

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Growing Up in St. Paul
Random Recollections
of Grace Flandrau

Page 12

Fall 2008

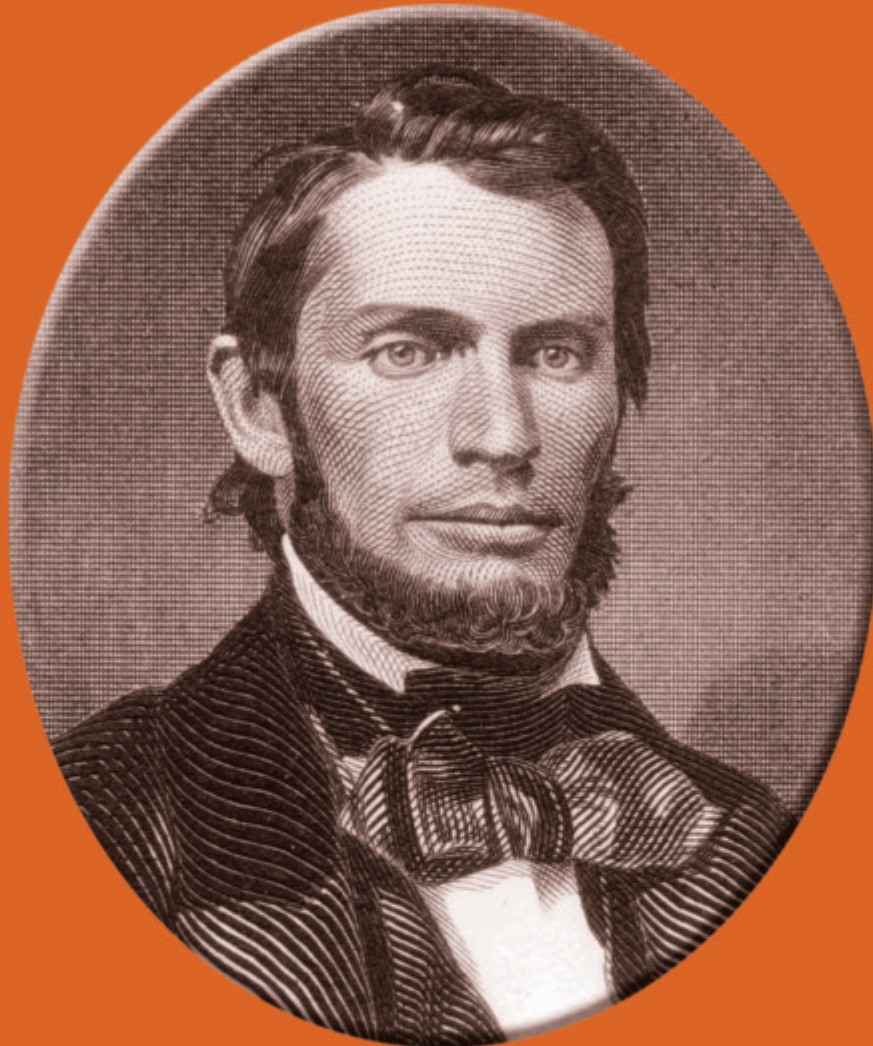
Volume 43, Number 3

Pith, Heart, and Nerve

Truman M. Smith: From Banker to Market Gardener

Barry L. and Joan Miller Cotter

—Page 3



An engraved portrait of Truman M. Smith from about 1857 by the Rawdon, Wright & Hatch Company. Engraving courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Priscilla Farnham
Founding Editor (1964–2006)
Virginia Brainard Kunz
Editor
John M. Lindley

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

W. Andrew Boss
Past President
J. Scott Hutton
President

Thomas H. Boyd
First Vice President

Paul A. Verret
Second Vice President

Joan Higinbotham
Secretary

Carolyn J. Brusseau
Treasurer

Norlin Boyum, Julie Brady, Anne Cowie,
Nancy Randall Dana, Charlton Dietz,
Joanne A. Englund, William Frels, Howard
Guthmann, John Holman, Judith Frost Lewis,
Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Marla
Ordway, Marvin J. Pertzik, Jay Pfaender,
Ralph Thrane, Richard Wilhoit.

