RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Fall 2006 Volume 41, Number 3

The 1894 Pullman Strike and the Death of Switchman Charles Luth

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A Little-Known Railway That Couldn't
The St. Paul Southern

—Page 4

Looking west from the Robert Street Bridge, this 1920s photo shows a St. Paul Southern car headed outbound for South St. Paul and Hastings. Between 1900 and 1910 the combined population of these two Dakota County communities increased 38.5%, encouraging construction of the interurban. But the line's ambitions to build on to Cannon Falls and Rochester went unfulfilled, and it eventually succumbed to automobile and bus competition. Photograph courtesy of the Minnesota Transportation Museum. See John Diers's article beginning on page 4.

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RAMSEY COUNTY
History

Volume 41, Number 3 Fall 2006

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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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

Transportation is the theme for this issue's two main articles: a history of the short-lived St. Paul Southern electric interurban railway, and an exploration of the social and economic implications of the1894 Pullman strike in St. Paul. The latest addition to our series, "Growing Up in St. Paul," presents a lyrical account of childhood in the Frogtown neighborhood in the 1930s. And a book review introduces a significant compilation of the letters of Bishop Loras, who sent priests from Dubuque in the 1850s to minister to the population of the new Minnesota Territory.

These articles, with their varying subjects and approaches, illustrate the different ways this magazine addresses its mission to preserve and highlight the many facets of Ramsey County history. We hope you will be able to contribute a little extra this year, through our annual appeal, to strengthen the financial base that allows us to present such great material on a continuing basis.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

The 1894 Pullman Strike in St. Paul
and the Death of Switchman Charles Luth

Gregory T. Poferl

The 1894 Pullman strike had explosive consequences across the United States. St. Paul experienced the effects of the strike because it was both a union town *and* a railroad city. In particular, the strike and its impact on the residents of Minnesota's capital city were reflected in the daily and weekly coverage of the events surrounding the killing of Charles Luth, a member of the American Railway Union (ARU), by a "scab," Charles Leonard. The death of Charlie Luth, his burial, and the trial of Charles Leonard provide a fascinating study of the political, religious, and social divisions within the city that crystallized around the strike.

A sketch of Charles J. Luth from the December 22, 1894, edition of the St. Paul Herald. *Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

The Death of Charles Luth

St. Paul, Minnesota, was a major transportation hub and a significant center of activity for the 1894 Pullman Strike. Over a dozen railroads operated in the Twin Cities, dominated by James J. Hill's Great Northern Railroad, which had just completed building to the Pacific coast the year before. Major shop and yard facilities in St. Paul employed thousands in jobs such as engineer, switchman, conductor, and brakeman. Typically, these workers belonged to one of several different craft unions, but in 1893 the American Railway Union (ARU) was formed with the goal of uniting all railroad workers, regardless of craft, into one big union.[1]

In April 1894 the leader of the ARU, Eugene V. Debs, went to St. Paul to lead the ARU's first strike against the Great Northern Railroad. The successful action that Debs organized in which the railroads chose arbitration over a possibly damaging strike was a celebrated victory, since it came after huge setbacks for labor in the depression years of the early 1890s. It was also significant because it armed ARU members with the confidence and momentum to vote in convention to support the Pullman strike. By June 1894, when the ARU refused to handle Pullman sleeping cars, the union had over 150,000 members across the country. This total significantly surpassed the combined membership of the railroad craft unions.

The working class in St. Paul strongly supported the Pullman strike. Numerous reports document testimony from "scab" train crews of having verbal abuse and rotten produce poured on them by citizens gathered on the bridges spanning the local railroad tracks.[2] At the urging of some ARU locals, supportive merchants and proprietors of small businesses, such

as boarding houses, refused to deal with these replacement workers. On the evening of Saturday, July 14, when the strike was being crushed by federal troops throughout the country, two officials of the Chicago, Saint Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railway Company walked up St. Paul's Rosabel Street (today's Wall Street) to a small boarding house, the Laborer's Rest Home, at the corner of Fifth and Rosabel streets (located near the present-day Farmers Market). According to later trial testimony, their purpose was to persuade the operator of the boarding house, Margaret Hansen, to take in ten or twelve of these "scabs" employed by the Omaha.[3] As they walked north on Rosabel Street, Charlie Luth, a striking switchman who had been employed by the Saint Paul and Duluth Railroad, recognized the two officials, Charles Leonard and Bert Nash.

As reported in the *Daily Globe,* witnesses testified that Luth and his companion, another striker named Joe Cox, followed Leonard and Nash into the boarding house. When Luth attempted to persuade Mrs. Hansen to refuse the replacements, Nash told Luth to shut up and mind his own business. Luth was a big man and got into an altercation with the much smaller Leonard. Leonard produced a revolver that he had been carrying and in the course of a brief, aggressive struggle, fired the pistol six times. Four of the bullets lodged in Luth's body, one of them severing his aorta. Within minutes, he was dead. Both Luth and Leonard were twenty-eight years old. Luth was married and had four children, the youngest was only two weeks old. Leonard and Nash left the building and soon surrendered to a passing policeman. City officials, who were worried about the possibility of a lynching by ARU supporters, took Leonard from the city jail and sequestered him at an unknown location.

