



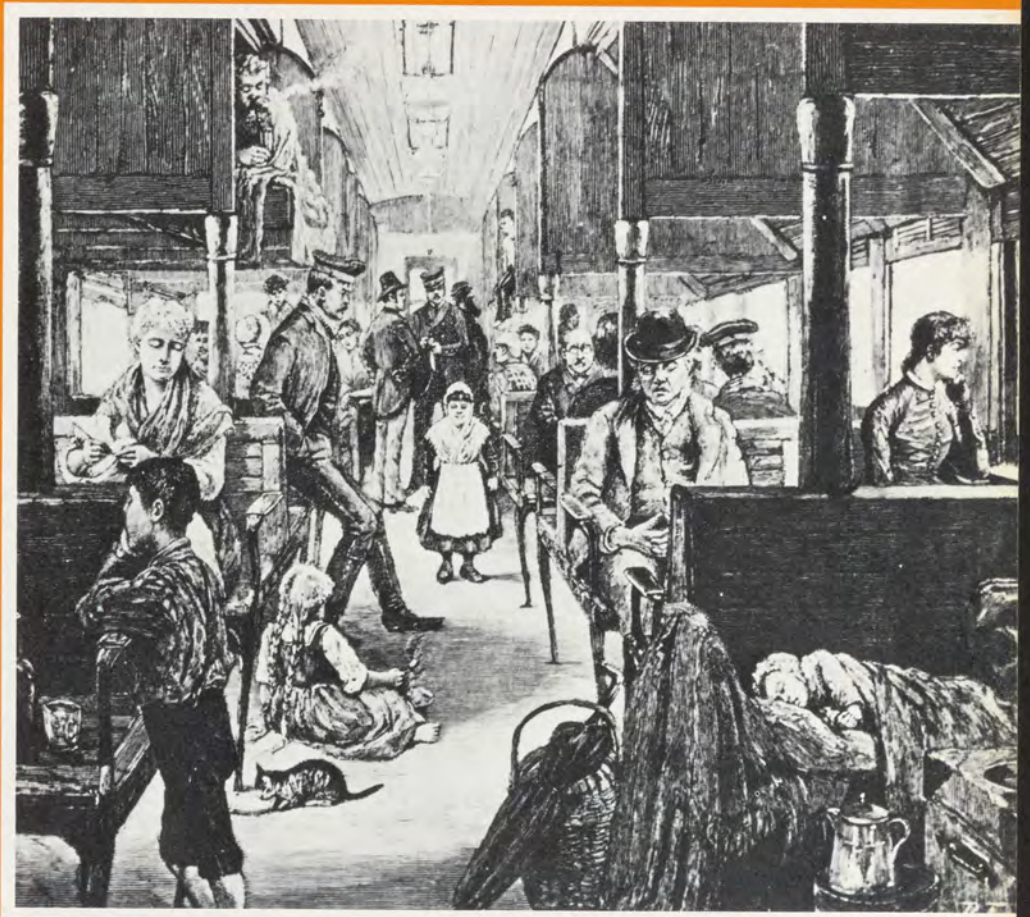
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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ON THE COVER: Lithograph of Emigrant Train leaving St. Paul's Union Depot — late 1800s. Immigrants supplied the railroads with the bulk of their work force.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Pictures used in this issue are from the audio-visual department of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, with the following exceptions:

Page 4 top, 6 bottom, 7 top — all from Joseph G. Pyle's Life of James J. Hill.

Page 9 bottom, 10 bottom — from The Good Years by Walter Lord.

Pages 14, 16, 17 and 18 — from the Hudson's Bay Company magazine, The Beaver.

Volstead and Prohibition

A Roaring '20's memoir

The 1920's was a fast-paced, swinging time, much of which is now legend. Yet lost in the romantic hue that beclouds the era, have been the lives of the ordinary working people, the "eight-to-four" men and women, who also lived through that time. Helen Warren Pflieger was just such a person. Her recollections of the Roaring Twenties provide an interesting perspective of the times. Not only did her job as a clerk/receptionist with the St. Paul Prohibition Office put her "where the action was," it gave her the opportunity to know the man who was, in large part, responsible for Prohibition — Andrew John Volstead. Volstead was the Republican congressional representative for Minnesota's 7th district from 1903 to 1922, and it was he who was selected to draft and introduce the 18th Amendment which, in 1919, made Prohibition law. When Mrs. Pflieger first met the Granite Falls lawyer, he was working in St. Paul as legal adviser to the chief of the Northwest dry enforcement district, having been defeated two years earlier in a bid for re-election.

BY HELEN WARREN PFLEGER
as told to
George A. Rea

The Honorable Andrew J. Volstead, the author of the "Dry" Act, was working as a lawyer-consultant in the Prohibition Office in St. Paul when I started to work there in 1925. His office was on the fourth floor of the Old Federal Courts Building, on the Market Street side, and it occupied nearly the entire fourth floor of the building.

The Federal Prohibition Administration was under the overall direction of Brigadier General Walter F. Rhinow, former adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard.

