



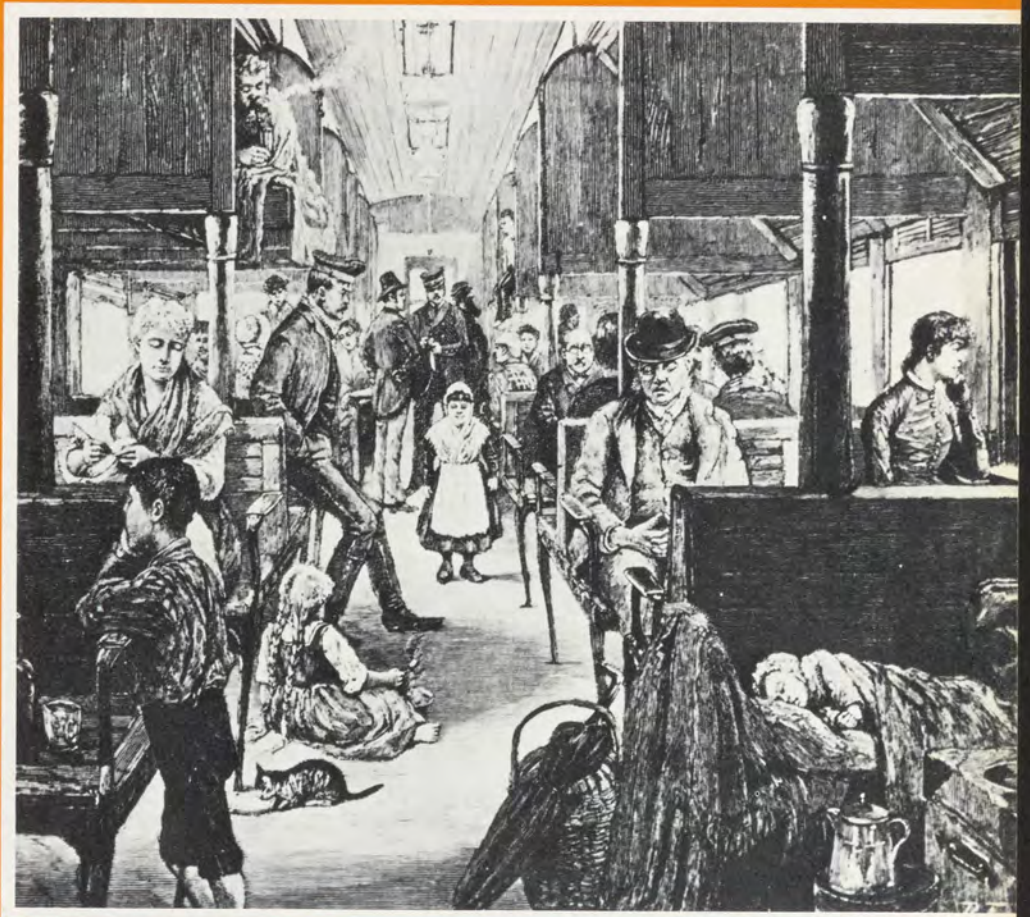
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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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*.

Fences

BY LANSING SHEPARD

On the face of it, a fence is a pretty simple thing — the wood, the wire, steel, stone or whatever . . . all pretty standard items put together for the rather humdrum purpose of keeping in what wants to get out, or keeping out that which wants in.

But if you take some time — go lie on your back under a tree, maybe — and work it around in your mind, you'll find a fence can take on some very impressive proportions.

The first thing that will strike you is the tremendous variety that exists — split-rail, chainlink, stake-and-rail, electric, post-and-log, barbed wire, rope, picket, spite . . . it's a healthy diversity. If it is true that the varied species is a secure species, the fence promises to be around for a long time to come.

Not that it hasn't already demonstrated impressive staying power. In fact, today's fence possesses a pedigree that would make any baron blush. Whether it's a collection of slats nailed to a horizontal beam and stretched between a couple of backyards, or the latest high-security chainlink, outfitted with the most sophisticated electronic gadgetry, it probably has for a great-great granddaddy some vine-and-tree affair strung out across a primordial river bottom, back beyond the beginning of recorded time.

Things that have been around that long become the stuff of truths, axioms, metaphors, and social commentary:

"I am amused," said Henry Thoreau, "to see from my window . . . how man has divided and staked off his domain. God must smile at his puny fences running hither and thither over the land." That has the makings of a good essay.

Add a little cynicism and you've got a well-quoted social statement. "The first man, wrote J. J. Rousseau, "who having fenced in

a piece of land, said, 'This is mine,' and found people naive enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society."

Possibly. But might not the fence have been a social necessity? We all must live together and aren't good fences supposed to make good neighbors?

Another thing that a fence is, is something you learn when you try to build one: Hard Work. Take, for instance, the deceptively simple Virginia stake-and-rail. The idea was brought to Minnesota in the early 1800's by the first settlers. It flourished here during the first half of the 19th century when wood was nearby and plentiful. Settlers used the stake-and-rail to mark their land and contain their livestock . . . yea, swore by them (and, no doubt, over them) until the 1870's, when wood fencing was replaced by barbed wire.

