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## Contents

|                  |   |         |
|------------------|---|---------|
|                  | The Plowing of America:<br>Early Farming Around St. Paul    |         |
| <b>Volume 13</b> | By Rodney C. Loehr .....                                    | Page 3  |
| <b>Number 2</b>  | Tough Times —   |         |
|                  | The Sometime Fortunes of Boxing in Early Minnesota ...      | Page 13 |
|                  | The Not-So-Peaceable Kingdom:<br>Religion in Early St. Paul |         |
|                  | By Dennis Hoffa .....                                       | Page 19 |

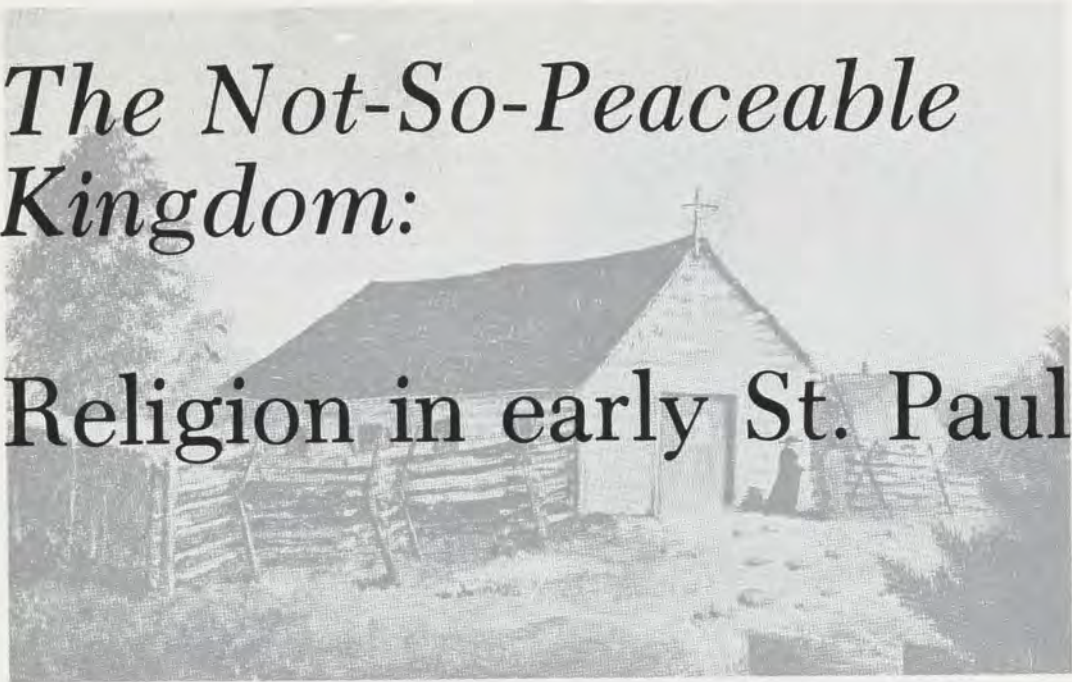
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*ON THE COVER: Minnesota Boat Club picnic at Crosby's Bottoms, Ca. 1890.*

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Pictures used in this issue are from the audio-visual department of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, with the exception of the pictures on pages 15 and 17, which are from the Ramsey County Historical Society.*

# *The Not-So-Peaceable Kingdom:*

## Religion in early St. Paul



St. Paul's chapel, 1852. By Robert O. Sweeny.

*By Dennis Hoffa*

Much has been made of the turbulent nature of the American frontier of the middle 1800s — the struggles for wealth and power, the frenzied good times, the bleak bad times, the monumental crashes, and the general, remarkable growth of commerce and government out of a literal wilderness. What has been less noted is the fact that many of these same characteristics apply just as well to the frontier church. Take, for instance, the history of religion in early St. Paul:

The first settlers were mostly French-Canadian with some Swiss farmers and traders. Seen in a less secular light, they could be characterized as predominantly Catholic with a few Protestants — disproportion which, at the time, was of no concern to anyone. Other issues preoccupied them. Refugees from a disastrous Canadian colonization experiment undertaken by Lord Selkirk in 1812, they had fled south into Minnesota, beginning in 1821, and had been

granted permission by Colonel Snelling to temporarily settle on the Fort Snelling reservation. There they remained until 1838 when deteriorating settler-soldier relations resulted in their forcible eviction from the military reservation. While most of them had left St. Paul within a decade, some of those who remained prospered. Among them were Benjamin Gervais and Vital Guerin. Other entrepreneurs moved into the area — men like the French-American merchants Louis Robert and Auguste Larpenteur. Their commercial enterprises had much to do with attracting a labor force, a substantial fraction of which were Irish and Germans. These and the French continued to provide early St. Paul with a predominantly Roman Catholic stamp.