On July 18 the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* chronicled Luth's funeral, which had been held the day before. The paper reported that approximately 3,000 ARU members and supporters gathered at Rice Park. They wore white ribbons and rosettes, the symbol of support for the strike, and filled the quadrant around the park three to four deep. The funeral procession marched to the east side of downtown, where they met another group of mourners, including members of the Independent Order of Foresters, a fraternal benefit group. At Luth's home, his coffin was placed in a horse-drawn hearse. The procession then moved to the German Evangelical Church of Saint Paul at Eleventh and Minnesota streets.

Margaret Hansen. Photo by August E. Hansen, St. Paul. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society collections.

Why the German Evangelical Church? Charles and Pauline Luth had been married at Saint Mary's Catholic Church in St. Paul's Lowertown and had raised their children Catholic. Considering that the Luth family was German Lutheran, Charlie may have had to take "instruction" in the Catholic faith from a priest before he could marry Pauline. Had Charlie been a convert to Catholicism and a member of St. Mary's, in all likelihood the funeral would have been held there and Charlie would have been buried in a Catholic cemetery. When Pauline died in 1952, her funeral was held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church on St. Paul's East Side, but she chose to be buried in the nonsectarian Oakland Cemetery so she could be close to Charlie. Mary Blomgren, who married one of Pauline and Charlie's grandsons and spent time with Pauline from 1946 to 1952, recalled that Pauline never lost her love for Charlie. Once during a visit to Charlie's grave, Pauline told Mary: "This is my home!"

A sketch of Charles Leonard from the December 22, 1894, edition of the St. Paul Herald. *Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

The Reverend Hermann Fleer of the German Evangelical Church agreed to preach the funeral sermon. According to Rev. Fleer's grandson Edward, the Independent Order of Foresters, to which Charlie belonged, made the arrangements for the funeral service with the Reverend Fleer as the preacher. The day after Charlie's funeral, the *Pioneer Press* reported that Pastor Fleer's sermon "was full of imprecations against railroads and monopolies," and strongly supported the strikers' cause, using the "first four verses of the fourth chapter of Isaiah" as his text. Perhaps Rev. Fleer chose this chapter of Isaiah, which emphasizes the connection between worship and ethical behavior, to bring hope and glory to the strikers as "the survivors of Israel" in the struggle against those who were treating them with cruelty and injustice.

After the service, the mourners proceeded to St. Paul's Oakland Cemetery, where Charles Luth and his widow Pauline are interred. A large headstone, probably placed by his lodge brothers in the Foresters and the Knights of Pythias, another fraternal order with which he was affiliated, marks the site.

In December 1894, Charles Leonard was tried for second-degree murder in District Court in St. Paul. The prosecutor for this case was the Ramsey County Attorney, Pierce Butler, who later served on

the U.S. Supreme Court. Leonard was defended by the legal partnership of Thomas and Christopher O'Brien. Christopher O'Brien had served as St. Paul's mayor in the 1880s and his brother Thomas often represented the railroads. After a trial of several days, Charles Leonard was found not guilty because of self-defense. Hundreds of ARU supporters attended the trial and were bitterly disappointed by the verdict. The *Daily News Record* reported when the verdict was read, "Leonard's face brightened and a sigh of relief went up from his friends. . . . The crowd in the galleries gave no sign either for or against the verdict."

With Charlie Luth dead and Charles Leonard found not guilty of the switchman's death, what does this long-forgotten episode of labor violence tell us about St. Paul in the 1890s?

The Railroads and Organized Labor

Historian Walter Licht emphasizes the significance of the railroads in the nineteenth century and their "enormous economic, social, and political impact on American history."[4] The railroads pioneered the emergence of corporations and large bureaucracies while at the same time comprising the first enterprises in America to undergo extensive unionization. As the nation's railroads grew in size and number, they were shaped by inevitable bureaucratization and often inefficient and conflicting management strategies. Workers joined unions around the various railroad occupations, such as the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. By the 1880s railroad engineers, firemen, brakemen, switchmen, and general laborers numbered over 400,000 and comprised approximately 2.4% of the nation's total workforce.[5]

Working on the railroad was a totally different experience for people who were accustomed to working with their own hands, with their own tools, and at their own pace. According to Licht, it was quite a challenge when industrialization and new methods of organizing work forced workers "to become appendages of capital-owned machinery."[6] In general, train crews in the 1880s worked a seventy-hour week—twelve hours on weekdays and ten on Saturdays. And railroad work was dangerous. Boiler explosions, flying sparks, smoke, train wrecks, and derailments due to faulty roadbeds evidenced the dramatically unsafe conditions that were widespread in the industry.

