



RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Spring

1972

Volume 9

Number 1



Ramsey County History

Published by the RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Editor: Virginia Brainard Kunz

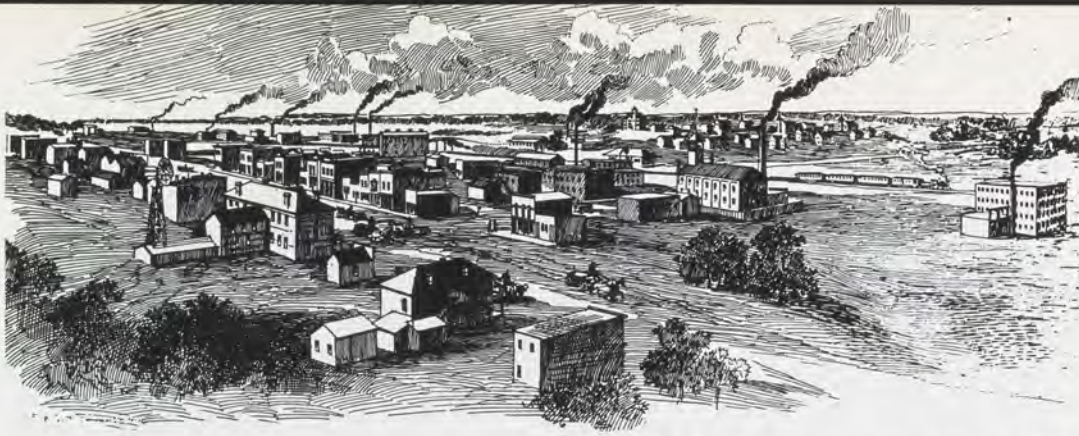
Contents

Spring	Old Federal Courts Building — <i>Beautiful, Unique — Its Style of Architecture Faces Extinction</i> By Eileen Michels Page 3
1972	
Volume 9	A Teacher Looks Back at PTA, 4-H — <i>And How a Frog in a Desk Drawer Became a Lesson in Biology</i> By Alice Olson Page 10
Number 1	Forgotten Pioneers . . . XII Page 15
	North St. Paul's 'Manufactories' <i>Come-back After 1893 'Bust'</i> By Edward J. Lettermann Page 17

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY is published semi-annually and copyrighted, 1972, by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota. Membership in the Society carries with it a subscription to Ramsey County History. Single issues sell for \$1.50. Correspondence concerning contributions should be addressed to the editor. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Manuscripts and other editorial material are welcomed but no payment can be made for contributions. All articles and other editorial material submitted will be carefully read and published, if accepted, as space permits.

ON THE COVER: The Old Federal Courts Building, viewed from across Rice Park about 1905. With the park itself, and the Minneapolis Public Library directly across from it, the Old Federal Courts Building lends a sense of community to the area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The editor is indebted to Eugene Becker and Dorothy Gimmestad of the Minnesota Historical Society's audio-visual staff for their help with the pictures used in this issue.



North St. Paul's business center in 1891. Sketches with this article were reproduced from *The Northwest Magazine* of March, 1888, by the Minnesota Historical Society.

North St. Paul's 'Manufactories'

Come-back-- After 1893 "Bust"

Born in the building boom of the 1880's, North St. Paul showed all the promise of many other Minnesota towns newly minted during the post-Civil War prosperity. At the energetic urging, coupled with more concrete inducements, of Captain Henry Anson Castle, founder of North St. Paul, some of the more famous of the state's late Nineteenth Century businesses built factories there and turned out products that reflected the needs of that era. But the financial Panic of 1893 put an end to the boom years. Today North St. Paul has come of age as one of the growing residential communities surrounding St. Paul and not as the industrial center Castle had envisioned. The story of those early "manufactories" is told here.

By Edward J. Lettermann

IN 1912, Henry A. Castle wrote of North St. Paul:

"In spite of the usual vicissitudes which have attended such enterprises, the town has achieved a final degree of prosperity which vindicates the foresight of its founders."

A half dozen manufacturing establishments, he added, had plants in the village at that time.¹

Conditions had been bad. The Panic of 1893 had virtually wiped out the booming manufacturing suburb, but by 1912 it was slowly beginning to regain some of its former promise — a promise, however, which was never fulfilled as Castle hoped, right up until his death in 1916.

