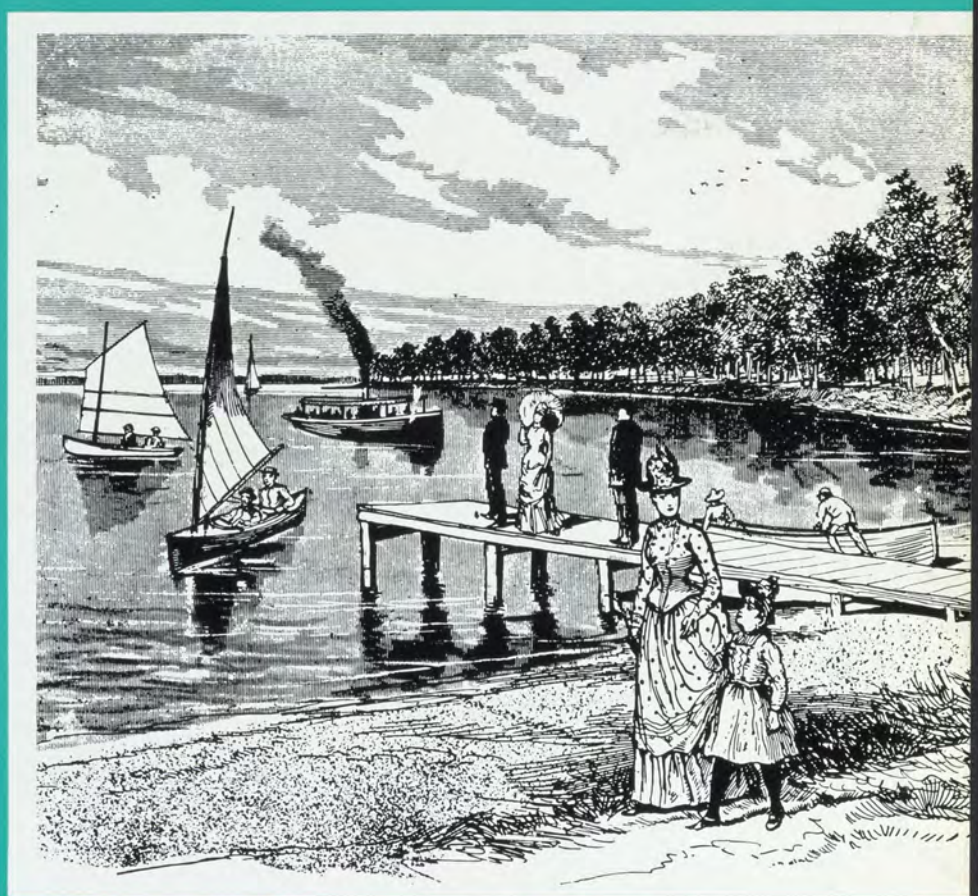


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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Volume 5  
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# Ramsey County History

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*ON THE COVER: During the 1880's, a steamboat took Sunday visitors to North St. Paul on a trip around Silver Lake. Price was 25 cents a person. This tranquil scene of the lake appeared in the March, 1888, issue of The Northwest Magazine and is reproduced here, courtesy of the Picture Department, Minnesota Historical Society.*

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

*From a Pioneer Farmer*  
Memories of Those Early Years  
Make 'A Chill Run Up My Back'

*John Darius Scofield, who came to Minnesota from New York in 1849, was a pioneer of both the Ramsey and Hennepin county areas. More than 60 years later, in 1915, he was found to be the fifth surviving territorial pioneer in Minnesota.*

*A year earlier, in 1914 when he was 86, he had written out his memories of a lifetime spent in the cause of agriculture. To him it was a "cause," because he vividly expressed his attachment to the soil, an attachment shared by great numbers of pioneers in a nation which then was essentially rural. His story also is typical of thousands of other men and women who came to Minnesota during the last half of the Nineteenth Century with few assets except imagination, shrewdness and the willingness to work hard. Scofield's reminiscences, a portion of which are published here, were given to the Ramsey County Historical Society by his granddaughter, Mrs. A. E. Henry of St. Paul, a member of the Society.*

*John D. Scofield was born August 29, 1828, in Fairfield County, Connecticut, the tenth in a family of thirteen children. He recalled that each child, beginning at about age five, was taught to do his or her share of the work on the farm home. The district school "was two-and-a-half miles by the road, one-and-a-half in a straight line. The school year consisted of two terms, three months in summer, three in winter." Children attended when not needed at home.*

*"There was a small library owned by the district which we made good use of at odd spells," he wrote. "Every book was read thoroughly. We had no regular papers until after I was sixteen. My older brother and I had earned some money chopping wood and subscribed for the Saturday Evening Post. We read and reread them, then packed them away for reference. Our few hours of leisure were filled with hardy sports; running, jumping, wrestling, now and then a scrap with some neighbor boys to give spice to life."*

*Scofield then described his decision to come west and his years in the Ramsey and Hennepin County area.*

WE began to hear of the west and got all the information possible and planned as soon as I was of age to go somewhere to settle, as the home farm was yet full of stumps and stones and as we expected to be farmers, we wanted something better.

