

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Digging Into the Past—
The Gibbs
Claim Shanty

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Spring, 1996

Volume 31, Number 1

Childhood Among the Dakota

Jane Gibbs: 'Little Bird That Was Caught'

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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.

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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

Letters to the Editor

St. Paul's Highest Hill?

I was interested in John S. Sonnen's article about the city's seven hills in the Fall, 1995, issue of *Ramsey County History*. I feel that one hill was overlooked. I lived the first few years of my life at 2121 Iglehart Avenue, near the top of the Iglehart and Finn hill. I don't know the elevation of this hill, but my late mother used to tell me that Iglehart and Finn was the highest spot in St. Paul. She also told me, and I have read in *Ramsey County History*, that our state's founding fathers (John L. Merriam, for one) seriously considered this area as a site for a new state capitol, about the same time the Town and Country Club golf course was plotted. She also said 2121 Iglehart was built by a man named Nichols, who allegedly built Mechanic Arts High school, also. Can you shed some light on any of this?

Philip L. Markert, Lakeshore, Mn.

We'll have to defer to John Sonnen in the case of the Iglehart-Finn hill and we're uncertain about Nichols. However, we do know about the plans—fleeting though they were—late in the last century to build a new state capitol in Merriam Park. Archbishop John Ireland and former Governor William Merriam dreamed of uniting Minneapolis and St. Paul in the Midway district. Ireland planned to build his new cathedral there and James J. Hill hinted he'd build the Union Depot there. It all came to nought in 1893 when the site was deemed too far from the center of either city and too undeveloped.

A Childhood Remembered

I was fascinated by the article on bungalows in the Twin Cities in your winter issue of *Ramsey County History*. I, too,



Bungalows lining Capitol Avenue near Dunlop (now Englewood) in St. Paul, 1931. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

grew up in a neighborhood lined with bungalows, much like those pictured. While our house was in south Minneapolis, it was built about the same time—the early 1930s. I doubt very much that ours was a Sears house, but it was truly homey and sturdy, as your writer stated. I loved the built-in buffet in our dining room—so practical—and the beautiful dark woodwork. Years later other owners of our house told me an interior designer suggested painting that lovely woodwork *white*! They were horrified and declined.

Frances Owens, Minneapolis.

Early Internet

My grandfather insists that his parents had a telephone more than 100 years ago. That can't be true, or can it?

Morris Hanson, St. Paul.

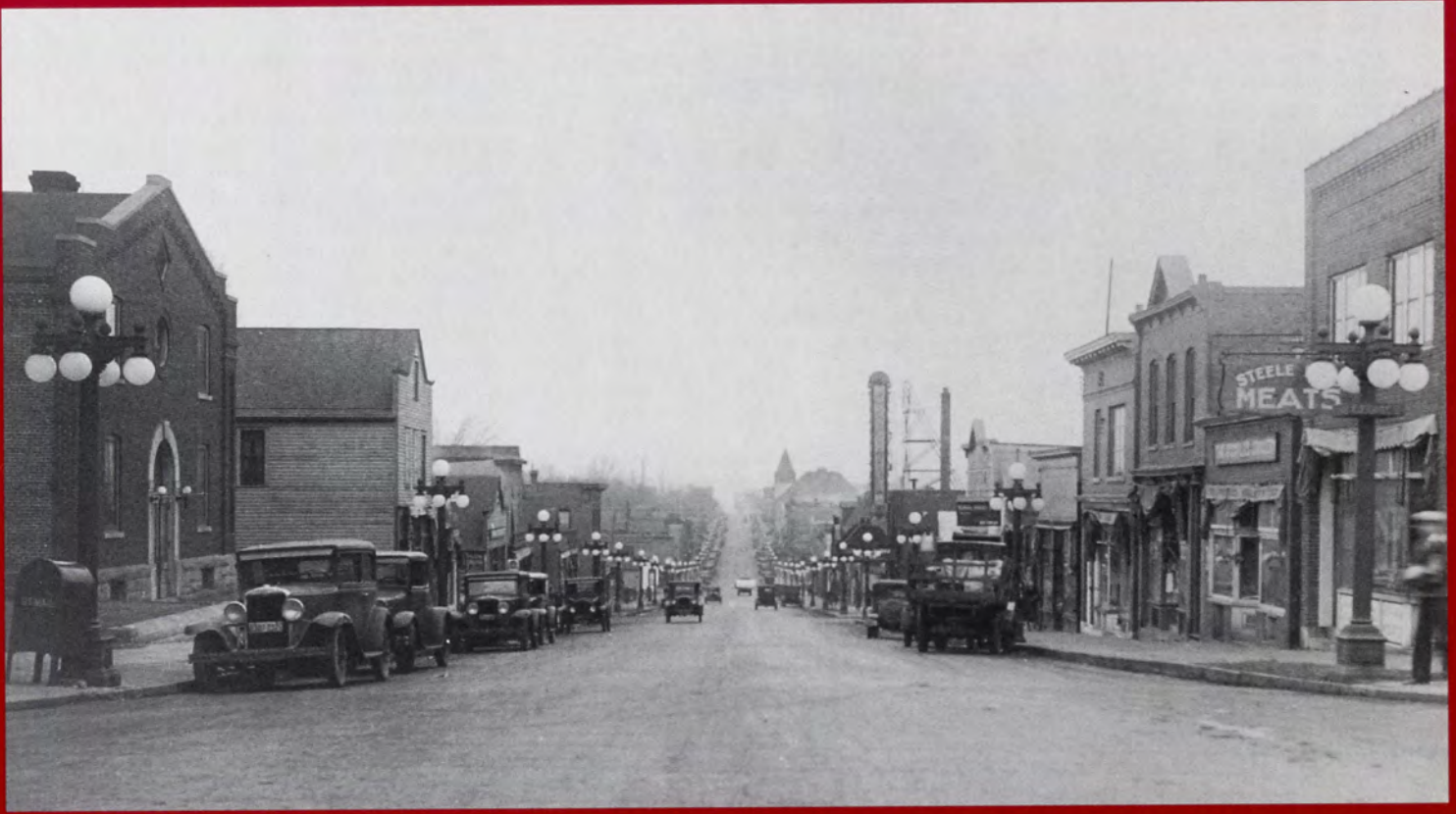
It's true if they lived in Minneapolis or St. Paul. The two cities were linked by telephone in 1879. A year later, 600 phones were in use.

He Likes the Magazine

Issue after issue, *Ramsey County History* becomes better and better. The story of Fountain Cave (Winter, 1995) does a real service to St. Paul's history. The story of the St. Paul Curling Club explains in a thorough way what I have often wondered about that Selby Avenue building. I doubt if my mother ever curled, but in the early days she did belong to the Nushka Club. I found Arthur Mc Watt's reminiscences especially appealing and hope you can continue to pull in similar fine articles. Continuing congratulations.

*James Taylor Dunn,
San Antonio, Texas.*

It's particularly gratifying to receive such praise from Jim Dunn, a renowned historian in his own right, the retired librarian of the Minnesota Historical Society, and a descendant of a prominent pioneer St. Paul family. His mother was Alice Monfort Dunn, his father a noted photographer who chronicled many of St. Paul's early years.



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.
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