

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Digging Into the Past—
The Gibbs
Claim Shanty

Page 17

Spring, 1996

Volume 31, Number 1

Childhood Among the Dakota

Jane Gibbs: 'Little Bird That Was Caught'

Page 4



Jane DeBow Gibbs (Zitkadan Usawin), an undated portrait by C. A. DeLong, Sunbeam Gallery, St. Anthony, Minnesota, dating from the 1880s. Ramsey County Historical Society archives. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Editor

Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joanne A. Englund

Chairman of the Board

John M. Lindley

President

Laurie Zenner

First Vice President

Judge Margaret M. Marrinan

Second Vice President

Richard A. Wilhoit

Secretary

James Russell

Treasurer

Arthur Baumeister, Jr., Alexandra Bjorklund, Mary Bigelow McMillan, Andrew Boss, Thomas Boyd, Mark Eisenschenk, Howard Guthmann, John Harens, Marshall Hatfield, Liz Johnson, George A. Mairs, Mary Bigelow McMillan, Laurie Murphy, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Thomond O'Brien, Robert Olsen, Vicenta Scarlett, Evangeline Schroeder, Charles Williams, Jr., Anne Cowie Wilson.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Pat Hart, Laurie M. Murphy, Dr. Thomas B. Mega.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, Clarence Frame, Otis Godfrey, Jr., Ronald Hachey, Robert S. Hess, Ronald M. Hubbs, Fred T. Lanners, Jr., Don Larson, George Latimer, David Marsden, Robert B. Mirick, Samuel H. Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome Plunkett, James Reagan, Solly Robins, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hal Norgard, chairman
Commissioner Susan Haigh
Commissioner John Finley
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Richard O'Connor
Commissioner Brenda Thomas
Commissioner Richard Wedell

Terry Schutten, manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102 (612-222-0706). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1996, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 31, Number 1

Spring, 1996

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 'Little Bird That Was Caught' and Her Dakota Friends
Deanne Zibell Weber
- 17 Digging Into the Past: The Excavating of
The Claim Shanty of Heman and Jane Gibbs
Thomond R. O'Brien
- 21 Growing Up in St. Paul
Sam's Cash-and-Carry, the Tiger Store—
Payne Avenue and the 1930s Depression
Ray Barton
- 24 Books, Etc.
A Painted Herbarium: The Life and Art of Emily
Hitchcock Terry (1838–1921)
Reviewed by Betty Cowie

Dillinger Slept Here
Reviewed by Charlton Dietz
- 26 1995 Donor Recognition

A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue of *Ramsey County History* features the remarkable story of Jane DeBow Gibbs and her family on the Minnesota frontier. Deanne Weber's research on Jane Gibbs and her struggle to make a life for her family, along with Thomond O'Brien's report on the archeological dig for the Gibbs's sod shanty that the Ramsey County Historical Society undertook at the Gibbs Farm Museum last summer, have awakened new interest in Jane Gibbs, an otherwise ordinary woman of her times who displayed extraordinary strength of character in the face of substantial hardships. For the Society, this new research has prompted a total re-examination and reinterpretation of the Gibbs Farm Museum. For members of the Society and friends of Ramsey County history, we hope this issue of our magazine will be the beginning of their own reassessment of what life was like for Minnesotans in the middle of the nineteenth century.

John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

Books, Etc.

A Painted Herbarium: The Life and Art of Emily Hitchcock Terry (1838–1921)

Beatrice Scheer Smith
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992

Reviewed by Betty Cowie

The forty-seven plates in this handsome book represent some of the earliest paintings of Minnesota flora. Beautifully done, the illustrations were copied from nature by a nineteenth century botanist and artist named Emily Hitchcock Terry.

Born and brought up in Massachusetts, Terry came by her scientific and artistic talents naturally. Her father, Edward Hitchcock, was a well-known professor of geology at Amherst College and her mother had once assembled a small book of her own botanical paintings.