In October, 1849, my brother, Elias, two years older than myself, who had been my chum and confidant from early childhood, tied up a small bundle after the style of tramps, and turned our faces westward, with Minnesota our objective. We went by rail to Buffalo, by boat to Detroit, by rail to the landing opposite Chicago, then by rail to Elgin, Illinois, the end of the road at that time. We went by stage to Galena,

waited one day for a steamboat<sup>1</sup> and as money was running short, took deck passage to St. Paul, were nearly three days with one meal.

Reached St. Paul just as the sun was rising, bright and clear. We thought it a good omen, got a good breakfast at a hotel, then took stock of our possessions. We found we had \$2.50 in cash each and some trinkets of no value, but we had two shirts, and were full of health, courage, and determination to succeed.

OUR FIRST JOB was cutting a pile of poles into stove wood for the schoolhouse in town, that was built of logs. When that was done we got a job for winter in what is now Rose Township, hauling out logs



from a swamp to make posts, rails and square timber for use in building. We built a log cabin with a fireplace of sticks and mud, which served to warm the place and cook our meals. We both took claims, put up a small house on one and cleared a small piece of land on each claim.

In the early summer of 1850, I purchased a half interest in two yoke of oxen and a covered wagon with William G. Hendrickson. My brother, Elias, being handy with tools, found work with settlers and in town building something to live in. Hendrickson and I broke small pieces of land for settlers in the locality of what is now the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus and the Minnesota State Fairgrounds, sleeping in the wagon, cooking our food over a camp fire.

The summer passed quickly, as we had gained something and had helped others to make a start. In the fall we sold the outfit at a small profit and separated as good friends. The claims Elias and I had made did not satisfy us after seeing more of the country. They were covered with scrub oak, which must be dug out before sod could be broken, and we had done all the clearing we wanted to do when we were boys.

ELIAS SOLD his claim during the summer. In the fall of 1850, I traded mine for a span of horses and a wagon, did jobs of hauling about town and to different trading posts. This was my first experience with living in the city and working for others. Neither Elias nor I were satisfied; we both longed for the farm. We learned there was a farm at Red Rock<sup>2</sup> for rent, so we looked at it. There were forty acres broken. Most

Red Rock, where Scofield rented a farm, was across the Mississippi from present-day South St. Paul. In this 1909 picture, two boys look at the boulder, painted with vermilion stripes and Indian symbols, which gave the site, sacred to the Indians, its name.

of it had been cropped to oats for two years. We rented and boarded with the owner, William R. Brown.<sup>3</sup> We seeded four acres to wheat, the balance in oats and potatoes. There was no wagon road to St. Paul, except that going east to the Cottage Grove<sup>4</sup> road five miles farther than the Indian trail under the bluff, so as much of our time as could be spared was used in building a road to market. Now, after sixty years, the road is in the same place, much improved.



W. G. Hendrickson. From the Ramsey County Historical Society files.

There were several farms in Cottage Grove and vicinity where oats and some wheat were raised which was fed in sheaf or threshed with a flail or tramped out with horses or cattle. These threshing floors were smoothed by a pin; horses or cattle were hitched to the other end and driven around on the grain spread on the ground. The grain was then turned and shook up by one in charge.

As we neared harvest time, we wanted a better and quicker way to thresh. Brown said he would get a machine if we would run it. The bargain was made and a J. I. Case two-horse tread power thresher was purchased. The crop was good. Elias and I cut it with a cradle and bound the sheaves by hand. The four acres of wheat yielded more than 150 bushels. This was made into flour at a little mill completed that fall on Boles Creek below Stillwater. The flour was sold in St. Paul.

Threshing was a new job for us, as we had raised but little grain on the home farm, but we had been taught early in life to find a way to do any job that came our way. We soon overcame all difficulties and ran the machine until the snow was too deep to move.

