

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*A Different
Sesquicentennial*

Remembering Fredrick McGhee

Paul D. Nelson

—page 13

Fall 2011

Volume 46, Number 3

Gone But Not Forgotten?

The Survival of Outdoor Sculpture in St. Paul

Moira F. Harris, page 3



In 1958 Sculptor Robert Johnson crafted a golden eagle as a corporate symbol for Minnesota Federal Savings and Loan. The eagle and rock weighed 1,100 pounds, stood eighteen feet tall, and the eagle had a twenty-three-foot wingspan. After the savings and loan merged with another financial institution, the eagle took flight in mid-1986 to the campus of Northwestern College in Roseville, where it was installed near the school's entrance gates. Eagle photos at Minnesota Federal by Jay Pfaender; at Northwestern College by Moira F. Harris.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 46, Number 3

Fall 2011

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

Public art, like all reflections of popular sensibility, has changed over the years in Ramsey County. Molly Harris looks back at the evolution of our outdoor art, from zinc and cast-iron fountains and war heroes, to the Germania and eagle figures that graced insurance-company buildings, down to the colorful sculptures of Charles Schulz *Peanuts* characters. Leila Albert recounts the history of St. Paul's West Side, where people of Mexican descent were drawn by work opportunities and stayed to raise their families. Albert's accompanying book review essay and a current Landmark Center exhibit also highlight this community's struggles and achievements. Doug Heidenreich shares evocative memories of growing up in the West End neighborhood, where vacant lots acted as playing fields, and the coming of spring brought hollyhocks, rhubarb, and the trash man hauling away ashes produced by winter's coal-burning furnaces. And Paul Nelson notes the sesquicentennial of the birth of Fredrick McGhee, a pioneering African American criminal defense attorney and civil rights leader. As you settle down for a good read, don't forget that a membership makes a great holiday gift for anyone with personal Ramsey County memories.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

A Book Review Essay

Mexican-Americans in Ramsey County and Minnesota

Leila Renee Albert

Ramsey County is home to a flourishing Mexican-American community with a history in Minnesota that dates back nearly to the time of statehood. In fact, the 1860 census showed a handful of Mexicans already living in the state. Historian Dennis Valdés has written three books that shed light on the experiences of Mexicans in Ramsey County, Minnesota, and the Midwest: *Al Norte: Agricultural Workers in the Great Lakes Region, 1917–1970* (University of Texas Press, 1991; \$35.00), *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (University of Texas Press, 2000; \$37.00), and *Mexicans in Minnesota* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005; \$13.95). Prior to the publication of these books, the most authoritative and detailed source for historical analysis of Mexican-Americans in the local area and Minnesota was Susan M. Diebold’s chapter “The Mexicans” in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State’s Ethnic Groups*, edited by June D. Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981; \$39.95).

Dennis Valdés is a professor of history at Michigan State University. Additionally, he previously taught history and Chicano Studies for two decades at the University of Minnesota. He specializes in the experiences of Mexicans in the Midwest. His three books were written as narrative social histories that highlight Mexican and Mexican-American history in the Midwest, Minnesota, and St. Paul.

Each of the books is clearly presented and well documented. Chapters are arranged in chronological order, introducing readers to a series of events that influenced the Mexican and Mexican-American experience. *Al Norte* and *Barrios Norteños* were written for a more scholarly audience and so are a bit long; *Mexicans in Minnesota*, on the other hand, was written for a more general audience and is an easy read. The books provided an informative and insightful account of Midwesterners and Minnesotans of Mexican descent; their presence, their plight, and their progress.

The first book, *Al Norte*, illuminates the lives of migrant workers and

farmers, the practices of agribusiness and officials, the responses of communities and organizations, and the ongoing consequences each of these factors had for the others. Valdés discusses institutional policies that influenced how agricultural workers were treated by employers, public officials, and the general public as well as how workers reacted to such treatments. The book outlines how workers were actively pursued by agribusiness representatives, brought to the region under promises of potential opportunity and prosperity, only to be either isolated, insulted, or both. In turn, workers resisted hardships, began organizing, and persevered in the places that would become, for many, their new home.

