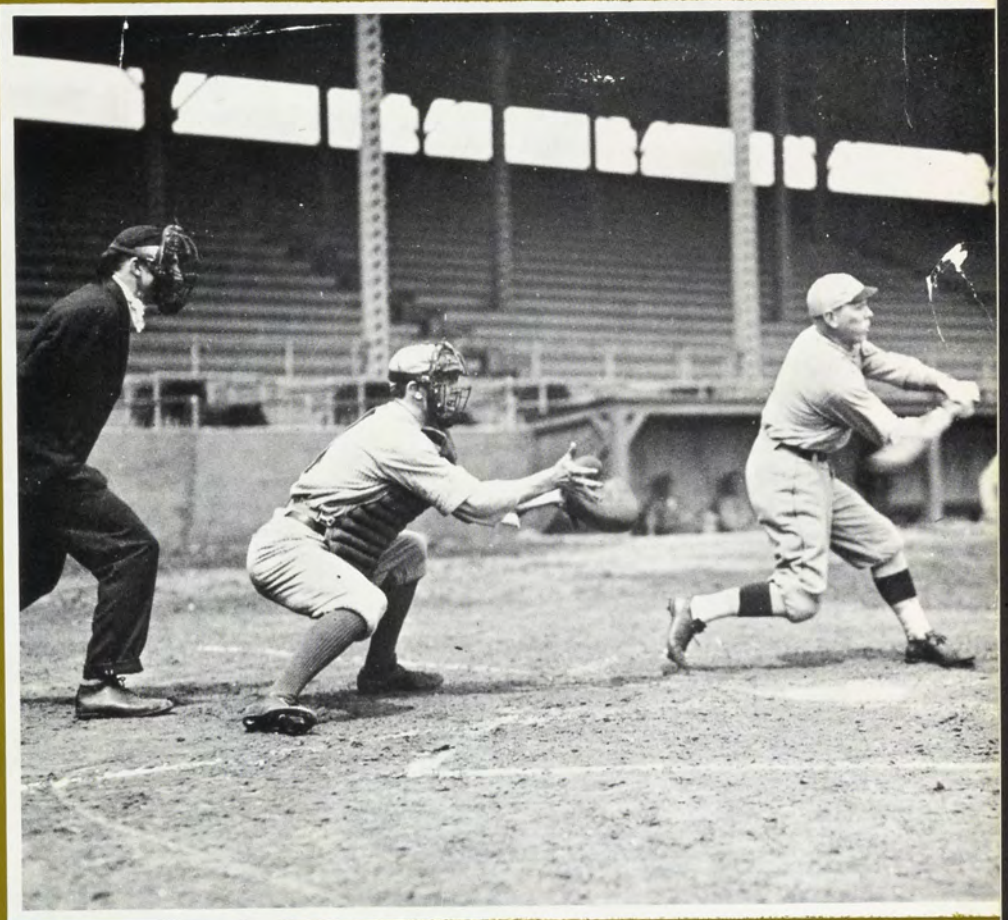




RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Spring

1973

Volume 10

Number 1

Ramsey County History

Published by the RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Editor: Virginia Brainard Kunz

Contents

Spring

1973

Volume 10

Number 1

A Revolutionary, A Scientist,
And a Civil Rights Leader — 300 Years of
Pioneering for St. Paul's Colorful Markoes . . Page 3

Play Ball!
Lexington Park, Home of the Saints Page 12

1924's 'Prime Underdogs' And
Their Two-Title Victory Page 14

The First 'Living Flag' Page 21

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY is published semi-annually and copyrighted 1973 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: He swings — and misses — in practice at Lexington Park, home of the St. Paul Saints from 1910 to 1956.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The Markoe coat of arms on page 3 and the picture of Abraham Markoe on page 4 are from an article by F. W. Leach, "Old Philadelphia Families — XVI: Markoe," September 22, 1907, North American, published in Philadelphia. All other pictures in this issue are from the audio-visual department of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

1924's "Prime Underdogs" And Their Two-Title Victory

BY GORDON HAYES
with Norvy Mulligan

The year 1924 was the year of the underdog in minor league baseball, and the prime underdogs were the St. Paul Saints. They had won both the American Association and minor league titles. In spite of this, the Saints were picked as the foremost contenders for the *cellar* of the American Association. No wonder that season is remembered as a paradox.

