorded.

### **A Short Eton Jacket**

Her clothing, likewise underwent minute scrutiny in the hope that it contained a clue. "All the clothing is cheap but nearly new. The Rough Rider or cowboy hat is of tan-colored felt with a band and edging of black ribbon. It was fastened by one black headed hat pin. The short, Eton jacket is of a tan-colored stuff resembling frieze with brown cotton lining, tight sleeves, a wide collar faced with light brown velveteen, and large buttons showing the same material as the jacket. The Turkey red cotton waist has tight sleeves and small conical buttons of polished steel. The stock is of pleated black velvet. The skirt, of rough material, has

two black silk flounces each three inches deep. The girl's belt is of black patent leather. The one shoe found has not been worn long. It is of Vici kid. There is black cotton hosiery; a black cotton underskirt trimmed with red braid . . . a lavender corset; a white cotton corset cover trimmed with two inches of inexpensive lace, and white underwear." Even her purse bore testimony to her "neat and frugal habits" and her upstanding character. It was described as "although . . . much worn . . . mended elaborately with black silk thread." Details as specific as her hair pins (one gilded, one steel), the size of her shoes (4D), a manufacturer's mark on the back of her coat buttons, and the contents of her well-mended purse (\$10.51, a tidy sum in 1902) were deemed important clues to her identity.

Her death must have been quick and ghastly. The wheels on one side of an eastbound Milwaukee freight car passed through her neck, nearly severing her head, while those on the other side amputated her left foot and crushed her right ankle. Had she been lying across the tracks? The newspaper story lost no time in getting to the point: Was her death accidental, a suicide, or something more sinister? Potential witnesses were interviewed, largely men working the late shift in the depot yards. Several swore they had seen a short woman walking through the dark yards at Dayton's Bluff shortly after 10 p.m., several hours before her body was discovered at 1:40 a.m. According to one observer, who claimed to have warned the woman of danger, she answered sharply, "I'm all right. I know where I'm going." Questions were raised several days later about the veracity of these interviews, claiming that "whenever any man or woman becomes the center of a published tale involving much



# GIRL'S DEATH A MYSTERY

BODY FOUND THURSDAY UNIDENTIFIED

**Police and Coroner Unable Even to Guess at Who She Was—Theories Concerning Manner of Her Death.**

Who was the young woman killed last Wednesday night in the Union depot yards? Was she a traveler or a resident of St. Paul? Did she die by accident, was she murdered, or did she take her own life?

For three days this girl's body has lain at the morgue. Dozens of men and women from the Twin Cities and from surrounding towns have attempted to identify her. But all have failed.

The first surmise of the authorities was plausible. It offered no difficulties. Identification would be speedy. But the closer this theory is compared with known facts, the less likely it appears. The girl's death seems more mysterious and her fate attracts a wider sympathy.

The surmise in question was that the girl was a housemaid employed at one of the suburban villages along the line of the Burlington road—at Oakland, Highwood, Newport, St. Paul Park. She missed the evening train and was walking home through the yards. She was accidentally run down by the Milwaukee

the shoe was declared yesterday, by a visitor at the morgue, to be identical with that sold at a local department store. But the shoe has no mark indicating that it might not have been made by the same manufacturer for a customer in some other city.

**Body Found Thursday.**

The body was found about 1:40 o'clock last Thursday morning on the Milwaukee track less than half a mile west of the Burlington railway's passenger station at Dayton's Bluff. The body was lying close to the track on the river side. Fifteen or twenty rods westward was picked up the victim's hat, her purse, and one of her shoes. Between this spot and the body blood and bits of cloth were scattered along the ties, and the cinders between the rails were scored deeply by a dying body dragged and crushed beneath the wheels.

The second shoe was not discovered. At some distance beyond the body part of the left foot lay upon the track. The girl had fallen crosswise of the

be interfered with if she made her attempt in a lonely portion of the yards.

On the other hand, the condition of her body and her clothing afford no argument for the supposition of suicide. She was apparently in sound health and she was not destitute. The autopsy showed that she was an unmarried girl of absolutely irreproachable character, discrediting the theory of suicide.

