

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Fall, 2005

Volume 40, Number 3

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

Page 20

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

—Page 4



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.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Editor

Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Howard Guthmann

President

W. Andrew Boss

First Vice President

Judith Frost Lewis

Second Vice President

Joan Higinbotham

Secretary

J. Scott Hutton

Treasurer

Duke Addicks, Charles L. Bathke, W. Andrew Boss, Norlin Boyum, Joseph Campbell, Norbert Conzemius, Anne Cowie, Charlton Dietz, Joanne A. Englund, Robert F. Garland, Howard Guthmann, Joan Higinbotham, Scott Hutton, Judith Frost Lewis, John M. Lindley, George A. Mairs, Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Marvin J. Pertzik, Jay Pfaender, Penny Harris Reynen, David Thune, Paul Verret, Glenn Wiessner, Richard Wilhoit, Laurie Zenner.

Richard T. Murphy, Sr.

Director Emeritus

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, *chair*, James B. Bell, John Diers, Thomas H. Boyd, Tom Kelley, Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Paul D. Nelson, Jay Pfaender, David Riehle, C. Richard Slade, Steve Trimble, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, William Fallon, Robert S. Hess, D. W. "Don" Larson, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Robert Mirick, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, chairman
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Toni Carter
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Janice Rettman
Commissioner Jan Wiessner
Commissioner Jim McDonough

David Twa, manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 2005, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. **All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.** The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address admin@rchs.com.; web site address www.rchs.com

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 40, Number 3

Fall, 2005

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.

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 *Stonebridge: The Story of a Lost Estate and Oliver Crosby, the Inventive Genius Who Created It*
Jay Pfaender
- 20 *Ramsey County's Distinguished Agriculturist*
Willet M. Hayes, the Scientist Who Saw
'Shakespeares' Among His Plants
Harlan Stoehr and Forrest Troyer
- 27 Book Reviews

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

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

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

Jay Pfaender

Built during World War I, once the scene of glamorous, Gatsbyesque galas, later seriously considered as a governor's residence, demolished in 1953, the Stonebridge estate once was one of Ramsey County's largest and most elegant properties.

The creator of Stonebridge was industrialist, inventor, and civic leader Oliver Crosby, founder of American Hoist and Derrick, a company that was known worldwide and was one of St. Paul's largest employers.

Yet today, even in St. Paul's Groveland neighborhood, where seventy custom-designed homes occupy the twenty-eight acres that once comprised Stonebridge, little is remembered about either Oliver Crosby or his magnificent estate. A casual Internet look-up of either name produces hardly any useful information.

According to Jessie Beney, secretary to Frederic Crosby, son of the estate's builder, "The grounds and mansion at Stonebridge cost well over \$1 million to build in 1914-16"—the equivalent of \$20 million in 2005 money.

Who was Oliver Crosby and how was he able to build a residence that cost twenty times as much as the most elegant house then in existence on Summit Avenue?



Even though he was recently inducted into the Minnesota Inventors' Hall of Fame, the career and accomplishments of Oliver Crosby seem little appreciated. He was the holder of at least thirty-six patents. He founded and led a company that had over 1,000 employees and manufactured unique hoisting products sold and used around the world. The company eventually reached Fortune 500 status in the 1970s.

* * *

Between the end of the Civil War and the Great Depression (1865-1929), the United States saw the transition from the age of iron to steel, water transportation to rail, horse power to the automobile, and steam energy to electricity. At the same time, America was building its infrastructure, including dams, canals, buildings, and ports. As Jocelyn Wills writes in her book, *Boosters, Hustlers, and Speculators*,

By 1883, marked by the completion of the St. Paul to Seattle Northern Pacific rail line, St. Paul and Minneapolis had established itself as the seat of transportation, commerce, and manufacturing for an agricultural empire extending west to the Pacific Ocean, north into Canada, south into Iowa and parts of Nebraska, and east into western Wisconsin.

St. Paul became identified as the center of transportation, wholesale distribution, and finance. Minneapolis was noted for its prominence as the flour-milling headquarters as well as manufacturing hub for agriculture products.



Oliver Crosby. Unless otherwise noted, many of the photographs with this article are from Dexter Crosby's private collection and are used with his permission.

The rail line from Chicago and one of the few bridges over the Mississippi River made the two cities a gateway to the west. St. Paul was growing fast—from 41,000 to 110,000 in the five years from 1880 to 1885.

Oliver Crosby, a New Englander, came to St. Paul in 1876 to seek opportunities in the growing West not available back East. Armed with a good education and an entrepreneurial spirit, he found himself in precisely the right place at precisely the right time to build a business that paralleled the growth of St. Paul and the country.

Crosby was born in Dexter, Maine. His family had come to America from Scotland about the time of the Revolutionary War. His father was a judge. At an early age, Oliver showed an inclina-

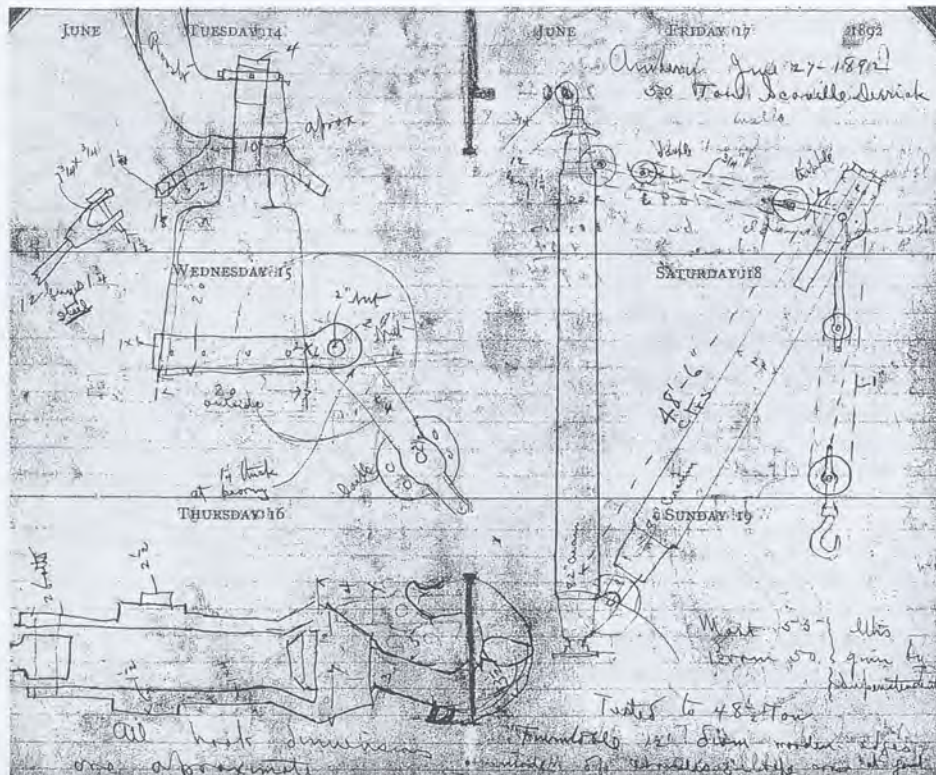
tion for mechanics. He instinctively liked tools and made and used water wheels, turbines, windmills, and pulleys, early skills he would find helpful in later life. He attended the University of Maine, graduating in mechanical engineering. Following graduation in the fall of 1876, he earned enough money to travel west.

He had a St. Paul connection. A. B. Stickney, a friend and contemporary of his father's and later president of the Minnesota and Northwestern Railroad in St. Paul (a predecessor of the Chicago and North Western railroad) said that he would help any of the Crosby children if they ever came to St. Paul. Stickney, who also had grown up in Dexter, had studied law in the senior Crosby's law office before moving on to St. Paul. This gave young Oliver a place to stay in St. Paul and a resource to help him find a job in an unfamiliar new town.

In fact, Oliver lived with Stickney during his first two years in St. Paul while working at a variety of entry-level jobs. These jobs gave him experience in industries that would become important customers for his company. They included cook and jack-of-all-trades in a lumber camp, draftsman, and locomotive fireman, as well as short stints at J.J. Hill's St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway shops and the St. Paul Foundry. He also gained an impromptu education in locomotive operation, handling the controls and making up trains on the St. Paul to Willmar run. After two years in St. Paul, Crosby married Elizabeth Wood, also of Dexter.