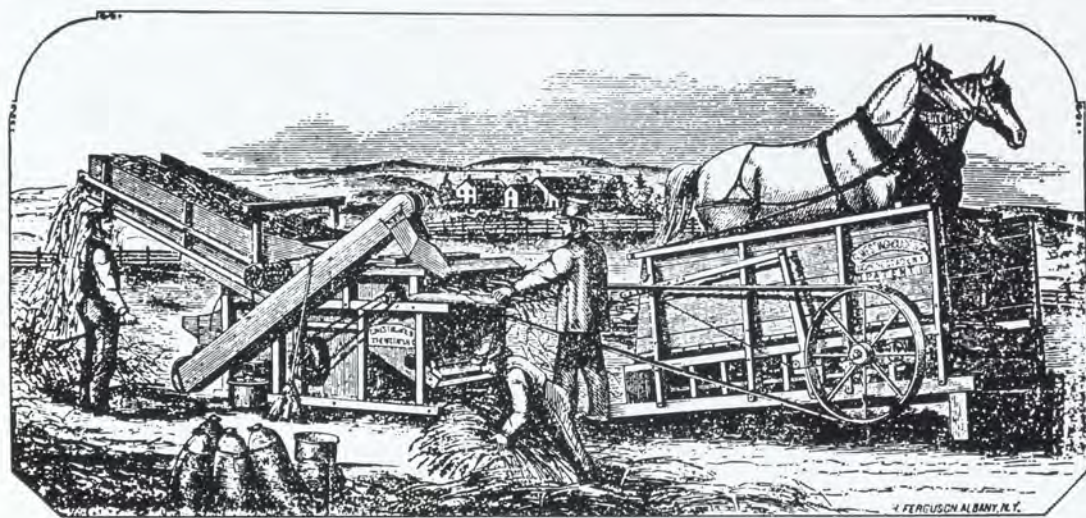
LATE IN THE SUMMER we bought 160 acres of land at the head of Grey Cloud Island. More than half of it was nearly level prairie and the rest was covered with timber. There was a nice spring where we built a small house in the late fall of 1852. An older sister, Clara, and a younger brother, Joseph, had come to us so

we had a Scofield family in the far west. Ten acres of this land were broken and, with the Brown farm, this gave us plenty to do the next spring. We had also made some good friends, among them S. M. Cook and his sister, Sophia, who came from Canada and had been teachers in the Indian schools founded by the missionaries, Williamson, the Pond brothers and others.<sup>5</sup> Cook was at Kaposia<sup>6</sup> and Miss Cook at Oak Grove,<sup>7</sup> in what is now Bloomington in Hennepin County.

In the spring of 1853, I purchased land on the west side of the river which had been opened to settlement.<sup>8</sup> I sold my interest in the land to Elias, retaining a half interest in the crop, and staked out a claim in the Oak Grove area, where I now live. The Indian schools had been broken up but Miss Cook remained at the Gideon Pond home in Oak Grove, teaching his children and a few Indians living near where I boarded.

We were married that summer and after the harvest and threshing was done, we commenced housekeeping at the Pond house, as Mrs. Pond had died and the children were sent to his friends for a time. He boarded with us for the winter while I was getting material ready for a house. Lumber was all in the rough, planed by hand on the place. Doors were the same. I did find sash and put in the glass myself. Carpenters were scarce and so was money.

Two-horse powered thresher and cleaner, similar to that used by Scofield. From *The Earth Brought Forth* by Merrill E. Jarchow (Minnesota Historical Society, 1949).



The days were too short for the work that must be done, the nights too short for the needed rest.

UP TO THIS TIME pioneering had been rather a joke, its hardships to be laughed at, a blanket, a place to spread it out, something to eat. All was lovely, but now a woman who was none too strong, who had been used to the comforts of life, at least must be provided for. Gideon Pond was returning with a wife.<sup>9</sup> His house must be vacated, our new house must shelter, so I fear the farm work was somewhat neglected that year. I hardly know how or when, but the house was enclosed and we camped in it and tried to get other things in shape, but the struggles of that summer—and I might add the next few years—even to this day make a chill run up my back. But there were bright days and good friends, chief among them Mr. Pond and his wife, ever ready with a cheery word or helping hand.

A son was given us for a short time, then taken from us. Another son, Leslie, came to cheer our lives, grew to manhood, was a good farmer. He is now resting. A girl was given who is now a mother to nine healthy children, a credit to her and I hope will be a help to the world. In time, another girl came who has had her full share of joy and sorrow. After a long sickness, the mother went to her long rest, bringing forcefully to my mind the admonition, "Remember the days of darkness for they shall be many." Even the deaths of dearest friends can stop us only a short time for the care of those left urges us on.

