

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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*St. Paul's Biggest Party:
The Grand Army of the Republic's
1896 National Encampment*

Moira F. Harris and Leo J. Harris

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Fall 2009

Volume 44, Number 3

The 1924 Junior World Series

The St. Paul Saints' Magnificent Comeback

Roger A. Godin

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Saint Paul Saints first baseman Johnny Neun, right, dives toward a Baltimore Orioles runner in an attempt to tag him during one of the 1924 Junior World Series games played at Lexington Park. St. Paul Daily News photo, courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. St. Paul Saints insignia reproduced by permission of the St. Paul Saints Baseball Club.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 44, Number 3

Fall 2009

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.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Last summer, St. Paul and Ramsey County hosted the Republican National Convention, which attracted national attention. Impressive as that event was, we may have forgotten other locally held, but nationally important gatherings held here. Our authors explore two of them in this issue. In 1924, the St. Paul Saints defeated a minor league rival, the Baltimore Orioles, to win the Junior World Series at Lexington Park at Lexington and University Avenues. Roger Godin guides us through the story of the series and the excitement it created. In 1896, St. Paul welcomed about 150,000 Civil War veterans and other visitors for the National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic, an enormously popular group with considerable political influence. Moira and Leo Harris recount the festivities, which included the display of an enormous "living flag" outside the then under-construction Landmark Center. On a smaller scale, we share Nathalie Chase Bernstein's warm story of growing up in the 1930s Jewish community of St. Paul's West Side. P.S. Don't forget, a membership to RCHS (including, of course, this nationally award-winning magazine) is a great holiday gift idea!

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

Growing Up in St. Paul

The Mishpacha on Texas Street

Nathalie Chase Bernstein

M*ishpacha* is Hebrew for family. Because my mother was very lonely for her *mishpacha*, my family got its start in St. Paul on Texas Street. Being the youngest of seven children, I saw my mother, Lottie Eva Frank (Nesha Reva Frank), as a woman so talented in every aspect as a wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, aunt, friend, and businesswoman. Mother was the matriarch of the family. She and her brother, Fishke, left their homeland of Lithuania in about 1898 or 1899 intending to enter the United States from Canada. All went well until they reached Canada. At their port of entry, the Canadian immigration official misunderstood Fishke Frank's name and recorded it as "Frank Fisher." Afraid to correct this error, Fishke was thereafter also known as Frank Fisher. For a few years they lived with an aunt, uncle, and cousins in Charlevoix, Michigan. There my mother was enrolled in school, where she was always called a big girl in a class with little kids.

Independent of my mother and her brother, other members of her family had come to America a few years later and had settled in St. Paul. I believe that my uncle Meyer Frank had settled in St. Paul a few years before these other family members arrived in Minnesota's capital city. They all lived on Texas Street and the surrounding streets on the West Side.

My mother met my father, George Chase, when he came to visit his sisters in St. Paul. George had been living in Burlington, Vermont, before he came to Minnesota. They courted for a year before getting married in 1902. After my sister Ida was born in St. Paul in 1904, they moved to St. Johnsbury in northeastern Vermont, where my brother Morris, sister Rhae, and brother Sam were born. Because my parents were observant Jews and had enough family (cousins) who lived nearby, they were able to conduct daily services in my father's orchard. They got their kosher meat in Portland, Maine. At the time, my father was in the junk business, although I prefer to call it the scrap-iron business.

George, Lottie, and their children lived in Vermont for thirteen years. My mother, however, was very lonely for her family;



Lottie Frank Chase, Nathalie's mother, in 1909. This and all other photos in this article are courtesy of Nathalie Chase Bernstein.

so they moved back to St. Paul and lived amongst the *mishpaca* on Texas Street. Once settled in St. Paul, my father opened another business with a partner on State Street. My brothers Sid and Jack and I were all born in our home on Texas Street. Then when my sister Ida went away to college in

St. Cloud, Minnesota, my parents moved a few blocks to a house on Eaton Avenue, where my father started his own scrap-iron business and my mother became a businesswoman. The business was located adjacent to our house. There my mother was busy with the kids, maintained the house, and helped out with the business. Since I was only about two years old when we moved in the early 1920s, I don't even remember living on Texas Street.

Where we lived on Eaton Avenue was higher ground and a block from South Robert Street. This area was not part of what was known as "the Flats," that portion of the West Side that was close to the Mississippi River and across from the area we knew as the "Indian Bluffs." Today the opposite side of the river is known as Mounds Park and Dayton's Bluff. We had Jewish neighbors across the street and *De Arabie* (the Arab), Mr. Charles Monsour, who was of Syrian heritage, living down the block on Eaton Avenue. He owned



Nathalie's father, George Chase, in 1909. At the time this photo was taken, the Chases lived in St. Johnsbury, Vermont.

a store on State Street that carried lots of Syrian foods. My parents used to call him *Curtsi hayzen* because he always wore short pants. Across the street from *De Arabie* was Katzovitz's feed store, where we used to play hide-and-seek behind barrels of feed and bales of hay. The Smiths owned a grocery store a few blocks away on Fairfield Avenue. My mother would buy groceries there practically every day because they didn't have refrigerators then. The iceman would come to our house every other day and bring a block of ice and put it in the icebox. I know I was in Smith's store every day with a penny to buy candy.