Four years later, in 1882, Crosby co-founded with Frank J. Johnson what later became the American Hoist and Derrick Company. It was called the American Manufacturing Company and it was located at Eighth and Robert streets in St. Paul, and was first in the business of repairing heavy equipment used in the timber and iron ore industries. Shortly thereafter, the partners changed the focus of the business and introduced a line of hand- and horse-powered hoisting equipment, and this became the core of the business.

Crosby was the inventor-manager. He would draw schematics for hooks and cranes in his diary and bring them to the



An entry from Oliver Crosby's pocket journal, dated June 1892, and showing his ideas for a new derrick. It was common for him to make notes in his journal, then take them to pattern makers at work.

shop for pattern makers to construct. The early patents Crosby earned included friction drums for hoists to control the speed of derrick cables, and the Crosby Clip, a device used for looping and securing wire cable without decreasing its strength. The Crosby Clip is still sold and used today.

In 1886, the company moved to the south end of the Robert Street bridge and established a large presence there, including 250 feet of riverfront property. It would be its home for nearly a century. In 1892, the name of the corporation was changed to American Hoist and Derrick. Over the next two decades, the company established itself as a designer and manufacturer of custom lifting equipment sold and used throughout the world. By 1912, the company had over 700 employees.

Over the same period, three other Crosby inventions were to solidify the success of the company in its industry. Two were the direct result of experience Crosby gained when he first came to St. Paul. For the railroad industry he

designed the American Ditcher, a flat-car-mounted crane that could scoop out dirt to make ditches on either side of the track. This revolutionized the railroad industry by eliminating the need for large numbers of laborers to do the same task. For the lumber industry he designed a moveable crane that could safely lift logs onto and off of rail cars. Timber could then move to sawmills by rail rather than being floated down rivers.

The third invention was the traveling crane. The company supplied these giant cranes for harbors and shipyards throughout the world. One crane from that era used in the Panama Canal Zone was just retired in the last ten years, a testimony to its design and durability. The traveling crane at the famous Mare Island Naval Shipyard near San Francisco was recognized as the largest crane in the world for more than fifteen years.

In other high profile projects, American Hoist construction machinery was used in the building of the Keokuk Dam across the Mississippi, the Roosevelt and Yuma

dams in Arizona, and the water supply dams and tunnels for New York City.

By 1905, American Hoist and Derrick was an international company with offices in Chicago, New York, New Orleans, San Francisco, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, and other cities. Between 1910 and 1920, the company was a major supplier of marine deck equipment for both merchant and naval ships, supplying cargo winches, anchor windlasses, steering engines, and boom-topping winches. American Hoist was a major supplier and designated as an "essential" industry during World War I.

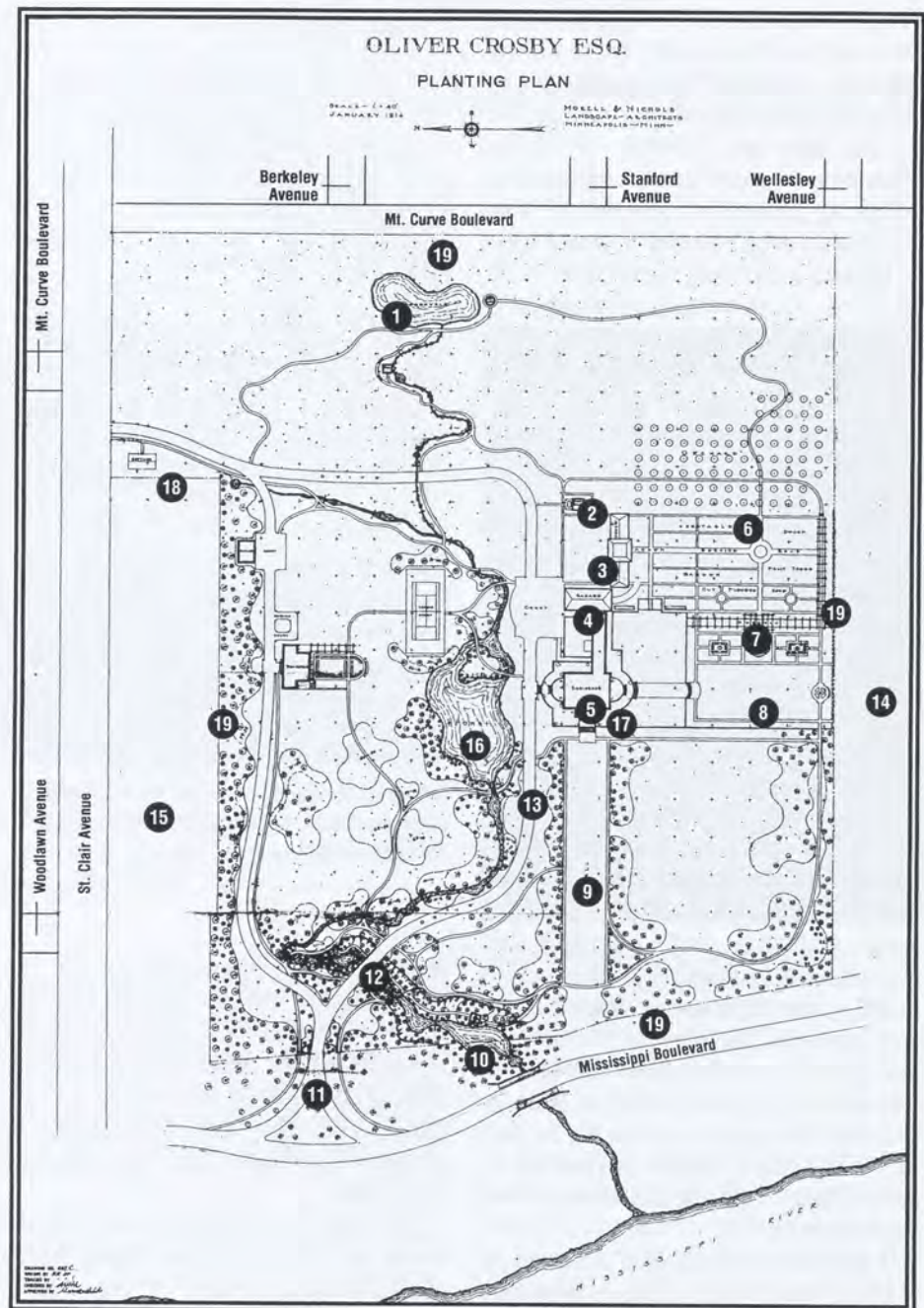
* * *

By the early 1890s, the growth of his company and the success of his own inventions had made Oliver Crosby a wealthy man. Because there was no state or federal income tax, wealth accumulated much faster than now. Crosby had many interests, including automobiles, horticulture, water hydraulics and construction. It was now time to start spending some of this money and living out some of his other interests.

In the late 1890s, Crosby purchased four lots on the southwest corner of Avon Street and Lincoln Avenue in St. Paul's Crocus Hill neighborhood. The exterior of the magnificent house he built at 804 Lincoln Avenue was made of solid limestone, requiring the foundation to settle for two years before final construction. To supervise construction, he built an interim house at 801 Goodrich Avenue.

He hired the most sought-after architect of the day, Clarence Johnston Jr., to design and build his new house, inaugurating a relationship that was to continue for many years. Johnston had designed the Glensheen mansion in Duluth and was later designated the State of Minnesota and University of Minnesota architect. He designed nearly thirty homes along Summit Avenue. In 1900, the Crosby family moved into 804 Lincoln which became a Crocus Hill landmark. The house included a large greenhouse and garage, and the interior featured many of the designs that later would be incorporated into the Stonebridge mansion.

