RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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The Great Railroad Excursion of 1854

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From Iceboxes to Freezers: The Seeger Refrigerator Company

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A view of the Seeger Company's Arcade Street factory, ca. 1930. The last building remaining at the company's site was razed in April, 1995. See article beginning on page 4. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

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Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr.

A Message from the Editorial Board

This Spring issue of *Ramsey County History* offers two stories about growing up in St. Paul. The first is an institutional and corporate history of the Seeger Refrigeration Company written by James B. Bell. The other is a personal and individual account written by Frieda Claussen of her coming to adulthood and launching her career as a medical technologist at Miller Hospital. While the Seeger Company was located on the East Side of St. Paul from 1902 to 1984, Frieda Claussen's professional life spanned forty-two years in the development of modern medical practice. Unlike the Seeger Company, which has passed from the local scene, Frieda Claussen and her sister, Clara, have made sure their experiences will enrich others in their willingness to value local history and to tell their story in our magazine. For this, we thank them.

John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

Growing Up In St. Paul

Gas stoves, Gas Jets, Gas Lamps And Coal Through an Open Chute to the Cellar

Frieda Claussen

In 1891, my grandfather, Ferdinand Willius, who had established the German-American bank in St. Paul, built a house at 469 Laurel Avenue for his family. In 1892, he built another house, a duplex, at 525–527 Laurel Avenue, for two of his recently-married daughters. I was born in this house in 1897, the youngest of four children of Martha Willius Claussen and Oscar Claussen.

At that time, Laurel Avenue ranked among the upper class neighborhoods of St. Paul. It was only a few blocks from Summit Avenue, where the Hill, Weyerhaeuser, and Lindeke families lived. In the early 1900s, as I was growing up the streets were not paved, and electricity was not yet introduced. Instead, we used gas for both light and heat. Gas was piped into the houses and hooked up to gas stoves, gas jets, and gas lamps, with chimneys and cords stretching up to the ceiling. We had a coal furnace for heat. Coal was delivered from a coal wagon through an open chute on the side of the house into the "furnace cellar," where it was shovelled into the furnace each day.

Frieda Claussen at the age of three and at "not-quite-thirty." All photographs are from the author, and the captions are adapted from her own words in the voluminous scrapbooks she kept for many years.

Our father, Oscar Claussen, was the city engineer of St. Paul during a time of rapid physical expansion for the city, when both traditional and modern city services were provided. His city engineer's reports from 1889–1901 show not only proposals for sewers, cement walks, and electric light poles, but also cycle paths and horse-drinking fountains! Father also designed the famous spiral bridge in Hastings. Father's office was in the beautiful new courthouse pictured on the cover on the Spring, 1992, issue of *Ramsey County History*. He used to walk the mile to work and back twice each day, coming home for lunch. If he had to work on Sunday, he would often take some of his four children—my brother, my two sisters, or me—down to the courthouse, where we would run up and down the wide halls. He abandoned his walking regimen for these trips, taking one child on his bicycle handlebars or all of us on the Selby-Lake streetcar that whooshed through a tunnel near the Cathedral on its way downtown. That was exciting!

As children, we had many playmates in the neighborhood. They congregated in our large backyard to play in our sandbox and swing from our trapeze. We played traditional games such as tag, hide-and-seek, run-sheep-run, hopscotch, and jump-rope. On quieter days, we girls cut out paper dolls and blew soap bubbles. Of course, in winter we went ice skating and sledding.

Our mother, Martha Claussen, ran a busy and active household for her husband and children. Although we had a live-in maid like most upper middle class households of the time, there was plenty for Mother to do. Monday was washday. The clothes were washed in big tubs, wrung out with hand wringers, and hung on the line. This was quite a chore, since we wore voluminous long, full skirts and petticoats with long silk stockings and garter belts. If the lace curtains had been washed, they had to be stretched out on frames to dry. When clothes needed to be dry cleaned, Mother took them out into the back yard and cleaned them herself with benzene. After wash day, Tuesday

"The house where I was born." The duplex at 527–525 Laurel Avenue was built in 1892 by Ferdinand Willius for his two daughters, Ida and Martha. The four Claussen children attended the old Webster School, half-a-block away.

was ironing day, with the flat-irons heated and re-heated on the gas stove for all the clothes, table linens, and handkerchiefs.

