

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.*

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# 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*

## A Pioneer Child on Minnesota's Frontier

### Jane Gibbs, the 'Little Bird That Was Caught,' and Her

Deanne Zibell Weber

On May 31, 1910, the front page of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* sadly announced that "Mrs. Jane DeBow Gibbs . . . the oldest white settler in the State of Minnesota, died yesterday afternoon at the family homestead, Rose Town."<sup>1</sup> Though her family may not have realized it, Jane marked an important personal anniversary on the day she died: exactly seventy-five years earlier, in 1835, she had disembarked from a boat at Fort Snelling as a six-year-old child. In fact, as one of the earliest white residents of the Lakes area of Minneapolis, as well as one of the original settlers in Rose Township, she was a pioneer in each of the Twin Cities—something few other people could claim.

The house at the corner of Cleveland and Larpenteur avenues in present-day Falcon Heights where she lived almost all of her later, married life is familiar to many people since it serves as the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum. What many people do not realize is that Jane's early years with a missionary family at Lake Harriet also had a profound effect on her life. Taken as a whole, Jane DeBow Gibbs's life story provides a fascinating viewpoint on the history of settlement in Minnesota, especially the evolving relationship between white settlers and the Native Americans from the 1830s to the Dakota Conflict of 1862.

An in-depth look at Jane's life is only possible because her experiences have been chronicled in a wealth of secondary sources, unusual for a woman in nineteenth century Minnesota. Chief among these sources is *Little Bird That Was Caught*, a fictionalized biography of Jane written by her daughter Lillie Belle Gibbs LeVesconte in 1944 and based on stories her mother had told her.<sup>2</sup> Other sources include a detailed newspaper biography by Charlotte Whitcomb dated 1897; lengthy, front-page obituaries; published and unpublished remembrances by two other children; and letters from the missionaries at Lake Harriet to

their governing organization in Boston.

Unfortunately, historical inaccuracies and discrepancies have emerged in all of these major sources, and none of them can be considered definitive. In gleaning the facts, care has been taken to cross-verify the dates and events of what are otherwise vividly detailed memories. Furthermore, there are no extant sources written from the Native American point

of view, so a white bias in the secondary sources may be evident.

Jane DeBow was born on November 20, 1828, in Batavia, New York, the fourth child of Peter and Jane Bartholf DeBow.<sup>3</sup> Peter DeBow was a carpenter, an occupation which provided a steady, if seasonal, income in western New York. To fill the gaps, he also helped run the nearby Checkered Tavern. Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte depicted her mother as a typical little girl, too young to keep up with her older brother and sisters, but too restless to stay home with the younger members of the family.

However, soon after her fifth birthday, Jane was to meet a family whose serendipitous arrival would alter the course of her life. Jane's mother, still weak from the birth of her sixth child, collapsed that winter and suffered a severe head injury. In order for Peter DeBow to stay with his wife at the hospi-



The Checkered Tavern, which Jane Gibbs's father, Peter DeBow, helped run in Batavia, New York. This was one several sketches Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte, a talented artist, made during a visit with her mother to Jane's childhood home in 1890. Lillie's sketch book is in the Ramsey County Historical Society archives.

## Dakota Friends

tal in nearby Rochester, New York, he arranged for the children to live elsewhere until their mother recovered. Jane stayed with the Vedder family, neighbors who lived just across the meadow from the DeBows, while the rest of her siblings went to stay with various aunts and uncles. LeVesconte's story suggests that Jane was unhappy with the arrangement and was unable to understand why she couldn't go home, especially since it was so close by. Jane constantly ran away.

Meanwhile, the Vedders also were hosts to Jedediah (J.D.) and Julia Stevens and their sons Dwight and Evert, a missionary family traveling west to the frontier. Originally from Peterboro, New York (a small town southeast of Syracuse), J.D. Stevens had decided to become a Presbyterian minister in the late 1820s, during the peak of fervor surrounding the Second Great Awakening. This movement emerged as a largely Protestant response to a number of political and social upheavals in the late eighteenth century. According to the movement's supporters, these watershed events, including the Revolutionary War, the French Revolution, and the rise of Deism, had fostered feelings of indifference and hostility toward American religion. Moreover, many believed that the migrations westward to the frontier would dissipate church influence. To combat all of these "dangerous" developments, leaders of the Second Great Awakening relied heavily on revivalistic preaching, a method of arousing religious interest which had proven its usefulness in the original Great Awakening in the mid-eighteenth century. The Second Great Awakening also began an attempt to Christianize every aspect of American life by advocating mass conversions at revival meetings, Bible education at all levels, and missionary work among the



*A scene from the Batavia, New York, region, as sketched by Lillie LeVesconte during her 1890 visit. Lillie's sketchbook, Ramsey County Historical Society archives.*

"uncivilized" and "un-Christian."<sup>4</sup>

J.D. Stevens had embraced all of the ideals of the Second Great Awakening, but he was especially attracted to missionary work, a demanding and difficult pursuit in the early nineteenth century. Many of the missionaries recruited for the movement had personally experienced a spiritual dedication to Christianity and saw their work as a wondrous, patriotic and spiritually fulfilling adventure. Others, like J.D. Stevens, were attracted more by the autonomy and power a missionary position provided, and the accompanying desire for acclaim from their evangelical peers.<sup>5</sup> Given the difficult and often impossible conditions accompanying the work, missionaries were almost automatically elevated to a position of respect within their denominations and were praised as true religious crusaders and models of dedication to the faith. Stevens, who was described as a self-opinionated, overbearing, and dictatorial man, no doubt welcomed the recognition that a missionary's life provided.<sup>6</sup>

In 1827, after leading revival meetings for a number of years, Stevens accepted a position with the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), one of many Protestant missionary societies which sprang up during this period.<sup>7</sup> At that time, work among the Native Americans on the fron-

tier was considered "foreign," so Stevens was sent to Fort Mackinac, Michigan Territory, and then to Green Bay, Wisconsin, in 1829 to minister to the Stockbridge Indians on the Fox River.<sup>8</sup> Nearly dismissed by the ABCFM in 1833 because of a disagreement with another missionary, and probably distraught over the recent death of his baby daughter, Stevens returned to New York later that year for what the secretary to the ABCFM termed a "leave of absence." He was also "licensed" (ordained) during this time.<sup>9</sup>

In May, 1834, Stevens was leading revival meetings near his hometown of Peterboro when the ABCFM assigned him to minister to the Mdewakanton Dakota near Fort Snelling in the frontier wilderness that became Minnesota. Stevens welcomed the idea of returning to the Northwest Territory, since the Board's choice of location was partially based on Stevens's six-month reconnaissance trip to the Fort Snelling area in 1829-1830.<sup>10</sup> He left Peterboro in June, 1834, accompanied by his wife, his two sons, and his parents, whom he was moving to a brother's house near Monroe in Michigan Territory. Even with the detour to Monroe, Stevens was hoping to reach Fort Snelling by the end of the summer.<sup>11</sup>

It was at this point in their journey that the Stevens family stayed with the

Vedders in Batavia. According to Lillie LeVesconte's account, the Stevenses were still mourning the death of their own daughter, and discussed "adopting" Jane with the Vedders after hearing of the illness of Jane's mother. LeVesconte wrote that, "Janie wanted to go"; the Vedders, believing that Jane's mother would not recover and that the minister's family would provide a better life for her, helped Jane pack her few, meager belongings. So, without her parents' permission or knowledge, five-year-old Jane DeBow was headed for the western frontier in a covered wagon crowded with strange people and baggage.

When Peter DeBow learned of the "adoption," he was understandably furious, and set off with two of his wife's brothers to catch up with the Stevenses and bring Jane home. For two days, the New Yorkers followed the wagon trails in pursuit of the young child. They had almost caught up to the wagon when J.D. Stevens, at an Ohio boarding house where the Stevens party had stopped for the night, overheard a fellow traveler. The traveler was discussing three men whom he had met the previous night at a tavern east of the boarding house, and whom he said were searching for a young girl. Stevens evidently did not need to hear any more; he became so frightened that he packed up his family in the middle of the night and left. According to Karen Bluhm, Jane's great great-granddaughter, Jane remembered this part of the trip clearly.<sup>12</sup> Unknown to Stevens, Peter DeBow was willing to push ahead further but his brothers-in-law convinced him to turn back and the men returned to New York empty-handed. Jane's mother died in late 1834 without ever knowing about her daughter's extraordinary adventure.