One of the mainstays of North St. Paul's industry and financial development was the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Edward J. Lettermann, curator of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum, has been a frequent contributor of articles to Ramsey County History. He is the author of several books on state and local history, including Farming in Early Minnesota, published in 1966 by the Ramsey County Historical Society.

furniture manufacturing firm founded by John Luger, Sr. Luger was born in Austria in 1832 and came to Minnesota in 1861. A cabinet maker by trade, he started a small business at Wabasha, Minnesota. Until 1872, he used horse power in his shop, but then he installed a steam plant and increased his operations. His two brothers were associated with him and for some time the business was conducted as Luger Brothers. Later a Mr. Dugan became a partner and the name was changed to Luger Brothers and Dugan. When Dugan sold his interest to a Mr. Box, the firm name changed to Luger Brothers and Box. Finally, in February, 1882, the company incorporated under the name of the Luger Furniture Company.²

IN JUNE OF 1887, the company acquired five acres of land in North St. Paul between Helen and Margaret Streets, alongside the Wisconsin Central Railroad tracks. Here it built a plant that was advertised in 1888 as "the very largest" of its kind "in the country."

The main building was brick, five stories high, 50 by 100 feet in size, with an el 19 by



Mr. and Mrs. John Luger

44 feet. Cost was \$65,000. Machinery was brought from Wabasha. Besides the main building there was a 60 by 100-foot warehouse, a 40 by 80-foot dry kiln, a 45 by 35-foot engine room, a 25 by 40-foot varnish room, a lumber shed, blower room, office, and other smaller buildings.³

Its first season in North St. Paul the company had nearly 200 employees. During the Depression of the 1890's, little expansion was carried on, but by 1912, the company had doubled its capacity.⁴

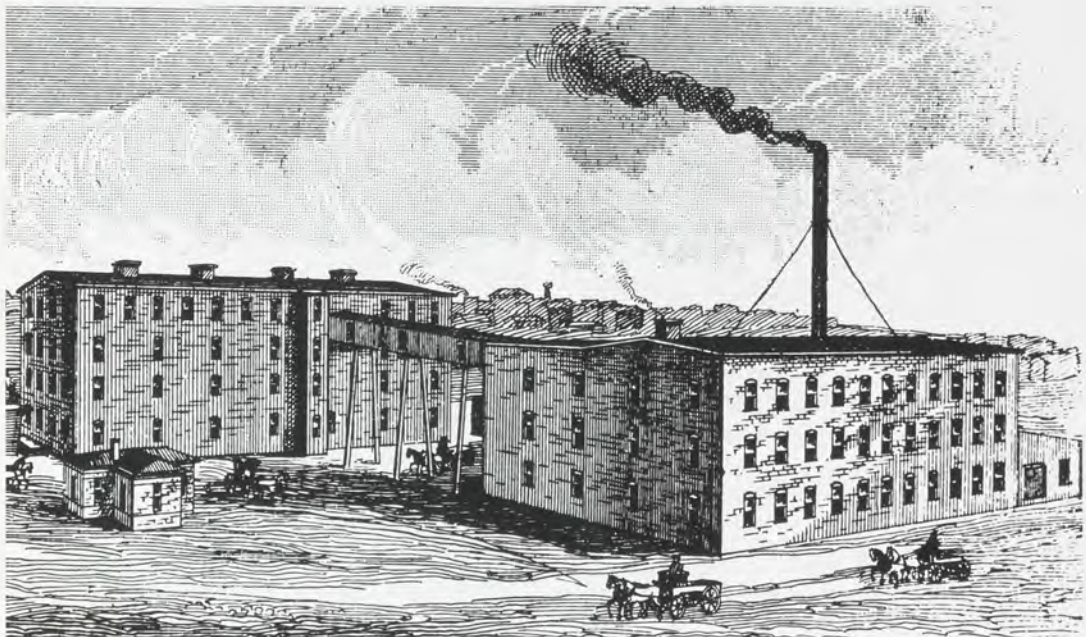
Undoubtedly a major factor in helping it weather the Depression was that it was a family business. In 1888 *The Northwest Magazine* reported that, "the Lugers have been enabled to push their goods to the front without delay, and find a ready market. There are six traveling salesmen constantly on the road. Their success, however, is not due entirely to this. There are in all no less than thirty-three of the Luger Family employed at the works, every one of whom seem[s] to have in view the success of the institution."⁵