In 1910, Crosby called on Clarence Johnston Jr. again to build a house

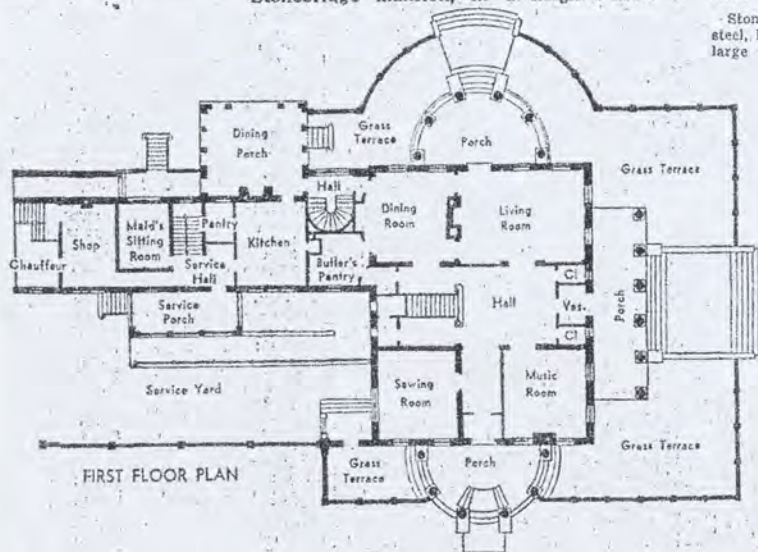


Key

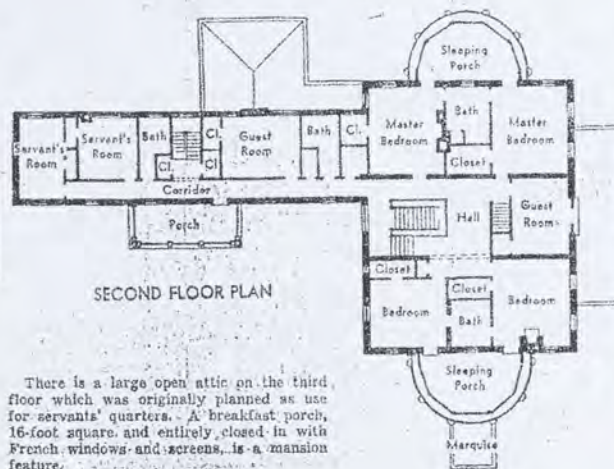
- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1 Reservoir feeding streams and waterfalls | 10 Frog Pond |
| 2 Well Pump House | 11 Main Entrance Gate |
| 3 Greenhouse | 12 Stone Bridge |
| 4 Garage | 13 Internal Road |
| 5 Main Residence | 14 Buffer Zone to Jefferson Ave. |
| 6 Gardens | 15 Existing Homes |
| 7 Pergola | 16 Lake Elizabeth |
| 8 Sunken Garden | 17 Cistern |
| 9 Mall | 18 St. Clair Ave. Gatehouse |
| | 19 Fence Surrounding Estate |

Stonebridge mansion, in a neighborhood of fine homes, overlooks the Mississippi river

Stonebridge is constructed of concrete, steel, hollow tile and brick. The garage is large enough to accommodate eight cars. The estate at one time consisted of a large acreage. Later many plots were sold. Present grounds include about three acres.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

There is a large open attic on the third floor which was originally planned as use for servants' quarters. A breakfast porch, 16-foot square and entirely closed in with French windows and screens, is a mansion feature.

The first and second floor plans for the residence..

on Summit Avenue. This time it was a wedding present for his son, Frederic. The house, located at 2010 Summit Avenue, was considered by the 1979-1982 Summit Avenue Architectural Survey to be "the most sophisticated Tudor Revival structure from the pre-World War I era along Summit Avenue."

Now he was ready to create his masterpiece: Stonebridge.

Platting of an Estate

In 1890, the property that Crosby purchased later was platted as St. John's Woods and it followed the city's normal north-south and east-west streetscape. The plat showed 208 lots with the streets Lydia, Grace, Sloan (later renamed Berkeley), Stanford, and Wellesley avenues running all the way to the river. However, by the early 1900s, the only development in the plat was a group of lots on the north side of the property along St. Clair Avenue.

In 1907, Crosby purchased all of St. John's Woods, with the exception of the lots along St. Clair, consisting of approximately twenty-eight acres of open land roughly bounded by South Mississippi River Boulevard, St. Clair and Jefferson Avenues and Mount Curve Boulevard. Shortly after the purchase, Crosby sold the south one-quarter of the land

to his colleague at American Hoist, Will Washburn. Washburn later sold his acreage back to Crosby, who never improved this portion of the property, leaving it as a buffer zone between the mansion and Jefferson Avenue. Meanwhile, Crosby developed his portion of the land to resemble the estates he had known in the East, incorporating his love of gardening, water, and cars.

According to Larry Millett, architectural critic of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, "Although the brick mansion, which featured a huge Ionic portico on the outside and plenty of fine detailing within, was certainly an impressive architectural specimen, it was not the biggest or most dazzling house ever built in St. Paul. The estate's lavishly landscaped grounds, however, were nothing short of astonishing, at least to modern eyes."

At that time, the property was on the outskirts of St. Paul. The closest streetcar line was the Grand Avenue line that terminated at Cretin Avenue, seven city blocks away from Stonebridge. To the north of the property, developer Bill King had purchased land from Archbishop John Ireland that ran between the St. Paul Seminary and St. Clair Avenue and was building custom homes in what was called King's Maplewood. To the east, development was moving west from Snelling Avenue and had

nearly reached the eastern boundary of the estate. To the south, Jefferson Avenue was still a gravel road, with hardly any development further south.

The first step was to re-plat the land as Crosby Place and Hawthorne Woods, a platting that coincided with the ownership: Crosby Place was to be developed by Crosby and Hawthorne Woods was to be developed by Washburn. Oliver Crosby again engaged architect Clarence Johnston Jr. to build his new residence, Stonebridge, on his land.

The estate was named after a stone bridge that crossed over a ravine on the property. One of the mysteries over the years has been whether the stone bridge was on the property when Crosby bought it, or whether he built the bridge and then named the estate. No one knows for sure, but had it been built before Crosby acquired the land, the road and bridge would have been inconsistent with the streetscape of the 1890s St. John's Woods platting. The most likely scenario is that Crosby built the bridge following completion of a survey of the property in 1913 and just before building the mansion.

Crosby had many interests that he wanted to include in his development of the property. He and Johnston hired surveyors to create a contour map and record the detail of every tree and elevation on



An aerial view of the mansion and the newly-constructed streets of Stanford Court and Woodlawn Avenue. Streets at the top are Stonebridge Boulevard and the alley between the Boulevard and Mount Curve Boulevard. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

the property. This was followed by a formal planting plan drawn by Morrell and Nichols, the premier landscape architects of the day and the company Johnston later used exclusively in projects for the University of Minnesota.

Their Stonebridge plan called for hundreds of plantings to supplement the already amply forested land. Possibly inspired by the mall that was proposed for the University of Minnesota some years previously, the plan included a 65-foot-wide, one-city-block-long mall stretching from the front of the residence to the Mississippi River bluffs.

Because of Crosby's interest in water

and hydraulics, two artificial lakes were included. One was a reservoir at the top of the hill on the east edge of the property that was filled with well water from a pumping station at the bottom of the hill. A rocky stream, including waterfalls and reflecting pools, ran from the reservoir to the bottom of the hill. The stream led to Lake Elizabeth, a city-block-sized, concrete-lined lake on the north side of the residence. An island in the middle was accessible by a small wooden bridge.

From Lake Elizabeth, the stream went under the stone bridge to the Mississippi River. All along the stream were walking paths so visitors could enjoy the scenery.

Just before the stream ran into the Mississippi, there was a large pool of water that became known to several generations of kids as the frog pond because of its abundance of frogs and turtles.

To the immediate south of the residence, a large sunken garden held fountains, wading pools, and imported statues. A 100-foot-long pergola divided the sunken garden from other formal gardens. Brick-lined walkways guided visitors around the property. All the grounds, with the exception of the Stonebridge hill, were planted with Kentucky bluegrass and were nicely mowed, trimmed,

and cared for. An orchard nearby featured many species of apples.

Other structures on the property included a chauffeur's house near Mount Curve Boulevard and St. Clair Avenue, a caretaker's house at the St. Clair entrance gate and a large woodshop and storage building east of the main house. To maintain privacy, Johnston designed an eight-foot-high ornamental wrought-iron fence along Mississippi River Boulevard. A large entrance gate, with the word "Stonebridge" across the top, directed visitors to the residence. A wooden fence surrounded the rest of the property.