The establishment of formal religion in the area began, however, in 1839, when the Right Reverend Mathias Loras, Catholic bishop of Dubuque, and Father Anthony Pelamourgues visited the community around the fort and made arrangements to erect a church in anticipation of the arrival of a priest the following year. The priest's name was Lucien Galtier.

Father Galtier, a native of France, arrived in the United States in 1838 with two other seminarians, Augustine Ravoux and Joseph

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Cretin (both of whom would also come to St. Paul). After a year in a Maryland seminary completing his training for the priesthood and learning English, Father Galtier came to Dubuque and, in 1841, was assigned to the new church at St. Peter's (Mendota). Upon arriving, he found that many of his parishioners had already removed to the present site of downtown St. Paul, and he decided to move with them. That same year, he commissioned the construction of an 18 by 20-foot log chapel on land deeded to the church by Guerin and Gervais. In 1844, Galtier was succeeded by Father Ravoux, who had been serving as a missionary to the Sioux along the Minnesota River.

By 1851 Father Ravoux had doubled the size of the original chapel. The parish, however, had grown too large for him to manage alone. Accordingly, the diocese of St. Paul was created and Joseph Cretin was appointed the first bishop of St. Paul. Bishop Cretin oversaw the completion of a new cathedral building in 1853 and supervised the planning of still another cathedral, which was not completed until 1857, after his death. Both buildings stood on the block bounded by Wabasha, St. Peter, Sixth, and Seventh streets. The old chapel was taken over as a girls' school by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. This was the forerunner of St. Joseph's Academy. St. Joseph's Hospital was opened in 1853 and a Catholic boys' school was begun in the new cathedral.

Indeed, the growth of the Catholic presence in the area nearly paralleled that of the town's politics and commerce. With this expansion, however, came increasing friction with many of St. Paul's Protestant leaders who saw the Catholic growth as a threat to their attempts to establish a "Puritan" character for the capital city. Just what this meant is unclear. Presumably the dream was to make St. Paul's religious profile conform to that of a typical Yankee, New England town.

Curiously, such Protestant consternation appeared to heighten with distance eastward.<sup>1</sup> It appeared, in fact, to find its rather frenetic culmination in Philadelphia in the writings of the Reverend Albert Barnes, minister of that city's First Presbyterian Church. For Rev. Barnes, the west — peopled as it was by emigrants from everywhere — was a highly unstable entity which, without guidance from the east could well degenerate into a collection of barbaric, Roman Catholic or even atheistic societies.<sup>2</sup>

While growing Catholicism was a real concern among St. Paul's Protestant leaders, it should be noted that they took a far more reasonable attitude. Their hostility toward the Catholic presence appeared to be more intellectual than personal.

Prominent among these Yankees were such figures as the Reverend Edward Duffield Neill, Harriet Bishop, and J. Lloyd Breck. Their Protestant cause was supported by the town's first newspaper, the *Minnesota Pioneer*, whose editor, James M. Goodhue, on May 19, 1849, looked to "the germinating influence of Yankee enterprise," to serve as an antidote to the problems of his frontier town. Problems, for Goodhue, included the presence of too few Protestants and too many Catholics, the latter being, he felt, under influence from abroad.

The beginnings of Protestantism as a force within the community centered around the establishment of Harriet Bishop's Sunday School. Miss Bishop was the first of several teachers sent to St. Paul by the Board of National Popular Education, a New England-based operation. Her Sunday School's first meeting on July 25, 1847, consisted of seven children and one Indian woman. This meeting was the first of a series of such events culminating in the establishment of First Baptist Church two years later. Although Miss Bishop's school drew its members from the six Yankee families who had taken up residence in St. Paul, by 1847 she was finding it difficult to expand her class. She laid the blame on Father Ravoux, who, Miss Bishop wrote, was instructing his children to "avoid, as a pestilence, the Protestant Sunday School."