Charles Luth (1866–1894). Photo courtesy of the family of Charles Luth.

Licht found that the work was particularly dangerous at night and during storms.[7] Many brakemen lost their lives slipping off cars while attempting to set each car's brakes in bad weather. In addition, the job of "coupling" rail cars together claimed lives and limbs of the brakemen who had to stand between two cars to use the link-and-pin system. Licht observes, "The job was so hazardous that 'old time' brakemen were often recognized by missing fingers or crippled hands."[8] Yard crews, station hands, switchmen, shop men and track repair crews were also exposed to unsafe conditions in the busy yards where men were frequently hit by shunting engines and cars accidentally put in motion. Licht reveals that despite such hazardous conditions, prior to 1880 and even 1890, railroad companies resisted the introduction of safety devices like the automatic air brake and the automatic coupler.

Industrial capitalism required standardization of labor and operations. According to English social historian E.P. Thompson, "The transition to a mature industrial society entailed a severe restructuring of working habits—new discipline, new incentives, and a new nature upon which these incentives could bite effectively."[9] The railroads were not the first to implement new work rules and railroad workers were not the first to violate and ignore the rules. Licht states that working on the railroad in the latter part of the nineteenth century was characterized by negligence, incompetence, "unruly habits," theft, insubordination, and the disruptive influence of "troublemakers"—union leaders, union sympathizers, and strikers. Working conditions on many roads were deplorable. Consequently effective labor relations and industrial discipline became increasingly essential to the successful operation of railroad companies. The first national strike in American history had taken place in 1877. Called the "Great Upheaval," it was a precursor to the labor unrest of the early 1890s and had been broken only through the intervention of state militia forces and federal troops. In 1894 the Pullman Company became a celebrated attempt to deal with these increasing tensions, inefficiencies, and labor problems.

The Pullman Strike

In May 1893 the U.S. economy collapsed in what became the Panic of 1893. Loss of public confidence in the banking system, a weak currency, a sputtering economy, and trade imbalances spelled bad times. The depression hit hard. During these times, there was no unemployment insurance, welfare, or temporary jobs programs to provide relief. The Cleveland administration attempted some economic measures, but hard times continued. Across the country, tensions arose, and in the Middle West those out of work formed "Coxey's Army," which was led by Jacob Coxey, a businessman from Ohio. He inspired workers across the country to march on Washington, D.C. to demand jobs from Congress. When the workers arrived in Washington, the police intercepted Coxey, clubbed him, and then arrested him for trespassing: "walking on the grass."[10] The Coxey incident exemplified the growing unrest in the nation, which was not ignored by George Pullman.

In the aftermath of the great strike in

1877, George Pullman, owner of the Pullman Sleeping Car Company, looked for a solution to the continuing labor strife in the railroad industry. He strongly believed that social reform and good business practices could be complementary and built his company accordingly. In 1880 he developed the model town of Pullman, Illinois, designed to be everything Chicago was not: "orderly not chaotic, green and antiseptic not concrete and sooty … to elevate the character of its residents by reducing drunkenness, strengthening family life, encouraging thrift and ambition—in its broadest sense—an agent of fundamental social reform."[11] Pullman was sincerely interested in labor problems and was influenced by a popular novel of the day, *Put Yourself in His Place* (1870), by Charles Reade, an English playwright and novelist who described the horrible working conditions in industrial communities in Europe and America, the corruption in trade unions, and the hostility of capital and labor. Pullman believed labor and capital must cooperate. Accordingly, his social vision was incorporated into the town of Pullman. According to historian Stanley Buder, the town was "intended to propagate middle-class values of equality, industry, and morality and by demonstrating that capital and labor could cooperate, it would affirm, not challenge national orthodoxy."[12] Despite such good intentions, Pullman's company grew too large for a simple, personal touch. One Pullman employee declared, "We are born in a Pullman house, fed from the Pullman shops, taught in the Pullman school, catechized in the Pullman Church, and when we die we shall go to the Pullman Hell." The Rev. William H. Carwardine, the Methodist minister in Pullman, characterized the town as a "civilized relic of European serfdom."[13]

Buder also observes that workers had honest grievances (e.g. overcharge of rents), and the company began to interfere in the workers' private lives using spies. Moreover, 1893 was a depression year and George Pullman increased rents and cut wages 25–50%. After subtracting rents and other company costs, some workers could end up with nine cents ($.09) at the end of a twelve-day work period! Understandably, tensions mounted. Lines were drawn between entrenched workers who saw the hardships caused by wage cuts and owners who wanted to reduce their labor costs that eventually hardened into a nationwide strike that was explosive, both literally and figuratively in the American experience. Led by Eugene Debs, "Pullman became the storm center for one of the classic labor struggles in American social history."[14]