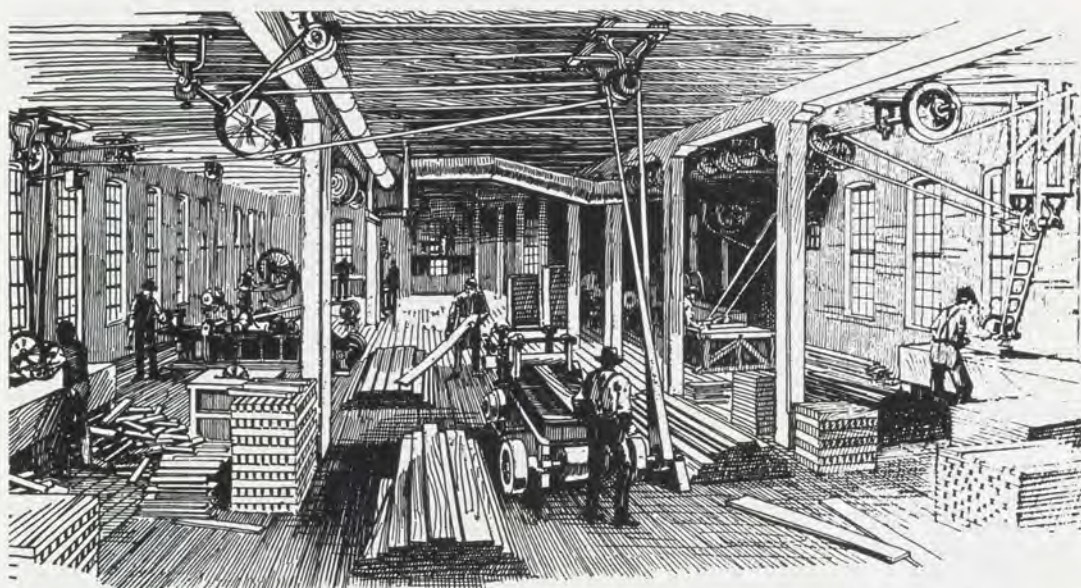
ALL FIVE of the sons joined the company. They began work in the shop while still very young. This biographical sketch of Louis, one of the sons, reveals how they were trained to take over the reins:

"Louis A. Luger was born in Wabasha, March 10, 1862. In the common schools of that place he received his education. When he was only nine years of age he began to assist his father, and with the other boys worked nights and mornings, Saturdays and vacations, and on leaving school went to work regularly in the factory. When he was twenty-one he became a stockholder to the extent of one thousand dollars."

At the time the company moved to North St. Paul, Frank, 30, was secretary-treasurer; John, Jr., 27, was general manager; Louis, 25,

Luger Furniture Company plant.





was designer; Joseph, 20, was assistant treasurer, and Edward, 13, was "assisting the employees of the factory in whatever capacity his services could be used." After graduation from St. Paul Central High School, Edward joined the company as a country salesman.⁶

Martin Luger's biography gives some background on how and why the many Luger relatives also joined the company. He was a nephew of John, Sr. Born in Austria in 1870, he "attended school in his native country until he was fifteen years of age, and at that time began to serve an apprenticeship at the cabinet-making trade, at first receiving about forty cents a day and later being advanced to fifty cents. Like many of his countrymen who could see nothing ahead of them but long years of hard work, with little prospects of ever accumulating a fortune, he decided to come to this country, and this determination was strengthened by his dislike of having to spend three of the best years of his life in the Austrian army. Consequently, when he was seventeen years of age he left his home and made his way to the United States, landing at New York City and coming directly to North St. Paul, securing employment with the Luger Furniture Company."⁷

Another firm, the Konantz Saddlery Company, also was one of the first to take advantage of the "solid inducements" offered by Henry Castle's North St. Paul Land Company to lure industry to the village. In 1887 the company was called an "old and widely

Interior view in Luger Furniture Company's manufactory.

known St. Paul concern," but "old" is a relative term. The Konantz Saddlery Company was incorporated in 1889 as a manufacturer of harnesses, saddles, and collars, but the company seems to have had its beginnings nearly 20 years earlier in Quincy, Illinois, as W. H. Konantz and Brothers. Edward A. Konantz, who had graduated from the Quincy High School at 13, began work in the harness factory when he was 16. At 20 he was a member of the firm, and in 1882, five years later, he came to St. Paul to open a retail harness business, undoubtedly selling harnesses made in Quincy. In 1884, he added a wholesale department. By 1887 he was looking for a location for a factory. An 1888 report on the company reads in part:

"The Konantz Saddlery Company of North St. Paul employs sixty men, and occupies a handsome three-story brick building fifty by one hundred feet.