George A. Mairs
Richard T. Murphy Sr.
Directors Emeriti

EDITORIAL BOARD

Anne Cowie, *chair*, James B. Bell, John Diers,
Thomas H. Boyd, Laurie Murphy, Richard H.
Nicholson, Paul D. Nelson, Jay Pfaender,
David Riehle, G. Richard Slade, Steve Trimble,
Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Olivia I. Dodge, William Fallon, William
Finney, Robert S. Hess, George Latimer,
Joseph S. Micallef, Marvin J. Pertzik, James
Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Jan Parker, chair
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Toni Carter
Commissioner Jim McDonough
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt
Commissioner Janice Rettman

Patrick H. O'Connor, interim 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 © 2008, Ramsey County
Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758.
**All rights reserved. No part of this publica-
tion may be reprinted or otherwise repro-
duced without written permission from the
publisher.** The Society assumes no respon-
sibility 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 43, Number 3

Fall 2008

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

C O N T E N T S

- 3 *Pith, Heart, and Nerve*
Truman M. Smith: From Banker to Market Gardener
Barry L. and Joan Miller Cotter
- 12 *Growing Up in St. Paul*
Random Recollections of Grace Flandrau
Horace Blair Flandrau Klein
- 16 “Mr. Livingston . . . Had the Tenth”
An Episode in Minnesota Railroad Building
John M. Lindley
- 24 *Minnesota at 150*
Marking Minnesota’s Sesquicentennial: Four New Books
Steve Trimble

*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

Today’s headlines blare news of bank failures and foreclosure notices. But in October 1857, when New York banks failed, there were no federal bailouts and no financial “safety nets”: eighty percent of St. Paul businesses went under. Truman Smith, who had pinned his hopes on fervent land speculation in the young frontier town, lost his bank and later, his house. In this issue, Barry L. and Joan Miller Cotter tell Smith’s harrowing story. But stay tuned for a future issue of our magazine, in which Smith “reinvents” his career. And check out Minnesota Public Radio’s website at mpr.org, where the archives (search “Truman Smith”) contain Dan Olson’s July 2008 report on the Panic of 1857, based in part on the Cotters’s research.

Also in this issue: John Lindley’s look at Crawford Livingston’s role in railroad financing in the 1880s; a personal story of Blair Klein’s 1950s road trip with his aunt, writer Grace Flandrau, in her green Packard sedan; and Steve Trimble’s review of four books celebrating 150 years of Minnesota statehood.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Minnesota at 150

Marking Minnesota's Sesquicentennial: Four New Books

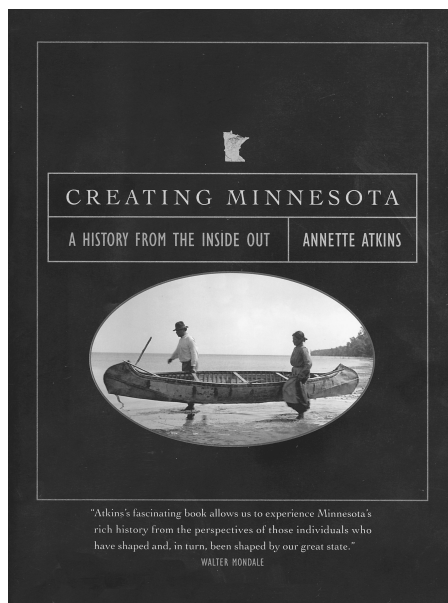
Steve Trimble

You might expect that people living in the capital of Minnesota Territory in 1858 would have been in a celebratory mood when they heard that the state had officially been admitted to the Union. After all, in early 1858 the St. Paul newspapers had been publishing lengthy columns containing the congressional debates over the bill to make Minnesota the thirty-second state. Oddly, when President James Buchanan signed the statehood bill into law, there were only brief mentions in the local journals. Historian J. Fletcher Williams, the gregarious chronicler of early St. Paul history, noted just how matter-of-fact residents were when he wrote that “on May 14 the papers announced that the state was admitted, but no demonstrations were made over the event.”

One hundred and fifty years later, there seems to be a greater interest in the state's official origin. There are numerous local celebrations and exhibits acknowledging Minnesota's 150th anniversary of statehood and local publishers have supplied us with plenty of reading material. At least four new books covering the history of the state mark the sesquicentennial. Each has its own approach and is primarily written for different audiences. This review introduces each book, explains its stated goals, and assesses the individual strengths and weaknesses of each of the sesquicentennial books.