The Emergence of Debs and the ARU

Eugene V. Debs, like George Pullman, was a central figure in the Pullman Strike. Debs left school at the age of fifteen to work on the railroad and increasingly became involved in the labor movement during the tumultuous times of the Great Upheaval and the campaign for the eight-hour day in 1886. During the early years in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, Debs supported the tactical use of strikes, and came to believe a different form of union was needed, in which the various groups of workers were not pitted against one another—a union to include all railroad workers. Debs was instrumental in bringing together railroad workers of all crafts to form the American Railway Union in 1893, which grew in strength during the months preceding the Pullman strike. The strikers turned to the ARU for help, but Debs was at first reluctant to gamble the fledgling ARU's future on an all-out strike against Pullman. ARU delegates, however, meeting in convention in Chicago voted overwhelmingly to declare a boycott on Pullman cars. This vote of support followed a direct appeal for help from Pullman workers at the ARU's convention in June. Their appeal, combined with the ARU's successful strike against James J. Hill and the Great Northern earlier in April 1894, reinforced the ARU's resolve. According to historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., "Debs was an impassioned advocate of social justice for the humble and disinherited."[15]

Once the decision was made, Debs took charge, wired his men throughout the country, and told them not to work on trains unless the Pullman cars were uncoupled. Work stoppages spread along all lines leading to Chicago and by the third day, about 40,000 workers were out. Schlesinger claims that "[t]he business community, already panic-stricken by the combination of labor militancy and hard times, now set out to mobilize the power of the state behind Pullman."[16] The railroads sought out sympathetic federal judges and got a sweeping injunction forbidding ARU officers from assisting the strike. Debs and others ignored the injunction. They were arrested for contempt of court and conspiracy to obstruct

Pauline Luth (center) with her second husband, Frank, who was Charlie's brother, and her granddaughter-in-law, Mary Blomgren (right). Photo courtesy of Mary Blomgren.

the mails (at this time mail was delivered mostly by rail) and sent to jail. Despite a protest by the Governor of Illinois, John Peter Altgeld, President Grover Cleveland sent federal troops into Illinois. In a few weeks, the strike was defeated.

The Pullman experience informed and transformed Debs. Historian and biographer Anne Terry White states that something happened when Debs saw the U.S. soldiers out his window. Debs had held that it was shallow thinking to rationalize the conflict between factory owners and workers as class conflict, but now facing military might, he saw how shallow his own thinking had been.[17] White observes that Debs was bitter because the president who called out the soldiers was Grover Cleveland, a Democrat for whom Debs had campaigned three times. Henceforth, Debs believed that in the struggle between workers and corporations neither a Democratic nor a Republican president would be impartial because both would act on the side of big business.

Schlesinger suggests Debs understood the weakness of the craft unions and the importance of organizing a big industrial union that was able to take on big business. Moreover "The Pullman strike," wrote Schlesinger, "now showed that he had not reckoned on the press, the courts, and the army. All the institutions of capitalistic society appeared to be in league against the working man."[18] When a self-vindicating article entitled "The Government in the Chicago Strike of 1894," written by President Cleveland, appeared in *McClure's Magazine* in July 1894, Debs challenged the president's conclusions as *ex parte* and based solely upon railroad interests: "When the strike at Chicago occurred did President Cleveland make a personal examination? No. Did he grant both sides a hearing? No."[19]

While in jail in 1894, Debs wrote

Eugene V. Debs in 1894. This illustration is from Harper's Weekly *(July 14, 1894). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

A "Great Big Man"

The Reverend Hermann Fleer

Hermann Heinrich Fleer (1852–1918) was forty-two years old when he preached at Charlie Luth's funeral. Unlike his regular Sunday sermons at St. Paul's German Evangelical Church at Eleventh and St. Peter streets, this one would be in English. Many of Rev. Fleer's sermons have been preserved in the extensive collection of Fleer Family Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, often written on the backs of envelopes, but regrettably the Luth sermon is not there.

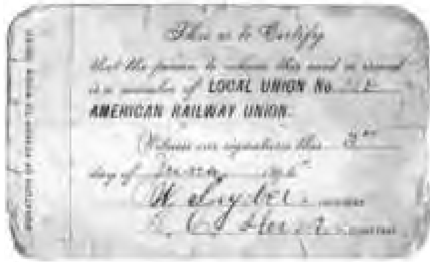
Hermann Fleer had the unusual distinction of being the oldest of five brothers who became Evangelical pastors. Born in Prussia, Fleer came to Missouri as an infant and was ordained in 1878 from what is now Eden Seminary in St. Louis.

Fleer's first parish was St. John's Evangelical Church of Minneapolis, while simultaneously serving as pastor for a parish in formation, Mount Olivet in Plymouth. Over a lifetime he served in some ten parishes, the last one in Chicago. In 1887 he arrived in St. Paul to begin his seven years of service there.

