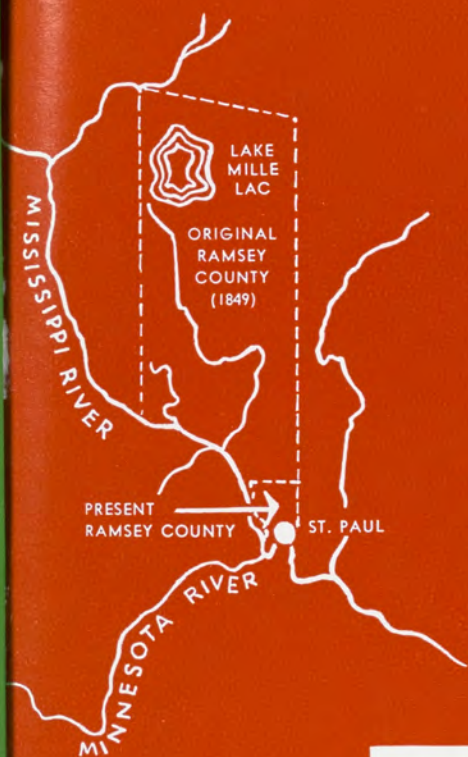


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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CONTENTS . . .

	Early Explorers' Trails Alan R. Woolworth	Page 3
Spring 1967	Portrait of a Pioneer Photographer Henry Hall	Page 9
Volume 4	A Bridge, A Street, A Levee Patricia Condon	Page 14
Number 1	The Saga of Charley Pitts' Body Forgotten Pioneers . . . III A Pioneer Seeks a Farm The Waterways of Minnesota	Page 19 Page 20 Page 21 Page 22

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ON THE COVER: This picture of Fort Snelling, taken about 1870, is an example of the work of William H. Illingworth, pioneer St. Paul photographer whose career is described in the story beginning on Page 9. This is an appropriate cover picture because it also illustrates the story of the early explorers of the Ramsey County area, beginning on Page 3. It was from the Fort that expeditions of exploration set forth into the "howling wilderness" of the Minnesota area between the 1820's and the 1850's.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: All pictures in this issue, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Picture Department of the Minnesota Historical Society. The editor is indebted to Eugene Becker, picture curator, and his assistant, Dorothy Gimme-stad, for their help.



The colorful French voyageurs, the backbone of the fur trade, paddled many explorers along the waterways of Minnesota. This is a sketch of Fred Faribault drawn by F. B. Mayer about 1851.

Early Explorers' Trails Criss-Crossed Today's Ramsey County

BY ALAN R. WOOLWORTH

FOR CENTURIES, the area that became Ramsey County has been crossed and criss-crossed by the men, Indian and white, who came to hunt, to trade, to explore and settle the northern wilderness which is now Minnesota.

The future state's system of waterways was their highway into the northland. With three major rivers, the Mississippi, the Minnesota and the St. Croix, joining in the vicinity of Ramsey County, it was inevitable that most of the great explorers who played leading roles in Minnesota history should have participated in the exploration of Ramsey County and passed over parts of it.

(For a map of Minnesota's Waterways, see Page 22.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Alan R. Woolworth received his master's degree in anthropology from the University of Minnesota in 1956. He has been curator of the Minnesota Historical Society's museum since 1960. He was chairman of the North American Fur Trade Conference held in St. Paul in 1965 and has co-authored three archeological reports for the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. He presently is working on a report for the Indian Claims Commission of the United States Department of Justice and the National Park Service. He will be listed in the 1968 edition of *Who's Who in America*. He is a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Board of Directors. His article is based on a tape recording of a speech he gave to the Society last November.

With the Mississippi forming the western border of the county, those who canoed on its waters commented on its natural beauty. It is indeed exciting to think of the black-robed friar, Louis Hennepin, being carried through the region as a captive of the Sioux; of Charles Le Sueur passing by the site of St. Paul, bemused by his dreams of wealth from non-existent copper mines; of the lonely Jonathan Carver probing into what became known as Carver's Cave; of Pike and Long journeying here, and of the expatriate Joseph Nicollet traveling on foot northward through the County's lakes and woodlands.

THE MILITARY explorations of the region were mounted from Fort Snelling after the fort was established. Individually and collectively, these men made their contributions to a fuller understanding of the nature of the region, and left behind them records which have allowed future generations to peer into their times with them.

