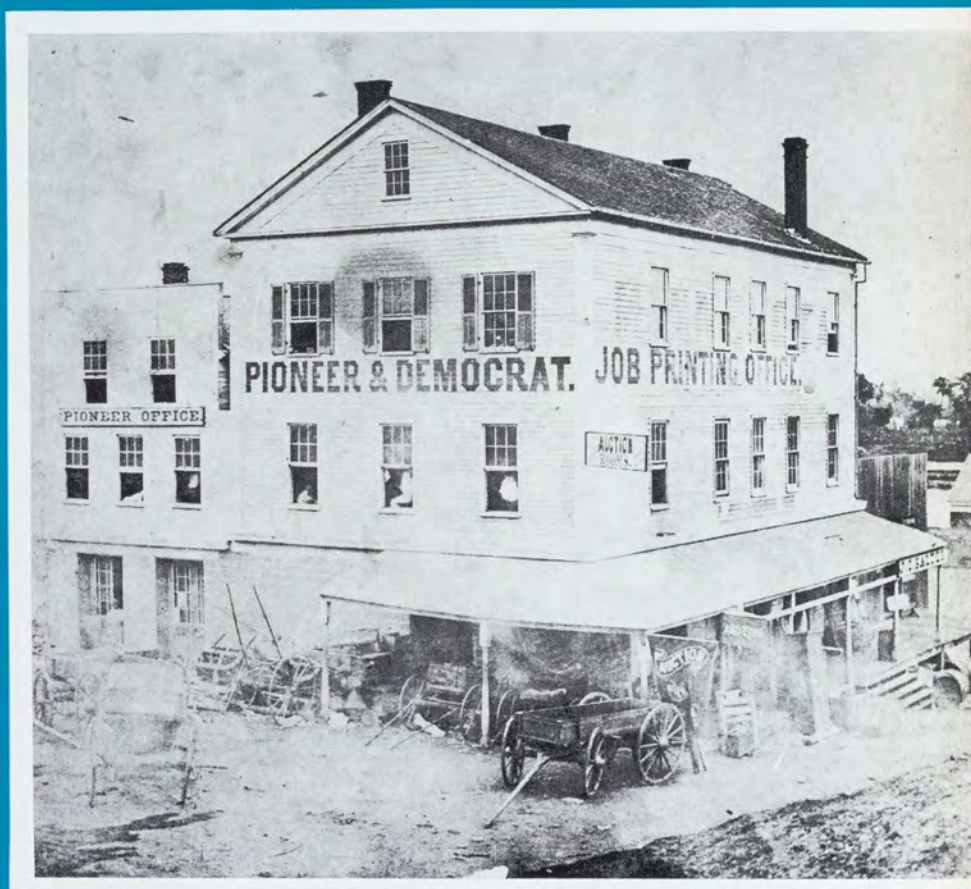


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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ON THE COVER: *The Pioneer and Democrat* office, as it looked between 1854 and 1857. It stood on the corner of Third and Jackson Streets.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: *Barbara Owen and Paul Trautman, Macalester College students, for preparing the basic material for the stories on pages 16 and 18, winter interim projects; Nancy L. Woolworth, for additional research, annotation and writing; Dorothy A. Smith, for editing and production help; the Minnesota Historical Society Picture Department for all pictures except those with Mr. Bull's story.*



The hand press believed to have been used by James M. Goodhue in printing the first issue of his *Minnesota Pioneer* in 1849. It is on display at the Minnesota Historical Society.

*Colorful and Handy*

*With the Pistols*

## St. Paul's Territorial Editors

By Berneta Hilbert

*"Among the institutions that gave direction to the early community, few were more immediately influential or had longer after-effects than the frontier press. It has been said that American newspaper editors were in the vanguard of the westward movement, 'setting up their presses and issuing their sheets before the forests had been cleared or the sod turned.'"—Theodore Blegen.<sup>1</sup>*

ST. PAUL'S newspaper editors, during the Territorial years of the 1850's, rattled out a pungent style of prose that was typical, in its own way, of the other literary excesses that were so much a part of the Victorian era. Questions of libel sometimes were settled with pistols rather than in courts of law, and tempers of rival editors flared so frequently and so heatedly that this "era of personal journalism" became a major chapter in the history of Ramsey County.

Many St. Paul editors during these turbulent years not only were opportunists but were devastatingly honest about it:

"IN POLITICS we shall be Democrat or Whig, just as may best serve our interests.