Nor is there any thing to intimate that she was placed upon the track by men that had robbed or attacked her. This possibility was investigated carefully. Her body shows no injuries that could not have been caused by the wheels that killed her. And the unopened purse is further proof that her death did not conceal a crime.

## INSURANCE RATES UP

AN AVANCE OF 25 PER CENT.

**Underwriters Announce a Rise Because of the Heavy Losses Companies Have Had.**

Beginning to-morrow premiums on fire insurance risks in St. Paul will be advanced 25 per cent. The announcement was made yesterday by the St. Paul board of fire underwriters, but its action was influenced by the Western union of insurance companies.

The action was deemed imperative by the managers of the insurance companies of the country. The last two or three

## STREETS ARE LIGHT AS DAY

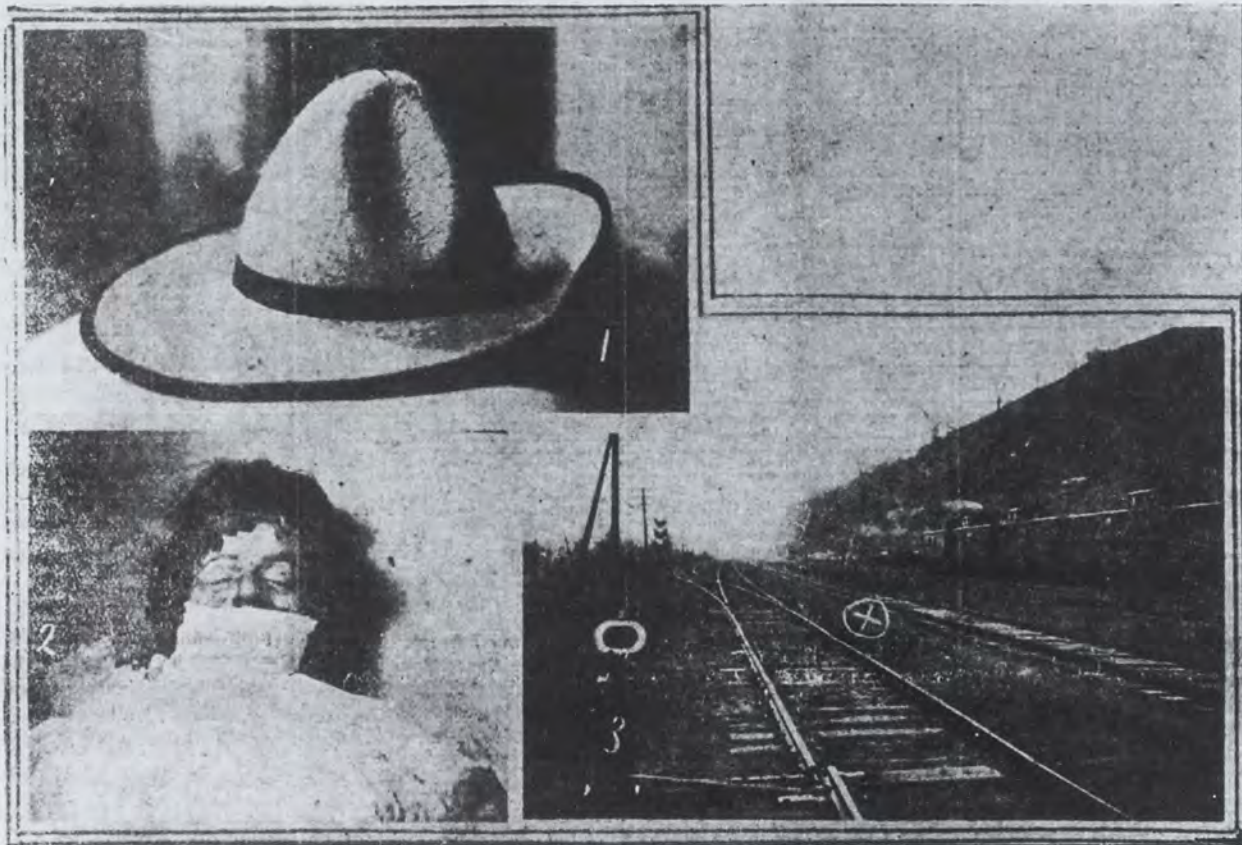
NEW WELSBACH BURNERS ARE PUT ON STREET LAMPS.