Down the block on Fairfield Avenue was Bransil's grocery store. What Smith's didn't have, Bransil's did. A few stores down was a Greek bar and pool hall. Kleyman's grocery was on State Street. So was Simon's grocery, and in the middle between them was Primaus's store, a grocery store that was not run by Jews. At this store, they sold grab bags and surprise packages. We would go in and buy one of their grab bags, but the store did not have the "smell" of Jewish foods.

Later on in 1931, Our Lady of Guadalupe mission, which served the small number of families of Mexican sugar-beet workers who lived on the Flats, was located in a former bar and pool hall at 186 East Fairfield. Across the street from there was the New Ray Theater. For five or ten cents, kids could stay all day and night watching the movie. My sister Ida used to play the piano at the theater when they showed silent movies. A lumberyard, or at least what had once been a lumberyard, was also close by. I only remember it as a playground and an ice skating rink in the winter. The snow in wintertime was wonderful. We all went ice skating and played "King of the Hill" on the piles of snow that accumulated. My brothers would put a harness on Sportie, our dog, so that he could pull us in our sleds. We were the envy of our block because we had a dog.

There were four synagogues in a radius of four blocks of our house on Eaton Ave. One was the Russian *schul*. There was also a Polish *schul* and two "Litvok" synagogues. The Talmud Torah Hebrew School stood close by. Every afternoon after our regular school, Talmud Torah



The Chase family (left to right) in 1909: George, son Morris, daughters Rhae and Ida, and Lottie.

held classes and they also had Shabbat services. My brothers Sid and Jack had their Bar Mitzvahs there. The Roman Catholics in our neighborhood usually attended St. Michael's Church. The few black families usually gathered at a storefront church on Fairfield Avenue. It was the Riverview branch of the Union Gospel Church. Their services were so different and full of spontaneous religious excitement that many of the neighborhood children would stand outside moving rhythmically to their beautiful music.

Lafayette Elementary School was down the block and across the street from Talmud Torah. All the children in my neighborhood attended Lafayette. In the morning before school, many of the children in my community whose families were of Irish, Polish, or French descent worked in the small garden plots at their homes, milked the cows they kept, or gathered eggs from the chickens they raised. After completing all the grades at Lafayette School, most of the children in the neighborhood continued their educations at Roosevelt Junior High School and then went on to Humboldt High, which was about three miles away. We all walked to school, regardless of the weather—fair or foul; warm or frigid cold. A lot of the kids in those days dropped out of school before graduating because they had to go to work to help support their families.

The neighborhood around our house on Eaton Avenue included Nathan Lapidus, who had a shoe repair shop and also sold shoes. Mintz's shoe store, where I got shoes for Passover and Rosh Hashanah, was several blocks away. I remember this because Benjamin Mintz sold Red Goose shoes. Tatelbaum's grocery was on Fairfield, which meant we had three grocery stores within a two-and-a-half blocks of our house. Across the street from Tatelbaum's was "Lavonah," which was run by Mr. Aaron Stacker. We didn't call it a deli, but it had to be one because he sold corned beef, salami, and pastrami. I can still remember the smell of his store—delicious! He also sold Jewish newspapers, such as *The Forward*. My father would sit and read the news and "A Bintel Brief," a forerunner of *Ann Landers* and *Dear Abby* that was all about failed romances and other heartbreaks, to my mother as she darned socks and mended clothes.

Our neighborhood had three kosher meat markets and a fish store. The butchers were Goldberg, Geer, and Fishman, who also sold fish. Our grandfather Isaac Frank also sold fish. That was his vocation. My mother said she could always tell if a fish was fresh if it smelled like cucumbers. Weiss, Meckler, and Koenig were all *Shochets*, fowl slaughterers. They also slaughtered cattle at Swift & Company. Mexican women "flicked" the feathers



George Chase at work in the family's yard at 98 Eaton Avenue, on St. Paul's West Side, in 1936.

from the fowl after the birds were slaughtered. The feathers were then gathered up and my father would buy them. When Sam, my brother, picked up the bags of feathers to bring them to my father, the feathers would fly all over the neighborhood.

A Mrs. Flanagan raised chickens and sold the eggs. In the winter she would come by horse-drawn sleigh to our house to sell eggs to my mother. With seven children and two adults in our house, my mother was a good customer and we ate a lot of eggs. Of course no one in those days knew anything about eggs and bad cholesterol. Our local barbers were Rosen, Chernoff, and Londer. Abramowitz had a hardware store in the neighborhood and Kessel's bakery was next door. There was also Erlich's bakery and a few blocks away stood Rosenbloom's bakery.