A Move to the Mansion

By the time Oliver and Elizabeth Crosby moved into the mansion in the spring of 1916, they were empty nesters. Of their three children, Louise had married and moved to the East Coast; Frederic also was married and lived on Summit Avenue; and Ruth was away at school in the East. Around 1917, Ruth returned to St. Paul with her husband, Cornelius Van Ness, a recent Harvard graduate, and they lived in the mansion for a short time. They also created quite a stir in St. Paul literary circles, starting the Kilmarnock Bookstore located in downtown St. Paul near Fourth and Cedar Streets, presumably with the backing of Oliver Crosby.

The bookstore was a gathering place for many St. Paul writers and artists, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, Charles and Grace Flandrau, Tom and Woodward Boyd, and James Ray. Fitzgerald rented a room near Kilmarnock where he worked on page proofs of *The Beautiful and the Damned* and often stopped by the bookstore. One can only imagine whether some of those writers and artists may have been guests at parties at the mansion or whether Stonebridge was one of the inspirations for Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* published in the mid-1920s.

The bookstore eventually moved to a storefront in the Guardian Building on Fourth and Cedar Streets and finally to the basement of the art deco Women's City Club on Kellogg Boulevard and St. Peter Street before being sold in the early 1920s.

The residence, built in the Georgian Revival style between 1914 and 1916,



The south side of the nearly 350-foot, 20,000 square-foot complex showing the main residence, garage, and greenhouse.



A party on the southwest lawn, with a raised dance floor and a band playing for the guests.



The stone bridge, near South Mississippi River Boulevard, for which Stonebridge was named. The estate's streets were paved with asphalt when many nearby city streets were gravel.

floor and nearly every countertop. There was a Clarence Johnston Jr., trademark—a grand, switchback, central staircase. On the lower level was a large ballroom-theater with a stage. The house also featured a sixteen-foot-square, glass-enclosed early version of the three-season porch.

The garage, which could house nine cars, was one of the first large residential garages in the area. After all, cars had just recently been invented. It was heated by the central boiler and had a high ceiling with skylights that opened during the summer. There were garage doors at both ends; cars entered a center driveway and parked to either side. For automobile maintenance, the garage included two below-floor grease pits similar to those at today's quick-oil-change franchises.

Crosby was known to have many cars, including racing cars. According to Dexter Crosby, Oliver's great-grandson, he owned a Stutz Bearcat that he used in local rallies. Mrs. Crosby also was seen driving an electric car around the estate. Another feature of the complex was the attached 100- x 25-foot greenhouse, one-third the size of the Como Park Conservatory. The greenhouse was heated by

used techniques and materials usually reserved for industrial construction. The basement was formed using poured concrete, and the exterior and interior walls were made of concrete and hollow clay tile blocks. The exterior was red brick and the roof was slate. Most likely the only supporting wood used in the construction was the roof trusses.

The nearly 20,000-square-foot, 250-foot long complex included the main house, garage, and greenhouse. The main house was designed for entertaining, with a separate section for the Crosbys and another section for staff and cooking. It took a staff of eleven to maintain the mansion and estate. There also was a full-time chauffeur.

The main house had three levels with twenty-four principal rooms, five bathrooms, and a grand entrance that faced the river. Marble and rare woods were imported from Europe to build fireplaces and decorate the interior, which also featured ornamental plaster ceilings, cornices, and friezes. Marble was used for the entrance



The mansion's first floor with its ten-foot-high center hallway and double switch-back stairway. Doorways on either side led to the servants' area. The depth of the concrete and hollow tile walls can be seen in the doorway at left. The grandfather clock, now in the possession of Oliver Crosby's great-grandson, came to America with the Crosby family before the American Revolution. A chest-high steel safe was located under the stairs. Photograph from the Minnesota Historical Society.



The Crosbys often entertained employees of American Hoist and Derrick. Here Clara Lundquist Hanggi, a telephone operator at the company, sits beside the pergola. Photo courtesy of June Person, her daughter.

the central boiler and featured skylights that opened during the summer. A little-known concrete tunnel ran from the greenhouse, under the garage, and on to the main house.

Several examples of Crosby's inventive genius formed the basis of the estate and mansion water systems. A reservoir at the top of the hill supplied water to all of the waterfalls and ponds, as well as the grounds and gardens. To provide soft water for laundry and bathing, Crosby created a large underground cistern adjoining the mansion to collect rainwater from the mansion roof during the summer months and store it for year-round use. No small storage facility, the cistern was made of poured concrete and was the size of a two-story, two-car residential garage. Most likely, water was pumped from the cistern to a tank in the attic and fed by gravity throughout the mansion. The cistern still survives today, buried below the foundation and garage of a nearby home. At least one of the waterfalls on the hill survives on private property.

Oliver Crosby's Death

After only six years at Stonebridge, Oliver Crosby died in December 1922. He was sixty-seven. For his last three years,

he had suffered from anemia and his death was not a surprise. Although a holder of thirty-six manufacturing patents, Crosby was no inventor-geek. Over his lifetime, he was prominently involved in St. Paul's social and political scene.

The St. Paul paper said this of Crosby:

During the forty years Mr. Crosby had been developing the American Hoist and Derrick company into one of the greatest industries of its kind in the world, he never was too busy, but always found the time to concern himself in the promotion of civic welfare, and although he had not been a seeker for public office, his opinion and advice were widely solicited in matters affecting municipal affairs and civic development. He had devoted considerable attention to city planning and beautification, and as a member of a former city charter commission, contended that the affairs of a municipality should be conducted along lines similar to those employed in the management of large business corporations. These methods, he maintained, are nearer the correct principle than those usually employed by the political machinery of city government.

Crosby and his wife were active in the most prestigious social clubs in the St.

Paul area: the Minnesota Club, Town and Country Club and White Bear Yacht Club.

Crosby's death set in motion a series of events that would take nearly forty years to completely play out. Crosby had set up a twenty-year trust that allowed his wife, Elizabeth, to live in the mansion if she wanted to. Otherwise, any of the children could live there. A set amount of money was provided for whoever decided to live in the mansion. If no one in the family wanted to live there, the mansion would be sold. Merchants National Trust was named trustee for all of the Crosby assets, including the mansion; his son Frederic was named executor of the estate.

Shortly after Oliver's death, the State of Minnesota contested his will. The St. Paul paper observed:

St. Paul attorneys who have heard of the case forecast a bitter battle which is expected to produce many new and unusual legal technicalities before the case is settled. Previous to Crosby's death, Hoist and Derrick was having difficulty in meeting differing state laws to make sales. This necessitated a change in the organization and a new partnership was formed. He gave his wife and children each a partnership in the business. They were not active partners but did participate in dividends. The trust contended that the partnership was a gift before death and consequently not subject to inheritance tax. The State of Minnesota argued that according to state law, partners cannot be taken into a firm without the full consent of the other partners which was not the case.

This dispute eventually was settled, but with interest and penalties the settlement may have put a financial strain on the trust and accelerated or altered decisions that were to be made on the estate land and mansion.

Elizabeth continued to live in the mansion alone. However, she knew that she could no longer pay expenses on both the mansion and estate land while also maintaining a staff of servants. As a result, Frederic Crosby and trust officials started planning to sell the mansion and subdivide the twenty-eight acres of land. They contacted the original landscape designers, McColl and Nichols, and William S. King, who had developed King's Maplewood to the north, to propose a

plan for sale of the estate property. Drawings for subdividing the property were completed as early as 1923. Actual implementation of the plan, however, was delayed until Elizabeth's death and her memorial service at Stonebridge in June 1928.

In October 1928, it was announced that the trust had sold the estate property to John Cable and Bill King. According to the announcement in the St. Paul paper,

Stonebridge, the famous Crosby estate on the Mississippi River Boulevard, one of the beauty spots of St. Paul, and considered the finest estate in the Northwest, was sold Saturday to John E. Cable and will be subdivided into 100 home sites for an exclusive residential district. Announcement of the sale was made by William S. King, a St. Paul Realtor, who represented both the Crosby interests and the purchaser in the negotiations and who has the contract for the development and management of the property. The plot will be restricted to high-priced homes

and the natural beauty of the estate will be preserved.