Annette Atkins, *Creating Minnesota: A History from the Inside Out* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007; \$27.95).

Creating Minnesota recently received the top award from the American Association for State and Local History. It also received a Minnesota Book Award. Annette Atkins, its author, is a social historian who teaches at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict. In the preface, she states that the book's goal is “to understand the nature of people's lives and choices, their opportunities and limitations, their public and secret lives, their roles, their safety nets, their



failures—‘from the inside out.’” In doing so, Atkins does not presume that “the important things” happened elsewhere, “but that important things happen here, in this place and this time and to and through the agency of these people.” In short, her book seeks to “identify who holds the story-making power in the state at any given time,” primarily those who got the attention and often appeared on center stage. Consequently in each chapter she asks “What’s the story here?” and “What are the best sources for telling it?”

Atkins clearly does some experimenting with those sources and their presentation of information. For instance, she tells the story of the 1848 frontier Minnesota in the form of a play with imagined dialogue. Her play includes scenes set at Henry Sibley’s house at Mendota, a St. Paul tavern, the kitchen of the house belonging to John and Ann North on Nicollet Island, and the camp of Dakota leader Ta-o-ya-te-du-ta (Little Crow) and others in Mendota. Another chapter takes a look at the Campbells, a mixed-blood family whose experiences illustrate different world views during the frontier era. Later on in the book, Atkins examines how individual Campbell descendants, in the wake of the 1862 Dakota Conflict, made different choices of self-definition by presenting themselves as either white or Indian.

In a chapter titled “The Look of the 1920s,” Atkins once again takes an unusual approach. Instead of a traditional narrative, she presents thirty images from that decade and discusses the art of photography as it displayed the men behind the lens as well as the people, places, and content that can be seen in each of these photographs.

The book includes ample discussion of how historians work. Atkins’s approach is to take a look at some tiny item, such as oranges appearing in a Christmas photo from 1898, and then examine how railroads linked Minnesota to national consumer markets. Her method of moving from a St. Paul family’s holiday celebration seen in this photo to the much larger world of consumers’ demand across the nation for fresh fruit even in the winter works very well. The book lacks, however, an in-depth look at how the railroads affected Minnesota in other ways. Consequently this vignette is one of the few times Atkins addresses the impact

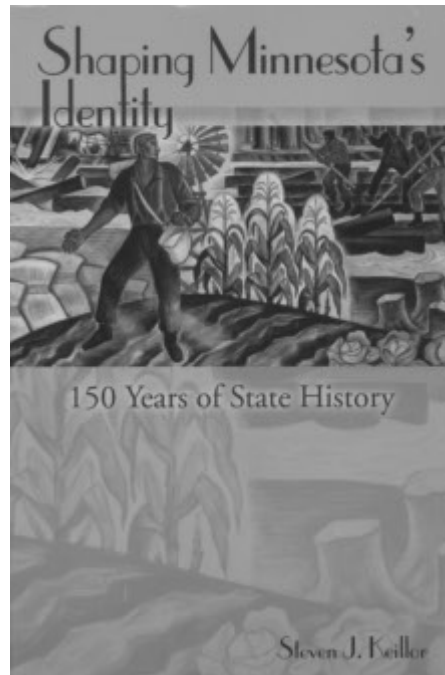
of transportation on our state. A third example of this micro-macro technique appears in Atkins's last chapter. Here she uses the creation of a walleye quesadilla at a north woods restaurant as a means for a thoughtful discussion of the increasing diversity of the population of the North Star state.

Creating Minnesota is a strong, well-researched book that makes readers do a lot of thinking about Minnesota history and how it is best uncovered. There are a few minor weaknesses. While Atkins's citations at the back of the book are a treasure trove of sources, interesting information, and considerable material for future research, the sidebar items on most pages are sometimes annoying or distracting. The frontier stage play does not work all that well and the chapter on the Twenties is a little confusing because the featured photos are all reproduced on unnumbered pages. Hence the attentive reader can have trouble matching them to the specifics of her narrative.

At the end of her book, Atkins sums everything up by writing that the "new Minnesota, like the walleye quesadilla, brings together the customs and traditions of Europeans, American Indians, Latin Americans, and others. Minnesota has been made more interesting, more imaginative, and a bit spicier. It's a good thing."