Then came Wednesday, housecleaning day. As soon as we children were up, the windows were flung open wide and all the bedcovers thrown back so they could be thoroughly "aired out" before the beds were made up. Sewing day followed. Once Mother baked and baked cookies to sell to raise money for a Wilcox and Gibbs sewing machine. I still have the receipted bill: $75 with a $10 deduction for prompt payment. Although Mother made most of our clothes herself, we sometimes had a seamstress come in to help—I loathed the days when I would have to stand by the hour and "be fitted" or have a hem pinned up.

Saturday was baking day. I remember the aroma of fresh-baked bread and waiting for cookies to come out of the oven. Mother was a wonderful cook, and Father especially loved her soups and traditional desserts, such as cold fruit soup with dumplings. Of course, there were no refrigerators, but instead we had an icebox with an opening onto the kitchen porch where we would leave a sign telling the ice man how much ice to leave every day.

Mother bought all of her produce from a man who would drive by daily with his horse and buggy; he rang a bell, and she came out to select carrots, potatoes, and fruit. Other supplies were purchased at a little shopping area on Selby and Mackubin, one-and-a-half blocks away. We loved it when Mother sent us to pick up what she needed at Nash's meat market or Kane's grocery store. If her order was too large for us to carry home, it was delivered in big wooden folding boxes.

The neighborhood of Selby and Mackubin held other delights for curious children. We would go for ice cream sodas to Conger's Drug Store, and since Mildred Conger, the pharmacist's daughter, was a friend of mine we got ours for free—a great treat. On another corner was the "Hook and Ladder Company," a building that housed the fire engine. We walked up to watch the regularly scheduled fire drills, but it was even more exciting when we heard the "clang, clang" of the fire bell summoning the engines for a real fire. Then we would rush over and watch them hitch up the horses and go tearing out of the barn to quell the blaze! Just a block east on Selby was a livery stable, where Father occasionally rented a horse and carriage or sleigh to take us for a drive as another Sunday treat.

Trips downtown were important, too. Mother bought our coats, shoes, and the material for sewing our other clothes at one of the St. Paul department stores: Field-Schlick, at Fifth and St. Peter Streets, Schuenemann's, at the present Dayton's site, or Mannheimer's, at Sixth and Robert. Across the street from Mannheimer's was the old Metropolitan Theatre. As we grew older we were allowed to take the trolley down to spend our allowance for seats in the highest balcony and a treat after the show at J. George Smith's candy store next door. Smith's sold chocolate in yard-long boxes, advertising "candy by the yard." The store had little tables equipped with telephones so we could order our ice cream sodas in grand style.

Our school days were more mundane. Through eighth grade, all four of us went to the old Webster School. Fortunately, we lived only two houses from the school, so we waited every morning until we heard the big school bell ring, then skipped over and got to class right on time. The school had a large playground surrounded by a big iron fence over which we loved to do somersaults.

Mother and Father had a lot of fun at their grown-up parties with their friends

in the German-American community: the George Sommers, the Theodore Hamms, the Charles Hausers, the George Benzes. There were elaborate dances, dinners, and sleigh ride parties. Father was the life of the party as he wrote clever verses to read aloud. Before her marriage, my mother also had belonged to a small social club called the W.O.R.B., short for Wreath of Rose Buds. These friends had their portrait taken together and even had jewelry engraved with their insignia.

Although we children did not go to the adult parties, we adored family parties, especially Christmas. We celebrated on Christmas Eve at our house, following the German tradition, and then Christmas night at my grandparents at 469 Laurel. It was the family custom to put up the large tree behind closed doors. We children were forbidden to look, except that we were allowed to string popcorn and cranberries which the adults used to decorate the tree. Christmas Eve provided the climax for all the preparations. As we all finally gathered in the dining room, the doors would slowly swing open to reveal the huge, beautifully decorated tree, lighted with real candles, with my mother at the piano playing "Die Weinachtsglocken" ("The Christmas Bells"), ending with "Stille Nacht" ("Silent Night"), which we all sang in German. (Of course, there was always a bucket of water next to the tree as a safety precaution!)

