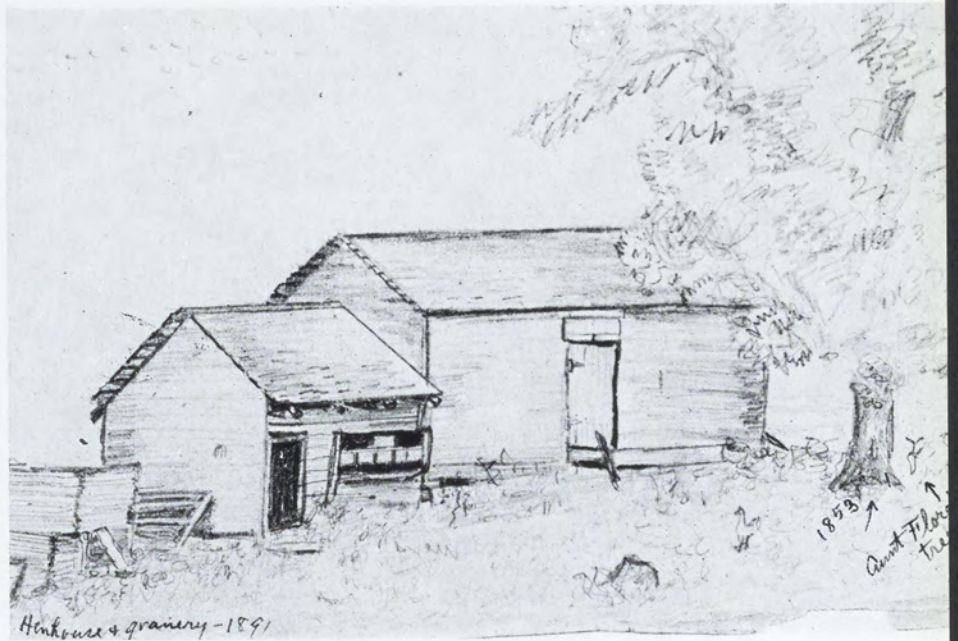
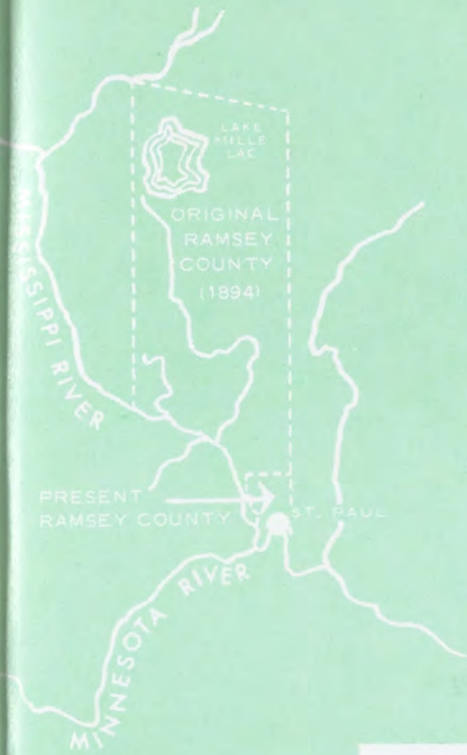


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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# Ramsey County History

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## Contents . . .

Sod Shanty on the Prairie  
... Story of a Pioneer Farmer Page 3

'... Conclude it my duty to Enlist &  
therefore Enlisted'  
... Diary of a Civil War Soldier Page 6

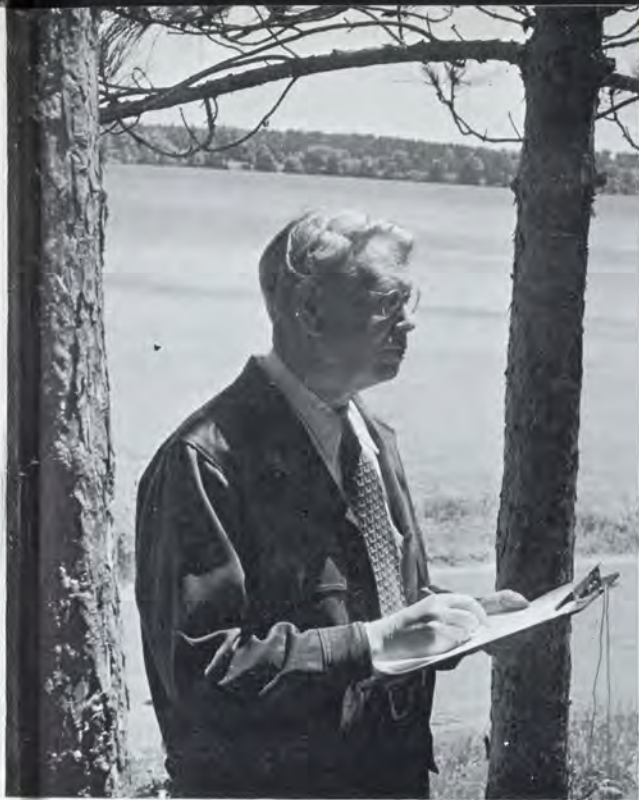
Wolves, Indians, Bitter Cold  
... A Fur Trader's Perilous Journey  
Page 15