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Berneta Hilbert is a 1954 graduate of Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, where she majored in English. She did graduate work in psychology at Kansas State University, Manhattan, and in theology at Chicago Lutheran Seminary, Maywood, Illinois. She has been a high school teacher and a campus counselor for the National Lutheran Church at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, State University. She is the wife of John Hilbert, assistant professor of speech at Concordia College, St. Paul.*

We are after the public printing, and everything else out of which money can be made."<sup>2</sup>

They were fiercely competitive and spared no invective in lashing out at their journalistic colleagues:

"... the sinister eye of the *Pioneer* editor was upon us, and his forked tongue commenced its natural office of slander and falsehood..."<sup>3</sup>

And they often were ardently partisan and prideful concerning western civilization in general and Minnesota in particular, a fact which made them among the best "boosters" of settlement in the new territory:

"... MINNESOTA embraces the latitude of those nations of the earth which in all ages have produced the most vigorous minds and the greatest aggregate of intellectual and moral forces."<sup>4</sup>

It should be pointed out here and now that this was not "frontier journalism," and therefore unrestrained, in keeping with other aspects of pioneer life on the edge of the wilderness. Rather, the editors and

their newspapers were typical of newspapers throughout the country during the Nineteenth century.

Indeed, most of the editors were immigrants from the earlier-settled East and had learned their trade there. The influx of presses and publishers began in 1849 when Minnesota became a territory and it resulted in the establishment of 89 newspapers, eleven printed in St. Paul alone, before Minnesota became a state in 1858.<sup>5</sup> Several were short-lived, while others, through frequent mergers, endured and not only influenced the settlement of Minnesota but also helped shape the political life of the area.

THE POPULATION of fewer than 1,000 persons listed for St. Paul in the July, 1849, census provided a meager subscription list for the newspapers and the collection of money was a difficulty shared by all publishers. Consequently, one of the great journalistic battles fought during these years was by editors scrambling for appointment as Territorial Printer. This financial and political plum often determined whether or not a publisher could stay in business, because it involved the printing of public documents, such as legislative bills, all paid for by the Territorial government.

Competition, of course, was intense and editors vying for the job of public printer found themselves supporting candidates who might help them get the appointment. As political sides were chosen up, each editor naturally found himself the victim of personal abuse from the others. For instance, D. A. Robertson established the *Minnesota Democrat* in December, 1850, with the promise that the paper would be a "family journal . . . prepared with more labor than is usually bestowed upon western papers."<sup>6</sup> He further declared that the paper ". . . shall never be the vehicle of personal abuse."<sup>7</sup>

ROBERTSON'S ideas of what should go into a "family journal," however, seem to have changed under the pressure of competition for public printing. He declared, in print, that James Goodhue, of the *Minnesota Pioneer* had been "in and out of the Hall of the House of Representatives, threatened to fight and whip members of



James M. Goodhue

the Legislature because of certain facts . . ." to obtain public printing.

"Goodhue," Robertson went on, warming to his subject, "is a moral lunatic, and were it not that vice, meanness and corruption of the vilest stamp, are abhorrent to every virtuous feeling, his transparent wickedness would excite only the pity and compassion of the community."<sup>8</sup>

Earlier, Robertson had fired another salvo by declaring that Goodhue privately threatened the Legislature with his displeasure if they didn't serve his "pocket politics." "He is a self-confessed public profligate."<sup>9</sup>

But Robertson was in the line of fire, too. J. P. Owens, editor of the *Minnesotian*, a Whig paper which began publication in September, 1851, accused Robertson of "whining around certain Whigs, to get votes in the Legislature for the printing. He stated to a Whig that 'if he was elected printer, he would allow one-half of the work to go to a Whig press' . . . the tone of his paper would be governed by the course the Whigs of the Legislature chose to pursue in this respect."<sup>10</sup>

RIVALRY over public printing grew as more newspapers sprang up in St. Paul. Goodhue had been first with publication of the first edition of the *Minnesota Pioneer* on April 28, 1849. Several months later, he

described, in an article in the newspaper, how he had established his paper on a non-partisan basis and how he had circulated 2,000 free copies of the paper. He claimed it to be “. . . more extensively copied than any other newspaper far or near.”<sup>11</sup> He insisted that there was room for only one press in St. Paul, but noted that he had “treated with manly forbearance and courtesy, both of the other prints which have since been commenced here. . . .”

Goodhue had indeed seemed to view the arrival of his competitors with a certain degree of equanimity. The first issue of the *Minnesota Chronicle* appeared June 1, 1849, and the second number of the *Minnesota Register* was printed in St. Paul on July 14, 1849, the first issue having been printed in Cincinnati, Ohio, in April.

WITH THREE papers already present, it is little wonder that when Goodhue heard of the prospect of yet another paper coming to St. Paul, he wrote, apparently with a growing sense of alarm:

“Mr. W. Wyman of Madison seems to think there is an opening for another press in St. Paul. . . . If he has a friend left in Dane County, that friend ought to make application in Wyman’s behalf, for a commission of lunacy.”<sup>12</sup>

By the time of the *Pioneer’s* first anniversary, Goodhue was asking for advance subscribers, suggesting, “If anything should be paid in advance it should be a newspaper. After all,” he added, “it is really only the subscribers who may complain about what is printed.”