After leaving Ohio, Jane and the Stevenses traveled north to Monroe where they helped J.D. Stevens's parents get settled. The rest of the family continued north to Detroit, then west to Chicago and Green Bay. From August until October, 1834, Jane and the Stevenses waited in Green Bay for water levels to rise high enough for them to complete their journey. But the dry spell did not end. With little time before the winter ice and chill, Stevens decided to spend the winter at

Fort Mackinac instead of trying to travel to Fort Snelling.<sup>13</sup>

Jane, though mistakenly remembering in LeVesconte's story that she was at Mackinac all summer, did recall living in the island's Mission House, located close to the Presbyterian Chapel. She attended school in a log schoolhouse with Dwight and Evert Stevens and with other children of the frontier settlement. Fort Mackinac also provided Jane's first substantial contact with Native Americans. A story in *Little Bird*, in which she was nearly "kidnapped" on her way home from school by a tall Indian, while perhaps exaggerated, illustrates her growing curiosity about the native people.<sup>14</sup>

On April 24, 1835, when Lake Michigan was finally free of ice, the Stevens party boarded a boat for Green Bay. They visited friends at the old Mission House in Stotesbury for two weeks before arranging for a boat to take them west to Prairie du Chien. In a letter to the ABCFM, Stevens later described the scene:

Our family & Boatmen now numbered eleven. *Myself & Wife & niece*, our Two little children, a Boy 17 or 18 years old from the mission at Mack[inaw], part Sioux, a little girl 8 or 9 years old, one coloured man, two Stockbridge Indians & one white Boy about 15, these men were employed to go as far as we wished to go with our Boat.<sup>15</sup>

Jane's presence (and her incorrect age; she was only six at this point) seems to be only an afterthought for Stevens, who never mentioned to the ABCFM the circumstances surrounding Jane's "adoption." In fact, this is the only direct reference to Jane in any of Stevens's letters written between 1834 and 1839.

The group traveled up the Fox and Wisconsin river route to Prairie du Chien, arriving May 22. There, Stevens dismissed his boatmen and sold his boat. They left Prairie du Chien on May 28 on a steamboat named "The Otter" that made the upstream journey on the Mississippi River only twice a year. The party finally arrived at Fort Snelling on May 30, 1835, some seven weeks after leaving Fort Mackinac, and nearly a year after departing from Batavia, New York.<sup>16</sup>

The military outpost at which the

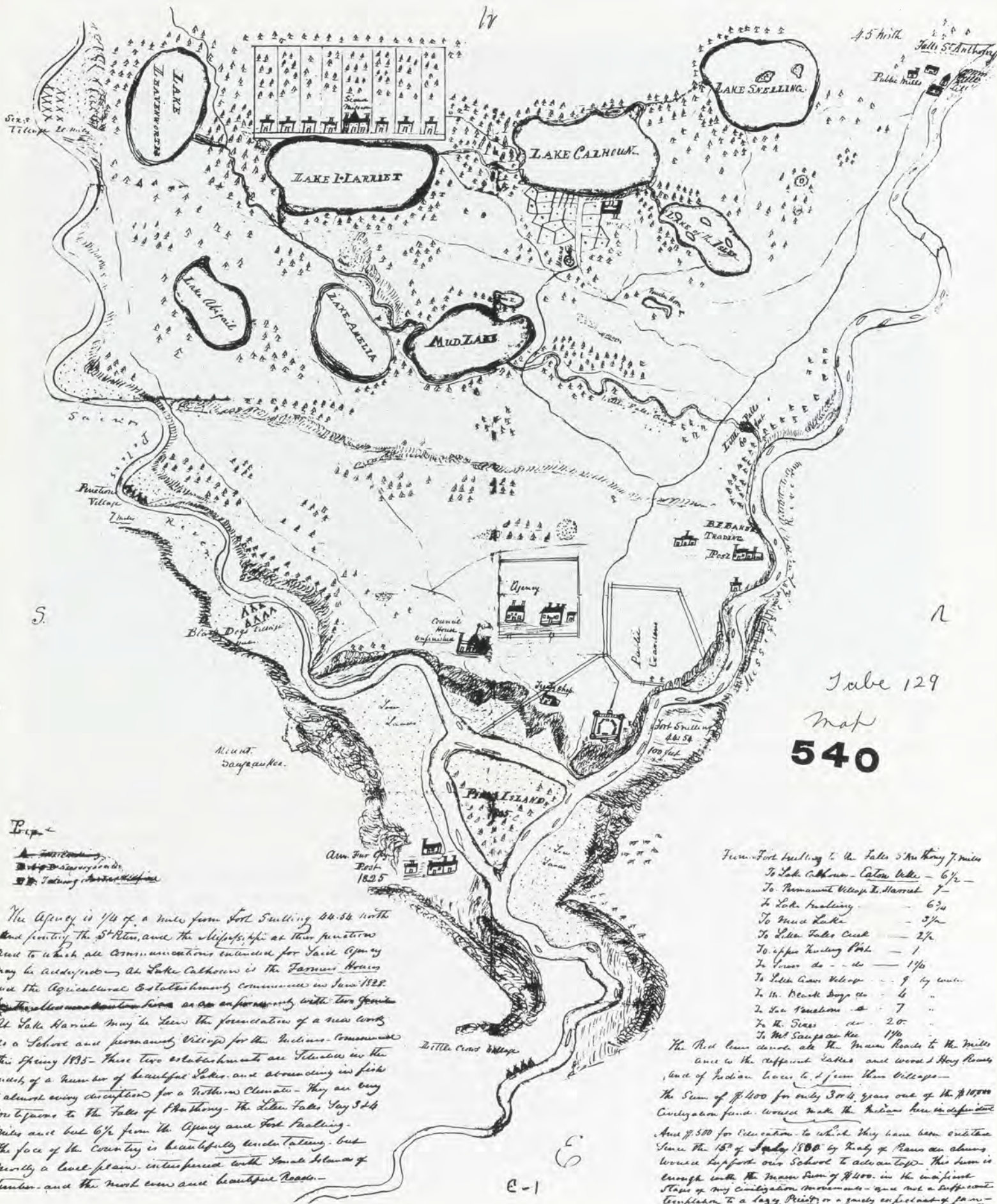
Stevens party arrived was much different from the "Historical Fort Snelling" known today. Since it was the only northern military outpost in the Mississippi valley for the first three decades of its existence, Fort Snelling served as the area's center for trading, negotiating, and socializing.<sup>17</sup> The children were awed by the long stone buildings, the watch tower, and the cannons peeking out from the holes in the fort's walls.<sup>18</sup>

Jane apparently loved the fort's bustling, city-like life. She recalled some sixty years later that it was "almost as good as a circus with its daily drill and parade, the gayly uniformed officers, and sights of painted, feathered Indians."<sup>19</sup> Because she was a child, Jane's presence was a rarity at the fort; in 1835, the entire area the fort protected probably held fewer than one hundred white families, including those of traders and discharged soldiers, and approximately 1,000 Mde-wakanton Dakota spread among five bands, or groups.<sup>20</sup>

At Fort Snelling, the Stevenses were met by other missionaries who had arrived two weeks earlier. Dr. Thomas Williamson and his family, natives of Ohio, also had been commissioned by the ABCFM and their landing at Fort Snelling was similarly delayed by low water. Williamson, arriving first, had decided to build his mission at Lake Calhoun in present-day south Minneapolis, one of three locations that he had scouted the previous year and judged receptive to missionary activity.<sup>21</sup> After seeing the beautiful Lake Calhoun surroundings, however, Stevens decided that he wanted to be assigned to Lake Calhoun, not Williamson, and insisted that the unor-

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*The region Jane Gibbs entered as a child in 1835 was mapped that year by Lawrence Taliaferro, Indian agent at Fort Snelling. Taliaferro wasn't a cartographer, but his drawing clearly shows Lake Calhoun, Lake Harriet, Fort Snelling, the American Fur Company post at Mendota, across from Pike Island, and the Native American villages that dotted the area. He indicates with squares Cloud Man's Village at the southeast corner of Lake Calhoun, and he has drawn in the projected "Sioux Mission" at Lake Harriet where Jane would live. From the map collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.*



S.

N.

Table 129

Map  
540

Exp.

- ▲ Agency
- Falls St. Anthony
- Falls St. Anthony

The Agency is 1/4 of a mile from Fort Snelling 24 1/2 north and facing the St. Peter, and the Mississippi at their junction and to which all Communications intended for said Agency may be addressed. At Lake Calhoun is the Farmers House and the Agricultural Establishment commenced in June 1828. At Lake Superior may be seen the foundation of a new work as a School and permanent Village for the Indians. Commenced this Spring 1835 - These two establishments are situated in the midst of a number of beautiful Lakes and abounding in fish of almost every description for a Northern Climate - They are very convenient to the Falls of St. Anthony - The Falls are 3 1/4 miles and but 6 1/2 from the Agency and Fort Snelling - The face of the Country is beautifully diversified, but mostly a level plain, interspersed with small islands of timber, and the most even and beautiful roads.