M. L. Harney, assistant federal prohibition director, was in charge of the investigations, or "raids," as the newspapers called them. He was in charge of all federal agents in Minnesota. His department looked into reported violations of the Volstead Act and entailed dangerous duties because some-

times Mr. Harney or his agents were shot at by people whose activities were being looked into. Mr. Harney's brother was killed on one such assignment.

Mr. Volstead and his group of lawyers drew up the indictments from information secured by Harney's department. The completed indictments were sent to the Federal courts (which occupied the same floor, and some of the third floor of the Old Federal Courts Building).

I WORKED DIRECTLY under General Rhinow, and I had three jobs at the time. I was the receptionist, the mail and file clerk supervisor, and the telephone switchboard operator. As the work increased, my work was divided and I had assistants to help me, but from 1925 to 1954 I always was in charge of all three positions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mrs. Pflieger, a neighbor of George Rea's, told this story to Mr. Rea over a period of months. Mr. Rea is a member of the Ramsey County and St. Paul Historical Society.



Federal agents breaking up an illegal still in St. Paul, 1925.

Most of the mail sent us was of a routine nature, but whenever I read an important letter that needed immediate attention, I took it directly to the person addressed, not waiting for the office boy or any of the messengers who usually distributed the mail. General Rhinow, Mr. Harney, and Mr. Volstead all appreciated this extra service. Their confidential clerks and secretaries were most cooperative and saw to it that the important mail was taken care of as promptly as possible. Mr. Volstead's secretary, Miss Danielson, was gracious and efficient, and we became fast friends.

General Rhinow occasionally asked me to work at the switchboard at nights. He always asked me to call my mother so she would not be worried, and he also had one of the agents take me home in his car.

WHENEVER HE ASKED ME to work at night, I knew it was a sign that Harney or his agents were going to make an investigation of some illegal activity and General Rhinow wanted to keep in touch with them by telephone. Of course, I never told anyone in the office or outside, except my mother, that I was going to work late at night because this might have disclosed secret information. I had to be most careful at all times. Occasionally newspaper re-

porters would try to "pump" information from me, but I always referred them to the heads of the departments.

As the receptionist, I met all callers to the Prohibition office. There were quite a lot of people who came to report on their neighbors regarding suspected illegal liquor activities. I received them politely and usually sent them to see Mr. Harney. If they were asking about a legal question, I sent them to see Mr. Volstead. Both Mr. Harney and Mr. Volstead were always willing to give of their time to visitors, regardless of how much work was on their desks. As the volume of work increased, I know that they often had to work after hours to catch up with their duties.

I DID NOT MIND working extra hours at the switchboard. It gave me a chance to clear my desk of odds and ends, and I also was able to catch up with my reading of books or magazines, as well as having the added treat of being able to eat dinner downtown.

Sometimes the agents wore old clothes when they went on assignments in poorer neighborhoods, or when they acted as tramps in order not to be recognized. It was quite a contrast to see the usually well-dressed agents all ragged and down at the heels.

There were some amusing incidents that came to light during some of the investigations. For instance, there was a flower shop in St. Paul which was suspected as being a source of illegal liquor. The shop was beautifully decorated with all sorts of fine floral displays. A small flower stand held a display of ferns. The investigating agent looked around the shop and could find no violations and was just about to leave when he happened to notice an extra spigot in back of the flower stand. He turned the faucet and out flowed a stream of high-grade, intoxicating liquor. The proprietor pretended to be unaware of the illegal source of liquor, but it was too well-planned a device to have been an accident.

Mr. Volstead never went on investigations into illegal liquor activities. He was far too busy with his law activities, and besides, that was not the province of his department. The notion that he went about with an axe in his hand, as a sort of male Carry Nation* in order to break up liquor stills, is not true.

In 1925, Mr. Volstead was 65 years old. When I first met him, I was a young woman and I thought he was quite an old man. He was a dignified gentleman, quiet and unassuming, but most affable. He always greeted the staff in the mornings. He was a trifle shorter than most men. He had salt and pepper colored hair and his mustache, of the same shade, was always well trimmed. His photographs show his mustache as bushy, but I do not recall that it was too big, compared with the standards of that time. He was, also, somewhat thinner than average. He was always well dressed, in a conservative fashion.

MR. VOLSTEAD was a retiring man. He had been a country lawyer before he became a congressman and was far from the "hail-fellow, well-met," back-slapping type of politician. In 1928 his family lived in an apartment at 806 Linwood Place, St. Paul. Besides his wife, he had a beautiful daughter named Laura. Laura Volstead later married Carl Loman who operated a reindeer ranch in Alaska.

I wonder how many of the thousands of

**The spelling of that lady's name is "Carry." It is a family name and is frequently misspelled "Carrie."*



Andrew Volstead in 1925.

persons who passed by Mr. Volstead on the streets of downtown St. Paul recognized him. I don't imagine many did, although his name was well-known all over the world. There was no television in those days and it was not the custom to publicize prominent politicians or other people in the public eye, as greatly as is done today.