She hadn't long to worry, for Yankees continued to come to St. Paul, and in 1848 a Protestant Temperance Society was founded at Miss Bishop's school. That same year Abram Cavender and Benjamin Hoyt founded a "union prayer meeting," and, on Dec. 31, a Methodist class meeting was organized by Benjamin Close. This latter conclave eventually became the Market Street Methodist Church. Church meetings were held in the parlor of the newly-erected Territorial Hotel on Bench Street until a brick building across from Rice Park was completed. The land was donated by Henry M. Rice and John H. Irvine. It was the first Protestant church built in territorial Minnesota and the second brick building in the city. (Later a portion of the congregation

split from this church and formed the Jackson Street Methodist Church, which, in 1887, became the Central Park Methodist Episcopal Church.)

Miss Bishop, meanwhile, had requested a minister from the Baptist Home Mission Society. The mission responded by sending the Reverend John Parsons to St. Paul. This action culminated in the formation of First Baptist Church at a meeting held in Miss Bishop's school on Dec. 31, 1849. The congregation continued to meet there until 1851, when a church home was erected.

Both Protestantism and Catholicism grew as community forces during the turbulent 1850s. Protestant recruits were supplied by the continuing influx of Yankees, as well as some German and Swedish families. The Catholic diocese benefited correspondingly by the growing numbers of Irish and German Catholic immigrants.

By July of 1850, Christ Episcopal parish had been formed and the next year an Episcopal "Missionary Society for Minnesota" was organized in St. Paul.

Reverend Neill was instrumental in forming at least two Presbyterian churches in territorial St. Paul — First Presbyterian and House of Hope. Responding to the urgings of the American Home Mission Society, Neill arrived in St. Paul in April of 1849 from Galena, Ill., where he had been engaged in missionary work. Alarmed as much by the western community's lawlessness and worldly concerns as he was by the influence of Roman Catholicism, he threw himself into the task of correcting this situation by bringing a more "Puritan" influence to bear. Besides the establishment of churches, people like Neill, Harriet Bishop, territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey, and other church and lay leaders, sought to bring Protestantism into the school curriculum, to legally enforce temperance and, in general, to uphold the "Protestant ethic."

Neill's First Presbyterian Church became the center for much of this activity. His first church had burned, but by November of 1850 a second, larger edifice was completed. Neill, besides his activity in the church, was instrumental in the formation of St. Paul's schools. In 1853 he established Baldwin School for Girls, financed in part by Governor Ramsey. In 1855 Neill established House of Hope Presbyterian Church. After meeting in a number of temporary locations and nearly disbanding because of the Panic of 1857, a



**Father Augustine Ravoux was accused of not being overly fond of the Protestant newcomers.**

small wooden structure was built on Walnut Street — a far cry, indeed, from the imposing structure which stands on Summit Avenue today.

Central Presbyterian Church was founded, not by Neill, but by the Presbyterian missionary, J. G. Riheldaffer in February of 1852. The first services were held at First Baptist Church on Baptist Hill. Meetings soon were moved to the courthouse, then to the Supreme Court chambers in the first state capitol. This was directly across from the site, where, in 1854, Central built its first church on what was then a marshy plateau.

Lutheran influence appears to have come to St. Paul with the Germans and the Swedes. Most early Swedish immigrants who came through St. Paul kept on traveling to such rural areas as Chisago City where they knew they would be among fellow countrymen. However, Scandinavians, mostly Swedes, began to settle in St. Paul as early as 1852. A letter written from St. Paul in March of 1854 to Pastor Hasselquist in Illinois — a founder of the Swedish Lutheran Augustana Synod — requested his help in obtaining a pastor for the St. Paul Swedish community. On May 6 of that same year, Pastor Eland Carlsson, who was on his way to the Chisago Lake settlement, stopped in St. Paul and assisted the local Swedes in organizing and in drafting a constitution for a Lutheran church. He also helped in the calling of a Swedish pastor. Such was the inauspicious beginning of First Lutheran Church, the first Lutheran church in the state.