- From Fort Snelling to the Falls St. Anthony 7 miles
- To Lake Superior - Eaton Lake - 6 1/2 -
  - To Permanent Village St. Joseph 7 -
  - To Lake Snelling - 6 3/4
  - To Mound Lake - 5 1/2
  - To Lake Falls Creek - 2 1/2
  - To Upper Landing Falls - 1
  - To Lower do - do - 1 1/2
  - To Little Cross Village - 9 by water
  - To the Black dog do - 6 "
  - To the Pensions do - 7 "
  - To the Falls do - 20 "
  - To Mt. Saupeaukee 1 1/2

The Red men cannot see the Mass Roads to the Miller and in the different Lakes and woods they have and of Indian traces to be seen from their Villages - The sum of \$400 for only 3000 years one of the \$10000 Civilization fund, would make the Indian here independent and \$500 for Education to which they have been entitled since the 15th of July 1800 by Treaty of Peace an above would support our School to advantage - This sum is enough with the Mass sum of \$400, in the unproductive state of any Civilization movements - give not a sufficient temptation to a lazy Priest, or a greedy exploitant of poor -

E-1

dained Williamson find another post. Fortunately, a trader named Joseph Renville had requested a missionary for his post at Lac qui Parle, some 200 miles up the Minnesota (then called the St. Peter's) River. Since he was also a physician, Williamson conceded that he would be better suited for the remote location of Renville's post, and left Fort Snelling with his family in June, 1835.

Stevens, however, was not left without assistance at Lake Calhoun. He was greeted by Gideon and Samuel Pond, farmers and budding missionaries who had arrived at the lake in 1833.<sup>22</sup> The Ponds, who would later become known for their extensive Dakota language dictionaries, instantly impressed Stevens, who wrote, "These men appear to be truly pious, & devoted to the work of saving souls. They have made considerable progress in acquiring a knowledge of the Language. This is unquestionably a suitable place for a Mission Station & these men will probably be valuable helpers in the work."<sup>23</sup>

With the help of Gideon Pond, who was an expert carpenter, Stevens erected a two-story log Mission House building on the northwestern bank of nearby Lake Harriet, and close to the present location of the Lake Harriet bandstand.<sup>24</sup> This was about a mile from the Ponds' small cabin, and only a short distance from Cloud Man's (*Mahpiya Wicasta*) Dakota village, which occupied the area between lakes Harriet and Calhoun now encompassed by Lakewood Cemetery. Stevens lived at Lake Harriet in a tent during the week while constructing the building, and returned to the fort on the weekend to lead church services. The rest of the family remained at Fort Snelling until the building was completed.

On September 18, 1835, Jane DeBow and Julia, Dwight, and Evert Stevens moved to the Mission House at Lake Harriet. In *Little Bird*, Jane vividly remembers the rough journey. Following the "Little River" (Minnehaha Creek), the group traveled an Indian trail for nearly a full day before reaching Lake Harriet. When the wagon finally stopped, Jane recalled, the children ran to the top of a hill where they spied the new house and many, many tepees. Young Indian

children heralded their arrival with shrill cries, and dogs barked as they finally alighted from the wagons.<sup>25</sup>

The band of Mdewakanton Dakota who lived in the tepees had originally lived in Black Dog's village some four miles up the Minnesota River from Fort Snelling, but they had moved to Lake Calhoun as part of a grand farming experiment begun by Major Lawrence Tali-



*Jane Gibbs as she might have looked as a child. Actually, this is a photograph of Karen Bluhm, Jane's great great granddaughter, at age six-and-a-half. Her resemblance to Jane Gibbs shows clearly when compared with the cover photograph and the portrait in the photograph on page 15. Photo from Karen Bluhm.*

aferro, the Indian agent for the area who was stationed at Fort Snelling.<sup>26</sup> Taliaferro has been described as a fair and influential leader who tried his best to protect the Native Americans from corrupt traders, and in turn, to keep the Dakota and Chippewa [Ojibway] from harming each other. These tribes had thrived by trapping game and gathering food in the southern part of the unsettled territory during the summer, and then by traveling northwest to gather wild rice and hunt game in the fall and winter. Despite his sympathetic attitude toward the Indians, Taliaferro was also a realist who knew that impending settlement would eventually rob the bands of their land.

Taliaferro believed that the only way the Native Americans would survive the

coming onslaught of settlers was to learn and develop their skills in farming.<sup>27</sup> His experiment, named "Eatonville" after Secretary of War John H. Eaton, began on the southeast shore of Lake Calhoun in 1828 with fertile land, seed, hoes, plows, horses, oxen, and a government farmer named Philander Prescott. The farm was home to only a few families until the extremely harsh winter of 1828-1829, when Cloud Man, the soon-to-be appointed leader of one band of Mdewakanton, became convinced that his people needed to learn a new way of life and recruited many of them to live at the settlement.\* The farming community, named *Ti-a-ka-hte Otanwa* (village whose houses have roofs) by the Dakota, was home to more than 200 Mdewakanton by the time Stevens arrived in 1835. According to Stevens, "Many of them plant more or less corn, potatoes, & c. . . . This year they are doing more—they are furnished with a yoke of oxen by the Agent for the Indians [Taliaferro]—have ploughed considerable for the Indians who appear to be making much progress toward agriculture."<sup>28</sup>

For the next two years, the days at Eatonville were adventurous ones for Jane, Dwight, Evert, and their new friends, the Mdewakanton children. Jane's daughter, Abbie Gibbs Fischer, later recalled that "The first Indian child my mother ever saw was a small boy who stood on the edge of Lake Harriet beckoning to her. She was afraid at first but finally joined him and always played with

\*Gary Cavender, (Shunghl-da, or Red Fox) a direct descendant of Cloud Man and a member of the Mdewakanton band at Prior Lake, describes Cloud Man as a visionary leader who foresaw the conflict the struggle between hunting and farming ways of life would create for his people. Cloud Man was aligned with the Pond brothers and understood the long-term implications of the issue. Cavender, who is an instructor in the Sioux language, Indian Studies Department, University of Minnesota, is one of the members of the Native-American Advisory Board formed by the Ramsey County Historical Society to plan the reinterpretation of the Gibbs Farm Museum to include the story of Jane Gibbs's relationship with the Dakota of this region.



Cloud Man's village, between Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet in what is now south Minneapolis. This is a photograph of the original painting by George Catlin, 1835–36. Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

the Indian children from that time.”<sup>29</sup> The children adopted the life of their friends, swimming in the lakes, capturing and cooking the plentiful turtles, and playing charade-like games, all the while subconsciously learning to speak the Dakota language. In a description that might make the modern reader wince, one biographer noted:

[Jane] early became familiar with the skin lodge, or tepee, the sound of the paddle on the lake, the orgies of the feast on the return of the hunters from the chase, the death song, the war whoop, and the sight of the half naked warrior and his preparations for the war path. Being of the suppressed sex, it was not permitted her to witness the antics of the medicine man, but, having an inquiring mind, she lingered near, heard the incan-

tations and pow-wow, and knew pretty well what went on.<sup>30</sup>

According to Jane's offspring, the Dakota children were fascinated by her story of how she came to Minnesota, and gave her a Dakota name, “Little Bird that Was Caught,” probably “*Zitkadan Usawin*,”\* to reflect their feelings toward her unusual “adoption.” As the story was repeated throughout the community, the Dakota became very protective of Jane. In fact, Jane learned later that this protection extended to her adoptive mother's discipline; apparently, Mrs. Stevens feared retribution from the Dakota women if she was too harsh with Jane.

\*Translation into the Dakota language by Gary Cavender.

Jane's days at Lake Harriet were not completely carefree, since the children also had to attend school. At the urging of the ABCFM and Major Taliaferro, J.D. Stevens actually started two schools: a day school for Dakota children who lived at Eatonville, and a boarding school for the half-white, half-Native American children fathered by Taliaferro, explorer Philander Prescott, and Henry H. Sibley, the American Fur Company agent at Mendota, among others.<sup>31</sup> Both endeavors were fraught with difficulties. In *Little Bird*, Jane recalls bribing the Dakota children with turnips, hoping that the gift would encourage better school attendance. Moreover, Stevens's letters seem to continually request supplies, including schoolbooks, teaching assistants, and money.<sup>32</sup>



While Stevens was progressing slowly in educating and converting the Native Americans, his relationship with the Pond brothers was faring even worse. Stevens's arrogant decision to build his Mission House at Lake Harriet, when the Ponds already had built a house on the eastern shore of Lake Calhoun, eventually forced the Ponds to move to Lake Harriet to be closer to the center of activity. And because Stevens believed that ordination was necessary in order to interpret the faith correctly, he treated the Ponds merely as the "helpers" he mentioned in one of his early letters, expecting them to serve as manual laborers while he studied the language. This caused unbearable tension for the obviously talented and gifted brothers.<sup>33</sup>

At the end of 1836, Gideon Pond left for Lac qui Parle and Samuel Pond returned to Connecticut to study theology in preparation for ordination. These departures left Stevens without laborers, but more importantly, without his "most skilled translators" and interpreters of the Dakota language. By all accounts, Stevens had no gift for languages whatsoever. He might also have refused to learn the language because it was, in his eyes, a language of "heathens." He had made little, if any, progress in gaining a basic understanding of conversational Dakota words, although, as Thomas Williamson observed,

I think the Dakota language is uncommonly difficult to learn. Men who have lived with the Ojibways and now live with the Sioux tell me that they learned more of the Ojibway language in living among that people one or two years than they have learned of the Dakota in living among the Sioux from ten to twenty years though they have Dakota wives.<sup>34</sup>

Lacking any further support from the ABCFM, Stevens probably turned to the only interpreters he knew—his children. Though it is never mentioned in any of his letters to the ABCFM, it is likely that Stevens employed Jane, Dwight, and Evert to communicate with the Dakota. That the children could know the language so well was noted by the Ponds in their seminal book *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota As They Were in 1834*.