Terry was only in Minnesota for little more than twelve years, from 1871–1884, but during that time she added much to the botanical knowledge of the young state. Collecting, identifying, and painting, she followed her husband, Cassius Terry, throughout the state. A pastor at Plymouth Church, he suffered from ill health and often went to northern Minnesota to rest and recuperate. His wife came along with her paints and recorded the flora of the region.

Cassius Terry's later employment by the Geological and Natural History survey also led them both afield. Emily Hitchcock Terry's botanizing resulted in establishing the northern limits for some species and her name was among those mentioned in Upham's

1884 *Catalogue of the Flora of Minnesota*.

A few years after her husband's death in 1881, Terry returned to Massachusetts where she became lady-in-charge at Hubbard House at Smith College. There she continued her botanizing, but turned away from painting and spent her time developing an herbarium, growing ferns, collecting, and even discovering new species.

The author has collected material from many sources to produce this well-documented history. The book is well footnoted, explaining the text and in many cases adding interesting details. I was intrigued by a footnote concerning General Custer's favorite staghound, Cardigan. The Custers had been friends of the Hitchcocks, and after Custer was killed at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, his wife Libby gave the dog to Cassius Terry. When the dog died, it was stuffed and put on display at the University of Minnesota's zoological museum, where it remained in a glass case for forty years!

The plates illustrating the flowers and grasses are lovely. Especially interesting is the page facing each plate, where the modern scientific name is listed, followed by Terry's caption in her own words and the date on which she did the painting. Other intriguing facts are also included here. For instance, we find that Terry collected the White Lady Slipper, *Cypripedium candidum*, growing wild near Lake Harriet.

Both a scientist and an artist, Emily Terry has left us a beautiful and at the same time accurate record of some of the plants growing wild in our state more than one hundred years ago. This lovely book should be an addition to the library of anyone interested in botanical

history, early women scientists, or historical paintings.

Betty Cowie is a member of the St. Paul Garden Club, a supervisor on the Ramsey Soil and Water Conservation District Board, and an honorary board member of the Science Museum of Minnesota.

John Dillinger Slept Here

Paul Maccabee
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1995
362 pages;

Reviewed by Charlton Dietz

John Dillinger Slept Here—in St. Paul, along with many other gangland characters as well as the good and bad of local society which supported and tolerated this underworld.

Paul Maccabee's book is literally "A Crook's Tour of Crime and Corruption in St. Paul, 1920-1936." In 362 pages, including end notes and index, Maccabee chronicles sixteen years of dark, informative, and fascinating St. Paul history. The book is a must for any local historian, or any non-historian who is interested in knowing who lived in the neighborhood during this G-man era.

Maccabee's preface sets the stage to this gangland guide. While travel guides direct tourists to the homes of F. Scott Fitzgerald and James J. Hill, "No bronze plaque marks the St. Paul apartment building from which Dillinger machine-gunned his way out of an FBI trap in March, 1934," the author points out. "Nor are there any signs identifying the West St. Paul home that served as a hideout for Ma Barker . . . other 1930s

gambling dens, prohibition speakeasies, brothels, Murder, Inc., assassination sites, and Dillinger gang safe houses . . .”

This tour takes the reader to familiar places: Summit and Grand Avenues, University and Cleveland, Lincoln and Lexington; to the Hotel St. Paul, the Lowry and Commodore; to White Bear Lake, Bald Eagle, and on to Wisconsin and Minneapolis. There are detailed maps, a chronology, and a glossary to assist the reader on the tour.

Maccabee's research broke new ground for historians of this period. He gained access to nearly 100,000 pages of FBI files (after filing more than 200 FOIA requests), conducted more than 250 interviews of detectives, gangsters' family members, FBI agents, prosecutors, judges, and gangster girlfriends, as well as using other published works. All this research has produced an easy-flowing compilation of sixty-seven vignettes organized into eleven chapters that are more or less in chronological order. Each vignette is focused on a geographic location, so this book can be picked up and laid aside without losing any of the central theme—crooks and corruption.