Even more wonderful than the tree itself was the miniature scene which Grandfather had spent days constructing underneath it. He had probably brought this tradition from Germany, and he was a true master of the art. His scenes were stupendous, full of tiny buildings, figures, and animals. One year he built an enormous castle; another year he fashioned a mill wheel with real running water piped up from the basement. He would build mountains out of rocks and "clinkers," the burned-out pieces of coal from the coal furnace. We never forgot these scenes, which became a part of our family heritage carried through the generations. (My mother later made elaborate Christmas scenes depicting children's storybooks; one of these, "When the Root Children Wake Up," was displayed at the St. Paul Public Library. Still later, my sisters Else and Clara took over the family tradition, often depicting under the tree some important family event.)

"My mother, Martha Willius Claussen, at age fifty-seven.

"My beautiful sister Clara at age thirty."

After exclaiming over the Christmas scene, we children came to the gifts, which were not as elaborate as children's toys today: perhaps books, a doll, roller or ice skates, and of course little presents we had made ourselves. Then it was on to supper, with a specialty that everyone seemed to look forward to except me: traditional herring salad made with gilt herring from a fish house on Snelling. Mother had skinned, boned, and chopped the herring, put it in a special cut glass bowl, and decorated it with chopped egg yolks, dill pickles, and a star made of boiled egg whites. For dessert, we had traditional Christmas cookies that we children had helped to cut out as reindeer, squirrels, and stars. Finally, there was Christmas sausage, a confection of powdered sugar and dark chocolate rolled into a sausage shape and carefully sliced.

New Year's Eve, in contrast to Christmas Eve, was generally a rather quiet affair. Mother would bake Berliner Pfankuchen, a special kind of doughnut filled with jelly, and at midnight, Father always woke us up to have a traditional glass of wine. One New Year's, however, provided some unplanned excitement. My older brother Norman, who always went out gallivanting, had failed to arrive home by his 1 a.m. curfew, and my parents were worried. It turned out that Norman had decided to go ice boating with some friends on White Bear Lake. Between the island and the peninsula there was a stretch of open water into which they inadvertently sailed, and the boat had gone under! The boys had grabbed the ice on the edge of the hole, but it kept breaking off. They finally managed to pull themselves out, left the boat, and walked back across the lake, dripping wet and freezing cold, to the family cottage where they had parked a car. Mother, who had eventually fallen asleep, finally heard him come in at 4 a.m. and found him in bed with a pile of soaking wet clothes on the floor.

As we children grew older, my sisters and I left elementary school to go to the new Central High School on Lexington near Selby. (My older brother remained at Mechanic Arts High School, and there was a great rivalry between the two schools, especially in football.) Central was a little over a mile from our house, and in good weather we walked to school. Otherwise the Selby-Lake streetcar was handy.

My high school days were filled with school girl "crushes," dances, and many school activities. Several of my teachers

Oscar Claussen in his office in 1922. At the age of sixty-two he resigned as St. Paul's city engineer and Commissioner of Public Works and opened his own office as Consulting Engineer in the Merchants National Bank Building. He named his company the Claussen Carroll Engineering Company. "This is a picture of father's last office," Frieda Claussen noted, "and I think it is a 'honey' in all its messy detail. Imagine a carpet like this in any man's office now-a-days."

still stand out vividly in my mind: strict Mr. Fiske in Latin, sweet Miss Probst in German, stern Mrs. McClintock in Physics, and above all lovable Helen Austin in English, who also directed the dramatic club of which I was a member. Miss Long directed the orchestra in which I played first violin, and Miss Minor supervised "The World," the school magazine, where I was a member of the editorial staff.

When I graduated in 1916, I was ready for college. I was fortunate that my parents could afford to send me to the college of my choice, Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. My freshman year I roomed with a girl from Pennsylvania, and we were both so homesick we used to hear each other crying ourselves to sleep at night. Since there were, of course, no commercial airplanes, I took the train, and could make the long trip home only at Christmas and for the summer. My laundry, however, criss-crossed the country more frequently by Railway Express, as it was the custom to send our long skirts and linens home to be laundered. They always came back with some brownies or other goodies tucked inside.