Steven J. Keillor, *Shaping Minnesota's Identity: 150 Years of State History* (Lakeville, Minn.: Pogo Press, 2007; \$17.95).

On the surface, *Shaping Minnesota's Identity* is primarily a traditional history, covering the state's story chronologically, but it does have its own unique approach. In his introduction, Keillor, an adjunct professor of history at Bethel Univer-



sity, stresses that this volume is "an interpretation" rather than an attempt at a comprehensive history and only covers the people and events needed to illustrate his themes. As a result, he chooses not to begin with Native American history in Minnesota.

"The history of an American *state* has a plot," Keillor writes. Then he asks, "does the state succeed or fail in forming a society and governing it, in doing what the American Founders intended that a state should do?" To set the stage, the author closely examines the sort of society promoted by the Northwest Ordinance, stating that the land surveys sought "to create societies of religious, educated, self-governing, land-owning, and prosperous settlers."

Throughout his book, Keillor keeps returning to this basic theme and to analyzing what happened to this vision over the next 150 years. He takes time to discuss in depth how the geography of Minnesota and then the railroads shaped the state into several different zones, thereby creating a variety of economies and cultures that were sometimes the source of internal conflict. Some of those areas became ethnic "enclaves," often among German immigrants, something which was not anticipated by the Founders.

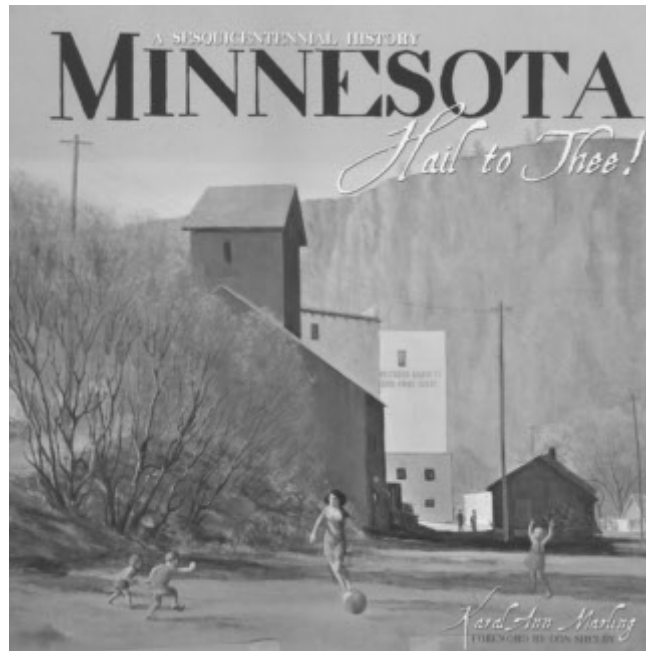
Shaping Minnesota's Identity contains

considerable detail on politics, particularly in the twentieth century, and how different groups and parties had a moral view behind their attitudes and actions. Throughout the book there is an emphasis on the changes in the political climate and the values that affected Minnesotans' attitudes and actions. Keillor's emphasis on politics and morality to the exclusion of other possible explanations of what forces, conditions, or factors have shaped Minnesota over the years is one of the few weaknesses of this book. On the other hand, some readers may welcome Keillor's willingness to discuss Minnesota's rich political heritage and the many colorful party leaders who played such a central role in the state's history.

One of the biggest changes over time in Minnesota, according to Keillor, was the end of our state's unique political culture and the gradual "nationalization" of the state's politics through the efforts of both Republican Harold Stassen and Democrat Hubert Humphrey. As he puts it, circumstances change "through the virtual world." The state of Minnesota now has "less power to shape its own identity than the state that entered the Union in 1858." Consequently, the "long-term effects of technological revolutions upon a state's identity, and on what exactly statehood still meant, were yet to be determined."

Karal Ann, Marling, *Minnesota Hail to Thee: A Sesquicentennial History* (Afton Historical Society Press, 2008; \$28.00).

Marling, a University of Minnesota professor of American Studies and Art History, starts her sesquicentennial history with the story of the state seal and other symbols from wild rice to the blueberry muffin. There is also a look at the origins of the term "Gopher State" and the



state song that provided the volume's title.