Mike Kelley had guided the club for most of its 23-year history and he had fielded teams with superior talent in 1919, 1920 and 1922. Yet, each year the Saints failed to win the titles, despite being the favored team. And after the 1923 season, Kelley switched his allegiance. He became manager of the Saints crosstown rival, the Minneapolis Millers.

I remember Kelley as a distinguished looking man with gray hair. However, I always thought that the fans didn't seem to like him. He never went out on the coaching line. He sat on the bench and he never wore a uniform. Most managers were in uniform, but not Kelley. He usually wore a fedora hat. But he never went out on the field and he never coached on the bases. If there was an argument, he sent his assistant out on the field.

I think Kelley moved from the Saints to the Millers because he had a chance to buy into the team. The St. Paul team was owned by the Norton family and there was no chance of buying in there. Of course, there was such tremendous rivalry between the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Gordon Hayes, a junior at the University of Minnesota, with a major in journalism and an interest in sports, wrote this story as part of his business communications course. Interspersed with his account are comments, in italics, from Norvy Mulligan, a life-long sports fan who grew up in St. Paul. Later a well-known musician and now a retired insurance executive, Mulligan drew upon his own memories of the Saints.



Mike Kelley

two cities that it was unbelievable to St. Paul fans that Kelley would go over to Minneapolis, but he did.

Many baseball experts insisted that losing Kelley and his leadership qualities was too much of a burden for the Saints to overcome. Also, the Saints' ace pitcher, Tom Sheehan, one of the greatest of pitchers, had been sold to Cincinnati. He had won games in 1922, and he had tied the American Association record with 31 victories in 1923 — the year the Saints finished in second place.

After losing Kelley, Charley Chech guided the club in this, the closest race in the league's history. The Saints set a precedent. They became the first club in league history to win more than 100 games, but not the title. Their 112 victories matched Kansas City's, but the Saints had accumulated three

more losses. They were the next to last hitting club in the league.

THE 1924 CONTEST for the pennant was a nip-and-tuck battle between Indianapolis and St. Paul. It began September 23 in Lexington Park, a five-game series that would decide the championship. Indianapolis led by a mere half game, but had saved their ace, Jess Petty, for the first game. He had won 29 games during that season. However, the Saints' Tony Faeth pitched a brilliant game, beating Petty 2 to 0.

In the second game Indianapolis regained the lead and at the end of the sixth inning in the third game was leading 5 to 2. But St. Paul scored five runs in the seventh inning for an 8 to 7 victory. The Saints won the next two games, also, virtually clinching the championship. Faeth won his third game, 3 to 2, rallying from a 2 to 0 deficit with three sixth-inning runs. That was the story of the 1924 team. They never quit, and they produced comebacks many times.