The United States entry into World War I influenced life on the homefront at my women's college. Many girls on campus were knitting sweaters for their brothers or boyfriends overseas. One Southern girl didn't know how to knit and didn't seem to be able to learn, so I offered to knit a sweater for her to send to her boyfriend and pretend she had knit it herself. In due course she received his letter of thanks, telling her that every time he wore it he thought of the love she had put into every stitch. She later married him.

The 1918 influenza epidemic also struck during my years at Smith. All the girls living near enough were sent home, and two large dormitories were closed to house flu patients. Since all the movie houses were closed and we were not allowed to enter each other's dormitories, we needed something to do. Then we learned that the farmers in the outlying county were hiring girls from the college to work in their fields, picking corn and tobacco. After we got permission from our parents, the farmers came to Northampton with big trucks to pick us up. After we worked all day in the fields for them, they brought us back at night.

The flu epidemic hit home personally as well; it took the life of my brother Norman. Norman had been a captain in the Field Artillery and had won the Croix de Guerre and many other honors during his year on the battlefields in France. Shortly before the war ended, he had been ordered to come back to the States and instruct at an army camp in Kentucky. There he developed the flu and died. I was not even allowed to go home from college for his funeral, for fear I would contract the flu as well.

I'll never forget the story Norman once told about his experience at the front. He and a French officer were trying to communicate; Norman did not know French, and the other officer did not know English. They discovered, however, that they both knew German, so they plotted together in the enemy language!

Despite my sadness at my brother's death, I was able to enjoy myself at college. Smith had a beautiful campus, and there were plenty of activities going on. I had several different roommates, lived in different houses, and had lots of friends. We went to movies often, and had dances with friends from Amherst, a nearby men's college. Since radio was not yet available, many nights after dinner I would play the piano for dancing. I joined the Glee Club and Dramatics Club, and though I had first learned the violin, I switched to viola when the orchestra needed a viola player.

My studies, however, remained the center of my life at Smith and ended up pointing the way to my future career. Unlike most women of that time, I majored in science; my best grades were in organic chemistry, biochemistry, physical chemistry, and bacteriology. I applied for honors in chemistry, which required a devastatingly difficult oral examination before the whole chemistry department. There were just two of us who took the exam, and we both passed.

I was excited because upon graduation, I was planning a career in the new field of laboratory medicine. I could even work in a new hospital; my brother-in-law, Dr. Edgar T. Herrmann, had arranged for me to start work at the new Charles T. Miller Hospital, scheduled to open in St. Paul in the fall of 1920. I had to wait a few months, however, since when I arrived home with my new degree the hospital had not yet opened, and I decided I needed further training to qualify myself thoroughly for this new job. So my father, who had supported me through college, had to pay yet more tuition while I attended summer school at the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Finally, on December 1, 1920, the Miller Hospital opened. Located near the Cathedral of St. Paul, it was a convenient place to walk from my family's house on Laurel Avenue. The hospital was named for the famous physician, Dr. Charles T. Miller, whom I knew only from his portrait which I saw hanging in the lobby as I came to work each day.

The hospital was then five stories high. (Later a sixth story was added, along with

The four Claussen children were photographed at Christmas, 1900, probably so photos could be circulated among friends, as many families still do today. Left to right: Frieda, three; Else, seven; Clara, six; Norman, nine.

The Claussen family in their living room at 525 Laurel Avenue in 1901. Note the gas cord that extends from the ceiling to the gas lamp on the table.

a nurses' dormitory, a large new wing named after Dr. Zimmerman, and the Wilder dispensary.) The laboratory was located on the fifth floor, next to the nursery and across from the operating room. One entered the lab through the pathologist's office and came to a long room with benches and microscopes, stools, sinks, the centrifuge, and the bacteriology oven.

The pathologist, my boss and teacher, was Dr. Margaret Warwick, who was moving from the University of Minnesota to take the new position. The staff was small: along with Dr. Warwick and me, there was only one other young woman with less training than I had, and a young boy called a "diener" who helped Dr. Warwick with postmortems. We were called laboratory technicians then, not the modern-day term of registered medical technologist, and it was strictly "on-the-job-training"; even with my thorough scientific background, Dr. Warwick had to teach me a great deal.