St. Paul's Municipal Forest  
... Its 50 Years of Growth Page 19

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lished, if accepted, as space permits.

*ON THE COVER: The old henhouse and granary which once stood behind the Gibbs farm house are long since gone but they are recaptured here in one of a series of charming pencil sketches made during the 1890s by Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Heman Gibbs. Sometime during that decade, Lillie accompanied her mother on a trip back to Mrs. Gibbs' childhood home near Batavia, N. Y. In the days before cameras, Lillie LeVesconte, like so many other men and women of her era, took along her little sketchbook and produced her own pictorial record of the trip. More of her sketches accompany the story beginning on the opposite page. They are reproduced from the original sketchbook which now is owned by the Ramsey County Historical Society.*





*With the sun shining on Lake Vadnais behind him, John H. Allison, Sr., looks over a stand of Norway pine in the Allison forest.*

St. Paul's Municipal Forest

## And Its 50 Years of Growth

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *There may not be many cities in the middle west which have an entire forest to call their own, but St. Paul is one of them. The John H. Allison forest which surrounds Lake Vadnais and Sucker Lake was established just 50 years ago this spring as a unique collaborative effort between the University of Minnesota's school of forestry and the St. Paul*

*Water Department. Although located in Ramsey county, outside St. Paul's city limits, the forest occupies an area owned by the city and used as a source of its water supply.*

*How the forest came into being and its development over the years is described in the following article by the man whose name the forest now bears.*

BY JOHN H. ALLISON, SR.

**W**HILE THIS FOREST is named for someone who has been closely associated with its establishment and development, it really is a municipal forest, owned and operated by the Water Department of St. Paul. By an informal agreement between the department and the University of Minnesota's school of forestry, the school, acting through Donald P. Duncan and myself, provides the department with the technical advice needed in the management of the forest. In return the Water Department permits the school of forestry to use the forest as a field laboratory in the instruction of its students and in research activities carried on by its staff.

Its use as a laboratory is of great value

to the school, not only in the fields of instruction and research but, at times, even with reference to the school's continued existence. During the years of 1958 to 1961, the location and character of the forest helped the school greatly in resisting an attempt to transfer it from the University's St. Paul campus to the Duluth Branch of the university. Such a transfer would have brought about a major downgrading of the school's position in forestry education because no graduate courses in forestry are available at the Duluth branch.

Now to take up the origin and development of the forest.

Altogether, the Water Department owns about 325 acres of upland suitable for de-



velopment as a forest. This land adjoins Lake Vadnais and Sucker Lake. The land included in the forest is somewhat hilly but not really rough. The Water Department also owns some marsh land. A portion of this marsh is occupied by a stand of tamarack from which came additional logs used in the restoration of the Gibbs House by the Ramsey County Historical Society during the early 1950's.

To the east of the lakes the soil is a moderately fertile glacial till formerly classed as "Miami fine sandy loam," with moisture equivalents ranging from 15.8 per cent in the first foot to 14.4 per cent in the third foot. This land is or has been covered by a fairly good stand of red, black and burr oak but the main stems of these trees are so short that they provide very little sawlog material and only very low grade lumber, even at 100 years of age. However, this land can produce white pine which at 50 years of age have diameters ranging up to 16 inches at 4½ feet above the ground. These trees have now reached heights of up to 70 feet and have a volume of about 50 cords per acre.