It was not part of the announcement, but according to the agreement, the sale price was \$200,000: \$50,000 down and a mortgage securing a five-year note to the trust for the remaining \$150,000. Notably, the sale did not include the mansion and approximately three acres of surrounding land.

At the time, Cable was secretary-treasurer of the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (3M) and a major landowner and developer of the new community of Falcon Heights. He lived in the Groveland neighborhood at 162 South Mississippi River Boulevard. Most likely Cable provided the money and King the development expertise. The Clapp-Thomssen Company was designated sales agent.

The announcement went on to say, "A unique feature of the subdivision will be the shape and sizes of the home sites. They will be cut in varying figures to pre-

clude the monotony of the usual system. Where it is necessary to remove trees, they will be replanted on other lots. All wiring will be done underground and all improvements will be of the latest and most desirable types." The deed contained several covenants: each house must be at least two-and-a-half stories and the construction cost must be between \$15,000 and \$70,000.

The following spring of 1929, in order to construct new streets and make the lots ready for sale, it was necessary to remove some of the structures on the estate, including seventy-five feet of the 100-foot greenhouse, the St. Clair gatehouse, the ornamental wrought-iron fencing along Mississippi River Boulevard, and the wooden fence around the remainder of the property.

Now, Woodlawn Avenue cut right in front of the mansion and the address was no longer the prestigious 302 Mississippi River Boulevard, but simply 302 Woodlawn Avenue. Unique to the neighborhood was a twelve-foot-round island located at the intersection of Stanford Court and Woodlawn Avenue. The grand brick and wrought-iron entrance on Mississippi River Boulevard was not removed until later.

After Elizabeth's death, Frederic decided to move his family to the mansion from his home on Summit Avenue. He and the trust attempted to sell the mansion, but there were no takers. By early 1929, the stock market was showing signs of weakening. By summer, economic conditions nationwide began to deteriorate. By November, the stock market had crashed and officials were meeting to decide whether to close the New York Stock Exchange. Locally, the Foshay financial empire collapsed. The Great Depression was underway, and there would be few land sales until the economy improved in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

By 1931, only nine houses had been built, just 10 percent of the proposed development, and from the time Cable and King bought the property in 1928, they had not paid the real estate taxes on any of the unsold lots. The trust therefore threatened to foreclose on the mortgage. In October 1931, Cable voluntarily agreed to return the property. Now the Crosby trust



In the late 1920s or early 1930s, Frederic Crosby purchased one of the recently developed commercial power lawn mowers for cutting the estate's remaining three acres. Photograph from the National Mower Company.

was back in the business of selling the estate property. As the 1931 Clapp-Thomsen sales brochure said, "During the last three years with as little disturbance as possible of the carefully planned landscaping, Stonebridge has been divided into homesites with paved streets and paved alleys, sewers, water, curbing, and ornamental lights. A number of homes costing from \$20,000 to \$60,000 have already been built at Stonebridge and during 1932 at least four or five more will be started." That prediction turned out to be wildly optimistic.

For some unknown reason, after canceling the mortgage with Cable and taking back the estate property, the trust decided not to pay the past-due or future real estate taxes. It may have been that there was not enough money available in the trust, or that the remaining lots were thought to have little value in the faltering economy. According to state tax policy, the lots should have been tax forfeited to the state in the summer of 1934, but because of the large number of homes already in foreclosure, the state and Ramsey County may not have followed that policy.

In any case, the trust continued to market the property even under the threat of tax foreclosure. According to Kris Kujala, current manager of Ramsey County's tax forfeited land, "There may have been so many properties in St. Paul that had been tax forfeited that the county decided to deviate from the policy." She also explained the usual tax forfeiture procedure: "The clock starts ticking on January 1 following the year taxes are not paid. If the property is non-owner occupied, the title will go to the state after three years. If it is owner-occupied, it is five years."

Gene Englebert remembered that "In 1936, my father, E.E. Englebert, bought two lots on Mississippi River Boulevard from the trust by just paying the outstanding taxes." The property he bought included the huge brick and ornamental-iron entrance gate to the mansion. Englebert eventually donated the gate to Como Park and arranged for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to move it to its present location at Midway Parkway and Hamline Avenue.

There were other impediments to land sales: rats and odor. At that time, Min-



The massive entrance gate that opened onto Stonebridge from South Mississippi River Boulevard. E. E. Englebert is at left, with M. Slocum. In 1937 the gate was moved to Hamline Avenue and Midway Parkway as the west entrance to Como Park. Englebert, who later built a home on the Stonebridge property, donated the gate and the WPA installed it. Pioneer Press photo, Minnesota Historical Society collections.

neapolis dumped raw sewage into the Mississippi River across from the estate property. This was not a major problem until the new Ford dam backed up the river between what are now the Ford and Lake Street bridges. This caused odors to hang over the properties near the river, and because of the raw sewage, there were rumors of rats in the neighborhood. That situation was not resolved until the late 1930s when Minneapolis hooked its sewer system to the Pigs Eye Waste Treatment Center.

In the late 1930s, the state decided to take possession of the unsold property the trust owned. As a result of the improving economy and possibly favorable selling terms by the trust, many lots were sold just before they would have been forfeited. However, nearly forty lots were forfeited to the state on July 31, 1940—nearly half the proposed development.

Frederic Crosby and his family lived in

the mansion for seven years, from 1928 to 1935. During those years, the landscaping was improved and everything in the mansion was kept in working order in hopes that a buyer would appear. And the real estate taxes continued to be paid by the trust. In 1935, Frederic bought the house at 804 Lincoln Avenue, previously owned by Oliver Crosby, and moved out of the mansion. It is not known why he chose to move at this time. He may have been anticipating the January 1942 expiration of the twenty-year trust, when taxes and maintenance expenses no longer would be paid. With Frederic leaving, the trust hired live-in caretakers, Mr. and Mrs. Rayburn, who were responsible for both interior and exterior maintenance. The trust paid the real estate taxes until 1938.

The Rayburns left in 1939 and the trust elected not to replace them. As a result, the property was vacant and not kept

Living in a Mansion

Who lived in the mansion the longest: Oliver Crosby or Frederic Crosby? Neither, actually. Hale and David Carr both lived there for nine years (1944–1953); Frederic Crosby lived there for seven years (1928–1935); and Oliver Crosby for six years (1914–1922).

In 1944, Ramsey County Commissioner Milt Rosen asked Hale Carr, a St. Paul postal employee, if he would consider being the caretaker at Stonebridge and living there with his wife and three sons. The arrangement was simple: Carr was to live in the house at no cost and receive a small reimbursement for maintaining the heating. In return, he was to shovel the walks, mow the lawn, and keep trespassers away. It was to be a year-to-year arrangement because no one knew when the mansion would be sold or razed. At the time, Doug Carr attended Minneapolis South High School, Lowell attended St. Paul Central High School, and David attended Groveland Park Elementary. The short-term arrangement eventually lasted from 1944 to the summer of 1953.

The Carrs lived in the servants' quarters on the first and second floors. The main kitchen was their primary living space. They used the servants' upstairs bedrooms for sleeping and the two upstairs bathrooms. The servants' quarters were heated and shut off from the rest of the mansion. The closed-off part of the mansion was scary. It was always cold and dark, the furniture had long since been removed, the windows were greasy-grimy dirty, and the dark paneling made it even darker. Everything was dusty and dirty and there was no electricity in most of the mansion.

Since the caretaker arrangement was supposed to be temporary, the hot water heater was never hooked up, so the entire time the Carrs lived there, hot water had to be heated on the stove. Doug Carr

recalls taking showers at South High School. No need for air conditioning: Since the house was made mostly of concrete, it was cold in both summer and winter.

While working at the Post Office, Hale Carr studied law at the St. Paul College of Law and did tax returns to earn extra money. Dorothy Malcolm Brendel recalls having Hale Carr do her taxes, getting a tour of the mansion and being impressed with the large ballroom and a stage on the lower level.

For Doug Carr, who lived in the mansion five years, memories include having to cut the grass on the grounds, shooting .22 rifles in the basement and a makeshift basketball court in the huge garage.