Her book then becomes chronological in its narrative, at least for its first half. Early chapters introduce Native American cultures, explorers, the fur trade, and the famous Runestone. Attention is given to the impact of Ft. Snelling, which signaled the start of Minnesota as "an American place," St. Anthony Falls, the transition from territory to statehood, the Civil War and Dakota Conflict, the changes wrought by railroads, and the importance of timber, flour, and iron for the state's development. These initial sections do provide some substantive information, but starting with Chapter Six, which is titled "Celebrating, Competing, Defining," the chronological approach is abandoned for a series of loosely arranged themes. One theme, for example, details how Minnesota celebrations help highlight the state's history. Unfortunately, almost all of the examples Marling identifies are from the Twin Cities. There were the 1883 galas when the Northern Pacific Railroad reached the Pacific coast, the State Fair, including butter sculpture, and a short piece on the Mayo Clinic.

One of the weaknesses of the volume is its too-limited treatment of people and events in the twentieth century. In these later chapters, Marling quickly whisks by many major events and even eras. The section called "A Thing of Beauty" starts with the story of the current State Capitol and then abruptly wanders through the topics of Minnesota art, literature, and architecture with brief accounts of the hardscrabble lives experienced by residents of Bohemian Flats in Minneapolis and the significant artistic contributions of the playwrights and actors who led St.

Paul's Penumbra Theater over the years. Here and elsewhere in this book, Marling tends to offer opinions without supporting information.

A chapter titled "Modern Minnesota" does touch on a few events, including the creation during World War I of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, but there is no coverage of the impact of the Great Depression on the state, other than a reference to the 1934 Minneapolis Trucker's Strike. There is no explanation of World War II and its impact on our state other than a brief acknowledgment that the war happened. Instead, Marling's focus is on Betty Crocker, suburbia, mall shopping, politics, the singer and artist known as Prince, the Minnesota Twins and the World Series, and modern industry. Taking a phrase from a 1973 *Time* magazine cover story titled "The Good Life in Minnesota," Marling concludes that for the most part the state in the twentieth century was a "textbook illustration of the good life."

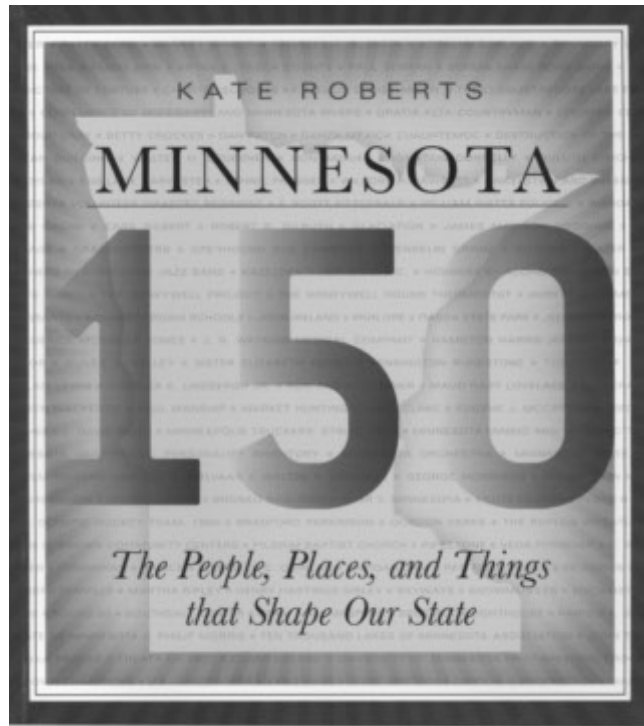
This book's final chapter offers some speculation about Minnesota's future. One of Marling's summary statements concludes that: "Minnesota—the idea of Minnesota—is as fragile as a wisp of smoke from a Native American campfire. What Minnesotans are, what Minnesotans aspire to be, must be nurtured, treasured, and they must be committed

to the change that has always defined the state's collective culture."

The major strength of the book, which the introduction calls "a celebratory history," is its production. It is lavishly illustrated with many images, including oil paintings and three-dimensional objects, reproduced in full color. Many readers, including the book's intended audience of upper elementary and secondary school students, will undoubtedly like this visually stunning means of telling Minnesota's story. While teachers will understandably appreciate this colorful presentation of state history, they may find the list of classroom activities that is included at the back of the book even more helpful when they have to present Minnesota history to a classroom of today's students.