To the west of these lakes one finds glacial outwash sands formerly classed as "Hinckley fine sands" with moisture equivalents ranging from 6.5 per cent in the first foot down to 3 per cent in the third foot. These soils are droughty and sterile. The natural forest growth on these sands consists of short, scrubby red and black oak so small in size that only rarely could a sawlog be cut out of them. Yet these soils when planted to Riga Variety Scotch pine will produce trees 60 feet high at 45 years of age and marketable pulpwood totaling nearly 40 cords per acre. The Norway pine produced by these lands is not as tall nor will it yield as much saleable wood at 45 or 50 years of age as will the Riga Scotch.

IT WAS THIS LAND and forest quality situation that faced G. O. House when he took over the management of the Water Department of St. Paul in 1912. Actually, the situation pertaining to lands owned by the department was not a matter of any great seriousness to it or its superintendent. But a few patches of the better land east of Lake Vadnais had been cleared and

were being rented to farmers. House wanted to get rid of this use of the land and his reason for wishing to do so was the need for a good, clean water supply for the expanding population of St. Paul.

During the city's earlier years, its water supply had come from Lake Phalen but as the city grew, this source became inadequate and the Water Department turned to Lake Vadnais.

These also were the days before the use of chlorination to purify water and it was, instead, necessary to prevent contamination of the lake's water. The department felt that farming operations around the shores of the lake, with the pasturing of cattle there, would contaminate the lake. But how could House explain to the renters why he was pushing them out of the area if he did not have another use for those lands? Quite unexpectedly, E. G. Cheyney of the University of Minnesota's school of forestry provided him with a good reason.

At a luncheon meeting held in St. Paul in March, 1914, the Northwest Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers selected forestry as the subject to be discussed and Cheyney as the person to discuss it. Thinking of the many thousands of acres of glacial outwash sands lying to the east of the Mississippi River and extending from the Twin Cities to Brainerd and beyond, he decided to make the real subject of his talk the planting of those lands to Norway and jack pine as a better use for them than the use to which they were currently being put.

As the meeting broke up following the end of Cheyney's talk, House told him that the St. Paul Water Department owned some of those outwash sands and also some better quality lands, both of which he thought might fit into a reforestation project. Then he asked Cheyney if he would care to look at them with such a project in mind. On the spot, he and Cheyney arranged for a joint visit to the Lake Vadnais area as soon as the roads dried out.

On March 26, House took J. P. Wentling, also of the school of forestry, Cheyney and myself to the brick building at Lake Vadnais housing a steam plant which at



that time was being used to pump water from deep wells into the city water supply system. This plant was located at the point where the conduits which carry the city's water supply to the filtration plant leave Lake Vadnais. It is known as the "pump house." From it we explored on foot the "island" lying a short distance to the north and also the lightly wooded lands lying directly south. We decided that both of these areas were suitable for planting to pine and maybe to spruce. On our way back to St. Paul, House drove us north to County Road F and thence to Edgerton Street by way of McMenomy and Kohler, thus enabling us to see something of the lands lying on the east side of Lake Vadnais. At one point our pre-World War I auto nearly became bogged in a frost boil.

During the return trip to St. Paul, Cheyney proposed to House that I, as the school's representative, become adviser to the Water Department in matters pertaining to the reforestation of its lands located outside of the city limits. Under Cheyney's proposal there would be no cost to the Water Department for my services or expenses. The University would absorb them as part of its public service activities. House accepted this proposal. Also, while we were together it was decided that the first planting operation should be initiated about the first of May and should involve about 10,000 trees, about half of them to be white pine. Thus began my long and pleasant association with the St. Paul Water Department and its personnel, not only with House but also with Superintendents Kelsey and May; General Managers Thompson and Hamblin; and Superintendent of Water Supply Gallagher.

As adviser, the first thing for me to do was to find 10,000 trees. I soon learned that the L. L. May Nursery of St. Paul had that number available in their seedbeds located on the west bank of the St. Croix River opposite Hudson, Wis. At House's request, I visited the seedbed area. Since the stock looked good, I approved it and House put in an order for 4,000 white pine and 4,000 Norway spruce, both 6 to 8 inches tall, together with 2,000 white spruce, 6 to 10 inches tall. The whole order cost only \$56. The stock was all "seedling." There were no transplants available.

This planting stock was delivered to the downtown office of the Water Department on April 21 and House brought it out to the Lake Vadnais pump house that afternoon. Neither Emile LaBissonniere, foreman of the Water Department's work crew, nor any of his men were there. I happened to be there, so House and I broke open the bundles and "heeled in" the little trees in a shady spot. That is, we dug a shallow, narrow trench with a sloping bank against which the little trees were laid. Then their roots were covered with earth which was hard packed over them. In such a trench the trees could be left safely for days or even weeks.