The Sioux and Chippewa Indians were the first to explore the vast area of which Minnesota became a part, and they used the interconnected system of rivers and lakes which formed the region's water highways. When the first white men arrived about 1660, they traveled by canoe along the same routes which were used for the next 200 years by fur traders, explorers,



The Falls of St. Anthony, first seen by Father Louis Hennepin in 1680, were surveyed by a later explorer, Captain Jonathan Carver, on November 17, 1766. Father Hennepin (left) had been captured by the Sioux and taken north, through Ramsey County.

missionaries, military expeditions and forgotten adventurers. Canoeists continue to use them today.

Minnesota's waters flow outward in three great systems—north, east and south. The Red River of the North flows into Hudson Bay; numerous streams flow into Lake Superior, gateway to the Atlantic, and the Mississippi drains the eastern, central and western portions of the state into the Gulf of Mexico.

France, first to claim and explore the western Great Lakes region, held the area from the founding of New France until she lost it to the British in 1760 as a result of the French and Indian War. The British next controlled the region until a few years after the War of 1812. Although the American victory in the Revolutionary War gave the new nation a valid claim to most of the region, it was only the founding of Fort Snelling in 1819 which gave the Americans true possession of the area. Military power was needed to wrest the land from the British fur traders of the North West

Company and to control the Sioux and Chippewa Indians living there.

EXPLORATION actually was incidental for many men we now romantically call "explorers." Most were fur traders such as Fred Faribault, who went wherever there appeared to be a good prospect of finding furs. As practical businessmen competing with others, they as a matter of course concealed their sources of pelts. Father Louis Hennepin embarked upon what was called an exploration but he was not an explorer, in the modern sense of the word. Not until the 1790's did a trained explorer appear. He was David Thompson, a geographer who applied himself to exploration as a career. The many military expeditions sent into the Minnesota country, beginning in the 1820's, usually had trained engineers with them. Finally, there is that neglected figure, Joseph N. Nicollet, who arrived in the Ramsey County area during the mid-1830's. He had the scientific knowledge, the instruments, and the drive to complete a great cartographic achievement.

THE FIRST white men of record entered the area about 1659 or 1660. Radisson and Groselliers, the French traders, landed on the north shore of Lake Superior and may have visited portions of Minnesota. Daniel Greysolon Duluth reached the head of Lake Superior in 1679. He went to Mille Lacs Lake (later a part of Ramsey County for a few years) and planted the arms of Louis XIV on a tree at the great Sioux village of Kathio on the west side of the lake. In June of 1680, he paddled along the fringes of what is now Ramsey

County. Opening a new route into Minnesota, he traveled from Lake Superior to the head of the St. Croix River and down it to the Mississippi. That summer he rescued three Frenchmen held captive by the Sioux.

One of the men was the hawk-faced Recollect friar, Father Louis Hennepin. He had left La Salle's post on the Illinois River in the spring of 1680 with two companions. Bound upstream on the Mississippi, they were captured near the modern Iowa border by a Sioux war party and taken to the vicinity of modern St. Paul. Then they traveled overland through Ramsey County to Mille Lacs Lake where they were kept as semi-prisoners until rescued by Duluth. Three years later, Hennepin published an account of his travels, mixing fact with vivid fancy. His book became a best seller in Europe. Hennepin's lasting claim to fame rests on his discovery and naming of St. Anthony Falls, but he also must have been the first public relations man to visit Minnesota.

Charles Le Sueur came to Lake Pepin on the Mississippi in the 1680's. He built a fort near present-day Mankato and tried to mine a blue earth he thought was copper ore. It proved to be valueless, but he made a contribution to geographic knowledge by providing data to French map makers. And there was Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendrye, who in 1732 established Fort St. Charles in what became Minnesota's Northwest Angle.

BRITISH TRADERS and travelers poured rapidly into the Northwest after the French defeat. Jonathan Carver was one of the first Englishmen to venture into the Minnesota country. He came in search of the legendary travel route, "The Northwest Passage," which reputedly led to the Pacific Ocean, but also was charged with the task of making friends with the Sioux so they would not hinder later explorations.

In the fall of 1766 Carver came up the Mississippi, examined Carver's Cave and visited the Falls of St. Anthony. After wintering on the Minnesota River, he went on to Lake Superior and to Grand Portage. Although his explorations were not of great significance, he wrote a popular travel narrative which created great interest in the potentialities of the western country.

The colorful French Voyageurs, those "hardy work horses" of the fur trade, who paddled the canoes, portaged the trade goods, and loved the wild, free life in the woods, were the backbone of the fur trade and without them little exploration or travel would have been possible. Explorers who came to Minnesota by way of the Great Lakes made an extensive use of the voyageurs' great Montreal canoes, and the men who paddled them.