Why did Rev. Fleer agree to preach a funeral for a man not a member of his congregation, whose wife was a Roman Catholic, and the deceased had been a worker considered by many in the context of a bitter labor struggle to be a social outlaw? Remembered by one of his fellow seminarians as a "great big man" who protected him while at school, the image of Hermann Fleer that emerges from the Fleer papers is highly suggestive of an individual who was aggressive, held strong opinions, and possessed of stiff-necked personal pride and integrity. Even the fragment of his sermon that has survived thanks to the *Pioneer Press* reporter who attended the funeral makes it clear that Fleer had some substantial sympathy for the strikers: "carefully tempered anathemas upon monopolies and monopolists." His selection of the 4th chapter of Isaiah, a favored text of social reformers to this day, as the scriptural basis for his sermon clearly was not random.

Was Fleer's departure from his parish, and St. Paul, only two months later, related to his willingness to not only preach at Charlie Luth's funeral, but also to take a stand in solidarity with the cause of the strikers? The circumstantial evidence is highly persuasive. It is a virtual certainty that the elders of the church, all solid *burgerlich* German-Americans, would not have been pleased. Church council members included Christ Stahlmann, an employer of hundreds of workers at his West Seventh Street brewery; Louis Eisenmenger of Eisenmenger's Meat Market; Justus Kahlert, operator of a large machine shop; Ernst Albrecht of Albrecht Furs; and others,

American Railway Union medallion.



An ARU membership card from 1895. Courtesy of David Riehle.

about the Pullman debacle declaring, "In the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle the class struggle was revealed."[20] Debs concluded the Pullman strike had been a lesson in socialism. Schlesinger sees this experience as pivotal in Debs's transformation from a "tough, pragmatic unionist to a radical well on the way to socialism." Debs led the socialist movement in the coming years and ran unsuccessfully for president.

Schlesinger thinks that Debs saw many things too simply, underestimated the middle class and American capitalism, and that Debs's own career disproved his repeated claims that capitalism would destroy political freedom. Debs believed in democratic traditions of change through debate and consent. Schlesinger claims Debs avoided the extreme syndicalism of the Industrial Workers of the World and the disloyalties of the American Communist Party and concludes, "Yet, in the central fight of American democracy—the fight against the political aspirations of the business community—Debs played an honorable and significant role."[21]

Labor, Capital, and the Catholic Church

After the federal government had deployed thousands of troops to defeat the Pullman strike, killing scores of strikers and supporters in Chicago alone, perhaps one more act of violence in St. Paul involving a railroad striker and representatives of the Omaha road was not likely to be condemned by a jury which had been bombarded with hostile newspaper accounts of the strike. Eugene Debs, the ARU's president, had been reviled by the newspapers and denounced from church pulpits. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (July 24, 1894) in an article on Debs's trial in Chicago, refers to Debs in its story line as "the Ex-Dictator." An editorial car-

including, ironically, Heinrich Guthunz, to whose undertaking parlor the body of Charlie Luth was conveyed.

On the other hand, it is unlikely that Fleer would have been dismissed from the parish. In general, the pastors of German Evangelical churches were held in far too high esteem as men of education and piety to be summarily fired. Further, the family papers indicate that he probably submitted his resignation at the quarterly meeting of the parish in mid-September.

A reasonable conjecture seems to be that leading church members conveyed their unhappiness to Rev. Fleer over his remarks at the funeral, and that Fleer responded with indignation. His *curriculum vita,* as contained in the Fleer Papers, has intriguing evidence of a hot temper deployed on more than one occasion. While at St. Paul's Rev. Fleer had come into a highly charged dispute with the church organist, Paul Zumbach, over his choice of hymns. This liturgical difference was apparently sharp enough to require third parties to arrange a meeting between the two men where they were "prompted to shake hands," according to church records. Organist Zumbach had complained previously that his honorarium for a recent concert had been insultingly small. "It was an outrage," Zumbach wrote, "for such a rich congregation to offer me such a ridiculous sum." In another expression of fiscal conservatism, the parish decided to lay off the horse watchman employed during services.

The Reverend Hermann Fleer. Photo courtesy of the Fleer family.

By early September, Fleer was in possession of numerous letters of recommendation from pastoral colleagues and others, including Rev. Edward Ingersoll of Park Congregational Church. One parishioner, Dr. Hahn, wrote that he had "won the love and high esteem of all our fellow citizens…." Rev. Fleer departed St. Paul's for a parish in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, followed a few years later by a call to St. Lucas parish in Buffalo, New York. According to his son, Rev. Fleer resigned from this parish because several church deacons had ignored his admonitions not to stop in a saloon prior to the Sunday service, telling his congregation that he took as his guide the words of Christ, "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another." Fleer spent his last years at Salem Evangelical Church in Chicago, resigning because of ill health in 1916. He died on January 23, 1918.

After a process of merger with other denominations, St. Paul's Evangelical Church became St. Paul's United Church of Christ, presently located on Summit Avenue. Use of the German language at the church was discontinued in the 1920s.