"Its trade extends to the Pacific Coast, into Wisconsin and Iowa, and it is the most prominent concern of its kind in the Northwest. Its machinery can be compared, favorably, with that of any factory in the East, and the work turned out, including everything in harness, saddles and collars, is second to none."⁸

The Konantz enterprise reflects the importance of horses for transportation and labor during the last decades of the Nineteenth Century.

One of the largest factories established at this time was the Harris Manufacturing

Company, a farm implement factory with Castle as president. A. P. Wright, a former employee of Castle's, was treasurer, and John T. Harris, general manager. Harris was an inventor, and the company benefited from his inventive genius not only in the actual farm tools he devised but also in the "many labor saving machines" he built and installed in the new factory.

THE COMPANY'S main building was a two-story structure 175 by 40 feet. It had complete facilities for making harrows, bobsleds, grading tools, and fencing so that the company could supply wholesale dealers with whatever they wanted in farm implements.

Then there was the St. Paul Casket Company, termed "one of the most extensive manufactories in North St. Paul," with about 100 employees. Its plant was considered one of the largest and best equipped in the United States, "including all the latest improvements for woodworking." Alfred Freshl, general manager, was born in 1857 and graduated from high school in Prague, Bohemia. He emigrated to New Hampshire in 1871, learned the casket business in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and started in a small way in Detroit.

Influenced by the availability of good lumber, cheap land, and excellent transportation, Freshl and some Milwaukee men formed the company and located in St. Paul. Office and salesrooms were at 110 West Third Street, and the plant was in North St. Paul. In 1888, the plant consisted of three large buildings, a machine shop 42 by 150 feet, and a finishing house and a packing house, each 48 by 98 feet. An engine room, 30 by 40 feet, was attached to the machine shop.

"EVERY KNOWN STYLE, kind and quality of coffins, caskets and undertakers' furnishings are made here," readers of *The Northwest Magazine* were informed in March, 1888.

Another early industrial establishment connected with the lumber industry was the Cramer and Coney Manufacturing Company. John C. Cramer, formerly of Bay City, Michigan, and William J. Coney of Akron, Ohio, built a two-story factory, 56 by 100 feet with an el 40 by 50 feet. It was equipped with wood-working machinery, "the latest and best" for that day. Their factory was divided

into two departments, one under Cramer's supervision which made all styles of wooden packing boxes, and the other under Coney which manufactured interior finishing supplies, such as sash and woodwork.

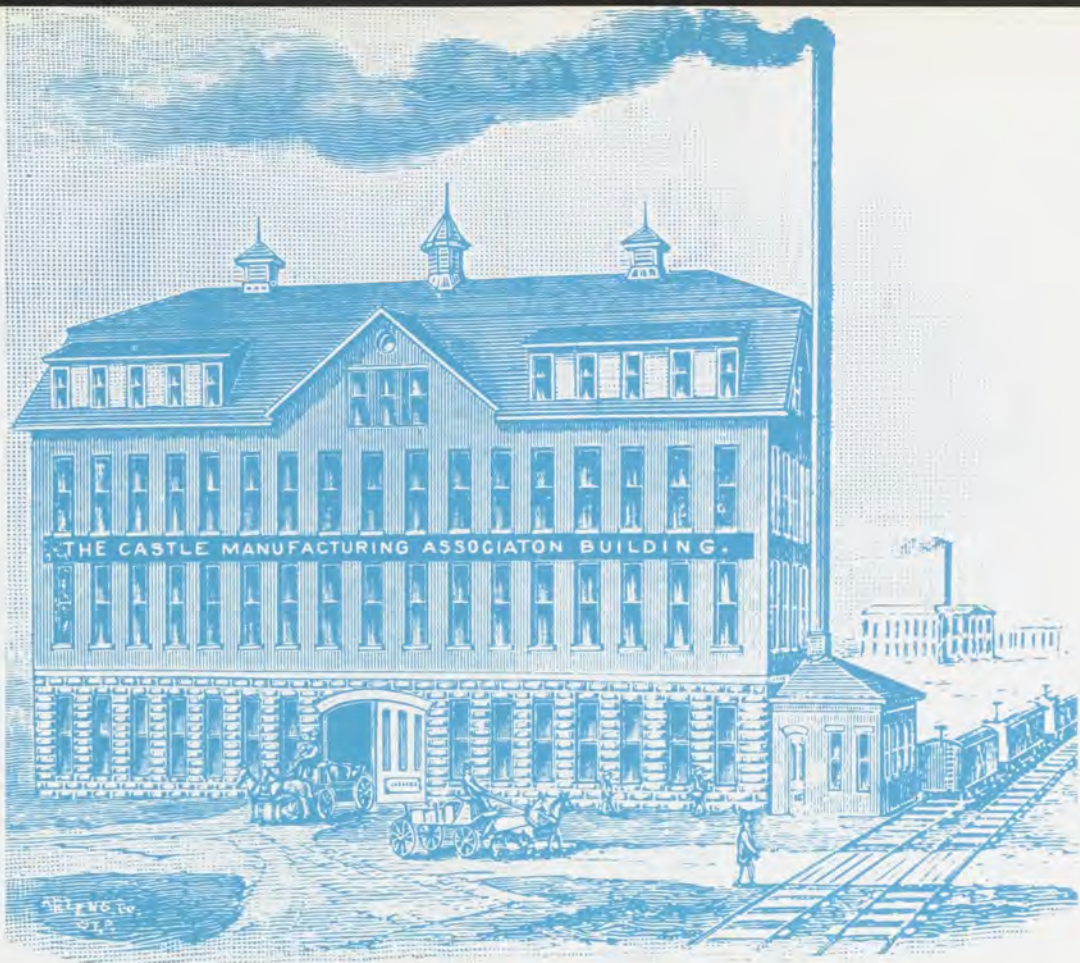
"They are both practical men of wide experience in their line of business and will make a successful firm," it was predicted.⁹