After most of the estate was sold, three acres of land surrounding the mansion remained. It was Doug's and Lowell's job to cut the grass with a human-powered push mower. Doug recalls hoping that it would not rain during the summer so the grass would not grow.

On the lower level of the mansion, there was a long hallway—perhaps seventy-five feet—where Doug and Lowell would set up targets for rifle practice. Perhaps most vividly, Doug remembers the huge garage. The official size (as reported by the newspapers over the years) was a capacity of nine cars. His recollection is that it was much bigger—maybe more than twenty cars. "It was big enough for half of a basketball court, plus the cars," he says. And he remembers that the walls from floor to ceiling were lined with inch-sized octagonal white ceramic tiles.

David Carr lived his first nine years of his life at the mansion. His recollections include strange noises in the night and softball games on the grounds. "When I was a little kid, I would sleep on the second floor in the servants' quarters," David says. "During the winter,

the snow would slide off the slate roof and make a big noise when it hit the ground. And it would wake everybody up." And in an era after World War II when very few kids had any baseball or softball equipment, David supplied everything—the field (on the mansion grounds), bats, balls, bases and gloves. Every Saturday, there would be a neighborhood softball game. In center field there was the mansion greenhouse that still had glass panes, and the highlight of the day was when somebody hit a long ball to center field and took out one of the panes.

David also remembers being the tour guide for neighbors and others interested in seeing the inside of the mansion. He remembers that "Neighbors and others would knock on the door and my mother would have me show them the mansion from the basement to the attic. Things really picked up when the legislature was considering the mansion as the governor's residence."

This author recalls that when my family moved to the Stonebridge neighborhood in 1950, there was an urban legend among neighborhood kids that somewhere on the estate's land there was what was called the old tile tunnel. No one knew where the tunnel was, what it looked like, or what it was for, but many Sundays were spent looking around the foundations of new houses for evidence of the tunnel. It was never found. Now the urban mystery has been found. The old tunnel was a forty-foot tunnel between the main residence and the greenhouse so the Crosbys could go between buildings during the winter months. Just like the garage, it was lined with white ceramic tile.

By 1953, Doug and Lowell were fighting in Korea. When the word came the mansion was to be razed, the rest of the Carr family started a new life in a conventional home in Maplewood.



The south side of the Mississippi on both sides of the Robert Street bridge and across from downtown St. Paul, the home of American Hoist and Derrick Company for almost 100 years. Ken Wright Studio photograph circa 1950.

up during the five years between 1939 and 1944. Neighbors reported that while the mansion was in still good shape, the adjoining property was unkempt and run-down. The hedges were not trimmed, the grass was no longer cut, and the fountains and statues were neglected. This is the time when many of the neighborhood kids got to know the inside of the mansion. There were "secret" windows that were known to give access to enterprising persons. Jean Carnes Rowland remembers groups of kids dressing up in costumes, going inside and pretending to be the owners. Jack Spindler recalls hiding in huge clothes dryers in the basement. Jim Stubbs said that he had never seen another house with two huge furnaces.

Since the trust had not paid the real estate taxes for the five years since 1938, and there was no buyer, the mansion was tax forfeited to the state on July 31, 1944.

During the mid-1940s, the state owned

the mansion and numerous estate lots. According to Kujala, "when property is tax forfeited, the state becomes the owner but the county manages the transaction for the state. The property is offered to other units of state government. If there is no interest, the property is sold at auction. If there are no bidders, individuals can pick up the property by just paying the taxable value."

During the middle 1940s, individuals and investors purchased a number of the lots directly from the state. Apparently, when the auctions were held, there were no bidders, but as World War II wound down, interest in the property increased. One of the major property investors and speculators was St. Paul businessman William Kahlert, a stock and bond broker by trade, who worked with H. and Val J. Rothschild, local real estate brokers, to sell directly to buyers after buying lots from the state.

About the same time, Ramsey County had to decide what to do with the mansion. It had been made available to other units of government and none was interested. The county tried to sell the property as the Crosby trust had done previously and was similarly unsuccessful. Many uses were proposed for the mansion, including a rest home, a cloistered convent, a club for Fort Snelling officers, and a church-run home for the elderly. One official suggested that with judicious use of wallboard, Stonebridge could be used for housing servicemen returning from WWII, as a hospital for wounded veterans.

The most serious proposal came from Frank Marzitelli, commissioner of libraries and museums and future St. Paul city councilman, who suggested that the mansion be used as a center for music and arts organizations. This idea was ahead of its time; such a center became a reality in the 1980s at downtown St. Paul's Landmark

Minnesota Inventors' Hall of Fame

Although he founded what became a Fortune 500 company and was one of St. Paul's largest employers, and although he held thirty-six patents, little is remembered about Oliver Crosby.

In June, Crosby was finally recognized for his accomplishments by being the sole 2005 inductee into the Minnesota Inventors' Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame, located in Redwood Falls, Minnesota, is a non-profit organization established in 1976 to honor inventors and bring public attention to the economic and social importance of their contributions to society. Since the inception of the Hall of Fame recognition in 1976, fifty-five other distinguished inventors have been honored.

According to Raymond Walz, board member of the Hall of Fame, "In addition to his company leadership and inventions, Crosby was a leader in the St. Paul business and civic community, focusing on city planning and beautification, and this was an important part of his selection." The recognition was made at an award ceremony held concurrently with the annual meeting of the Minnesota Inventors' Congress, billed as the oldest organization in the country for active and aspiring inventors. A plaque and Crosby's picture are on

display at the Minnesota Inventors' hall of Fame Exhibit at the Redwood Area Community Center.

While the organization honors all types of inventors, Crosby joins other well-known inventor-business executives including:

- **Richard Cornelius**-Inventor in many fields, holding 180 patents and founder of the Cornelius Company, a manufacturer of beverage dispensing equipment
- **Frank Donaldson**-Founder of the Donaldson Company and holder of twenty-two patents. His company is a pioneer in the design, manufacture, and marketing of air cleaner equipment for internal combustion engines.
- **Glen Dye**-An early inventor of mechanized photo-finishing equipment and founder of the Pako Corporation.
- **Earl Bakken**-Co-founder of Medtronic and developer of the first wearable, external, battery-powered heart pacemaker.

The most recent other Ramsey County inductee is **Norman B. Mears**, CEO of the Buckbee-Mears Company, who is best known as the inventor of the shadow mask, an essential component of the color television tube, and the cross-hair bomb sight for the armed forces, which he developed during World War II.

Center, but the idea did not fly in 1944. An attorney who lived in the area, Ralph Stacker, was quoted as saying he and others "would be up in arms if Stonebridge is selected. Residents oppose non-residential building in the neighborhood."

Leonard Seamer, assistant Ramsey County land commissioner, said, "the land commissioner's office has tried diligently to find a purchaser for the property ever since it was forfeited, but without success. Even the wealthiest persons here do not want it as a home. It would take a man earning over \$20,000 a year just to afford the maintenance."

Governor's Mansion?

The idea of the Stonebridge mansion as the governor's residence had been floating around since the early 1940s, even before

the state took title. Bills to that effect had been introduced in several legislative sessions with no action was taken. In 1952, St. Paul Mayor John Daubney, who favored the idea, tapped Betty Runyon, a St. Paul Republican activist, to get the endorsements of local civic groups. The plan was to introduce a bill in the 1953 legislative session with the support of the City of St. Paul and a host of civic groups. To add urgency and finality, they planned to include in the bill a provision that if the mansion was not approved as the governor's residence, it was to be torn down.

Runyon organized tours of Stonebridge, meeting with civic groups and the media to get their endorsement. The effort stirred quite a controversy over whether the governor should live in a state-provided residence. At the time, Governor C. Elmer

Anderson was leasing a 1,200-square-foot house in Roseville. Former governors Harold Stassen, Ed Thye, and Luther Youngdahl opposed the idea.