David Riehle

Christopher O'Brien. *Photo from* Men of Minnesota *(1902).*

toon in the *Minneapolis Times* (July 15, 1894) lampooned Debs's rise and fall, while on the same day a cartoon in the *Pioneer Press* depicted Debs in bandages with a crutch announcing, "Debs (to his dupes)—'We are stronger than ever.'" By December 1894 Debs and other leaders of the ARU, including Sylvester Keliher of Minneapolis, who had served as the ARU's secretary-treasurer, were on their way to jail in Illinois to serve their sentences for contempt of court. The Pullman strike was recorded as a crushing defeat.

The newspaper accounts of the Luth tragedy along with the daily reports of the progress of the strike, both nationally and locally, provide insight into the religious, social, and political divisions within the Twin Cities. In contrast to the harsh criticism of the competing newspapers, the *Minnesota Transfer Reporter* of Merriam Park, observed the respectable behavior of the railroad workers: "The ARU men at the Transfer have acted during the strike in most worthy manner. Their quiet behavior has been remarked by many, but nothing else could be expected as they are not the incarnation of such divilish [sic] schemes as the daily journals give the A.R.U. credit for" (July 21, 1894). Generally, reporting by the *Minneapolis Times* and the *Broadaxe,* a labor paper in Saint Paul, favored the workers whereas the *Pioneer Press* was very critical of Debs and the strike.

The question arises whether the Catholic Church and other churches in St. Paul sided with the railroad owners against the strike. The churches may have just echoed the general sentiments of those who did not support the strike. According to David Riehle, who has researched German Evangelical church records and conducted interviews with the Fleer family in Pittsburgh, the surviving documents and available testimony reveal that the local church hierarchy in St. Paul may have pressured the Reverend Fleer

Thomas D. O'Brien. *Photo from* Men of Minnesota *(1902).*

to move on because of his outspoken support of the strikers. Notwithstanding any possible attempts to keep labor issues out of the pulpit, most of the local newspapers during the time of the strike provide little evidence about how the churches stood on the relations between labor and management.

The *Northwestern Chronicle,* a Catholic newspaper published in St. Paul between 1866 and 1900, had significant coverage of the strike while it lasted. This publication was the closest thing to an official diocesan newspaper that was available locally prior to the arrival of the *Catholic Bulletin* in 1911. Historian James Michael Reardon reports that the *Chronicle* was founded by John Crosby Devereux as a private enterprise receiving no financial help from the Diocese except for rent-free space in the "Catholic block" in downtown St. Paul. Reardon reports, however, that the bishop at the time, Thomas Langdon Grace, suggested the name for the newspaper, and supported the project "as a medium of communication with the clergy."[22] According to Marvin R. O'Connell, who wrote the definitive biography of Archbishop John Ireland, Bishop Grace from his early days in St. Paul promoted Catholic journals and newspapers to defend the church against the popular press which was "wielded unsparingly and incessantly against the truth of our religion."[23] A decade after its founding, the then Bishop Coadjutor John Ireland purchased the paper, which was suffering continual financial problems, from Devereux for $2,000. The *Chronicle* was subsequently produced by a succession of clergymen until its demise in 1900.

In a number of articles, the Catholic Church weighed in unofficially on the strike, and clearly stated its general position regarding labor relations that reflected principles that Pope Leo XIII had articulated in 1891 in his encyclical on capital and labor—*Rerum Novarum.* In

Pierce Butler about 1890. *Photo from* Men of Minnesota *(1902).*

rait Types

Sunday

XVII.—PRICE FIVE CENTS. SAINT PAUL MINN., SUN

LOODY FRUIT.

gedy Last Night, g From Strike.

LUTH IS DEAD.

Bullets From Chas. nard's Pistol.

THE ASSAILANT.

treat While Luth by the Throat.

H. EYE-WITNESSES.

of the Encounter Its Results.

TEMENT FOLLOWS.

THE FATAL ENCOUNTER.

Front page of the July 15, 1894, edition of the St. Paul Sunday Globe *in which the newspaper reported the death of Charlie Luth.*

this encyclical Pope Leo defined at length the relative rights of the rich and the poor and their respective responsibilities in a just society. He emphasized the dignity and worth of workingmen's unions and the obligations of civil society to uphold the natural, God-given tendencies of men to join together for their common good. The encyclical distinguished such rights of the worker within the context of private property rights that were considered foundational to man's social and domestic obligations. Therefore, a good portion of the encyclical was devoted to discrediting "socialism" as an injustice and the threat to Church principles that was posed by "crafty agitators" intent on exploiting the differences between capital and labor to "pervert men's judgments and stir up the people to revolt."[24] Moreover, Pope Leo rejected the notion of class conflict and that "the wealthy and the working men are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict." He drew the two together by linking their respective duties and obligations to justice. The encyclical stated,

> The employer must respect every man in his dignity as a person ennobled by Christian character… and the proletarian and the worker are bound never to injure the property, nor to outrage the person, of an employr; never to resort to violence in defending their own cause, nor to engage in riot or disorder; and to have nothing to do with men of evil principles, who work upon the people with artful promises of great results, and excite foolish hopes which usually end in useless regrets and grievous loss.[25]