The actual planting was started on Monday, April 27, and finished on Friday, May 1, with one day out for rain. The trees were planted in furrows spaced about 6 feet apart, the furrows being about 6 inches deep and made by a two-horse farm plow. The trees were planted about 6 feet apart in the furrows, using grub hoes. The use of this spacing placed about 1,200 trees on an acre. The pine and spruce were planted in alternate rows. The island was completely planted. The excess stock was planted south of the pump house, between the present Lake Vadnais boulevard and the lakeshore. House was so interested in this project that he drove Cheyney and me out to the pump house on the morning the planting was started and remained there until noon watching Cheyney train the crew in the planting technique we wished them to use.

That summer the weather was favorable to the little trees. They made good growth. The survival in October was about 95 per cent for the white pine and 65 per cent for the spruces. The survival at the end of the third year was 87 per cent for the white pine (an extremely high survival) and 50 per cent for the spruces.

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John H. Allison, Sr., is a native of Connecticut and a 1906 graduate of the school of forestry at Yale University, New Haven, Conn. After a number of years with the United States forest service in Arizona, New Mexico and Arkansas, he came to the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus as professor of forestry in 1913. In 1923-24, he spent a year in Sweden studying the forestry practices of that country under an American-Scandinavian Foundation fellowship.*



THE FIRST YEAR'S planting operation has been described in detail because the creation of this forest depended in a major way upon the success of the planting work done during that first year. If there was good survival of the little trees and if they made good growth the project would be off to a good start. Both survival and growth were good. Thereafter, for 16 years the program was to move forward without hesitation although in some years the plantings took severe beatings from drought or other agencies.

In 1915 the planting operation was moved to the better soil on the east side of Lake Vadnais. The chief reason for making this move was House's desire to close out some small farming operations on that side of the lake. The white pine planting stock used that year came from the forestry school's nursery at Cloquet, Minn., and the Norway spruce from the May nursery. These were the chief species used. The weather was favorable and there was good survival and growth of both the white pine and the Norway spruce. But the small experimental plantings of balsam fir and red spruce were failures. The fairly large planting of green ash had good survival but made poor growth and ultimately it was dug up and planted elsewhere by a W.P.A. crew between the years of 1937 and 1940. Some of it also died out because it could not survive the strong competition of the white pine amongst which it had been planted on an alternate row form of distribution.

In 1916 a severe month-long midsummer drought was to bring about the first large loss to newly planted trees. In that year some 25,000 Norway and jack pine seedlings were planted on the dry outwash sand to the northwest of Lake Vadnais. The drought, lasting from mid-July to mid-August, completely destroyed that planting. A small planting on the more fertile soil east of the lake survived.

In the early summer of 1917 the state nursery inspector, acting on the advice of E. M. Freeman of plant pathology at the University of Minnesota's Department of Agriculture, ordered the 1914 white pine destroyed because it had been exposed, while in the May Nursery seedbed, to white pine blister rust. At the time this plantation was destroyed, there was an 87 per cent survival and the trees ranged up to 3½ feet in height. A few years later this plantation would have been watched, instead, and only such trees as developed the disease would have been destroyed.

IN DROUGHT YEARS the possibility that fire might cause serious losses was worrisome but, to date, such losses have not been excessive. Here much credit should be given to the intensive patrol maintained by Water Department personnel during periods of drought, plus the fine co-operation which the department has received from White Bear Lake and other local fire departments.

In the middle 1940's, the pine sawfly from Central Europe threatened to wipe out the white pine. Two sprayings with lead arsonate, separated by a year when no spraying was done, plus the activities of natural enemies of the sawfly since the second spraying, have saved the white pine.

We now find within the John H. Allison Forest about 250 acres of coniferous forest which contrasts vividly with our drab native oak forests. Thinning of the older stands, which improves their looks, has become a regular activity. Soon these thinning operations should produce sawlogs as well as firewood.

It is the hope that the forest will be of use indefinitely both for the training of students and for experimentation on the planting of the thousands upon thousands of acres of sandy soil which stretch for many miles to the north of the Twin Cities.





### THE GIBBS HOUSE

*Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue W., St. Paul, Minn.*

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 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.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey county will be preserved for future generations.