When I recall how we did blood tests in those days, in comparison with how they are done today, it is beyond belief! My fellow technician and I first went to the patients' rooms and collected by venipuncture or finger prick the blood to be tested. To perform a hemoglobin count, we compared the color of a drop of blood visually to a color chart with a sliding scale of colors from pink to deep red. We put other drops on slides to count the numbers and kinds of cells found under the microscope.

One very important test was crossmatching and grouping blood for transfusions. In those days before blood banks, a transfusion was performed by drawing the blood from the donor and pumping it directly to the patient, with the two of them lying side by side in the hospital. Before the transfusion could be done, a match must be found between the blood of the patient and the potential donor. We tested for the blood factors A, B, AB, and O; type O could be used for all four types. The Rh factor had yet to be discovered. The best chance of getting a donor was to have members of the family come into the lab to be tested, and I was frequently called to the lab at night or on a weekend to do an emergency crossmatch to find a proper donor.

My salary when I started work was $100 per month for a 44-hour week, with no extra time off or pay for on-call overtime. By 1929, my salary had risen to $175, but during the depression of the 1930s it went back down to $150, and some graduating students had to work for $50 per month. Finally, in 1949, my two weeks of vacation were increased to three weeks, the 44-hour-week was lowered to 40 hours, and night and weekend workers were hired.

Frieda Claussen when she was head of Miller Hospital's Medical Laboratory, with Dr. Kano Ideda, Miller pathologist.

Probably the greatest change of all came in the development of educational requirements in the field. The "on-the-job-training" I had received could not possibly be adequate for the growing complications of laboratory work. The University of Minnesota established the first school for Medical Technology that required a degree before entering the field. In 1937, Miller Hospital began a program with three years of training in college and the fourth year in the laboratory at the hospital. We had formal classes in the laboratory and became affiliated with Macalester College; as laboratory supervisor, I became professor of Medical Technology at Macalester College.

The American Society of Clinical Pathologists had also established a national registry in 1928, at the urging of Dr. Kano Ikeda, the pathologist who came to Miller in that year. I became number six on the national registry, and our title became Medical Technologist, registered by the ASCP, or MT (ASCP). As tests became more complicated and grew in number, many did not require the full training of a medical technologist, so the jobs of phlebotomist and laboratory technologist came into being.

We also organized: locally as the Twin City Society of Medical Technologists in 1924, then statewide as the Minnesota Society, and finally nationwide as the American Society. All through my years at Miller I became more and more involved in holding office in the various societies. By the time I retired in 1963, I had held every office available, had been president of all three societies, spent years on boards of directors, and had attended fifteen national conventions across the country.

After I retired my "work home" merged with St. Luke's Hospital and Children's Hospital to become United Hospital. When I enter these new laboratories today, I am amazed: computers in every department and large supplies of blood stored in the blood bank, grouped and typed for the Rh factor, and thoroughly tested for the AIDS virus. There are machines in every department and more than 100 employees.

And the old site of Miller Hospital, which played such an important role in my life, now has become a place to commemorate other lives as well; it is the site of the new Minnesota History Center.

* * * * * * * *

"The person or persons who took from Mr. Neill's storeroom on last Saturday night, 35 pounds of beef, one-half [tub] of mackeral, 1 crock of butter, the better half of a deer . . . are kindly requested to return the same when they have finished with them. It is evident that there are still thieves about St. Paul."—*Minnesota Pioneer,* November 27, 1851.

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"Arrangements are making in St. Paul for an engine and fire company. Something quite as indispensable is a larger reservoir of water to be constructed on Court House Square and supplied by a substantial viaduct from one of the streams north of town."—*Minnesota Pioneer,* March 20, 1851.

St. Paul around 1869 was still a rather rude frontier town and not exactly the "second city of magnificent distances" described by the Eastern press who descended on the village in 1854. This view of a muddy Jackson Street looks north from Third Street. The St. Paul Hotel, right, was built in 1846–1847 and developed into the Merchants Hotel. See article about the Great Railroad Excursion of 1854, beginning on page 14. McLeish & Pasel photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

R.C.H.S.
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