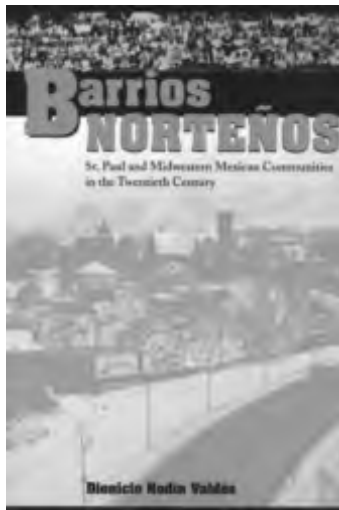
Although Ramsey County is not the primary focus of *Al Norte*, it provides a solid background to Midwestern Mexican history by placing the discussion into a broader historical context providing a full description of twentieth century agricultural and societal



changes throughout the United States and the Midwest. The author discusses the rise of agribusiness in the upper Midwest and how this industry influenced and impacted the lives of Midwesterners of both European and Mexican descent.

Barrios Norteños was a continuation of the research which resulted in the earlier book, *Al Norte*. Readers should know the book is highly analytical at times with discussions of scholarly hypotheses and interpretations such as the World Systems model, assimilation ideas, internal colonialism, and Marxist tendencies. In fact, the first chapter is largely a discussion of scholarly discourse. Valdés does make clear from the beginning that the book is intended for a scholarly audience. The tone of *Barrios Norteños* is just as authoritative and as well-written a narrative as *Al Norte* is.

Like *Al Norte*, *Barrios Norteños* presents a series of events and changes, in this case influencing and impacting when, where, why, and how Midwestern Mexican communities evolved in St. Paul and other cities throughout



Minnesota and the Midwest. The book portrays the Midwestern Mexican experience as a series of struggles and gains. Valdés discussed the development of Mexican communities as well as how the general public perceived and responded to a growing Mexican population.

Valdés explains that Midwestern Mexican communities originated after workers of Mexican descent were brought to the Midwest for work. Employers arranged for housing, subsistence, and transportation to and from the south, all of which was far below acceptable standards. Over time, employers determined it was more lucrative for the workers to stay in state year round. Workers were then encouraged to winter in nearby communities such

as St. Paul. Despite continued changes in perceptions, policies, and practices meant to retain control over this workforce, the workers did gain their own level of control and were therefore able to establish their own communities and largely on their own terms.

The last of the books, *Mexicans in Minnesota*, provides a brief yet detailed overview of the history and culture of Minnesota Mexicans. Valdés highlights when and why Mexicans and Mexican-Americans arrived to and settled in Minnesota; for work and then for family. He explains their contributions, difficulties, efforts, and achievements during the Depression, the Second World War, and the Civil Rights movement.

The book discusses how Mexicans in Minnesota have sought to retain control over their culture, identity, and portrayal throughout the state by maintaining their language, heritage, and traditions. Valdés makes clear that Mexicans have had a long presence in Minnesota and their history has been one of achievements and obstacles, discrimination and acceptance, regress and progress. Mexicans in Minnesota struggled to create their own communities and maintain their culture in both rural and urban areas from their arrival in the state through to the present day.

Mexicans in Minnesota, like the other two books, is sure to leave readers with an enhanced understanding of the



Mexican experience in Minnesota. The use of images, focused discussions, and sidebars provides for a more personal connection between readers and the content of the books. While none of the books focuses entirely on Mexican-American history and culture in Ramsey County, each of the books thoroughly presents when, why, and how Mexicans came to call the Midwest, Minnesota, and even Ramsey County home.

Leila Albert is a historian with expertise in Mexican-American history who has developed an exhibition and programming focused on the Mexican-Americans of Ramsey County. The exhibit, Living la Vida en Ramsey County, is currently available at RCHS's galleries in the Landmark Center in St. Paul.

Book Reviews

A Long View into the Past

Jeanne Reeves Newhall Shepard
Bloomington, Ind.: privately published
by Sybil S. Eakin, 2010
118 pages; no price available.
Reviewed by Robert F. Garland

A *Long View into the Past* by Jeanne Newhall Shepard gives the reader a personal history of St. Paul's admirable Jeanne (1917–2009) and Gordon

(1914–2004) Shepard family that is highly informative and will be enjoyed by many readers of *Ramsey County History*, some of whom will have been acquainted with the Shepards.

Beginning with her early life as a daughter of the prominent Newhall family of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, and on through her college days (Sarah Lawrence College, 1939) and marriage (1940) to St. Paul attorney Gordon

Shepard, Jeanne continues her highly personal chronicle of their life together in St. Paul, Sunfish Lake, and Mendota Heights. Thanks to the kind invitation of her good college friend Mary Livingston Griggs, Jeanne settled in St. Paul after graduation and found a job in advertising at Schuneman's Department Store. Living first on Summit Avenue and later on Portland Avenue and then on Salem Church

Road and Delaware Avenue, Jeanne and Gordon Shepard were in many ways experiencing the lives of the children of Scott Fitzgerald's contemporaries. Following Gordon's distinguished service in Burma as an officer in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II, they continued together in Gordon's marked success as a partner in the St. Paul law firm of Oppenheimer, Woolf & Donnelly. At the time he had joined the firm in 1939, Gordon was its tenth lawyer. Jeanne and Gordon established homes, raised their family, enjoyed their pets, served their community in various ways, and even took time for vacations and writing a poem or two.