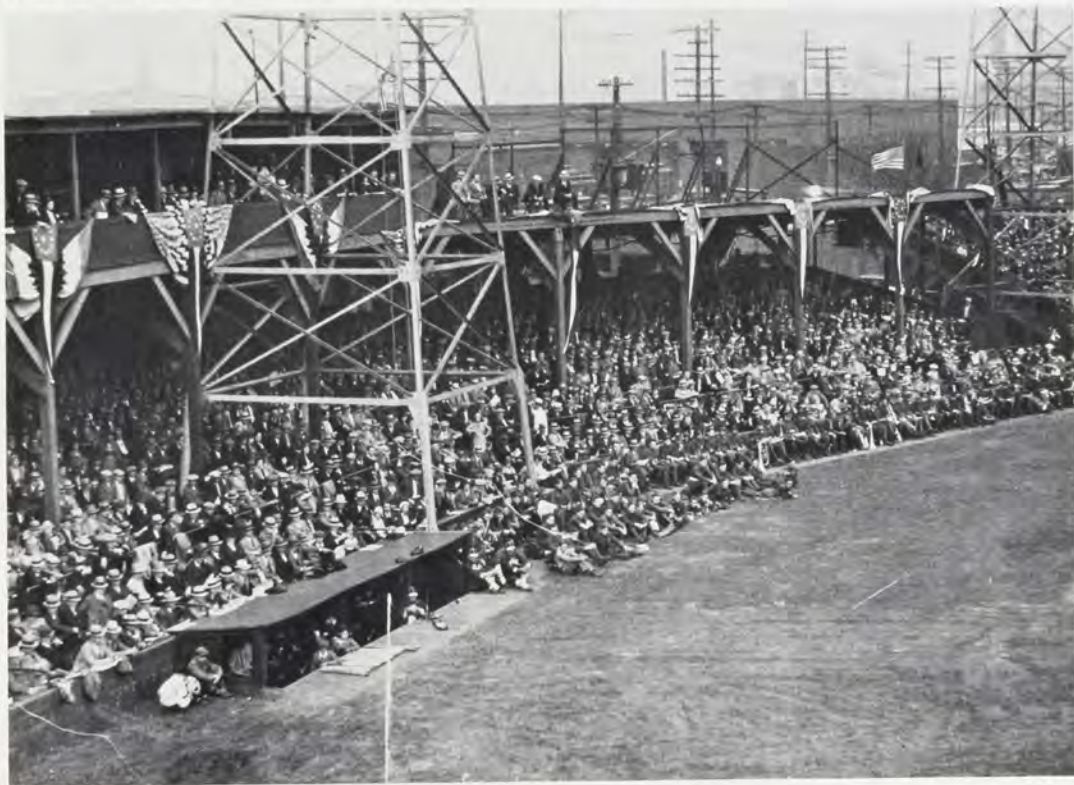
The team was managed at this time by Nick Allen. After winning the Association title, the Saints realized this might be their last chance at the minor league title. Many of their players were sought out by the major leagues. Infielder Charlie Dressen, later a

great manager, and Johnny Neun had been drafted by Cincinnati and Detroit, respectively. Cliff Markle, a 19-game winner, was drafted by Cleveland. Five or six clubs coveted centerfielder Walter Christensen, who had tied for the league lead in runs scored.

Dressen, a .300 hitter with speed and power, was a good third baseman. His achievements as a player were later to be overshadowed by his managing record with Cincinnati, Brooklyn, and Detroit. In 1952 and 1953, he led the Brooklyn Dodgers to the National League pennant, only to lose the World Series—both years—to the New York Yankees. Dressen also was manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1951 when the team lost the pennant to the New York Giants.

The Giants were behind by two runs and had two men on in the ninth inning. Thompson came up and hit the ball into the left-field stands for the winning homer — on one pitch. The Dodgers' pitcher was a losing pitcher after that. He was so shook up. The Dodgers had the game won by two outs in the ninth, and this pinch-hitter stepped up and won the game for the Giants.

Lexington Park, packed with fans for the opening of the 1931 season.



But in 1924, after the fifth game of the Junior World Series with Baltimore, things appeared gloomy for the Saints. In the best-of-nine series, they would have to win four of five games, and the series stood at three to one, with one tie. The third game spanned 13 innings and ended in a 6-to-6 tie. Baltimore had won the minor league title in 1920 and 1922 by defeating St. Paul both years. It seemed that, once again, St. Paul was going to let down the American Association.

THE CHIEF REASON for St. Paul's initial dismal performance was its inability to hit Baltimore's pitching, led by Lefty Grove and George Earnshaw. In the opening game, Grove struck out 11 men. In the fourth game, second inning, the bases were loaded with nobody out and Grove struck out the side.

The Saints had faced a pitcher who would become one of the game's all-time greats in the major leagues. Between 1925 and 1941 he would amass 300 victories, a feat only 14 pitchers have managed. He also would lead Philadelphia to three consecutive pennants and become a member of the Hall of Fame. From 1927 through 1934, he won at least 20 games a year. In 1931, the high point of his career, he won 31. He was the first southpaw in the 20th century to enter the elite circle of 30-game winners.

George Earnshaw won the fifth game of the 1924 series with his fast ball. He later starred with the Philadelphia Athletics in their championship years of 1929-31. No wonder there was so little hope for the St. Paul team! But in the sixth game, the Saints began their comeback. They struck out only four times.

The seventh game was another setback, but the Saints won the eighth game with a 3 to 2 score. Now they would have to defeat Grove to force a tenth game. Paul Fittery, a 16-game winner, was pitching for St. Paul. He fought gamely for six innings as St. Paul built up a lead. Markle took over in the seventh inning and the Saints won the game.