Samuel Pond (top) and Gideon Pond.  
Minnesota Historical Society photographs.



They wrote that children were the most able in learning the difficult language, an observation which they may have drawn by watching Jane and the Stevens children at Lake Harriet.<sup>35</sup> In *Little Bird* Jane recalls serving in the important role of interpreter for numerous councils with the Native American chiefs, including Red Bird and Wabasha.<sup>36</sup> It is hard to believe that Jane was still only a child of eight or nine at this time.

The councils for which Jane translated were held mainly to try to mollify the always-tense Dakota-Ojibway [Chippewa] relationship. In fact, some Mdewakanton

Dakota were afraid of moving to Eatonville because of its proximity to their ancient enemies. The simmering tensions ultimately culminated in 1839 with an incident which Jane remembered vividly. (Her reminiscences were recorded in the language used then and inevitably reflected the prejudices and insensitivities of that time.)

On a mid-June morning, her friend Waa-bec had left the Dakota village to go hunting with his uncle, Beaver, a son-in-law of Cloud Man.<sup>37</sup> Some Chippewa ambushed the warrior, killing and scalping him, possibly in retaliation for the shooting of some of their own near the fort the previous August. But Waa-bec, who was hidden in the tall grass, returned to the village unharmed and reported the murder. According to biographer Whitcomb, "[Jane] remembers Mr. [Gideon] Pond drawing her from the mission door to his knee and preventing her from seeing the mourning squaws tearing out their hair and gashing their flesh . . ."<sup>38</sup>

The Dakota warriors, some 100 strong, then went on the warpath to avenge Beaver's death, and returned with seventy Chippewa scalps, mostly women and children, from Hole-in-the-Day's band.<sup>39</sup> After revenge was exacted, Jane, Dwight and Evert imitated the scalp dance with their Indian playmates. Abbie Gibbs Fischer remembered that "My mother learned the dance. She taught me the Sioux words to this scalp dance and often sang them to us."<sup>40</sup>

The mounting tensions with fellow missionaries, the absence of any Dakota language skills, and a dispute with a newly-hired laborer all seemed to doom Stevens's tenure at Lake Harriet soon after the 1839 battle. The secretary of the ABCFM was about to ask for Stevens's resignation when Stevens persuaded a reluctant Taliaferro to assign him as government farmer (ironically, the same post the Ponds held at Lake Harriet) to Wabasha's band of Mdewakanton Dakota near present-day Winona. Stevens was dismissed from the ABCFM on August 14, 1839, and left for Winona with Jane and the rest of his family on November 7.<sup>41</sup> This was probably a fortuitous decision, because the community at Lake Harriet soon moved to the Minnesota

River valley near present day Bloomington and Shakopee to stay far away from the Chippewa raids.

The time spent with Wabasha's band proved difficult for the Stevens family since this band was not as friendly to whites, nor as receptive to the idea of learning farming as a new way of life. Wabasha (who was actually Wabasha II) and the other tribal elders thought it might be a good idea, but the younger members of the tribe would not obey them. Instead, the younger Dakota wished to continue their ancient ways of hunting, trapping, and fishing, and seemed intent on causing trouble for the Stevenses, at one point stealing and slaughtering nine of the family's ten oxen.

Moreover, the living conditions were harsh, even for pioneer standards. Because the family had left Lake Harriet so hurriedly and so late in the year, they lived in two tents until a drafty log house was built on Latsch Island, in the middle of the Mississippi River. Food was also a problem. In *Little Bird*, Jane remembers in detail the day she found a frozen potato at the bottom of an empty box. Cooking it over the fire and hiding it from the rest of the family, Jane savored every last bite.

Then, there were frightening nights when they nailed their doors shut for fear of wolves and Indians "crazed" from the traders' liquor.<sup>42</sup> The next spring, after surviving all of these calamities, they awoke to a prairie fire raging all around them. They were spared by a quickly-set backfire and a hastily-dug moat around the house.

Despite moving their house, log by log, to the western bank of Mississippi the following summer to be closer to the tribe, Stevens made little progress teaching Wabasha's band to farm. He was in danger of losing his contract as government farmer when he decided to move his family to the lead mining country of extreme southwestern Wisconsin territory in early 1841. For "three long and trying years," as they are described in *Little Bird*, sources variously place Jane and the Stevens family in Prairie du Chien, Plattville, Hazel Green, and Mineral Point.<sup>43</sup>

The family eventually settled in Eliza-

beth, Illinois, about fifteen miles southeast of Galena. Elizabeth was not a large town in the mid-1840s, though it boasted a platted village, a grist mill, a saw mill, and a school.<sup>44</sup> There, on March 2, 1845, Julia Stevens died, ten days after giving birth to a baby girl. Stevens remarried in November of that year and apparently moved to Waterford, Illinois, with his family. Jane decided to remain in Elizabeth, and moved in with her blind neighbor, Mrs. Davis, for whom she worked as a housemaid and companion.<sup>45</sup>

Living just down the street from Jane and Mrs. Davis were the town physician, "Doc" Little, and his wife, the former Charlotte Gibbs, who had been the town schoolteacher until her marriage. While entertaining her brother, Heman Gibbs, Charlotte introduced him to Jane, and romance soon blossomed. As Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte wrote in *Little Bird*, "Heman Gibbs seemed to find Mrs. Davis' home far more attractive than the boarding-house."<sup>46</sup>

Heman Gibbs was born March 16, 1815, near Jericho, Vermont. He left Vermont in 1837 after attending common school and a few terms of academy, and went to northern Indiana where he worked as a schoolteacher and farmer. About six years later, he traveled west to take part in the lead-mining boom in the mines of the Wisconsin-Illinois border.<sup>47</sup>

Heman and Jane were married in November, 1848, and moved to a house in Fairplay, Wisconsin, for the winter.<sup>48</sup> Though Heman wanted to travel to California to test his mining skills in the Gold Rush, Jane apparently persuaded him that life in Minnesota would be much more stable. Soon after the Mississippi River was clear of ice in the spring of 1849, the Gibbsses traveled to St. Paul from Galena on the steamer "War Eagle." Family tradition holds that Heman had to borrow money for the ship tickets.<sup>49</sup>

For her second trip up the river, Jane did not land at Fort Snelling, but at St. Paul, which had become the capital of the newly established territory of Minnesota, and had begun to attract settlers from the south and east. In fact, that spring a Galena newspaper reported that "there is a prospect of a heavy immigration to Minnesota the present season."<sup>50</sup> To il-

lustrate how quickly the immigration was occurring, in early 1848, the entire white population of the area was not more than 1,000; this number quadrupled only four months later.<sup>51</sup>

The Gibbsses were not without friends in their new land. After arriving, they visited Lott Moffet, a hotelkeeper who had owned the boarding house in Illinois where Heman had lived. That summer, while Heman secured land in Rose Township, northwest of the fledgling capital, Jane worked at "Moffet's Castle" (also known as the Temperance House hotel because no liquor was served.). Almost immediately, Jane renewed her acquaintance with the Mdewakanton. One morning, she had been doing some cleaning when she heard yelling downstairs in the kitchen. Apparently, the cook had set a pie to cool on the open windowsill and a Native American man had tried to steal it. With her language skills, Jane persuaded the man that the pie was not his to take, and saved the dessert for the evening.<sup>52</sup>