Other industries with factories in North St. Paul at this time were the North St. Paul Broom Company, started in St. Paul by George B. Pelton and moved to a 40 by 80-foot factory in North St. Paul in 1887; the L. D. Hayes Company, manufacturers of rattan furniture; The Acme Chair Company, and two concerns which produced musical instruments, the Wick Organ Company and the J. G. Earhuff Organ and Piano Company.

The Earhuff Company originally was located in Chicago and moved to North St. Paul in 1888.¹⁰ It took over the plant of the Beach Wagon Company, which had completed only one wagon before being bought out by Earhuff's. When in full operation, the Earhuff Company employed nearly 100 men and turned out 200 instruments a month. Most were organs. This company survived the Panic of 1893 and was one of the longer-lived establishments which could trace their beginnings to the boom era of the 1880's. Another company, which lasted well into present times, was the Enterprise Manufacturing Company, which made fishing tackle of every description.

Early North St. Paul also did not fall behind in the manufacture of that important commodity of the building boom era — cast iron. If the advertising of the St. Paul Iron Company is to be believed, in 1888 Crane Brothers of Chicago had real competition from this North St. Paul concern. Formerly known as the Western Iron Company of Cincinnati, St. Paul Iron was among the first out-of-state industries to relocate in North St. Paul's Silver Lake area.

IN THREE MAJOR buildings, a two-story 42 by 100-foot main building, a one-story machine shop of the same dimensions, and an 80-foot-square foundry, the company manufactured "radiators, steam, water and gas fittings, and everything appertaining to steam heating supplies." The firm claimed that only five other foundries in the United States had as good a set of patterns as St.



Paul Iron. It is true that the company filled a long-felt need in St. Paul and was "best appreciated by the local firms supplying houses and business blocks with steam heat."¹¹ The company was fortunate in discovering, near its plant, moulding sand of excellent quality which lent itself to superior cast work.

A. K. Pruden of the Pruden Stove Company, which had begun business in St. Paul in 1884, and L. A. Fullgraff and H. T. Duke of the St. Paul Iron Company joined together to form the St. Paul Stove Company. Its factory in North St. Paul had a 60 by 100 foot foundry and a finishing building nearly as large. The firm, called a pioneer in Ramsey County in the manufacturing of stoves and furnaces, "will soon turn out the first cook stove ever made in the vicinity of St. Paul."

Another North St. Paul iron manufactory was the Union Iron Works, which specialized in architectural iron work and steam heating appliances. It had been established in St. Paul for years, but moved the plant "to get better facilities for their works, the property they have hitherto occupied having become too valuable to be used for manufacturing purposes." In 1888 the company was melting

Castle Manufacturing Association Building.

about four tons of iron daily, and employing about 50 men.