I do not recall ever having seen a photograph of Mr. Volstead in any of the Twin City newspapers or in the newsreels which were a common feature of the motion picture houses at that time. Of course, he was working chiefly on indictments for the Prohibition Office, work which was confidential until the cases were heard in court, and publicity would have been a hindrance to his work.

The Prohibition Office was not the first place I worked. My first job, in 1915, was the Co-Operative Laundry Company at 242-246 West Seventh Street, in St. Paul. I was a temporary cashier and assistant bookkeeper. Later, I was offered a job as a clerk in a branch office they were going to open at 523 Wabasha Street, St. Paul.

AT THE LAUNDRY'S new outlet, I was in complete charge, receiving and giving out laundry and dry cleaning and handling all monetary transactions. While I worked at the main office on West Seventh Street, one of my duties was taking money to the bank.

The people in the office were amused when I made the money bags into a small parcel resembling a bundle of laundry because I was afraid of being held up.

After World War I, there were a lot of ex-soldiers out of work, and there was much robbery and violence reported in the papers. As I wanted a better position, after working at the laundry receiving station for two years, I took an examination for a clerk in the Civil Service.

I did very well and was offered a temporary position on August 14, 1919, at the Aviation School located on the third floor of the Army Building at Second and Robert Streets, St. Paul. The building has long since been torn down.

On September 22, Civil Service notified me to report for a permanent position in the Public Health Service and was assigned a job as a clerk. The salary was \$55 a month with a bonus of \$20, making a total of \$75 a month. The Public Health Service is now called the Veterans Administration. The part of the Service where I was employed dealt with the health problems of U.S. veterans of World War I. The office was located on the fourth floor of the Lowry Medical Arts building, at St. Peter Street, between Fourth and Fifth Streets.

I HAD LOST a brother in World War I, and felt I understood the patients' problems. It was sad to see the steady stream of disabled young men who came to us for help. Some of the shell-shocked veterans had their names written on cards pinned to their coats. The veterans who required hospitalization were sent to the various hospitals in St. Paul. Later, the Aberdeen Apartment-Hotel, located on Dayton Avenue near Western, since demolished, was made into a temporary veterans' hospital while the large Veterans Hospital at Fort Snelling was being built.

In 1925, it was decided that our department would move from the Lowry to the Fort Snelling location. As my mother was living in the family home on West George Street in St. Paul, it was not convenient for me to work at Fort Snelling. It would have taken me an hour by streetcar to go to and fro. I accordingly applied for a transfer to the Prohibition Office where I worked for 35 years until retirement in 1954.

Mr. Volstead retired in 1933 and returned to his boyhood home at Granite Falls, Minn. It was the same year the Prohibition Act was cancelled by the Twenty-first Amendment. Our duties were combined with the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Units of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Many of the agents resigned and sought work elsewhere. After a revision of our duties, because our work was lessened when Prohibition ended, our office was first moved to the Minnesota Building, at Cedar and Fourth Streets, St. Paul; and then when the new postoffice building was completed, to its location at Kellogg Boulevard between Jackson and Sibley streets.

I REALIZE THERE is a great deal I have left out. I have not mentioned the devotion to duty of all in the Prohibition Department, the handicap we worked under because of inadequate funds, or the evils of Prohibition, including the lessened respect for law and order, and the rise of powerful gangsters.

Nor do I want to leave the impression that it was all work during those times. Much of the entertaining in those days was done at private homes. Before radio and television, we made our own music by gathering around the parlor piano where we sang songs or danced. There were also a lot of theaters in downtown St. Paul which showed motion pictures, or where they had vaudeville acts, or stage shows. I particularly liked going to the Metropolitan Opera House on Sixth Street, where around 1925 there were presented a great many musical comedies, such as "Little Jessie James" or "No, No, Nanette," and operettas such as Friml's "Vagabond King," or Romberg's "Student Prince."

It also was pleasant to take a drive in the evening in an automobile. There were not many motor cars in those days, and it was relaxing to go for a ride along the uncrowded roadways. Those leisurely jaunts are a thing of the past on today's freeways which are almost as dangerous as the Indianapolis Speedway.

Maybe I am prejudiced by my own pleasant memories, because I was married to a fine, understanding man in June, 1927, but those days in the Volstead Era were most happy ones for me.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County and Saint Paul Historical Society as a restored farm home of the mid-nineteenth century period.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958, the Society erected a barn behind the farm house which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen. In 1966, the Society moved to its museum property a one-room rural schoolhouse, dating from the 1870's. The white frame school came from near Milan, Minnesota. Now restored to the period of the late 1890's, the school actually is used for classes and meetings.

Headquarters of the Ramsey County and Saint Paul Historical Society are located in the Old Federal Courts Building in downtown St. Paul, an historic building of neo-Romanesque architecture which the Society, with other groups, fought to save from demolition. The Society also maintains a museum office in the basement of the schoolhouse on the Gibbs Farm property. The Society is active in identification of historic sites in the city and county, and conducts an educational program which includes the teaching and demonstration of old arts and crafts. It is one of the few county historical societies in the country to engage in an extensive publishing program in local history.