Neighborhood House, a kind of community center for all ethnic groups, was located on Indiana Avenue at the corner with Robertson Street. It was funded by members of Mount Zion Temple across the river so that "foreigners" had a chance to go to night school to learn to read, write, and speak English. I went there for nursery school. Neighborhood House had programs for families, kids, and parents. There was a gymnasium where the boys could play basketball. In the summertime, the staff set up trips for kids so that we went by bus to different nearby lakes.

On one of these trips to Carver's Lake, I nearly drowned. I was afraid to tell my mother what had happened, but she found out anyway.

Rabbi Herman Simon and his family lived on East Fillmore Avenue, around the corner from our house. He and his sons would come into our yard twice a day, after breakfast and before dinner, to weigh themselves. During the Depression of the 1930s, many people who lived on the West Side were not able to afford a traditional Jewish wedding. Consequently they would go to Rabbi Simon's house

and soon my brothers would get a phone call from Mrs. Simon, the *Rebbetzen*, to come and hold up the poles for the *chuppah*, the wedding canopy.

When a peddler came to our house to sell his junk, my mother would go out to the yard and help. She would weigh things on the scale and figure the amount of money to give him in her head. Sometimes she would use a file to determine what kind of metal, aluminum or copper, was in some piece of junk that a peddler wanted to sell. These skills served her well after my father died in 1941 and she took over the running of the family business. Mother kept the petty cash for the business in a baking pan in the oven. Any big money that we had was kept in the kitchen table leg. When she opened up the table, there in the center of the leg was a big hollow space where a money box was hidden.

My mother's family was all so close. Tante Mashke (Mamie Frank Smith) lived nearby and when my mother called her on the phone telling her to come over, Tante literally ran all the way to our house. Every Sunday, Uncles Berke or Bear (Ben Frank) and Shimke (Sam Frank) would come to visit. They both smoked cigars and the tobacco odor would linger long after they had left. My grandfather Isaac, whom I never knew, had died, leaving his wife, Bubbie (Tobah Frank), alone. She, however, never lived with her children until the final days of her life. During that



Lottie Frank Chase outside the family home on Eaton Avenue in the late 1930s.



The Chase children (left to right, back row) Samuel and Sidney and (front row) Nathalie and Jack with their friend Walter Tankenoff in 1925 in the family's yard on Eaton Avenue.



When Nathalie Chase (center left) married Herman Bernstein (center right) on January 8, 1947, in St. Paul, the temperature outside was very cold, but the warmth of the occasion inside is evident in this portrait of the Chase family, which included her mother, Lottie (fourth from the right), and her sister and four brothers (in the back row) and other relatives. The bride's neice and maid of honor, Marion Rockowitz, is immediately to the right of Lottie Chase.

time, she lived with Tante Mashke, Uncle Benny, and their kids.

Prior to that, Bubbie always rented a room a few blocks from where we lived. She lived with the families who needed extra money and always made room for a boarder. My job, or Sid's, or Jack's was to bring her and Uncle Meyer, who also lived close by, a basket of food that my mother cooked for them. Every Friday night, the Smiths, Bubbie, and Uncle Meyer would come to our house for a *glassele tay* (glass of tea) and sit around the table and talk about their life in Lithuania. No one knew how old Bubbie was. She didn't speak much English (if any), and when we would ask her how old she was, she would say

she didn't know. I asked my mother if she knew Bubbie's age, but she said she didn't know either. Finally, years later, my mother said Bubbie was "drie un zibenson," that is 73, which meant that her son, Meyer, was older than Bubbie was!

On Saturday afternoons, we and the Smith cousins all would walk up to Tante Dvorke's (Dora Frank Dudovitz) and visit with her in her grocery store or at their house. We used to love to go to the store, as she would always treat us to a bottle of Orange Crush soda pop. We didn't get to see the Fisher family that often, however, because they lived in Minneapolis. When they came to St. Paul to visit, they would stay over at our house.

In 1926, when I was five, my sister, Ida,

married Henry (Harry) Rockowitz. Cousin Elaine Smith and I were flower girls. One of the adults tied our wrists together so we wouldn't run away as we walked down the aisle during the ceremony. My other cousins, Burt and Erwin Frank, were "miniature" ushers. This was a big wedding, with about 400 guests. Ida was the first grandchild to get married.

Looking back at those years, I recognize that there was a wonderful family cohesiveness then. I loved it and will always cherish those days of growing up on the West Side.

Nathalie Chase Bernstein lived at home while attending the University of Minnesota. She left the West Side when she married and moved to Oyster Bay, New York.

R.C.H.S.

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The cover of the Official Program for the 30th National Encampment of the G.A.R. in St. Paul in 1896, left, and a Delegate Badge from that convention. The five-pointed star and the "Delegate" bar above the eagle were made of Minnesota copper. The program image is courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society. The badge is from the Albert Scheffer family archives, photo courtesy of Moira F. Harris and Leo J. Harris. For more on the G.A.R. encampment in St. Paul, see the article on page 13.