With so much building going on, it was only natural that many companies were set up to supply building materials to North St. Paul manufacturers. One of these was the North St. Paul Brick Company. Nature provided the raw material, a fine-bodied clay, for an unlimited quantity of the "very best brick," we are informed, "and this company is making good use of it." Kilns were established, and a large plant was built to house the latest equipment. During its first season in North St. Paul, the brick company kept 70 men "constantly at work until cold weather set in."¹²

SMALLER COMPANIES were not left out of plans for the development of North St. Paul. Plans were made to locate small manufacturing concerns in two large buildings provided with power, light, heat, and railroad trackage. Operations could then begin with payment of a moderate rate for space and power. The larger of these was the North St. Paul Manufacturer's Union building. Five stories high, it was called

"one of the most conspicuous structures in the town." It was 120 feet long by 60 feet wide with an el 30 feet square. Substantially constructed and conveniently arranged, especially for wood-working purposes, it was equipped with engine, boiler, shafting, elevator, and heating plant. The 30-foot el housed a dry kiln for curing lumber.¹²

The second building intended for smaller companies was built by Captain Castle himself. This was a three-story brick structure 60 by 100 feet. Power was supplied by a nearby electric motor plant. The building stood on a side track so that goods could be shipped in carload lots.

Although not a manufacturing concern in the strict sense of the term, the establishment of Charles R. McKenney, North St. Paul's first editor, must be included. Not only did his newspaper, the *North St. Paul Sentinel*, provide advertising and news about manufacturing in the area, but his printing facilities added to the advantages of locating in North St. Paul. He did both job printing and "book work," so that it was not necessary for merchant or manufacturer to go out of town for stationery and other printed materials. *The Northwest Magazine* in March of 1888 reported, "In a short time, this establishment will need more room."

THE SAME reporter found the *North St. Paul Sentinel* "a weekly of particularly handsome appearance, and as ably edited, interesting and judiciously conducted a newspaper as there is in the state."¹² Its columns documented the village's rapid industrial growth during the early years. A few quotations from 1891 issues illustrate this:

September 25:

"Over at the Earhuff Organ and Piano manufactory orders are coming in at the rate of one hundred organs per week while the capacity is not greater than fifty per week. It is very evident an additional building is one of the necessities within the next few months."

October 2:

"The Konantz Collar manufactory in North St. Paul is running thirteen hours per day. Ten more men are needed and can expect constant employment."

October 9:

"The Konantz Saddlery Company shipped a ton of horse collars to Northwest points yesterday."

The Northwestern Magazine for December 12, 1891, published a "Bird's Eye View of

North St. Paul," an artist's sketch of the village. The article accompanying the sketch described the town's enormous expansion since its founding in 1887:

"The total manufactured product for the current year is six hundred and sixty-one thousand dollars. These figures tell their own creditable story of an industrial suburb only four years old: sixty-four factory, store and office buildings and two hundred and twenty dwellings, besides hotels, schools, churches, depots, engine houses, etc.

"But the North St. Paul Land Company is not satisfied to stop here. It has eligible sites set apart for thirty more extensive factories. It proposes to fill these sites as rapidly as possible, thus augmenting the value of its lots, and creating an increasing demand for them . . ."¹³

Certainly it was not lack of enthusiasm on the part of its founders which caused a leveling off and eventual decline in manufacturing in North St. Paul. The North St. Paul Land Company was a victim of economic conditions beyond its control, as were so many of the young industries which had optimistically established themselves in the Silver Lake area. After the hard years of the middle 1890's, things never were the same again in North St. Paul.¹⁴

Footnotes

1. Castle, Henry A., *History of St. Paul and Vicinity*. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912, Vol. II, page 630.
2. *Ibid.* Vol. III, page 1128.
3. *The Northwest Magazine*. Volume VI, Number 3, March, 1888, page 7.
4. Andrews, C. C., *History of St. Paul, Minnesota*. Syracuse: D. Mason and Co., 1890, page 449.
5. *The Northwest Magazine*. Volume VI, Number 3, March, 1888, page 7.
6. Castle, *op. cit.* Vol. III, pages 631, 832, 833, 936, 1129.
7. *Ibid.*, page 1029.
8. *The Northwest Magazine*. Volume VI, Number 3, March, 1888, page 9.
9. *Ibid.*, page 8.
10. Andrews, *op. cit.*, page 449.
11. *The Northwest Magazine*. Volume VI, Number 3, March, 1888, page 7.
12. *Ibid.*, page 9.
13. *The Northwest Magazine*. December 12, 1891, page 18.
14. "Early Days of North St. Paul." Reiff and others. Transcription of tape recording made by the Ramsey County Historical Society, October 12, 1954, page 6.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota.

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. In the basement beneath the school building, the Society has its office, library and collections. In 1968, the Society acquired from the University of Minnesota the use of the white barn adjoining the Society's property. Here is housed a collection of carriages and sleighs which once belonged to James J. Hill.

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.