Perhaps Archbishop Ireland had these words of Pope Leo in mind when he spoke out about the strike: "The fatal mistake which has been made in connection with this strike is that property has been destroyed, the liberty of citizens interfered with, human lives endangered, social order menaced."[26] Several editorials in the *Northwestern Chronicle*, as well as some articles written by Archbishop Ireland, took aim at Eugene Debs in most negative terms (for example "dictator," "emperor," "cowardly and unfeeling demagogue," "one living a life of sloth," etc.) while characterizing the strike as "revolution," "anarchy," "mob rule," and "lawless depredation." These articles also inveighed against the "haughty, greedy" railroad managers, and the "surpassing greed and inhuman indifference" of Pullman and his underlings, but most of their invective was directed against Debs and the leaders of the strike.[27] Nevertheless the *Northwestern Chronicle*'s overarching position on labor-management relations was carefully nuanced, again reflecting aspects of *Rerum Novarum* in deference to the workers. In the article "Midsummer Madness," the *Chronicle* editor cautions,

> Let us not be understood as arraigning or condemning the laboring man, or what is known as organized labor. Let us not be understood as holding responsible for the offense we have described the men who, either by persuasion, mistake, ignorance or threats of violence, abandoned or were compelled to abandon temporarily the various employments in which they were engaged. For them and for all honest citizens who earned their bread under the divine command, "by the sweat of their brow" we have nothing but kind thoughts, kind words, and an ardent and sincere sympathy.[28]

Further support for the Church's efforts to strike a balance was reinforced by Archbishop Ireland, who declared to the 1894 Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, "I stand with justice and righteousness and, consequently, I stand with both capital and labor. I stand with labor for the sake of labor, and I stand with labor for the sake of capital."[29] In addition, at the convention the archbishop quoted Pope Leo XIII extensively, whom he characterized as "the great thinker of our age . . . who loves to be called the pontiff of the working man." He spoke of the pope's emphasis on the dignity and rights of the worker and went on to empasize that the "sad mistake that they [socialists] made is to possess oneself of the idea that class is naturally hostile to class."[30]

Based on what was written in the *Northwestern Chronicle* during this tu-

multuous time in St. Paul, those who spoke for the Archdiocese distinguished the Pullman strike from other labor struggles because of its violence. Just months earlier in April, the Debs-led strike against the Great Northern had been successful because the conflict was resolved through arbitration, which was supported by the Archdiocese. Archbishop Ireland asked, "And why cannot the employers and employees avoid discord by peaceful arbitration?" He added, "Strikes should be dreaded for the ruin they cause."[31] In sharp contrast to later editorials pillorying Debs and Pullman, Debs and James J. Hill were discussed in the Catholic press in neutral terms within the broader context of their mutual civic responsibilities.

In her book about St. Paul, *Claiming the City,* historian Mary Lethert Wingerd emphasizes the impact of the depression of the early 1890s. She points out

An engraving of Archbishop John Ireland from 1894. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

that any extended transportation strike could have spelled disaster for St. Paul's economy. Despite Hill's machinations in April when he attempted to negotiate separately with the skilled brotherhoods, Wingerd observes that, "while labor displayed unprecedented unity, capital could not have been more disunited than in this struggle."[32] According to Wingerd, the lessons of the strike would "make an indelible imprint on labor relations in St. Paul." Hill and other railroad managers were determined to "rid themselves of the dangerous industrial unionism advocated by the ARU." When the major strike against the Pullman Company erupted in July, they made their move, using their collective political and economic influence to win government intervention.[33]

According to Marvin O'Connell, when pressed by Catholics and Protestants to speak on the Pullman Strike, Ireland endorsed President Cleveland's decision to dispatch federal troops to intervene. Ireland concluded, "Labor must learn that, however sacred its rights be, there is something above them, one absolutely supreme social order and the laws of public justice."[34] O'Connell opines that such sentiments made better reading in boardrooms than union halls, but Ireland stood by his convictions to support the right of the state to intervene in the affairs of its citizens

During the Pullman strike, despite appeals from Debs for peaceful, orderly, and law-abiding conduct on the part of the ARU membership, the *Northwestern Chronicle* reported there were some who broke laws and the "odium of their misconduct" was attributed to the railway union that "must bear the responsibility for the lawless elements of society to carry on their warfare."[35] The blame was placed squarely on Debs and ultimately resulted in his arrest. In response to being found guilty of contempt of court and being given a sentence of six months in prison, Debs stated,

> Every effort was made by the leaders to prevent violence. We warned the men to respect property rights and even to keep off the right of way of railway companies. Judge Woods intimates that this advice was given for the effect it would have on the public, and that the strikers were not expected to heed it. What right has he to draw such an inference? There is nothing in the evidence to support it.[36]

Based on the evidence in the *Northwestern Chronicle* and elsewhere, the Catholic Church's stance in St. Paul regarding the Pullman strike was derived from its professed doctrine supporting