THE FINAL GAME pitted Howard Merritt of the Saints against Alphonzo Thomas, who had not allowed the Saints a run for 18½ innings. But the Saints won easily, to become the Junior World Series league champions.

During the dressing room celebration after the game, Fittery said it perfectly:

"Pick out a star on this club. You can't do it. There's 22 of them" Thus reported the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* on October 14, 1924.

The winning share for St. Paul was \$15,925, or \$796 per player. John Norton, the club president, added \$100 to each man's share. The Baltimore players each received \$531.

Now that St. Paul had captured the Junior World Series, one obstacle remained to becoming the minor league champions. The league had agreed that the Junior World Series winner would play the Pacific Coast winner. Seattle represented the Pacific Coast with 108 wins out of 200 games played.

On the last Tuesday in October, 1924, the St. Paul Saints left by train for Seattle. They reached there Thursday night. Rain postponed the first game. The next day, with Merritt pitching, St. Paul won 12 to 4. Pacific Coast fans were stunned. They always had felt their team was the best outside of the major leagues. They boasted about it frequently in their press, but on that day they were thoroughly outclassed.

Rain continued for the next two days (Seattle was in the midst of its rainy season). St. Paul had so outplayed them that the rest of the series was cancelled. Each Saint picked up \$175.

During that long season, the Saints were noted for their excellent fielding and strong pitching. Catcher Lee Dixon led the league in tagging out baserunners. At first base, Neun broke a league record by participating in 134 double plays. Key hitters were Neun, shortstop Danny Boone and outfielders Christensen, Joe Riggert and Bruno Haas. But in hitting, the team finished next to last in the league.

THE PARADOX of the 1924 team was that it had won the championship with much less talent than previous Saints teams had shown in 1919, 1920, and 1922. Yet, neither of these teams won the pennant.

In 1919, St. Paul might have won the championship but a decision Kelley made concerning sportsmanship cost them an important game in the post-season playoffs.

That year St. Paul had won the American Association title for the first time since 1904 by seven and one-half games. They topped the league in runs scored and in allowing the fewest runs. Outfielder Elmer Miller



was the league's leader in homeruns, triples, and most bases. Bubbles Hargrave, who later would manage the Saints, was catcher and Dave Duncan and Joe Riggert, the key hitters. Leo Dressen, first baseman, was near the top of the league in scoring runs. Top pitchers included Charley Hall, Howard Merritt and Ree Williams.

Charley Hall was a workhorse. He once won 16 straight games. His shirt always used to come out when he was playing. Bubbles Hargrave was a great catcher. He later went over to Minneapolis. And do I remember Joe Riggert! Centerfielder. He was terrific. We had some wonderful centerfielders in St. Paul. I remember "Sea Cap" Christensen. He'd keep turning his cap around because he was always clowning around out there, but he was a great centerfielder. Sheehan was one of the great pitchers. He later managed the Millers, and pitched for them. He's Horace Stoneham's righthand man now, in San Francisco.

I remember Jess Petty. A wonderful pit-

Nicollet Park with standing room only during the 1904 season.

cher. That series with Indianapolis was really something. Nick Allen used to be a catcher under Kelley.

The fans showed their appreciation for Mike Kelley and the players. They gave Kelley a testimonial purse of \$1,400 and the players received wristwatches.

Considering everything, the experts speculated that St. Paul would win the 1919 series against Vernon. In the third game, Bill Erseck, the Vernon manager, ordered the infield watered down to slow down the speedier Saints. Vernon won the game, so the tactic was repeated throughout the rest of the series. Needless to say, this caused hostilities to emerge.

At the end of the sixth game, the series stood at three games each. Then controversy erupted. The owner of the Vernon club demanded that the team be permitted to sub-

stitute Jack Fournier, a Los Angeles first baseman, for Hughie High who was injured. The umpires rejected his plea. When the seventh game began, Fournier was at first base, so the umpires awarded the game to St. Paul. However, Kelley adamantly refused to accept the forfeiture. He merely asked that Fournier be removed. Vernon agreed, and won an easy victory.

THE NEXT DAY Dan Guiner won the third game of the series for the Saints. This forced a deciding game, but if Kelley had accepted the forfeited game, the Saints would have been packing their bags with the championship won.