**Work of Substituting Improved Burners for Old-Fashioned Ones Is Completed—Street Signs Will Be Placed on the Lamps This Week—Cost of New Lights.**

Since March 3 the American Development company has replaced 2,500 of the common street gas lamps with an equal number of improved street lamps fitted with Welsbach burners. The board of public works contracted for the new lamps about Feb. 1, and the St. Paul Gas and Electric company, to which the contract was given, employed the American Development company to procure the lamps and make the changes.

The magnitude of the undertaking will be better understood when it is known that the 2,500 lamps and the globes and other fixtures amounted to fifteen car loads. But the old lamps were removed and the new ones substituted in just thirteen days, the work being completed Friday. Between forty and fifty men were employed in the work.

**New Street Signs.**  
The lamps are ready for service, but the street names on the corner lamps



**THE MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY ON THE RAILROAD TRACKS.**

1. The girl's hat. 2. The girl is lying on a slab at the morgue, awaiting identification. 3. The cross shows where her mangled body was found. Part of the remains is buried just across the track.

—By a Staff Photographer.

A mysterious young woman's death in the Union Depot yards. St. Paul Dispatch-Pioneer Press photo, Sunday, March 16, 1902. Minnesota Historical Society archives.



conjecture, there are always people ready to insist that they saw the person in question just before the critical event."

### **A Housemaid? A Nurse?**

At first the question of her identity seemed a simple matter. Surely she must have been a housemaid employed at one of the "suburban villages" along the track: Oakland, Highwood, Newport, St. Paul Park, who was walking home through the yards. But no one from any of those communities reported a missing woman, nor could any of their residents identify her. Likewise, her smooth hands spoke of a life devoid of hard labor. A traveler then? That might explain the large sum of money in her purse. Perhaps she was attempting to board the slow-moving train and felt herself slip beneath its wheels? Could she have been a passenger who fell off? No hypotheses were left unexamined, no theories kept to oneself. Some proposed that her neat but slightly outdated clothing indicated her origins in a small community far from the large, fashionable stores of St. Paul or Minneapolis. She could be a poor farmer's daughter, a clerk, a factory employee, a waitress, or a child's nurse.

But no one knew her. A week went by, nearly two weeks. Nothing. It was clear that the time had come to lay her to rest. And this is where the story becomes even more remarkable.

### **Visitors Flood Morgue**

The city of St. Paul grieved for this young woman whom they could not know. She was called "the girl in whom everyone was interested." Flowers and visitors flooded the morgue, "fully a thousand men and women, representing all social classes." Masses of flowers were brought to her in tribute. One young woman "tendered a great sheaf of Easter lilies and maidenhair ferns tied with a

white ribbon and bearing a card inscribed 'Rest in Peace.' Another girl gave many pink roses. One matron brought a large bouquet of red and yellow tulips. Hence the nameless body was heaped high with delicate blossoms." It was the busiest day in the history of the morgue, peopled by those who felt compassion for a fellow human being who could never repay that compassion.

A committee of Merriam Park women representing their respective churches—Mrs. A. J. Trumbull for the Congregational Church; Mrs. J. M. Stoughton, for the Episcopal church; Mrs. H. J. Coykendall, for the Presbyterian church; and Mrs. James H. Crider for the Methodist church—handled all of the funeral arrangements. The four churches paid most of the expenses. A woman described simply as "living on Western avenue" offered a grave lot in her family's plot at Oakland cemetery. The proprietor of the Albion stables loaned a hearse. Mrs. A. S. Swanson provided additional flowers (although the flowers from the morgue visitation were still fresh and in use), and "a man who does not care to be known" contributed \$25 to cover any unforeseen expenses.