Last winter the Ramsey County and St. Paul Historical Society and students from the St. Paul New City Learning Center set out to make, from scratch, their own Virginia stake-and-rail. It was part of a plan to fence the perimeters of the Society's Gibbs Farm Museum and to enclose the farm's newly-acquired livestock.

Wielding old-fashioned, two-man saws and double-bitted axes, the students and Society staff members mused out to Zimmerman, Minn. and harvested a truckload of jackpine (donated by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources). Later the logs were stripped and, using old telephone poles, the group hewed out a fair rendition of the classic fence. Following are glimpses — past and present — of what goes into such a structure.

The contemporary pictures on pages 12 and 13 are by Lansing Shepard. The rest are from the audio-visual department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

To Build A Fence



1. . . . you need the wood. Harvest methods over the years. What is harvested, however same.

2. When you've stripped the trunks of branches cut off butt ends into about 7-1/2-foot lengths. The center of each pole will be your rails. Split pole (lengthwise) into halves, fourths, or maybe eighths depending on the thickness of the wood.

3. Place the bottom-most rails on stones. Fill the gaps between each rail end. Span the top layer of rails, resting the latter directly on the bottom layer. Hold the fence in place at these overlapping joints by splitting the butt ends down either side. Add layers as needed.

4. Fence corners are held in place by stakes driven into the ground one out — bisecting the corner angle.

Looks easy? Try it sometime.



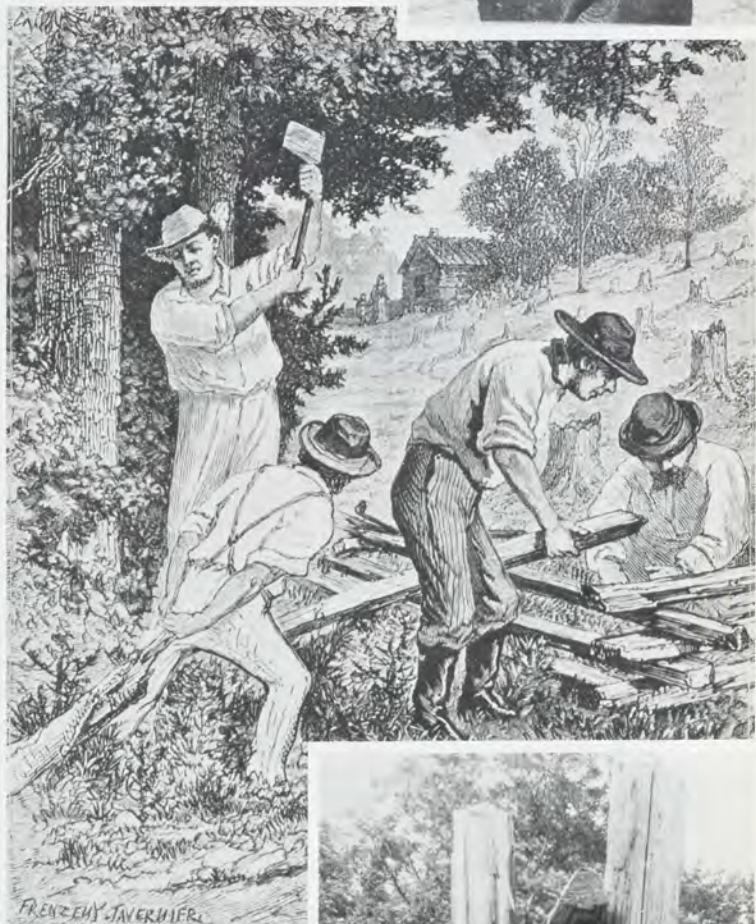
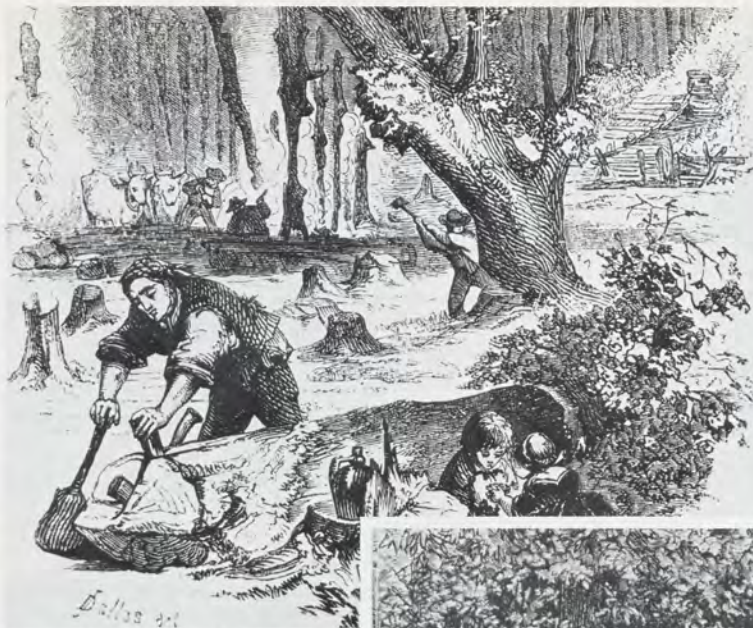
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THE GIBBS HOUSE

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.