Heman Gibbs purchased the land rights of Mexican War veteran Henry Cosmitz of the First Pennsylvania Regiment, whose payment for volunteering for service in the war was 160 acres of public land or \$100 in scrip at 6 percent interest. The Native American treaties of 1837, which ceded the land between the Mississippi and the St. Croix rivers, enabled men to purchase property for \$1.25 per acre. Heman probably purchased Cosmitz' transferrable warrant for the going rate and chose the southeast eighth of section 17 and the northeast eighth of section 20, Rose Township. Because it was originally a war payment, the certificate was reportedly the only land claim in Ramsey County which had been signed by President Millard Fillmore.<sup>53</sup>

That fall, Heman and Jane moved into a log-walled and sod-roofed half-underground dugout shanty near the eastern edge of their 160-acre parcel. Gibbs had learned this type of dugout construction in Wisconsin when he was employed as a lead miner. Because of these dugouts, miners were known as "badgers" in the local slang and probably served as the inspiration for the state's collegiate mascot.<sup>54</sup> The shanty, which was their home for nearly five years, originally had a

wood chimney; when the chimney burned, family tradition holds that Heman walked to Stillwater to purchase a stovepipe joint to replace it.<sup>55</sup> This home was certainly not a pioneer's "log cabin"; as a biographer noted, "Here, with a camp stove, some rudely constructed stools, a table and couch, with plenty of food, good health and a stout heart, [Jane] began housekeeping."<sup>56</sup> According to the Gibbs children, this original log shanty, or "soddy," could still be identified by the depression in the ground near the front porch of the new house.<sup>57</sup> An archaeological dig during the summer of 1995 confirmed the children's recollections when it located what was left of the 10 x 12 foot dwelling. The excavation revealed that the Gibbsses were an average, lower middle-class, agricultural family whose possessions (coins, a watch, ceramics, well-crafted metal goods) showed the region's connections to a significant worldwide trading network.

The land was divided approximately in half by the east-west running St. Paul-St. Anthony road (now Larpenteur Avenue). Also running through the property was a Dakota trail which ran from the Minnesota River to Forest Lake. It is unknown whether the Gibbsses deliberately decided to locate near such a trail, but it brought many familiar visitors to their home, especially in the early years. Some of the members of Cloud Man's band recognized their childhood friend and resumed their protective behavior toward Jane with an offer of a quarter-section of land near her old home at Lake Harriet. They teased Jane about her choice of Heman, a man more than thirteen years her senior, as a husband. Apparently, Heman was starting to lose his hair, and the Mdewakanton jokingly named him "Prairie on Top of his Head."<sup>58</sup> Since the Gibbsses were the only white settlers in the western part of Rose Township for a few years, the Indians' visits probably provided much-needed social interaction for Jane, who soon regained her fluency in the Dakota language.

In 1854 and 1855, Gibbs built a one-room frame house with a half-loft, cutting the beams, plates, sills, and studs for the house from logs gathered at the nearby tamarack swamps. By this time,

Jane had lost at least one, and possibly two children in infancy. Soon afterward, Jane and Heman adopted Ida Winona Smith, whose mother was a friend of Jane's and was unable to keep the child. Many later accounts never mention the adopted child as a family member, an omission which must have hurt Jane deeply. It is hard to believe that during the next ten years, while still in the one-room house, Jane bore four more children: Abigail Jane, born on March 10, 1855; Willie Wallace, born April 25, 1858; Frank Henry, born December 14, 1862; and Lillie Belle (author of *Little Bird*), born December 25, 1865. Ida, Abbie, Frank, and Lillie Belle grew to adulthood and all but Ida married; eight-year-old Willie died in 1867 as a result of smoke inhalation which occurred while fighting a prairie fire.

That same year after the fire and Willie's tragic death, Heman enlarged the house. He attached a small guest room and parlor to the first floor, and removed the roof of the existing building to add a second story. This gave the family space for four bedrooms upstairs. Reportedly, the Gibbs farmhouse was built to look like those in Galena and the Gibbs family home in Vermont.<sup>59</sup> But actually, it was like any number of rural ell- and tee-shaped, balloon-frame rural farmhouses built in Minnesota in the 1860s and 1870s. A back wing, including a summer kitchen and hired-man's quarters, was added in 1873.

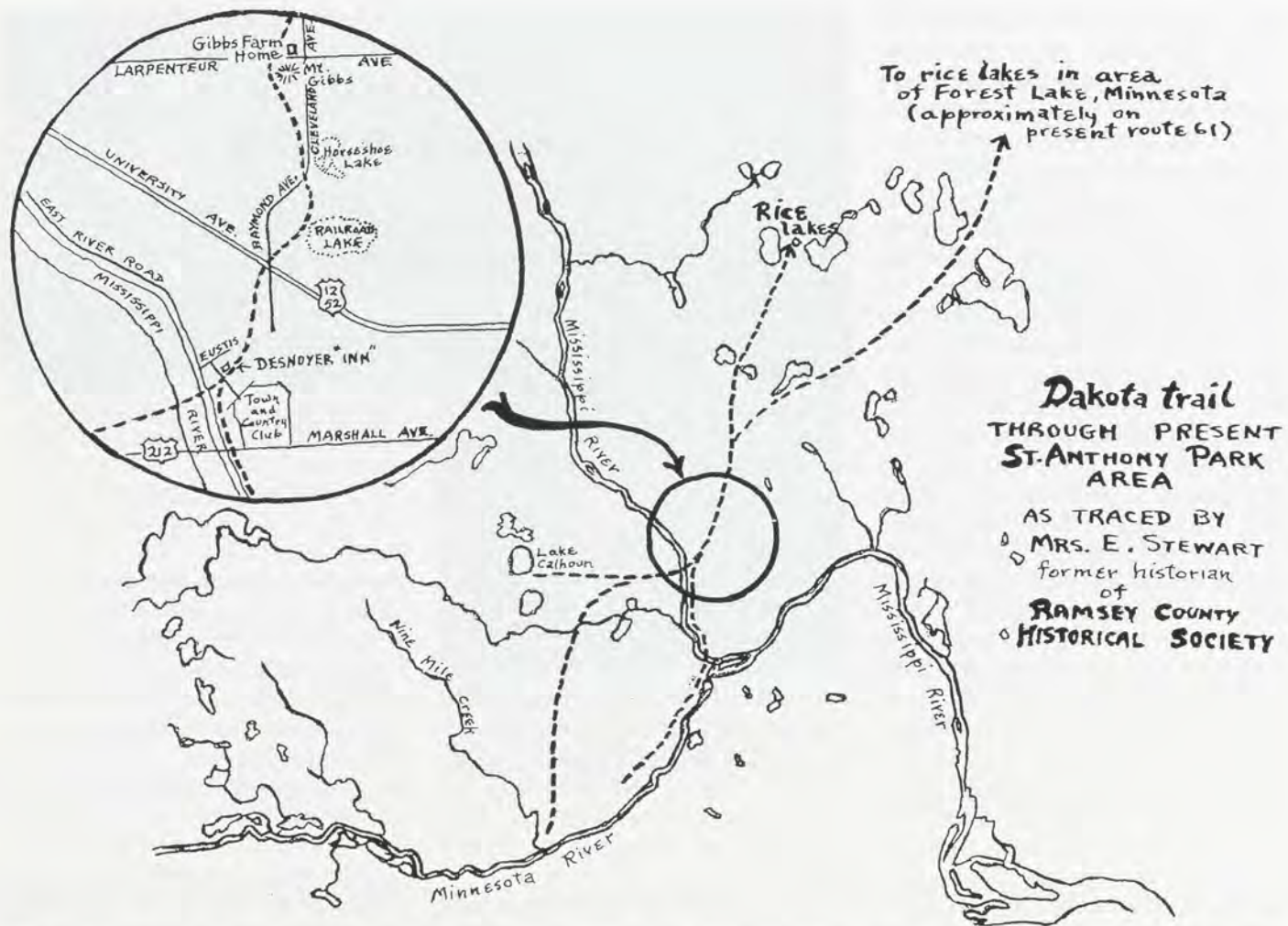
Like many nineteenth-century pioneer women, Jane Gibbs was chiefly concerned with raising children and keeping house. She made all of the clothes for her family, later owning one of the first sewing machines in the area. She cooked the meals: "Fish were so easily obtained that it might have been fish first, last and always," a biographer wrote. According to family tradition, Jane also was an accurate shot (which her husband was not), and provided the dinner table with some of the plentiful prairie chickens, quail, ducks, and geese from the area. Wild fruit such as strawberries, raspberries, dewberries, plums, and grapes, were gathered from the surrounding woods and fields.<sup>60</sup> Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte remembered drinking the bitter root beer

her mother made out of yellow dock, black root, cherrybark, dandelion root and parched corn, a folk "medicine" to give the body a "cleaning out," often in the spring of the year.<sup>61</sup>