Explorers invariably halted at fur trade posts when near them. These centers of civilization were the only sources of supplies in the wilderness, and often provided

Jonathan Carver



Zebulon M. Pike



Stephen H. Long



guides and open-handed hospitality to travelers. Customarily, fur posts were located on rivers or near their mouths to have an easy access to water-borne transportation.

Although the American government had a valid claim to lands east of the Mississippi after 1783, they were not in a position to possess them until about twenty years later. Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike of the United States Army was the leader of the first American military expedition to the upper Mississippi River. In 1805 he voyaged up the Mississippi, past the site of St. Paul, to the mouth of the Minnesota River. The extensive tract of land he bought from the Sioux Indians for liquor and tobacco, plus \$2,000 in trade goods which were paid years later, was to be the site of the frontier post, Fort Snelling. The tract also included most of the land which is now Ramsey County.

IT WAS NOT until five years after the War of 1812 that Colonel Henry Leavenworth could lead a small party of troops up the Mississippi to search for a site for a military post. He chose the spot at the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers where Fort Snelling was begun three years later.

American interest in the upper Mississippi region accelerated swiftly. The summer of 1820 found Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory, heading a large party to explore the western portion of his territory. The Cass party came through Lake Superior and took the St. Louis River—Savannah Portage route to Sandy Lake. From there, they searched for the source of the Mississippi, named Cass Lake, and then traveled downstream to Fort St. Anthony, later renamed Fort Snelling. The maps and narratives left by this expedition helped create a continuing interest in the geography of the upper Mississippi area.

In 1823, a military expedition commanded by Major Stephen H. Long, canoed up the Mississippi past the site of St. Paul, then up the Minnesota River to the Red River of the North and on to Lake Winnipeg. Long paused at the 49th parallel and found that the settlement of Pembina was on American soil. Thereafter, he went eastward by the well-known water route or "The Voyageur's Highway" to Lake of the



Joseph N. Nicollet, a French expatriot and scientist, came to Fort Snelling in 1836 to map the upper Mississippi River basin.

Woods, Rainy Lake, and on to Fort William on Lake Superior. This scientific venture left records of lasting value for historians and other scholars. They were published in 1824 by William H. Keating.

EN ROUTE UP the Minnesota River, Long was accompanied by an Italian romantic, G. C. Beltrami, a political exile from his native land. At Pembina, Beltrami broke away from Long's party and explored the Red Lake River to a small lake which he imagined to be the source of both the Red and Mississippi Rivers. A narrative of his adventures was published in New Orleans in 1824 and caused much controversy. Despite his mistaken beliefs, Beltrami is fondly remembered as an adventurer who added color to the story of Minnesota exploration. He was followed at a somewhat later date by another romantic, Henry R. Schoolcraft.

Schoolcraft had accompanied Cass to the upper Mississippi in 1820. He returned in 1832 to try to find the true source of the Mississippi. From Cass Lake he followed the infant Mississippi southwest to its source in Lake Itasca.

SCHOOLCRAFT was followed in 1835 by an irascible English geologist, George W. Featherstonhaugh, who made a swift trip up the Minnesota River in the summer of 1835. In 1847 he published an ac-