Kate Roberts, *Minnesota 150: The People, Places, and Things that Shape Our State*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007; \$19.95).

Minnesota 150 is a companion book to a major new exhibit at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul. Authored by Kate Roberts, the Senior Exhibits Director at the Minnesota Historical Society, this exhibit was created through the participation of public nominators who offered people, places, and things that they felt had changed Minnesota. Several local historians, Minnesota Historical Society staff members, and other outside advisors sifted through 2,760 nominations to whittle down the list to 150 items. Thus this sesquicentennial book uses those key 150 people, places, and things to extend the exhibit beyond the walls of the History Center.



Roberts's preface states that the goal of those who selected the 150 topics was a final group with "a broad distribution across time, across subject matter, and across the state, with subjects that could be developed into lively, thought-provoking exhibit elements." Each successful nominator, writes Roberts, "needed to convince us that the chosen topic truly had promoted change." Using one or two pages of well-written narrative for each topic, accompanied by 200 photographs, the book examines different places, events and people who, as the title states, shape Minnesota.

Thus *Minnesota 150* examines "how such intangibles as personal judgment, political culture, and popular taste can shape our view of the past." The topics, arranged alphabetically, go from "American Indian Movement" to "Theodore Wirth." The result is an interesting mix that includes Harriet Bishop, Floyd B. Olson, the Mayo Clinic, Sinclair Lewis, Bob Dylan, Patty Berg, and the 1980 Olympic Hockey Team.

One weakness of *Minnesota 150* is that it turns out to be mostly a "celebratory history." There are very few controversial topics. In addition some of the choices could have been presented more effectively. One topic, for example, covers the origins and development of the Phyllis Wheatley and Hallie Q. Brown Community Centers in Minneapolis and St. Paul, respectively. Few historians would disagree with the selection of these two institutions, but the failure to acknowledge the contributions of other community centers, such as Neighborhood House and the Christ Child Center in St. Paul and Pillsbury House in Minneapolis, skirts an examination of the

variety of approaches that community leaders used in dealing with urban immigration, poverty, social hygiene, child-rearing practices, and education in the twentieth century. And although most consumers in Minnesota admire Walter H. Deubener's invention of handles for shopping bags that made carrying groceries much easier, was this really a landmark change? Arguably, some of the people who made the list of 150 could have been chosen with more care. Some of those who were selected definitely had an effect on the state's development; others, however, are famous, but their major contributions, which apparently justified their selection to the list, really happened outside of Minnesota and thus had less of an impact in shaping our state.

Ramsey County readers will be especially interested in choices from their local area. Selections include obvious ones, such as novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, railroad baron James J. Hill, photographer Gordon Parks, sculptor Paul ManSHIP, and Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M). Less well-known, but just as interesting, inclusions on the list of 150 are Danza Mexica Cuauhtemoc, a dance group from the West Side, and Xang Vang, whose large-scale gardening projects have positively impacted the

Among community.

Minnesota 150 is not an in-depth history. Readers can skip around from topic to topic in whatever order they prefer, reading what seems to be interesting and discover fascinating information about Minnesota's heritage. The publisher undoubtedly hopes readers will also decide to visit the exhibit at the History Center. There is a useful section at the end of the book that offers sources of further information on each of the selections.

As Kate Roberts writes in the preface, "the topics provide a glimpse into what was on the minds of Minnesota history-minded people in the years leading up to our state's sesquicentennial."

If J. Fletcher Williams were alive today, he might be surprised at the number of events and publications celebrating the 150th birthday of Minnesota statehood. His own work was a chronicle of St. Paul's early history and he would probably also be amazed by the diversity of approaches to Minnesota history represented by these four books that were produced for our sesquicentennial. All of the authors took different approaches and readers may want to dip into each of them before picking their own favorites. All of these books have different strengths and weaknesses, but each one is a valuable addition to our libraries and convincingly demonstrates just how much good writing is available today about Minnesota history.

Steve Trimble is an independent historian and author who has written several articles for Ramsey County History and serves on the RCHS Editorial Board. Turner Publishing (Nashville, Tenn.) has just released his book Historic Photos of St. Paul, which is available at the RCHS offices.

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



An 1857 wood engraving from Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion of the Fuller House and the Truman M. Smith Bank in St. Paul. Engraving courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. See Barry and Joan Miller Cotter's article on page 3.