Along with many other settlers in rural St. Paul in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Gibbsses were market gardeners, known more commonly today as truck farmers. According to a biographer, "Mr. Gibbs found a ready market at Fort Snelling and St. Paul for all the vegetables he could raise, and he carried them there by the wagonload, and would frequently be gone all day."<sup>62</sup> Heman also apparently had a "vegetable route," because his account book regularly lists payments from the same people in the same order each week. These farms, characterized in an historical study as "urban fringe farms," were popular with settlers in such outlying areas as Rose Township because vegetable crops did not require large plots of land to be profitable. Heman Gibbs's 1876 account book lists that year's crops as strawberries, apples, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, and carrots.<sup>63</sup>

In the early years at the homestead, the end of the busy summer growing season was usually marked by the yearly journey of Jane's Dakota friends to the rice fields. The Indians, often numbering more than 100, would sometimes camp on the Gibbsses' farm property for three weeks at a time.<sup>64</sup> Abbie Gibbs Fischer remembered that her mother also entertained the Dakota as houseguests; they willingly surrendered their firearms upon entering the house and ate "as she did," seated at the table and using a plate, knife, and fork. "The kitchen floor would be covered with sleeping warriors," Abbie remembered. "Mother knew all their superstitions. One was that if a woman jumped over their feet they could never run fast again. I can well remember my gay, lighthearted mother running and jumping over all their feet in succession as they lay asleep in her kitchen and the way her eyes danced with mi[s]chief as she stood jollying them in Sioux." Abbie remembered these visits fondly, referring to the tribe as "our Indians" and "these good friends."<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes, though, the visits were



**Dakota trail**  
**THROUGH PRESENT**  
**ST. ANTHONY PARK**  
**AREA**  
 AS TRACED BY  
 MRS. E. STEWART  
 former historian  
 of  
**RAMSEY COUNTY**  
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The Indian Trail that led from Fort Snelling to the rice lakes near Forest Lake, as traced by Mrs. Ethel Stewart, former historian of the Ramsey County Historical Society. Encircled is the portion of the trail that passed near the present Town and Country Club and continued on to the Gibbs Farm Home on today's Larpenteur Avenue. Ramsey County Historical Society archives.

more trying than joyous. As the years progressed, the group arrived after drinking progressively larger amounts of liquor; when they were sober, Jane would try to exchange Bible stories for the Indian traditions about the Great Spirit. Many years later, a former neighbor recalled, "The Indians were always hungry and many a time Mrs. Gibbs took her baking of bread from the oven to feed them." Jane was a confidante and counselor, the neighbor said, "one of the understanding whites who exerted a fine and wise influence over the unhappy Indians."<sup>66</sup> She also was intent on trading food fairly with her friends. A biographer noted, "When they were persistent in their demands for melons and vegetables, [Jane] exchanged with them for rice, cranberries, and other

things, but always dealt fairly with them and on the principle that the exchange should be no robbery."<sup>67</sup>

The United States government, however, did not seem to follow the same principles of fairness. The Dakota made their last visit to the Gibbs farmstead in May, 1862, just before the beginning of the Dakota Conflict. "They were sullen and despondent," Abbie Gibbs Fischer said:

Well do I remember the dramatic gestures of their chief as he eloquently related their grievances. My mother followed every word he said for she knew how differently they were situated from their former condition. . . Her heart bled for them, her childhood's companions. [The chief] said his warriors could hardly be kept from the warpath

against the whites. That, so far, his counsel had prevailed, but every time they had a council it was harder to control them. That their hunting and fishing grounds were gone, the buffalo disappearing and there was no food for the squaws and papooses. The Great White Father had forgotten them, he knew, for their rations were long overdue and there was hunger in the camp. . . I can still see the sad look on my mother's face as she went from one to the other giving each a big, hot breakfast and trying to cheer them. She could see how they had been wronged. She stood and watched them sadly as they mounted their ponies and vanished down the old trail.<sup>68</sup>

During the Dakota Conflict, biographer Charlotte Whitcomb wrote, "The

Gibbs family remained on their place during the insurrection, though their neighbors all fled to the cities. [Jane] had never hitherto felt afraid of the [Dakota], but now she feared greatly that they would descend upon her family.<sup>69</sup> While it is possible their friendship with the Dakota might have saved the family, the Gibbsses were never truly in danger, since the fighting did not approach St. Paul.

Rose Township had begun to grow rapidly in the years after the conflict; in 1860, the township had 499 citizens; in 1875, the number jumped to 710. The burgeoning population resulted in a third school district for the county, No. 17, which opened in 1871 in the parlor of the Gibbs farmhouse. Two years later, Heman Gibbs donated some of his original land south of the house to the school district. A schoolhouse, costing \$1,000, was built there and remains to this day. Though his teaching days ended in Indiana, Heman obviously remained interested in education, since he became director of the school board in 1881.<sup>70</sup> He also emphasized learning to his family. Karen remembers hearing stories about how Heman would take the entire family to hear lectures at the nearby St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota.<sup>71</sup>

By 1880 the original 160-acre homestead had dwindled to fifty-nine acres.<sup>72</sup> Their neighbors had changed greatly over the years and they saw much less open space around them as population continued to grow. Looking across the street, the family could see the University of Minnesota's Agricultural School and its test plots. Son Frank Gibbs continued to farm the family property and became famous for growing onions. He also started a nursery across the street from the farmhouse, one of many nurseries on Larpenteur Avenue, known for years as the "Avenue of Flowers."

With her family raised and her thoughts probably turning to her family back east, Jane and Lillie traveled to New York in 1890 to visit DeBow relatives. This was actually her second return visit; in 1856, Jane, Heman, and baby Abbie had journeyed to New York after Jane had written to the Batavia postmaster for information about her family. Jane discovered that her parents both had died,



The Gibbs family on the front lawn of their farm home as it looked around 1890. Left to right: Abbie (seated), Lillie, Frank, Jane (seated on a bench that still can be seen in the farm house) and Heman. Ramsey County Historical Society archives.

but that some of her siblings still lived in the area and "had given her up as lost." When she arrived, Jane "was looked upon as one who had come back from the dead."<sup>73</sup> After that visit, Jane and daughters Lillie and Abbie began to correspond with the family. Jane's second homecoming to Batavia was at the urging of her sister, Mary DeBow DePowers.<sup>74</sup> During this trip, Lillie, a talented artist, made many sketches of the scenes around Batavia.

In the years following her final trip to New York, Jane's life is chronicled only by what is mentioned briefly in the letters between Lillie and Abbie, now in possession of the Ramsey County Historical Society. Heman's death in 1891 at the age of seventy-six was probably not a surprise, since he had been in failing health since a stroke in 1873. Because Jane continued to live at the farmhouse, very little about her day-to-day life changed after her husband's death. The farmhouse, of course, remained without electricity and indoor running water; Jane continued to pump water, sew, cook, and make what she needed.<sup>75</sup> She continued to attend services at the nearby St. Anthony Park Congregational Church, though she was still a member of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis.<sup>76</sup>

Interestingly, the letters between Lillie and Abbie reveal much about the Native American influence upon Jane's life. Several letters mention Lillie's attempts to persuade her mother to travel to St. Louis by steamboat to attend the 1904

World's Fair. Lillie wrote, "If mother don't go . . . it means that she can never again see all the sights and scenes that she saw in her youth . . . There is a Sioux Village there and lots and lots of Bucks and Sqaws [sic]." But there was some concern about Jane's health: "I don't think she is taking any risk about getting sick. She was cooking for a crowd last summer and the trip to the [Niagara] Falls [in 1890] didn't use her up."<sup>77</sup>

Jane's relationship with the Indians continued to have a profound influence on her and fascinated everyone she knew or met, as letters from friends and relatives indicated. One of Abbie's friends wrote: "I suppose your mother still sings those Indian songs as an evening past time [sic]. I have told of them more than once and of the early and prosperous life lived so near the growth of such a city."<sup>78</sup> Lillie's daughter Lillian loved visiting her grandmother, partly because no one teased her there, but also because "she had good times, listening to gramma's stories," Lillie wrote.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, this influence is reflected in the daughters' casual use of undefined Dakota terms like "Squaw winter" and "wa-kan" in their letters, which suggest that these terms were used frequently around the Gibbs household.<sup>80</sup> It seems that Jane used Dakota terms much as other immigrant families used their native European languages to describe things which could not be sufficiently described in English.

Still, despite Jane's friendship with

the Native Americans and her sympathy toward them, her daughters displayed some stereotypical and condescending behavior. In one letter Lillie wrote that "Our Indian was here today. Hank had given him a dog skin to tan—paid him \$1.00 for the job—and he did a good job too."<sup>81</sup> It is unclear what she meant by "our Indian." More disturbing is the gossip Lillie related about her "half-breed Sioux" neighbors who reportedly dug up and ate animals which had been buried for a week. She wrote, "Tell mother that I am so mortified that she belonged to such a tribe, that I haven't told any body about it."<sup>82</sup> Despite the harsh tone, this may be evidence that Jane felt that the tribe was more of a family to her than the Stevens family was.