Most of the congregation's early meetings were held at members' homes; occasionally School No. 2, on Jackson Street near Sixth, was used. During most of the 1850s — and especially after the Panic of 1857 — few Swedes felt inclined to stay in the area, and the infant church experienced no growth.

Johan Johansson, a tailor, seems to have been the one figure who held the church together during its early years. The group was without an ordained pastor, except for those occasions when it was visited by itinerant Lutheran missionaries whose business took them through the capital city. In 1860, Eric Norelius became the first official pastor of First Lutheran Church. He used St. Paul as his base of operations for missionary work in the state. An agreement stipulated that the congregation scrape up the money to pay his house rent (\$5 a month). Not until 1867 was enough money raised to erect a church on the west side of Phalen Creek valley. The present church is on a promontory on the valley's east side.

Trinity Lutheran, founded by German immigrants in 1855, experienced a similar rocky beginning. German immigration to St. Paul was heavy during the 1850's. By 1860 Germans represented 10 per cent of the state's population and constituted 22 per cent of the city's. A good many of these German settlers were from the northern, or Protestant, section of Germany. Among them was F. W. Wier, a German-trained pastor who had emigrated to America in 1841, and had served congregations in Indiana and western New York before setting out in 1855 for Minnesota. Wier arrived in July and soon was holding services in the courthouse and in Christ Episcopal Church. For a time the German congregation shared the same schoolhouse used by the Swedish Lutherans on Jackson Street. Trinity Lutheran Church (originally known as the "Deutsche Evangelisch — Lutherischen Dreifaltigkeits — Gemeinde, U.A.C. Von St. Paul, Minnesota") was soon organized. Like most territorial churches, it found the going rough and nearly succumbed during the 1857 Panic. C. F. Hyer soon replaced Wier as pastor but not until 1863 did Trinity obtain its own building.

German Catholics also arrived in good numbers in the early 1850's. For a while the three dominant Catholic ethnic groups, French-Canadian, Irish, and German all shared the cathedral — worshipping there at separate times, however. In 1854 Bishop Cretin sought to remedy this situation by agreeing to the creation of a separate German

Catholic parish. This, the first satellite church, as the new parish was known, erected a building on Exchange Street. It was replaced in 1874 by the present twin-towered St. Paul landmark, Assumption Church.

In 1856 another group became a force in the religious structure of St. Paul — that of Judaism. Some Jews were in St. Paul as early as 1849, but not until seven years later was their presence felt officially. Then a group of Jews became chartered as the Mount Zion Hebrew Association of St. Paul. Most of the early members were born in Germany, and a few came to St. Paul directly from Europe. They followed a trade (many were clothiers) and tried their luck in other states before reaching Minnesota. They were a young group — most of them in their early thirties. Among the membership were such men and women as Joseph and Amelia Ullmann (who left a vivid account of early St. Paul life). Originally Ullmann was a liquor dealer, but he soon built up a flourishing fur empire. Henry Cali, Jacob Newman, and Henry and Morris Marks, all clothiers, were also members of the congregation. For several years, however, the congregation was split over internal disputes, and it wasn't until the 1860's that Mount Zion was firmly established in a building of its own.

With the continuing movement of population from east to west, religious institutions, once established, grew almost automatically. St. Paul's territorial churches soon fostered more churches as the city and congregations expanded. The Lutheran movement provides a good example: First Lutheran spawned Gustavus Adolphus, the members of which soon formed Arlington Hills Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran became parent to St. John's Lutheran.

From St. Paul's earliest days, the presence of organized religion in the community has been strong and its influence has to be taken into consideration in the history of the city.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Donald B. Marti, *The Puritan Tradition in a "New England of the West,"* Minnesota History, Spring 1966, Vol. 40, No. 1, Pp. 1-11.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Barnes, *Home Missions: A Sermon in Behalf of The American Home Missionary Society*, preached in the cities of New York and Philadelphia, May 1849.



### THE GIBBS HOUSE

*at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County 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 Historical Society will be 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 presently has its offices at the Gibbs Farm. 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.