A caricature of Eugene Debs, wearing a crown labeled "Deb's American railway union," and seated on a section of a railway bridge identified as the "highway of trade." The artist was William A. Rogers. The illustration appeared in Harper's Weekly *on July 14, 1894. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

peaceful cooperation between labor and capital, the rejection of socialism, and the sinfulness of violence. This is consistent with Pope Leo's encyclical, which had been issued just three years before the strike and undoubtedly influenced most church officials, especially Archbishop Ireland. The church's leadership was, however, also inconsistent in its support of the labor movement generally. On the one hand, it harshly condemned Debs and the other ARU leaders; while on the other hand, it righteously uplifted the rank and file. From the perspective of the union workers, the injury to Debs was an injury to all. The record shows the membership of the ARU, by a democratic process at their convention, reached consensus to take a stand and boycott Pullman. It was their decision that obligated Debs to take action. The *Northwestern* editors apparently missed this point in light of their stated position on May 18, 1894, that such autonomy of separate groups (unions) to decide to strike was "a serious

This cartoon is from the July 21, 1894 issue of Harper's Weekly. *Drawn by William A. Rogers, the cartoon mocks Debs and the ARU by showing Debs as a clueless monarch being led to doom by knaves and fools. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

defect." The Catholic press in St. Paul criticized the employers and the leaders of the 1894 strike, but their narrow focus fell short in connecting to the dignity and worth of the workers and their unions—a stance that Pope Leo XIII had so carefully constructed.

* * *

Today what remains vital about the story of the Pullman Strike in St. Paul and the death of Charlie Luth is Charlie's example of solidarity with the striking Pullman workers. At the strike's end, many in the working class neighborhoods saw the Pullman strike as an honorable struggle for justice and embraced Luth as a hero of that struggle. At the same time there were those who remained apologists for the leaders of industry and placed the blame for the turbulence in the 1890s on the union "troublemakers."

Nonetheless, the subsequent prosecution of Debs and other ARU leaders for allegedly conspiring to interfere with interstate commerce and the U.S. mail dealt a fatal blow to the young ARU. As Wingerd observes, when Hill subsequently proceeded to join in association with the other transcontinental roads to regularize rates and labor negotiations, a pact was offered to the members of the "Big Four" brotherhoods representing engineers, firemen, conductors, and trainmen. It was designed to ensure efficient and continuous rail service that was vital to the transportation monopoly between St. Paul and the Pacific coast, and offered a "palatable alternative" to the industrial unionism advocated by Debs.[37] It was accepted by the brotherhoods.

The lessons from the labor struggles in 1894 were not lost on St. Paul businessmen or the working people. They set the stage for an era of compromise and negotiation between business and organized labor. Regardless of whether aligning with the American Federation of Labor's skilled craft unionism or with the ARU's model of industrial unionism open to all workers, by the end of the nineteenth century a strong union culture flourished in St. Paul, inspired by the hard work and sacrifices of men like Charlie Luth.

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Notes

1. This synopsis of the death of Charles Luth is drawn from contemporaneous newspaper accounts and from an interview with a local labor historian, David Riehle, who is also a locomotive engineer. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported extensively on the Luth killing (July 15–18, 1894), and on the Leonard trial in December of the same year.

2. *Broadaxe*, July 12, 1894.

3. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, December 15, 1894.

4. Walter Licht, *Working for the Railroad: The Organization of Work in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3.

5. Ibid., 31.

6. Ibid., xvi.

7. Ibid., 183.

8. Ibid.

9. Quoted in Licht, 79.

10. Edward L. Ayers et al., *American Passages: A History of the United States* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000), 531.

11. Stanley Buder, *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), viii.

12. Ibid., 92.

13. Illinois Labor History Society, *The Parable of Pullman.*

14. Ibid.

15. Eugene V. Debs, *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, introduction by Arthur M. Schlesinger (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948), vii.

16. Ibid.

17. Anne Terry White, *Eugene Debs: American Socialist* (New York: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1974), 46.

18. Debs, *Writings and Speeches,* viii.

19. Ibid., 143.

20. Ibid., viii.

21. Ibid., xiii.

22. James Michael Reardon*, The Catholic Church in the Diocese of St. Paul* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1952), 172–3.

23. Marvin R. O'Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 118.

24. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, Encyclical on Capital and Labor (May 15, 1891), 1.

25. Ibid., 6

26. *Northwestern Chronicle,* July 20, 1894.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., May 18, 1894.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 86.

33. Ibid.

34. O'Connell, 394.

35. *Northwestern Chronicle*, July 13, 1894.

36. Ibid., December 21, 1894.

37. Wingerd, 86–7.

This headstone in Oakland Cemetery marks the final resting places of railroad switchman Charles Luth and his wife, Pauline. For more on how Charlie Luth died in St. Paul's labor violence of 1894, see Gregory Proferl's article beginning on page 14. Photograph by Maureen McGinn.

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Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
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