Jane's health had begun to deteriorate after 1905. Her eyes began to fail first; in one letter, Lillie asked Abbie to "read aloud to mother" and later commented, "I hope mother feels better now. If she will only keep away from that cook stove her eyes would soon be well—that's the hottest corner in ten counties and she don't have to cook. . ."<sup>83</sup> After months of declining health, she died in her farm home on May 30, 1910, surrounded by family. She was buried next to her husband in Hillside Cemetery, St. Anthony.

Few of us can imagine living a life like Jane DeBow Gibbs's. She had a pioneering spirit from birth, bravely venturing westward at the age of five with people she barely knew. During the next fifteen years, she lived and traveled throughout the Midwest before settling with husband Heman Gibbs on the land on which she would live for the rest of her life. Among the extraordinary events Jane experienced, her life is most strongly defined by her continuing relationship with the Dakota. Though her years with them were brief compared to her long life span, she continued to use their language and tell stories of her life with them long after her friends' last visit in 1862. We will never really know, but it seems evident that Jane believed her true family was Cloud Man's tribe and her true home was the Minnesota "wilderness."



Heman Gibbs, charcoal portrait by Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte, in the parlor of the Gibbs Farm Museum. Ramsey County Historical Society photograph of the original portrait.



Karen Bluhm with a portrait of her great great grandmother Jane Gibbs. The charcoal portrait was drawn, probably from a photograph, by Lillie LeVesconte when Jane was around sixty. It hangs beside a similar portrait of Heman Gibbs in the parlor of the Gibbs Farm Museum.

### End Notes

1. "Oldest Settler Dies From Old Age," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 31 May 1910.
2. Lillie Belle Gibbs LeVesconte, *Little Bird That Was Caught* (St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society, reprinted, 1968.). The pamphlet, published first in 1954, is sub-

titled "A Story of The Early Years of Jane BeBow [sic] Gibbs by her daughter Lillie Belle Gibbs LeVesconte" and has a preface written by Lillie's son, Lester LeVesconte.

3. The exact date of Jane's birth remains in doubt. Birth certificates in Genessee County, New York, were not recorded until the early 1880s; a search of the local Protestant churches' extensive baptismal records also proved fruitless. Moreover, the 1830 federal census for the area revealed only that Peter DeBow had one female child under five years of age.

Most of the secondary sources agree that Jane was born on November 20. However, the year of birth in these sources ranges from 1826 to 1829. Little Bird never gives a definite date, but either an 1827 or 1828 birth year could be supported depending on how certain passages are interpreted. The question is further confused by the fact that both newspaper obituaries list Jane's age at death as 82, giving her an 1827 birth year; and Jane's gravestone reads "Jane DeBow Gibbs 1829-1910". The date of 1828 seems the most likely because of three sources: Jane's age in the federal census of 1870 (Census, Rose Town, 22 June 1870, roll #9, p. 898); a letter from Lester LeVesconte to Virginia Brainard Kunz, 16 July 1985, to which he attached a family tree; and Minnesota Territorial Pioneers, *Souvenir No. 2*, vol. 2, no. 1 (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1901), 17.

4. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper-Collins, 1990), 128-29; Michael C. Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes toward American Indians 1837-1893* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1985), 10.

5. Coleman, 23-25.

6. David Greene to J.D. Stevens, 4 July 1833, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Papers and Correspondence, Manuscripts Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. The Minnesota Historical Society's collection pertaining to Indian missions in the Upper Midwest was transcribed from the original letters at Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. (Hereinafter, the collection will be referred to as ABCFM Papers.) The collection contains both mailed and unmailed letters, as the note at the bottom of this rather critical letter proves: "The foregoing letter was not shown to Mr. S. . . ."

7. Theodore Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 144.
8. James H. Baker, et al., eds., *Minnesota in Three Centuries 1655–1908*, vol. 2 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1908), 219, 237.
9. David Greene to J.D. Stevens, 15 May 1834, ABCFM Papers
10. David Greene to J.D. Stevens, 20 July 1830, ABCFM Papers.
11. J.D. Stevens to David Greene, 24 May 1834; David Greene to Thomas S. Williamson, 4 March 1834, ABCFM Papers.
12. Interview with Karen Bluhm, St. Paul, Minnesota, 4 October 1995.
13. J.D. Stevens to David Greene, 16 October 1834, ABCFM Papers.
14. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 4–5.
15. J.D. Stevens to David Greene 15 June 1835, ABCFM Papers.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Blegen, 99–101.
18. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 10.
19. Charlotte Whitcomb, "A Pioneer Woman. Romantic Career of a Suburban Resident of St. Paul. . . ." *St. Paul Dispatch*, 26 June 1897. The article appeared the same day in the *Minneapolis Journal* with the title "A Woman Pioneer. Her Story of the Early Days in Minnesota. Mrs. H.R. Gibbs' Reminiscences of Life at the Old Indian Missions of Lake Harriet and Elsewhere."
20. Many of these non-military residents were refugees from Lord Selkirk's settlement at what is now Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. By 1835, 489 people, had migrated to Fort Snelling to escape the colony's dreadful conditions. Many of them continued south to other parts of the Mississippi River valley. See Marcus L. Hansen, *Old Fort Snelling 1819–1858* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1958), 188–89. For estimates of the Dakota population, see Edward J. Lettermann, *From Whole Log to No Log* (Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1970), i, 53.
21. Thomas S. Williamson to David Greene, 18 June 1835, ABCFM Papers.
22. Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 52.
23. J. D. Stevens to David Greene, 15 June 1835, ABCFM Papers. For more information about Samuel and Gideon Pond, see Gary Clayton Anderson's introduction to Samuel W. Pond's book *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota As They Were in 1834*, (1908; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986); and Theodore Blegen, "The Pond Brothers," *Minnesota History* 15 (September 1934): 273–281.
24. Baker, et al., 242–43.
25. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 10.
26. The Mdewakanton Dakota are from one of four tribes of the Santee (eastern) Dakota. They were called "Nadowessie" or "Nadowaysioux" by their Ojibway [Chippewa] enemies and also by the earliest French traders, who shortened this name to Sioux. The Mdewakanton preferred the name Dakota, which means "alliance of friends." The center of their world was Lake Mille Lacs, known to them as Mdewakan, or "mystery lake" (also, "spirit lake"). Thus, they are the Mdewakanton Dakota, or people of the mystery lake. Five villages of Mdewakanton had been established near the conjunction of the St. Peter's [Minnesota] and Mississippi rivers by the 1830s: Cloud Man's Village, near Lake Harriet; Kaposia, near present-day South St. Paul; and proceeding west along the Minnesota River from today's Long Meadow Lake in eastern Bloomington, the Black Dog, Good Road, and Shakopee bands. See Lettermann, 11–15, 53; and Virginia Brainard Kunz, *Saint Paul: The First 150 Years* (St. Paul: The Saint Paul Foundation, 1991), 4–6.
27. Lettermann, 57.
28. J.D. Stevens to David Greene, 15 June 1835, ABCFM Papers; Meyer, 48; David A. Lanegran and Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Lake District of Minneapolis: A History of the Calhoun-Isles Neighborhood* (St. Paul: Living Historical Museum, 1979), 5–6.
29. Lucy Leavenworth Wilder Morris, *Old Rail Fence Corners: Frontier Tales Told by Minnesota Pioneers* (1914; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976), 107.
30. Whitcomb.
31. J.D. Stevens to David Greene, 15 June 1835, 1 March 1836, ABCFM Papers; Whitcomb. Though Stevens doesn't mention any of these men by name, Taliaferro's daughter Mary, born in 1828, was sent to the "Lake Harriet Mission School," according to his papers. See Helen McCann White, *Guide to a Microfilm Edition of the Lawrence Taliaferro Papers* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966), 6. It is also possible that Seth Eastman's daughter Mary Nancy (Wenona), a granddaughter of Cloud Man born in 1831, also attended this school. See Rena Newmann Coen, "Preface: Mary Henderson Eastman, A Biographical Essay," in Mary Henderson Eastman, ed. Coen, *Dahcotah: Life and Legends of the Sioux* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 1995), xiv–xv.
32. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 10; J.D. Stevens to David Greene, 1 March 1836, ABCFM Papers.
33. S.R. Riggs to David Greene, 24 October 1838; Thomas S. Williamson to David Greene, 8 November 1838; J.D. Stevens to David Greene, 20 November 1838, all ABCFM Papers.
34. Thomas S. Williamson to David Greene, 4 May 1836, ABCFM Papers.
35. Pond, 77.
36. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 13, 16–17.
37. *Ibid.*, 15–16; Baker, et al., 164, 167–169.
38. By this time, Gideon Pond had returned to Lake Harriet from Lac qui Parle. Whitcomb.
39. Hole-in-the-Day was chief of the Mille Lacs band of Chippewa. See William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, vol. 1 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1921), 157.
40. Morris, 107–108.
41. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 16–22; Meyer, 63; David Greene to Samuel W. Pond, 14 August 1839 and Samuel W. Pond to David Greene, 14 November 1839, both ABCFM Papers.
42. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 20.
43. *Ibid.*, 22; S. Riggs to ABCFM, [March 1869], ABCFM Papers. A chronologically different account of the family's tenure in Winona is provided in "White Family Lived on Latsch Island 10 Years Before First Settler Came to Winona in 1848," *Winona Republican-Herald*, 25 June 1927, 5. This article asserts that the family first lived in a hut on Latsch Island, opposite Winona; then moved to a log cabin on the "mainland" to be closer to the tribe; and then moved to Holmes Landing (Fountain City) in Wisconsin Territory. The article has many inaccurate statements, and the ultimate source of its information is not indicated. However, this is the only source which refers to Jane as "Matilda Jane"; great-great-granddaughter Karen Bluhm remembered hearing that and indi-