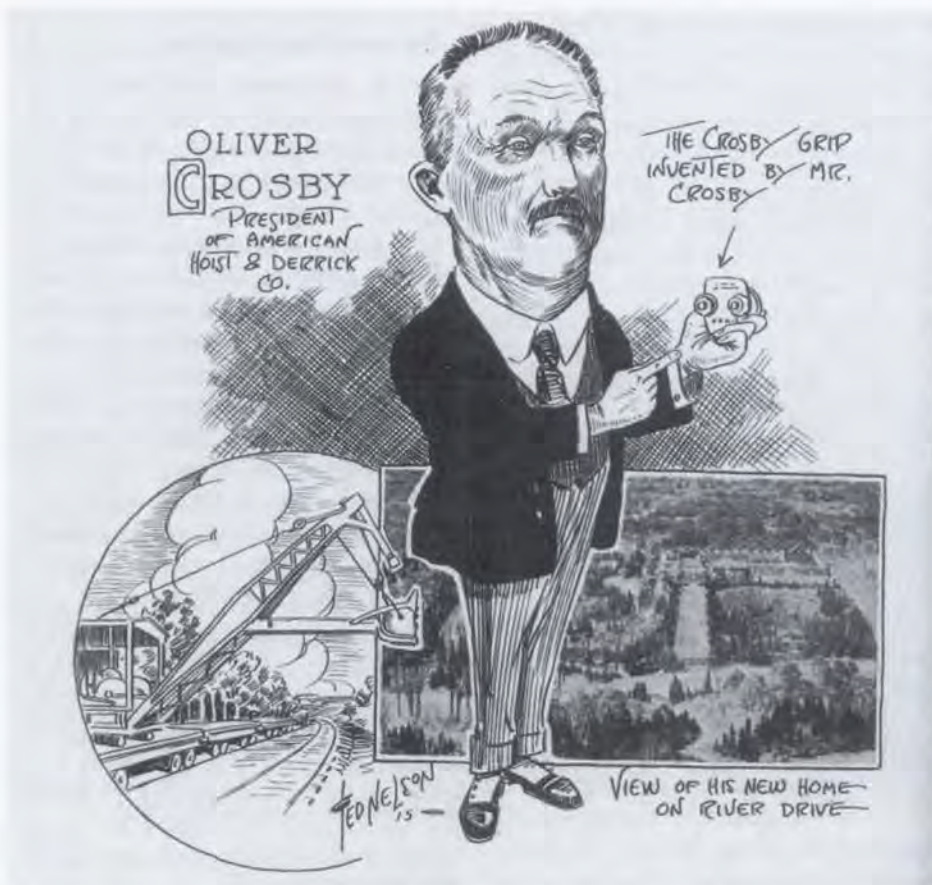
Newspaperman and KSTP television host George Grim spoke out in favor of the mansion as the governor's residence: "Wouldn't you like to say that's *our* house?" Civic groups in favor included, among others, downtown Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, the Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees), Daughters of the American Revolution, the Business and Professional Women's Association, the Territorial Pioneers, Association of Commercial Clubs, Payne Avenue Business Association, the Guild of Catholic Women and the Minnesota Federation of Press Women.

Under the terms of the bill introduced by Republican Sheldon Beanblossom of St. Paul, Republican Sally Luther of Minneapolis and House Speaker John Hartle of Owatonna, the state would take over the grounds and buildings, redecorate and furnish the mansion, staff it with sufficient help and provide funds for its upkeep, for state functions, and entertainment of prominent guests. It was estimated that it would cost \$20,000 for renovation and redecoration and approximately another \$20,000 to furnish it. Thirty-seven states already had governor's residences at the time.

Betty Runyon pointed out, that "They [governors] have to maintain their residences in their home communities. Then, in addition, they are required to set up a residence suitable to their position as governor somewhere in the Twin Cities. It is a severe financial hardship, unless the governor happens to be a man of independent means."

In the midst of this debate, in May 1953, Governor C. Elmer Anderson lost the lease on his rented home in Roseville when the owner returned from Europe. The governor said that after the legislative session, he would retire to his home on Gull Lake, north of Brainerd, for the summer, and return to St. Paul in the fall. It is a refreshing look at the way politics used to be.

The bill to make Stonebridge the governor's residence failed in the Legislature. That was the last hope for preserving the mansion, and the state proceeded with plans to raze the building and sell the property. Runyon, now a St. Paul re-



Oliver Crosby and the Crosby clip. From the Artist League and the Cartoon Club.

altor, recently gave several reasons why she thought the bill did not pass:

- The legislature was dominated by rural legislators who were not interested in seeing the governor live in a fancy house.
- After World War II there was a housing shortage that continued into 1953, and some did not think the governor should live in a state-provided house if others lacked housing.
- Families were focused on returning to normalcy after the war and were pre-occupied with raising families and pursuing careers.
- The preservation movement was still about fifteen years away. The Historic District Preservation Act would be approved in 1968.

Another reason could have been that America was still involved in the Korean Conflict and that a governor's residence did not seem a high priority.

The mansion was razed in the fall of 1953 and approximately three acres were

sold on December 18, 1953, to a group called the Stonebridge Trust. The group, which was made up of nineteen local residents, paid \$27,825 at the state auction. Representing the trust were Gordon Strate, John Wolkerstorfer, and Paul Delander.

The mission of the trust was to resell the land with the sole intention of ensuring development in keeping with the neighborhood. Several minimal covenants were included in the trust: Any house must be at least one-and-a-half stories, the garage must be rear-facing and driveways must be from the alley. There was a provision that any purchaser must be approved by 50 percent of the trust's participants. The bottom line was that an interested party, for all practical purposes, had to be invited to purchase a lot. By 1956, all of the lots were sold. Several of the new owners reported that their builders had problems with basement excavation because of remnants of the mansion's reinforced concrete foundation.

Between 1953 and when the last house

was built on the land, Ed Holbert pulled the neighborhood together by building and maintaining on one of the vacant lots a skating rink that was enjoyed by parents and kids.

Epilogue

The Stonebridge story does not end with the razing of the mansion, because it was at least three years later when the last of the estate lots was sold and even longer until the last house was built. The original plat called for ninety-four lots. Many buyers purchased multiple lots, so eventually seventy homes were built on what once had been the Stonebridge estate. Nearly all were custom-built, architect-designed houses.

The neighborhood has a distinct character and history that is a direct result of the Crosby legacy:

- Since the lots were sold and houses built over nearly forty years, there is a mixture of age and architecture.
- The neighborhood deviates from the normal city streetscape with its traditional north-south/east-west orientation. The streets do not match up with the streets in adjoining neighborhoods, discouraging through traffic.
- The lots are of varying size and depth.
- The 1890 St. John's plat called for 208 lots on land that Crosby and Washburn eventually bought with the prospect of that many homes on the property. With the Crosby development, only seventy homes were built.
- The group of houses located on the Stonebridge Boulevard hill are unique examples of post-World War II modern design in the Twin Cities, with flat roofs, large windows and non-traditional floor plans and designed by well-known architects.
- Several artifacts survive in the neighborhood and in the city. The stone bridge for which the estate was named still remains, although on private property. The curbscuts from the garage driveway and the mansion's north portico are visible on Stanford Court. One of the waterfalls and reflecting pools on the Stonebridge hill is still preserved on private property.
- Outside the neighborhood, the grand gates from Mississippi River Boulevard are now in Como Park. The sign "Stonebridge" from the top of the gate is located on

private property in the Stonebridge development in Lilydale. A large frog brought back from Japan by the Crosbys and displayed on the front lawn of the mansion is located just outside the entrance of the Como Conservatory.

- Jack Bilski, a Realtor for Edina Realty who specializes in selling homes in the Macalester-Groveland neighborhood and the suburbs says that "When people buy homes in the suburbs, they generally plan to stay for a short period of time before moving on. In the Stonebridge area, they plan to stay for a lifetime."

* * *

Whatever happened to the Crosby family? Oliver Crosby's daughters Louise and Ruth married, moved from St. Paul and raised families out East. Frederic and his family remained in St. Paul. He continued with American Hoist and Derrick, serving as its president from 1934 to 1945. He was active in the St. Paul business community, serving as president of the Minnesota Club and the board of the Minnesota Federal Savings and Loan Association. Oliver Crosby's great grandson and granddaughter, Dexter and Nancy, grew up in St. Paul and attended St. Paul Academy and Summit School before moving from Minnesota.



Two giant traveling cranes parked in the American Hoist and Derrick yard across from downtown St. Paul. From the company's 1981 Annual Report.