For anyone who is familiar with St. Paul, or has knowledge of the era, there are nostalgic nuggets to connect with the past. For example, your reviewer discovered that he lived just a few doors away from the hideout of the Barker-Karpis gang at 2061 Marshall Avenue and has driven countless times through the intersection of Lincoln and Lexington Avenues where Dillinger, the FBI, and Homer Van Meter had a shoot-out at the Lincoln Court Apartments.

There are other connections to be made: your reviewer, at one time, worked in the shadow of John L. Connolly (father of Ramsey County Judge John S. Connolly), St. Paul corporations counsel in the reform administration of Mayor Mark Gehan (grandfather of St. Paul attorney Mark Gehan, Jr.) Connolly engrossed his colleagues with his experiences in transcribing pamograph records of wire taps of the St. Paul police department that produced the real evidence of corruption within

the police force. Maccabee's account gives new meaning to those personal recollections. Many readers will be able to make similar connections.

Familiar names include William Hamm, Jr., then president of Hamm Brewing Company, who was kidnapped at Minnehaha and Greenbrier and held for \$100,000 ransom. The price went up to \$200,000 in the abduction of Edward Bremer at the corner of Lexington and Goodrich as he was driving to work at the Commercial State Bank. These events led to a defining moment in national law enforcement. It was during this period that J. Edgar Hoover demonstrated the viability of the FBI and projected the image as the nation's number one G-man.

Maccabee's research reveals that the St. Paul underworld and the underworld were far more intertwined than has been previously acknowledged. The evidence suggests that the local banking, brewery, city government, and restaurant industries had found common ground with organized crime through the "O'Connor Agreement" which provided that criminals had a safe harbor in St. Paul if they committed no crimes in the city limits and paid off police.

Why is this historical record worth reading? "Because the story of . . . St. Paul, like that of any city, is a mingling of glory and infamy, of people with high integrity and others with low morals. St. Paul was built as much on a legacy of gamblers, scoundrels, and sinners as on a tradition of philanthropists, statesmen and business barons . . . St. Paul's experiment in accommodating the underworld also provides a lesson in the consequences of government forging a partnership with criminals."

Get the book. It is enjoyable reading any time. It is a valuable history in any library.

Charlton Dietz is the retired senior vice president, 3M Legal Affairs and a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Development Committee.

Claim Shanty from page 20

"Story of a Pioneer Farmer," *Ramsey County History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 3.

6. Stewart. *op.cit.*

7. Stewart. *op.cit.*

8. Blair, p. 14

9. *Ibid.* p. 13

10. Stewart. Interview with Frank Gibbs, late 1940s. Ramsey County Historical Society archives. Hoyt Avenue is named for Lorenzo Hoyt, whose land at one point included the Minnesota State Fairgrounds and extended to Como Lake.

11. Charlotte Whitcomb, "A Pioneer Woman," *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 26, 1897. Ramsey County Historical Society archives. The last sentence was later corrected to read "for nearly five years."

12. Blair, p. 30.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 31

14. Welsch, Roger. *Sod Walls, The Story of The Nebraska Sod House*, J & Lee Co., Lincoln, NE, 1991, p. 98

15. Stewart. *op.cit.*

16. Welsch, p. 34

17. Blair, p. 28.

18. Welsch, p. 50.

19. Welsch, pp. 54-88. On page 71 he notes that where planks were not available, a thatching layer of grass and clay was laid over supporting poles and brush.

20. Welsch. p. 68-73.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 85

22. Blair, p. 34.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

24. An 1831 half dime, an 1838 one cent piece, and another coin, date obscured, similar in design to the 1838 one cent piece. Blair, p. 54

25. Blair, Appendix C.

26. KSTP-TV filmed more than two hours of the various stages in the excavation, which it edited into a 10-minute broadcast. The station generously turned over a copy of these tapes to the RCHS.

Thomond O'Brien is a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's board of directors. A strong supporter of the archeological dig, he also was an enthusiastic volunteer at the site, spending many days there last summer with trowel in hand as the early evidences of the Gibbsses' life there was uncovered.



Payne Avenue, as it looked in 1931. This view looks south on Payne from its intersection with Jessamine. See "Growing Up in St. Paul" on page 21. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989