The ninth and deciding game was close, but Vernon scored the winning run in the ninth inning. Despite the mistreatment of the Saints, Kelley went to Vernon's clubhouse and congratulated the players. He rationalized the club's defeat by saying, "My good hitters did not come through. If my team had played the kind of ball it did during the American Association, the series would not have gone more than six games."

Throughout the presses of the nation, St. Paul was lauded for extending the series to nine games in a foreign park where they were exposed to bad sportsmanship by the opposition. But, because of the sportsmanship issue, it was not until 1924 that the American Association again played the Pacific Coast champions.

THE FIRST 23 YEARS were successful years for the Saints, years capped by winning the championship in 1924. They resemble a book, with a strong beginning and ending, and sub-plots throughout the middle.

St. Paul also had won in 1903, the league's maiden season. From 1898-1901, St. Paul had been a member of the Western League, but financial problems prompted St. Paul to become a charter member of the American Association, along with Minneapolis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Louisville, Toledo, Indianapolis, and Columbus. The league was an immediate success.

At that time, Mike Kelley was the team's playing manager and George Lennon the owner. The first training camp was held in Richmond, Virginia. The 140-game schedule opened on the road on April 22, 1903. The Saints lost by 8 to 7 in an 11-inning

game that lasted one hour and forty-five minutes. They won their first game the next day by thrashing Toledo 18 to 6.

St. Paul waited until May 6 before viewing their local combatants. Pre-game festivities included a parade that passed through Rice Park and the downtown St. Paul business district enroute to Lexington Park. It became an annual tradition to open the season with a parade.

MAY 6 was a cold, bleak day. St. Paul won the game, 4 to 0, with Charlie Chech's pitching. The team finished the season September 22 by playing a triple-header.

Kelley, a good hitting and excellent first baseman, and Phil Geier were the key players.

Miller Huggins was on second base. He was plagued with a bad throwing arm, but was a swift baserunner and a good hitter. After leaving St. Paul, Huggins achieved baseball immortality because of his illustrious managerial career with the New York Yankees from 1918 to 1929, the years that established the Yankee dynasty.

In 1927 the Yankees won 110 games out of 154. Halsey Hall, the veteran Minneapolis sportswriter and sportscaster, calls them the greatest baseball team ever. They swept the World Series in four games from Pittsburgh. Babe Ruth hit a record 60 homeruns that season. Huggins also is remembered for fining Ruth \$5,000 for being overweight. In 1964, Huggins was enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

Back in 1903 Huggins and Mike Kelley roomed together in St. Paul. During that time, Huggins picked up some of the most important tenets of the game from Kelley. St. Paul won the title by seven games that year. The Saints were a good fielding and hitting club, and were blessed with blazing speed.

When a benefit game was scheduled between St. Paul and Winnipeg, the Northern league kingpins, pre-game events included Kelley's attempt to run the 100-yard dash in 10 seconds and "Ace" Bailey's try at breaking the world record in the 220-yard dash. Jimmy Jackson won a throwing contest. In all, 2,800 fans enjoyed the show. After that, the game was an anti-climax. The Saints beat Winnipeg.

IT WAS DURING the 1903 season that the team moved from Lexington Park to the

downtown ballpark between Robert and Minnesota, Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets. They stayed there until 1909, then moved back to Lexington Park for Saturday and Sunday games. The next year the team moved there permanently and stayed until the end of 1956.

We lived in the Midway and we took a streetcar to Lexington Park from Selby and Snelling down Selby to a block from the park. Then we would walk over from Selby — which would be quite a walk. Or we would take a streetcar from Selby and Snelling to University, transfer at University and get off at Lexington. The most vivid sight I remember is all those streetcars lined up at Lexington waiting for the game to end.

There were double-headers with the Millers. I remember one with Riggert, who was a great hero. My father was a baseball nut. The morning game was in St. Paul and they were ahead of us one to nothing in the last of the ninth. Riggert was up with a man on. My father said, "If he hits a home run, I'm tearing this hat up" (he had a straw hat on) "and we're going right over to the pill-box." And Riggert hit the ball onto the

Coliseum roof — a home run. We won it by one run, and so we went right over to Minneapolis on a Selby-Lake car that took us right to Nicollet Park.

St. Paul easily captured the league title in 1904 by nine games over Columbus. To honor the team, a burlesque baseball day was held with proceeds going to the 16 players. Every player was dressed in burlesque costumes. The fans were rollicking in their seats during the five-hour show.