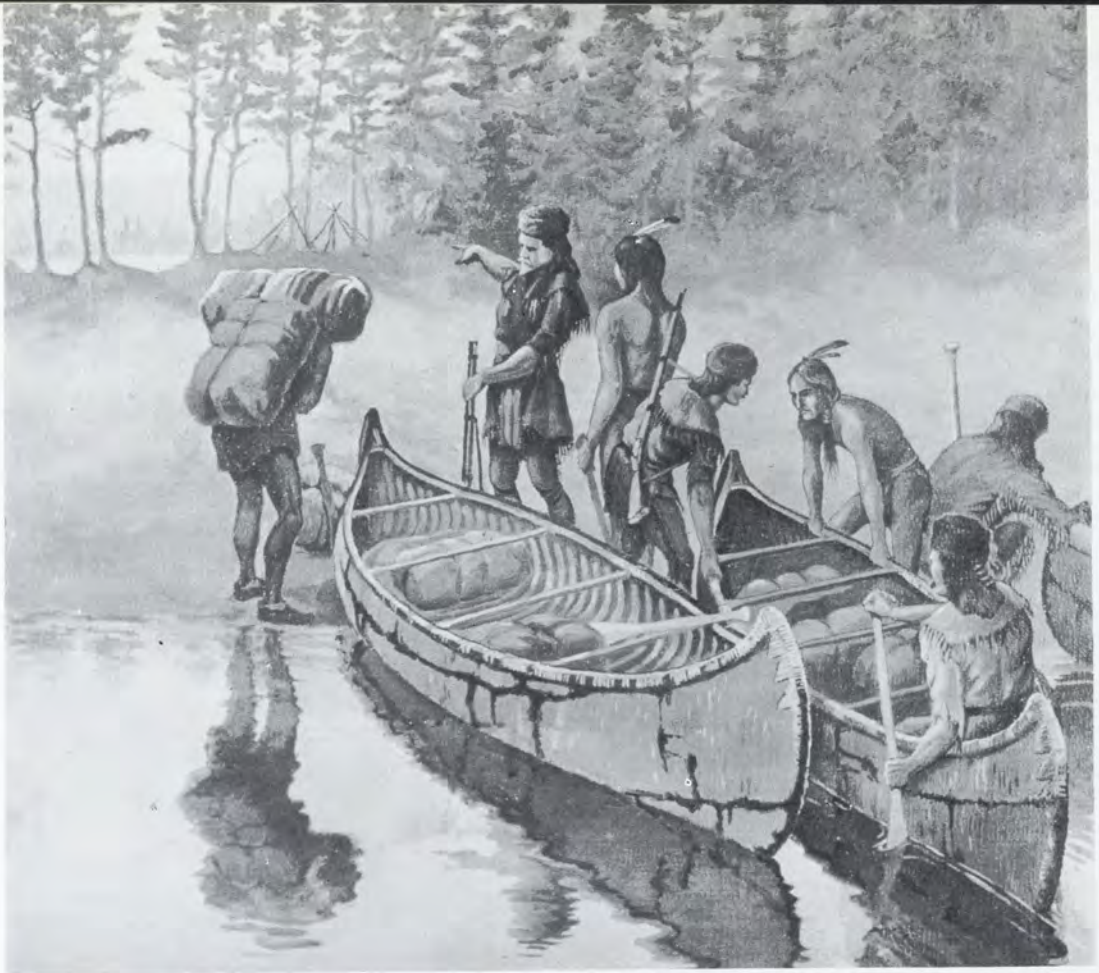


count of his trip: *A Canoe Voyage up the Minnay Sotor*. His short narrative added little to scientific knowledge, but he emerges from his account as a fastidious character who took a daily bath and had his cup of tea in spite of being in what he looked upon as a howling wilderness.

OF FAR GREATER stature was Joseph N. Nicollet, a French scientist who came to the United States in the 1830's, following financial misfortunes in his native land. By 1836 he had arrived at Fort Snelling and was hard at work on a monumental cartographic endeavor. This was the crea-

Nicollet's map of "The Hydrographic Basin of the Upper Mississippi River" was a monumental task, just a portion of which is reproduced here. This is the section which shows the Ramsey County of 1849, when its northern boundary extended beyond Mille Lacs Lake. The entire map is available at the Minnesota Historical Society.

tion of a map of "The Hydrographic Basin of the Upper Mississippi River." In this same year, he traveled to Lake Itasca and made a definitive study of the source of the upper Mississippi. He also went overland to La Pointe, on Lake Superior, and



Daniel Greysolon Duluth entered the Minnesota area in 1679 and in June of 1680 he paddled along the fringes of what is now Ramsey County. This reproduction of an oil painting by Francis Lee Jaques shows the explorer at the head of Lake Superior. Picture is used, courtesy of the Minnesota Arrowhead Association, Duluth.



G. C. Beltrami, an adventurer and political exile from Italy, added color to the story of Minnesota exploration.

in 1838 went westward from the Minnesota River into eastern South Dakota.

In 1839, he led an expedition from Fort Pierre on the Missouri River across northern South Dakota to Devil's Lake in modern North Dakota. During his years of wandering in the wilderness, he estimated

that he had made more than 90,000 astronomical observations. These formed the basis for his great map which was published in 1843. In 1838 and 1839, he was assisted by John C. Fremont who later became nationally known as the explorer of the West.

Little original exploration remained to be done in Minnesota after Nicollet completed his map. By the late 1850's, a number of military expeditions had examined virtually all of the state, and a series of public roads were well underway. The era of exploration drew to a close about 1860. It was now time for the more precise, but less dramatic and less colorful surveyors to complete in detail the mapping of Minnesota which had been commenced two centuries earlier by French adventurers who were subjects of Louis XIV.



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.