*Jane Gibbs to page 27.*

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### Memorials

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Dr. Swift Black  
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### Jane Gibbs from page 16.

cated that it was family tradition to refer to people by their middle names. Nonetheless, Jane DeBow Gibbs apparently never referred to herself as anything other than "Jane."

44. William V. Pooley, *The Settlement of Illinois from 1830-1850*, Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, No. 63 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1908), 467.

45. S. Riggs to ABCFM, [March 1869], ABCFM Papers; LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 23.

46. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 23.

47. Edward D. Neill, *History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul* (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1881), 268; Kurt E. Leichtle, "The Gibbs Family and Farm in Perspective," March 1982, Ramsey County Historical Society, St. Paul, 3. (Hereinafter, Ramsey County Historical Society will be referenced as RCHS.)

48. LeVesconte, *Little Bird*, 24.

49. Frank Gibbs, interview by Ethel Stewart, 23 May 1946, RCHS.

50. J. Fletcher Williams, *History of St. Paul to 1875*, (1876; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1983), 213. This book was originally published as *A History of the City of St. Paul*.

51. Williams, 207

52. Interview with Karen Bluhm.

53. For more information on the Indian treaties, see Baker, et al., 278. The land warrant is described in William L. Cavert, "Story of a Pioneer Farmer," *Ramsey County His-*

*tory Magazine* 1 (Spring 1964).

54. Leichtle.

55. Frank Gibbs interview.

56. Whitcomb.

57. "Historical Society to Dedicate Farm Home Museum," *Rose Tribune*, 3 December 1954, 4.

58. Whitcomb.

59. "Historical Society to Dedicate Farm Home Museum."

60. Whitcomb.

61. LeVesconte, "Childhood Days," 1870, RCHS.

62. Whitcomb.

63. Kendra Dillard, "Urban Fringe Farming," *Ramsey County History Magazine* 20 (1985).

64. Whitcomb.

65. Morris, 108-109.

66. "Gibbs House-Historical Interest of Site," n.d., RCHS.

67. Whitcomb.

68. Morris, 109-110.

69. Whitcomb.

70. Neill, 260; Roseville MN: The Story of its Growth (Roseville, MN: Roseville Historical Society, 1988), 23.

71. Interview with Karen Bluhm

72. David A. Lanegran, *St. Anthony Park: Portrait of a Community* (St. Paul: St. Anthony Park Foundation, 1987), 34.

73. Whitcomb; Frank Gibbs interview.

74. Mary DePowers to Abbie Gibbs, n.d., RCHS.

75. "Chronology of the Gibbs Farm &

Family," n.d., RCHS.

76. Whitcomb.

77. Lillie LeVesconte to Abbie Fischer, 20 May 1904, RCHS.

78. Ray Pook to Abbie Fischer, 18 April 1905, RCHS.

79. Lillie LeVesconte to Abbie Fischer, 2 March 1909, RCHS.

80. Lillie LeVesconte to Abbie Fischer, 4 March 1906 and 19 August 1908, RCHS.

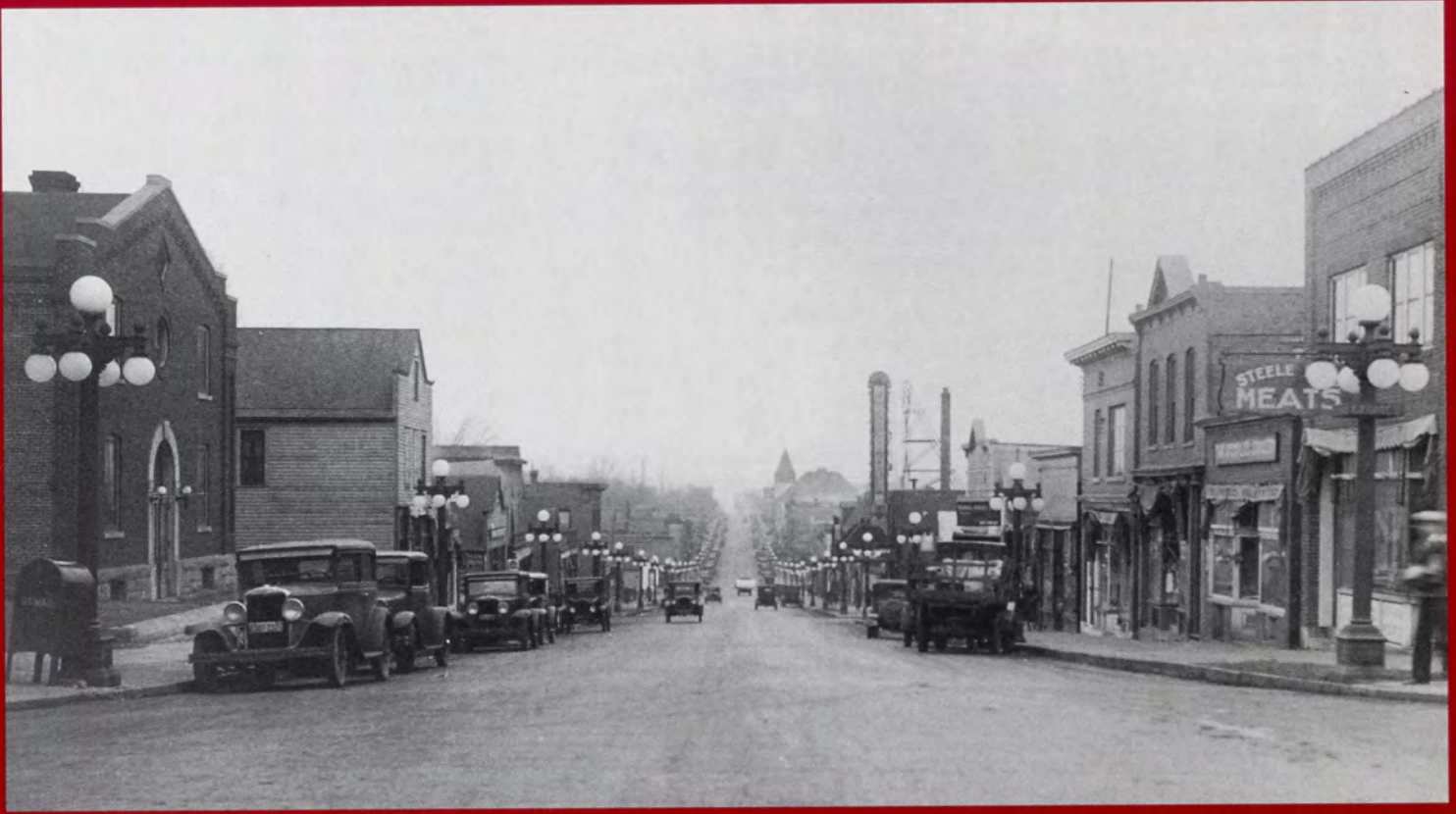
81. Lillie LeVesconte to Abbie Fischer, 22 March 1910, RCHS.

82. Lillie LeVesconte to Abbie Gibbs, 29 October 1896, RCHS.

83. Lillie LeVesconte to Abbie Fischer, 2 July 1909, RCHS.

*Deanne Zibell Weber, a St. Paul resident, earned a master's degree in Medieval and Renaissance history from Duke University. As a child, she had first-hand experience in modern market gardening, helping her grandparents sell produce at their vegetable stand on the northwest corner of County Road B and Snelling Avenue in Roseville. Her grandfather also served as the custodian at the Gibbs School for a short time. The Ramsey County Historical Society wishes to thank the Patrick and Aimée Butler Family Foundation for its support in the research and writing of this article.*





*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

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