

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
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**Fall, 2005**

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Willet M. Hays  
Who Saw 'Shakespeares'  
Among His Plants

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*Stonebridge: The Story of a Lost Estate and  
Oliver Crosby, the Genius Who Created It*

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*Stonebridge, one of Ramsey County's largest and most elegant homes. See article beginning on page 4. Photograph from Dexter Crosby's private collection and used with his permission.*



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 40, Number 3

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve 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 over this history.

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Author Jay Pfaender opens our Fall issue with a fascinating account of one of St. Paul's pioneering industrialists and inventors, Oliver Crosby, and Stonebridge, his lost estate that was located near the Mississippi River in St. Paul from 1916 to 1953.

Because our author was unable to find any color photo or even a postcard of the Stonebridge mansion, the RCHS Editorial Board decided, after much lively debate, to electronically colorize a surviving black and white photo of the famous Crosby home. This colorized version is reproduced on the front cover. The Editorial Board values accuracy and insisted that readers be told what we had done so that there was no deception. At the Board's request, Jay Pfaender systematically pursued examples of the actual colors that might have been seen if a color photo had existed. Thus he found brick from the original building and chased down paints used in other Clarence Johnston-designed buildings that have similarities to Stonebridge. From the landscape architects' plans for the Crosby estate he was able to identify the colors of the trees and shrubs that graced the grounds. The result, we hope, is a color image that conveys Stonebridge as faithfully as careful research and electronic wizardry permit. We, of course, invite you to comment on our decision to colorize and the results.

Two authors, Harlan Stoehr and Forrest Troyer, who have long been associated with the University of Minnesota's Agricultural Experiment Station in St. Paul, conclude this issue of *Ramsey County History* with a biographical profile and tribute to Willet Hays, the first head of agronomic research at the university. Hays served Minnesota between 1888 and 1891 and 1893 and 1904. During his long career as an agronomist, Hays not only conducted major research at the East Bank campus, but he also served for a time in the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. and as Minister of Agriculture for Argentina. Today Hays deserves to be recognized as one of Minnesota's true agricultural leaders.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board



# Book Reviews

## *Remembering the Good War: Minnesota's Greatest Generation*

Thomas Saylor  
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society  
Press, 2005  
312 pages, \$27.95

Reviewed by John M. Lindley

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Thus the publication of Thomas Saylor's *Remembering the Good War: Minnesota's Greatest Generation* is a timely reminder of what Minnesotans gave to our nation in that global conflict that now seems so long ago.

Tom Saylor is a professor of history at Concordia University in St. Paul. He writes in his preface that he began the project that expanded into this book with the idea that he would collaborate with his students in collecting, evaluating, and permanently preserving the "experiences and memories of Minnesotans during the World War II years of 1941 through 1946" through oral histories. By taking "Minnesotan" broadly to include people who were born and/or raised in this state, or who relocated to Minnesota during the war, or who have subsequently resided in Minnesota for a considerable length of time, Saylor and his students have produced over 300 hours of taped interviews and 5,500 pages of transcriptions from more than 130 men and women who either were in military service or contributing on the Home Front during the war.

*Remembering the Good War* organizes excerpts from these interviews around several themes. The first chapter, for example, focuses on memories and reactions to the news that Japanese aircraft

had attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Not surprisingly a good number of those who were interviewed recall with clarity exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news of the attack. Many admitted they had no idea where Pearl Harbor was, but they knew the attack was likely to change their lives in some way.

Other chapters in this fine oral history cover experiences in combat and coping with the hardships and changes wrought by the war on the Home Front. To Saylor's credit, the wartime contributions of women and minorities are given equal status with those who wore uniforms and served overseas. Not all the excerpts gathered in this book are positive and uplifting. Some of Saylor's interviewees recount instances of discrimination and racism in the military or here at home.

Although some of the people who were interviewed were genuine war heroes or individuals who have published memoirs of their wartime service, many of those who speak through Saylor's pages had no remarkable tale to tell. These ordinary people who were not of high rank or who never participated in some memorable event relate stories that are as compelling as those who survived a horrific firefight or other combat experience in Europe or on a Pacific island.

While Saylor readily acknowledges that his book is an "imperfect record" of Minnesotans' experiences in World War II, he makes a strong case that it is what he calls a "collective tale" and a "representative mosaic" of the war years. Thus he argues that there "was no single World War II experience, but thousands of different ones that depended on a multitude of factors. People who had similar experiences may remember them—and emerge from them—in quite different ways."

Because Saylor is currently working on a forthcoming book on Minnesotans who were prisoners of war in World War II, there are some shortcomings in this book that he might consider addressing in his future work. One is that those interviewed tend to be relatively low ranking in the military hierarchy. This bias is largely due to age. Most of the people who are still living were young, in their teens or early twenties, between 1941 and 1946. They didn't have time to advance to positions of senior responsibility. Yet it would be helpful to know what these senior leaders experienced. There's little in this book that represents those who chose to be conscientious objectors. They, too, deserve to be part of the mosaic of those who present the state's varieties of wartime experience.

The use of the phrase "Minnesota's Greatest Generation" in the book's subtitle, which conveys a sense of special mission that was absent in other times, does an injustice to Minnesotans of different generations, such as Native American ancestors or pioneers of the nineteenth century or those who served in the Civil War, World War I, Korean or Vietnam wars, or in today's fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. Ironically the negatives that Saylor includes in this impressive history, such as incidents of racism and discrimination, greatly undercut whatever oversized pride Minnesotans may feel in the many contributions that citizens of this state made to the war effort. As Saylor shows in countless ways, Minnesota did its part to protect and preserve the United States in World War II.

*John L. Lindley is an independent historian, researcher, and writer and chairman of the RCHS Editorial Board.*





*Top: In 1937, the South Mississippi Boulevard entrance gate was moved to Hamline and Midway Parkway as the west entrance to Como Park. E.E. Engelbert donated the gate and WPA workers installed it.*

*Below: The wrought-iron pedestrian gates were moved to near Lake Como and are frequently used for wedding pictures. Photos by the author.*



**R.C.H.S.**  
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