Robertson appealed to the readers in his

first editorial to subscribe so he could serve the Territory where he had chosen to live as the “result of an enlightened conviction, that no other portion of the Union presents equal inducements to the industrious, the virtuous, intelligent, and home-loving emigrant.”<sup>13</sup> He promised to support the various interests of the Territory and to disseminate knowledge of its advantages and resources and added, “We anticipate in return for our exertions, a liberal support from the citizens of Minnesota.”<sup>14</sup>

IN SPITE OF such appeals for subscriptions, the public printing remained the sought-after prize. To be Territorial Printer meant “fat takes,” as one writer put it, especially in the printing of bills. Large slugs or pieces of metal were inserted between each line of type to space out the length of the printed material. The reason for this was that the printer was allowed \$1 for each 1,000 ems of printed material<sup>15</sup> and 1,000 ems measured about 14 inches of type in a column, depending upon the size of the type. Newspaper columns usually were about two inches wide. Judicious use of slugs added considerably to the length of this official, printed material.

The *Chronicle* and *Register* merged in August, in order, as the papers stated editorially, “to have published at the Capitol of our Territory *one* journal occupying high moral and conservative ground.” The merger created a powerful rival for Good-

St. Paul in 1857. Capitol is in center background.





Joseph R. Brown



Daniel A. Robertson



T. M. Newson

hue, who appears to have been equal to the situation. He again expressed his position that there was room for only one paper in St. Paul and added:

"WE EXTEND to this new journal the hand of fellowship; hoping that they may have the same success that attended the *Chronicle* and the *Register*; and that we may indeed have published at the capitol of our Territory *one* journal, occupying high moral and conservative grounds."<sup>16</sup>

Goodhue was elected first Territorial Printer, and when the *Chronicle* charged that he had overcharged and made false measurements of the printing during the first legislative session, the *Pioneer* editor lashed back:

"That wretched string-bean concern, which came here under pawn, both branches of it—mortgaged for freight and storage . . . existing only by sufferance and which could not possibly have survived thru the coming winter, but for our concession to it of the printing of a part of the laws and journals—this poor old hulk, without a helmsman . . . this poor, mutinous, God-forsaken craft . . . cries out lustily against the *Pioneer* for offering them relief."<sup>17</sup>

The ingenuity with which editors capitalized upon the public printing almost defies description. Two incidents concern Joseph R. Brown, who succeeded Goodhue as editor of the *Pioneer* and was Territorial Printer during 1853 and 1854. Brown sat up all one night writing a "Bill to Suppress Immorality." Conveniently enough, Brown also happened to be a senator in the

Territorial Legislature. He took his bill to the Senate the next day, introduced it and moved that it be read by title and printed. The motion was carried.

THE NEXT DAY the bill was read. It provided for the suppression of liquor in the bars of steamboats, enumerated other elements of immorality and finally asked that no person be permitted to hang the under-garments of either sex on a public clothes-line, describing such an act as detrimental to public morals. The bill was indefinitely postponed, but in the meantime Brown, of course, had printed it in his newspaper and had netted \$100 for one night's work.<sup>18</sup>

The printing of a book, *Collated Statutes of the Territory of Minnesota*, was authorized on March 5, 1853. This was the result of a task the Legislature of 1851 had undertaken to pull together laws which had been passed during the years a portion of Minnesota had been part of the Wisconsin Territory, as well as those passed during and after the organization of the Territory of Minnesota.

It is suspected that Brown may have been responsible for this "Code of 1851" being printed in book form, as there is a tradition that he prepared bills which he had his friends introduce and which he, as Territorial Printer, then printed at the usual rate.

IN MAY, 1854, three of the existing papers became dailies and another new paper, the *Daily Times*, began publication. A fifth daily, the *Daily Free Press*, began



Earle S. Goodrich



John P. Owens



Judge David Cooper

publication in October, 1855. A new weekly, the *St. Paul Financial and Real Estate Advertiser*, appeared in May, 1854. With so many newspapers competing with one another, it is not surprising to find some chicanery in the historical record.

At one point, the man who had charge of the telegraph office was absent and difficulty arose between the operator and the *Times* concerning some election returns. The difficulty spread to the *Minnesotian* and both papers had to stop publishing dispatches.

When the owner of the telegraph office returned, Earle S. Goodrich of the *Pioneer* stepped in and secured exclusive control of the dispatches. This forced the *Times* and the *Minnesotian* to copy from the *Pioneer*. Thomas Foster of the *Minnesotian* decided there must be an easier way. He simply bribed a *Pioneer* pressman to leave an advance copy of that paper for him under a stone somewhat out of range of the *Pioneer's* offices. Foster got the *Pioneer*, copied the dispatches, and the *Times*, in turn, copied from the *Minnesotian*.