Services were held at the undertaking rooms of William Dampier, 313 Wabasha Street, at 2 pm on Monday, March 24, 1902. The newspaper's account of the funeral, titled "Laid at Rest by Strangers' Hands," describes it as an uncommon one "of peculiar pathos and peculiar dignity." Men and women "took the place of unknown parents and bid good-bye to this girl as to a daughter of their own." The young woman lay in a rich casket lined with white broadcloth trimmed in silver, "her head pillowed gently on one side, her still fair and comely forehead half concealed by white roses and pink carnations and the long ringlets of her gold brown hair." The

Reverend J. H. Sammis of the Congregational church delivered both the invocation and the benediction, while the Reverend Murdoch McLeod of the Presbyterian church read the scripture and spoke of a family who had no idea that "their daughter, their sister" was at that moment being buried lovingly by strangers. Even men's eyes grew moist. A quartet representing the four Merriam Park churches sang "Abide With Me" and "Nearer My God to Thee." As the small white casket was carried into the street to be borne on the ornate hearse "men bared their heads and read, with better understanding, perhaps, the inscription in large letters upon a card attached to a wreath of lilies, 'One Touch of Nature Makes the Whole World Kin.'"

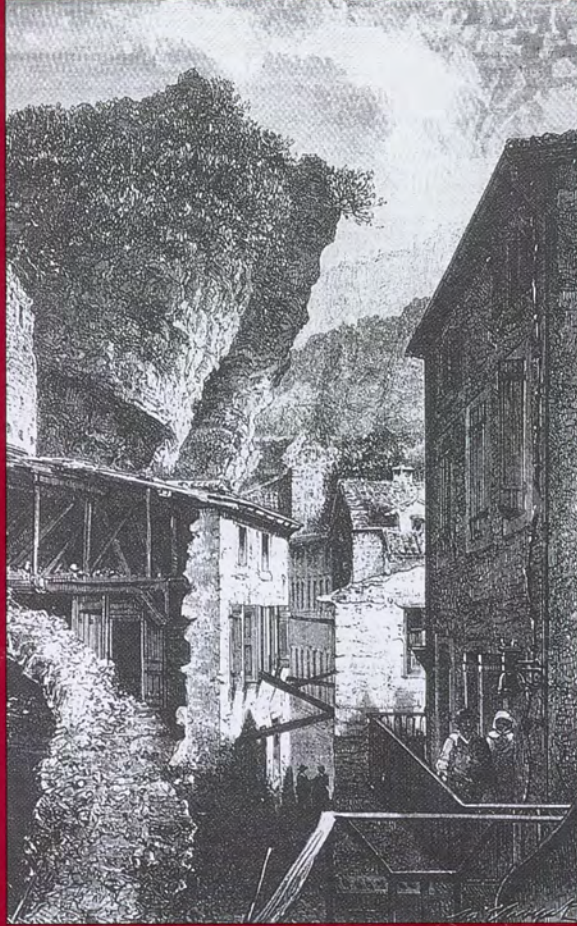
And so the body of this young woman was buried at Oakland cemetery on April 4, 1902. The ten days between the funeral and her interment allowed a few more people to view her in the hope that her tombstone could at last bear a name. But in the end no one could answer the questions: Who was she? Why was she walking along the railroad tracks at so late an hour? Was her death accidental, a suicide, or murder? It was those unanswered questions that brought this young woman—who could have been their own—so close to the hearts of the citizens of St. Paul. They cared and they wept because she was "the girl in whom everyone was interested."

*Susan Dowd is a researcher and writer living in south Minneapolis.*

### **Sources**

All facts came from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* between March 16, 1902 and March 26, 1902 with the exception of the date of burial. That information was supplied by Oakland Cemetery, St. Paul.





*The celebrated Roquefort caves of France where Roquefort cheese has been ripened since antiquity. Development of a Roquefort-like cheese in the 1930s at the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus, almost caused an international incident with France. See article about Minnesota's Blue Cheese beginning on page 4.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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323 Landmark Center  
75 West Fifth Street  
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