IT DID NOT TAKE LONG to convince me that a fairly good father was a very poor excuse for a mother, so after two years, Carolyn S. Damon, my former wife's niece, accepted the place of mother to the three children. She was a native of Canada, had taught school in country districts, had learned the needs of farm families and was a great help in the work that came to us a few years later.

During all this time, a part of each fall had been spent in threshing for others. I had sometimes failed to make money, but always succeeded in learning something of farm conditions. It has been said that to know people you must see them in their homes. If this is true of other occupations,



A pioneer farm, similar to Scofield's. From *The Independent Farmer and Fireside Companion*, January 1, 1879, courtesy Picture Department, Minnesota Historical Society.

it is doubly so of farmers, and the man who runs a machine has great opportunities to learn. We sit at their tables, sleep in their beds, talk with them of their plans, see their books and papers, learn their distance from school and churches, the kind of stock, the care given tools. If the grain threshed is extra good, we note the kind, learn what we are able of the preparation of the soil preceding the crop and the tools used; if the grain is poor, we try to find the cause and point out a remedy, and from year to year for over twenty-five years the work went on, teaching and being taught.

The first few years there was no small fruit, little effort to clean up about the house, few flowers, little to attract one to the place or keep him there. After ten years we found flowers in some of the yards, one in a hundred would have a lawn in some shape. In such a place we found more and better reading matter, more of the comforts of life, better cultivation, tools, stock, better surroundings. Such places increased each year and yet they are too few. The farmer should have the best of everything to enjoy with his family and friends or he will seek the best for the money he can keep but a short time at best.

John Darius Scofield's years in Minnesota were eventful ones. He also served on the first jury in Hennepin County and was Bloomington Township Supervisor for five years. It was in 1885 that he was appointed to the committee of the Minnesota Grange



The Gideon Pond home built in 1856 at Oak Grove, now part of Bloomington, Minnesota.

to ask the state legislature to establish a school of agriculture. Mostly through the committee's insistence, an Agricultural College was established in Minnesota in Rose Township, Ramsey County, in 1887. From this time until 1898, Scofield was on the Minnesota Grange Executive Committee. Many of his children served in offices of the state Grange.

Scofield died on his farm at Bloomington in 1915. He was 87.

Three days after his death, he was honored by the executive committee of the agricultural department of the University of Minnesota. A bronze tablet engraved with his name was ordered placed in the chapel at the University farm under the names of the other deceased founders of the college. The tablet honored Scofield for his pioneer boosting of scientific agriculture in Minnesota and as one of the founders of the Minnesota College of Agriculture.

### Notes

1. They arrived at St. Paul November 1, 1849, aboard the Dr. Franklin No. 2. *Minneapolis Journal*, August 15, 1915, page 9.
2. Red Rock was a village in Washington County, one mile north of Newport, Minnesota. Warren Upham, "Minnesota Geographical Names," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 17, page 570.
3. William Reynolds Brown was a Minnesota pioneer born near Urbana, Ohio, in 1816. He came to Minnesota in 1841 and bought a farm at Newport. He served in the Sixth Minnesota

Regiment from 1862 to 1865. He died at Newport on November 25, 1874. Warren Upham, "Minnesota Biographies," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 14, page 86.

4. Cottage Grove was a township in Washington County which was settled in 1844 and organized on May 11, 1858. A village by this name was platted in April of 1871. Upham, "Minnesota Geographical Names," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 17, page 568.
5. Thomas S. Williamson, Samuel W. Pond, and Gideon H. Pond, Presbyterian missionaries to the Dakota in Minnesota, 1850 to 1853. Edward D. Neill, *History of Minnesota*, page 590.
6. Kaposia was a village of the Dakota between 1837 and 1862. It was on the site of South Park, a suburb of South St. Paul in Dakota County. Upham, "Minnesota Geographical Names," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 17, page 170.
7. Oak Grove was later called Bloomington Ferry. It was the home in the early 1850's of the Dakota band under Good Road. Neill, *History of Minnesota*, page 590.
8. In 1853, Scofield took up a homestead on land near Old Shakopee Road in Bloomington Township, Hennepin County. See Andreas' *Atlas of Minnesota*, 1874.
9. The Presbyterian missionary, Gideon H. Pond and his first wife, Sarah, were assigned to Oak Grove and Good Road's band in 1850. As Scofield mentions, Gideon Pond married again some time after Sarah's death. Neill, *History Of Minnesota*, page 590.



### 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.