T. M. Newson, who tells the story, got a copy of the *Pioneer* just as his *Times* was about to go to press. He discovered that the *Pioneer* had caught on to the scheme and had printed one bogus copy of the dispatches entirely for Foster's benefit. Newson emerged with the best story of all: He capitalized on the situation by printing the bogus dispatches next to the genuine ones.<sup>19</sup>

WORD-SLINGING among editors was

one thing, but threats and actual violent encounters between editors and angered readers were not unheard of, either, during these years. Perhaps one of the most famous incidents resulted from Goodhue's editorial attacking Judge David Cooper and Colonel A. M. Mitchell, the United States marshal. Goodhue lacked no venom in leveling his criticisms. In his issue for January 16, 1851, he wrote:

"We never knew either of them, even to blunder into the truth, or to appear disguised, except when accidentally sober, or to do anything right, unless through ignorance how to do anything wrong, nor to seek companionship with gentlemen as long as they could receive the countenance of rowdies." Of Cooper, Goodhue wrote: "He is not only a miserable drunkard. . . . He is lost to all sense of decency and self respect. *Off* the bench he is a beast, and *on* the Bench he is an ass, stuffed with arrogance, self conceit and ridiculous affectation of dignity."

THIS ISSUE of the *Pioneer* came out two days ahead of the regular publication day, and a meeting was called for the next evening to hear public reaction to the article. That day, Judge Cooper's brother, Joseph, attacked Goodhue in the street. Both were relieved of their pistols by the sheriff. Cooper pulled out a knife and stabbed Goodhue in the abdomen. Goodhue broke away and shot Cooper with a second gun he was carrying. Cooper again rushed at Goodhue and stabbed him in the back. Both men were wounded seriously

but not fatally.

Goodhue's spirit was not broken, however. Neither was he intimidated. In an editorial published February 6, 1851, he devoted three columns to an even more scathing denouncement of the Coopers.<sup>20</sup>

Earle S. Goodrich, as editor of the *Pioneer*, was the victim of a number of threats. In 1854, he came out against the Democratic candidate because the man was not liked by many of the party members. The candidate threatened to kill Goodrich and roamed the streets with a revolver looking for him. A year later, Charles H. Parker, banker and publisher of the *St. Paul Financial and Real Estate Advertiser*, carried a loaded six-shooter and openly threatened to shoot Goodrich because the *Pioneer* editor had charged that Parker had not treated his depositors fairly. He stated that Parker had used deposits to buy real estate and had come out badly.

Newson reported that this was a truthful accusation, and he was able to intervene and bring about a settlement between the two men. Newson himself received many threats, ranging from horse-whipping to murder. On one occasion, several of his friends escorted him home after his life had been threatened at a meeting at which he had spoken of corruption in legislative halls. Twice, he was confronted by men in his office with loaded revolvers, but somehow, as he said, "the weapons didn't go off, but the men did."<sup>21</sup>

NOT ALL of these pioneer editors' time was consumed by political wrangling, diatribes against office-holders or other editors. They also published responsible accounts of the local news and promoted immigration to Minnesota.

Goodhue was perhaps the most visionary of these early editors and can be credited with attracting large numbers of settlers to the Territory with his accounts of how the area looked as he saw it during his frequent rides in all directions out from St. Paul. He seemed to be able to understand the settlement of the far west only by surmising that "... the distance lends enchantment to the view. . . ."

HE WONDERED how else it could be that people overlooked the "wide blooming plains and hills of Minnesota, the *virgin* Minnesota with her lands as fertile as the banks of the Nile—her forests of ancient

pinetrees, her noble rivers, leaping over their rocky barriers in wild majesty, her 1,000 lakes of crystal waters—and above all her fresh, bracing climate, which fills everything animate within her borders, with youthful vigor. . . ."

"There, [in California] you may look for speculation, gambling, vice; here, you will find industry, morality and virtue."<sup>22</sup>

Goodhue often called St. Paul the St. Louis and Minnesota the New England of the West and seemed almost impatient to see Minnesota realize her potentialities.

It is certain that the like of these men will not be seen again. As W. Edwin Emery, Jr., of the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism, has commented, the beginning of the Twentieth Century marked the end of the colorful era of personal journalism and the beginning of a new era when a newspaper bore less of the editor's stamp and took on more of a corporate entity. Readers also became less concerned with what one editor thought of another editor and more concerned with the news itself. Today undoubtedly marks an era of more responsible news coverage, but one in which some of the vigor and color is gone.

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### 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.