This memoir, which was brought to print by Gordon and Jeanne's daughter Sybil S. Eakin, is profusely illustrated with both color and black and white photos and amplified by helpful and interesting appendixes. *A Long View into the Past* is a book to be read as a recent family friend, sharing in Jeanne and Gordon's personal experiences and challenges, as well as in their professional and family achievements. It is "history in the making," and decades from now it will be valued by those making a study of our collective lives.

On finishing this comparatively brief volume, this reviewer, who had enjoyed Gordon Shepard's company as a fellow St. Paul Rotarian, only wished to have known his family sooner and that the

families of other old friends would be similarly commemorated.

Robert F. Garland is a long-time St. Paul resident, retired business executive who has served on the Board of Directors of the Ramsey County Historical Society, and the author of four articles for this magazine and six Humboldt Prior detective mysteries that are set in St. Paul.

Once There Were Castles: Lost Mansions and Estates of the Twin Cities

Larry Millett
 Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011
 363 pages; cloth, notes, and index;
 \$39.95

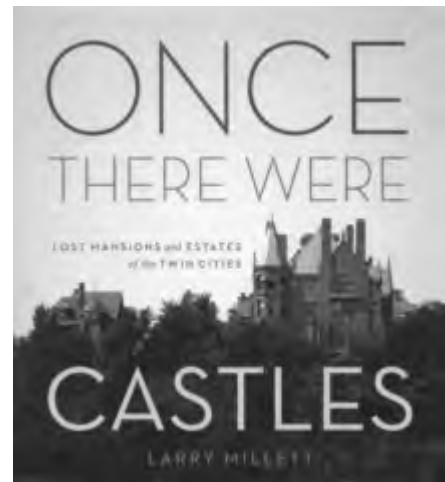
Reviewed by John M. Lindley

In this richly illustrated book, Larry Millett gives us a detailed portrait of what he calls those "lost mansions of the Twin Cities" and how they "constitute a graveyard of sumptuous dreams."

Millett's several earlier books about the architectural history of Minneapolis and St. Paul provide a starting point for this engagingly written history. He estimates that at least 500 "great houses" in the geographical area from Minnetonka on the west to Stillwater on the east have been lost over the years, including more than seventy-five that once graced St. Paul.

In his opinion, the "golden age" of mansion building in the Twin Cities was between 1900 and 1920. Some estates were torn down to make way for commercial or other development. Some were replaced by grander mansions. Urban renewal, construction of freeways, or demographic changes in a neighborhood led to the razing of others. Over the years, for example, three St. Paul neighborhoods—Capitol Heights, College Avenue, and Lowertown—were completely torn down. The result, Millett argues, is that large sections of both cities were once "far more urbane and beautiful" than what they are today.

Once There Were Castles opens with



an Introduction that sets out Millett's general observations about mansions in the area. The next six chapters concentrate on neighborhoods in St. Paul where great homes have been lost. Seven chapters covering lost mansions in Minneapolis conclude this book. Many pages display large-format photographs that allow the reader to examine specific details of a home.

Because the documentary evidence is uneven among all these grand mansions, Millett's discussion of individual properties varies greatly. Even with this handicap, he provides more than enough to satisfy both the casual and the serious reader.

Millett's secondary sources for this volume include citations to four articles on St. Paul people and their mansions that were published in *Ramsey County History*. He also cites at least nine other authors who have also written for this magazine. In addition, Millett generously acknowledges the research help he received from RCHS Board member Jay Pfaender and RCHS staffer Mollie Spillman.

Once There Were Castles is an attractive portrait of a bygone era in Minneapolis and St. Paul, a profile of the many wealthy people who had the means to build great homes, an account of the master builders and architects who constructed these estates, and an architectural look through about 100 years of local history.

John M. Lindley is the editor of Ramsey County History.

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Torre de San Miguel (Tower of St. Michael) is a major landmark on St. Paul's West Side and a powerful emblem for Minnesota's first urban barrio. For more on the history of Mexican-Americans in this neighborhood and Minnesota, see page 20. Photo by Lelia R. Albert.