And whatever happened to the company that Oliver built? The company thrived through the 1930s and '40s under Crosby's successors, including his son, Frederic. In the 1950s, '60's and '70s, the company went on an acquisition binge that transformed it from a manufacturer of cranes, hoists, and derricks into a broadly diversified organization. In the late 1970s, the company reached Fortune 500 status. Shortly thereafter, according to Bill Faulkner, former assistant to the president and to several other chief executive officers of the company, "due to a downturn in world economies, the American Hoist and Derrick company filed for bankruptcy, merged and moved out of St. Paul."

This was the end of the Crosby culture and the history Oliver Crosby created for both St. Paul and the Company.

Jay Pfaender is a member of the Editorial Board for Ramsey County History and of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Board of Directors. He is a Vice President of the Drake Bank in St. Paul.

Bibliography

Newspapers

General references in the St. Paul and Minneapolis newspapers:

- St. Paul Pioneer Press*
- St. Paul Dispatch*
- Minneapolis Star*
- Minneapolis Tribune*
- Highland Villager*

Books and Periodicals

- St. Paul Planning Board, *Historic St. Paul Buildings*, 1964.
- Donald Empson, *The Street Where You Live*, 1975.
- Paul Clifford Larson, *Minnesota Architect; The Life and Work of Clarence H. Johnston*, 1996.
- Byron Kermen, AIA, *The Development of a Neighborhood*, an unpublished paper for an architectural class, University of Minnesota.
- Henry A. Castle, *Minnesota: Its Story and Biography* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1915).
- Little Sketches of Big Folks*, (St. Paul: R.L. Polk and Company 1907).
- A.N. Margris, *The Book of Minnesotans*, (Chicago: A.N. Marquis and Company, 1907).
- American Hoist and Derrick, *Our First 100 Years*, (1982).

Seven Presidents

During the nearly 100 years that American Hoist and Derrick had its manufacturing facilities in St. Paul, only seven men served as president. **Oliver Crosby** was the company's first president until his retirement. **Frank Johnson**, his partner, became president in 1928 and held that position until 1934. **Frederic Crosby** assumed the presidency in 1934, serving until 1945. He was succeeded by **Harold O. Washburn**. **John E. Carroll** followed in 1953, serving until 1973. **Robert P. Fox** was president until the 1980s and was followed by **Robert Nassau**, who served until its crane facilities moved from Minnesota.

Jocelyn Wills, *Boosters, Hustlers, and Speculators*, Minnesota Historical Society, 2005.

Lawrence A. Martin, *Observations on Architectural Styles*, www.angelfire.com, (2001).

Simon Percy Crosby, *Two Crosby Families*, H.W. Kingston Company (1910).

American Families, Genealogical and Biographical, Historical Society, Inc. New York City, NY, Book 8 of 50.

Robert Goldston, *The Great Depression*, Fawcett Premier Book, Greenwich, Conn (1968).

John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash 1929*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston (1954).

Larry Haeg, *In Gatsby's Shadow*, University of Iowa Press (2004).

John Reif, A.B. *Stickney: The Man Whose Dream Came True, A Biography of A.B. Stickney*, John Reif, publisher, Dellwood, Minnesota (1991).

Personal Interviews:

- Bill Faulkner, assistant to the president, American Hoist and Derrick.
- Betsy Perry and Jeff Aldrich, residents of 804 Lincoln Avenue, Oliver Crosby's first home.
- David and Doug Carr, sons of the mansion caretaker, Hale Carr.
- Gene Engelbert, son of E.E. Engelbert who donated the Stonebridge gates to Como Park.
- Kris Kujala, supervisor, tax forfeited land, Ramsey County.
- Betty Runyon, governor's residence committee chair, 1953.
- Dexter Crosby, great-grandson of Oliver Crosby.

A Year-long Journey

My journey into the history of Oliver Crosby and his Stonebridge estate began more than a year ago, when I visited friends who had recently purchased Crosby's first house at 804 Lincoln Avenue. I remarked to my hosts that I felt like I'd been in the house before, because many of its elements seemed familiar. I had not, but I had been in Oliver Crosby's Stonebridge mansion and many themes had been carried over to that grand house.

When I was in grade school, David Carr, son of the Stonebridge caretaker, was one of my friends, and I was in and out of the mansion regularly until it was torn down in 1953. My hosts suggested that it might be interesting to research the history of Stonebridge, since I actually had been in the mansion and lived across the street for more than twenty years.

The first step in that direction was to locate David Carr, whom I had not seen since grade school. Thanks to the Internet, I found him just a mile from my house. We met and compared notes, but that conversation didn't shed much light on Stonebridge history. My second effort was to locate Oliver Crosby's great-granddaughter, Nancy, with whom I had gone to college. She put me in touch with her brother, Dexter, the family historian. During an exchange of phone calls and letters with Dexter, I learned a good deal about Oliver and his family, but Dexter knew little about what had happened after the family abandoned the mansion.

However, I did learn early on that the Oliver Crosby family was not related to the Crosby milling family in Minneapolis nor the Crosby family of Crosby Park in St. Paul. About that time I was hooked. I had to find the answers. Who was Oliver Crosby? Where did he get the money to build such an estate? What did the estate look like? When did he buy it? Why did it take so many years for the property to be developed? Why did the Crosby family abandon the mansion?

Many of the answers were tied up

in the records of property sale transactions. The Stonebridge lots are Torrens properties. Unlike abstract properties, for which a person can leaf through a document that lists all the owners and transactions over the life of the property, the title of a Torrens property shows only the latest transaction. Going through nearly a century of records required the knowledge of property ownership experts. Special thanks go to Midwest Title Guarantee and Commonwealth Land America Title, who took interest in the project and provided the answers to many of the mysteries of Stonebridge history. Thanks also to Barb Bezat at the Northwest Architectural Library, who was able to unearth for the first time the original drawings of the estate grounds, and to Kris Kujala, Ramsey County's tax forfeited land manager, who helped me understand the state tax forfeiture system. Terry Wolkerstorfer, who grew up in the neighborhood, was helpful in editing the text of the story.

Some might wonder if all this effort was worthwhile, when farms and urban estates are subdivided almost every day across the country. I believe it was because Stonebridge was located in the heart of the Twin Cities, and since the Crosby family left town long ago, the story of who Oliver Crosby was and what happened to the mansion and estate was in danger of being lost permanently.

Stonebridge Chronology

1882—Frank J. Johnson and Oliver Crosby start the company that became American Hoist and Derrick.

1888—Crosby patents the Crosby Clip.

1898–1900—Crosby builds his first house at 804 Lincoln Avenue in Crocus Hill in St. Paul.

1909—Crosby purchases twenty-eight acres on Mississippi Boulevard for a future home.

1910—Crosby builds a house for his son at 2010 Summit Avenue.

1914–1916—Stonebridge house is built and the family occupies it in 1916.

1922—Oliver Crosby dies and the Crosby Trust is established.

1923—State of Minnesota contests the Crosby will.

1928—Elizabeth Crosby, wife of Oliver Crosby, dies at Stonebridge.

1928—Estate land is sub-divided into ninety-six lots and sold to John Cable and William S. King.

1929—Stonebridge Boulevard, Woodlawn Avenue, and Stanford Court streets are constructed.

1931—Estate land sale to King and Cable is cancelled and land reverts to Crosby Trust.

1935—Frederic moves out of Stonebridge residence to 804 Lincoln Avenue, former home of Oliver Crosby.

1936–1938—A caretaker lives at the mansion but the mansion is vacant from 1938 to 1943.

1937—Stonebridge main gate is moved to Como Park, at Midway Parkway and Hamline Avenue.

1940—Over forty unsold estate lots tax are forfeited to the state.

1942—The Crosby Trust that pays the expenses and property taxes terminates.

1944—Mansion property is tax-forfeited to state because of delinquent property taxes.

1944–1954—Carr family lives in the mansion as caretakers.

1953—Mansion is considered as governor's residence by the Minnesota Legislature.

1953—Mansion is razed and property sold to nearby residents.

1956—Last estate lot is sold.

2005—Oliver Crosby is inducted into the Minnesota Inventors' Hall of Fame.



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.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989