THE EARLIER YEARS, between 1905 and 1918, had offered little to cheer about for the Saints. After winning the American Association crown in 1904, the team slipped to fifth place in 1905, seventh in 1906, and last place in 1907 and 1908. In 1909 they were in sixth place.

The big news of the 1911-1912 season was that St. Paul sold spitball pitcher Marty O'Toole and catcher William Kelley to the Pittsburgh Pirates for the astronomical

Laying the baseline tape at Lexington Park.



price (at that time) of \$22,500.

Kelley was famous for his sales of ball-players. O'Toole had won about 25 or 26 games. I once saw him strike out 21 Milwaukee batters, including the leading hitter in the American Association. But Kelley sold him to Pittsburgh for the biggest price ever obtained for a minor league ballplayer in those days. O'Toole wouldn't go to Pittsburgh unless his catcher, William Kelley, came along, too, so that's why they had to sell Kelley, also. For \$5,000, I think. O'Toole won about one game after he got to Pittsburgh and then faded into oblivion.

O'Toole was the key player in that trade, but he hurt his arm on a rainy day and was never again the same pitcher.

Between 1913 and 1915, the Saints held sixth place and last place. They finished fourth in 1916, tied for second place in 1917, and slipped to sixth place in 1918. When they finally won the title in 1919, it was after a 15-year drought.

In 1920 St. Paul mesmerized the other league teams by winning 115 and losing 49 games. The second place team, Louisville, trailed by 28-1/2 games.

Joe Tinker, president of the Columbus club boasted according to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* of October 4, 1920, that, "Mike Kelley's club is the greatest minor league combination ever."

THE SAINTS were overconfident when they played Baltimore, the International League titleholder. Baltimore's winning percentage was better than St. Paul's (.719 to .701) but St. Paulites felt this was due to weaker competition. Baltimore had won their last 25 games and easily won the series. The last game was witnessed by a near-record crowd of 10,000 at Lexington Park.

St. Paul's ball park was one of the biggest in the league. It was a fabulous park. I don't think that more than four players ever hit a ball over the rightfield fence. Babe Ruth did once, in an exhibition, and I think Red Russell did, also. The roof of the Coliseum ballroom formed part of the left field fence. If you hit a homerun, you hit the roof of the ballroom.

Lexington was a good park for watching baseball, especially when compared to the "pillbox" as my father called Nicollet park in Minneapolis.

I can remember many a game at the Nicollet Park when we'd stand out in centerfield because the park would be so crowded. Standing room only, and standing room was in centerfield. They had a rope between stanchions to hold back the crowd, and any ball that went into the crowd was a two-base hit! You couldn't get a homerun in those days, unless it went over the fence. The fielders would be playing in front of us. And much the same was true in St. Paul, although the park was larger.

The year 1921 was an off-season for St. Paul. Many players had been drafted by the American and the National leagues, and the Saints were in seventh place.

New blood helped produce a championship season in 1922: Tom Sheehan, who won 22 games; John Benton, who won key games in the 167-game season and Walter Gohin, a good hitter. With veterans Haas, Boone and Riggert, these newcomers helped revamp the team.

The Saints played Baltimore again for the minor league title. This time they forced the series to its limit. More than 7,000 fans swarmed onto the Lexington field after the Saints lost the final game, 4 to 3, on a questionable call in the eighth inning. They went after Baltimore executive Charles Schmidt and president John C. Toole. Policemen restrained them before injuries were inflicted.

THIS STORY would not be complete without saying something about the rivalry between St. Paul and Minneapolis. St. Paul usually emerged on top. From 1915 through 1926 St. Paul won the season's series. Minneapolis seemed jinxed when they encountered St. Paul. Many times as the underdog St. Paul still beat the Millers.

Six lean years followed the Saints' peak in 1924, but in 1931 they won again. They were the favorites for the minor league championship, but they lost. That same season, Philadelphia also was the World Series favorite, mainly because of Lefty Grove, a 31-game winner. Seven years earlier Grove had lost his last two games in the Junior World Series and that helped the underdog St. Paul team win the series. Was it better to be an underdog? Maybe not, but for Saints fans, the answer probably is "yes."



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.