

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

**Spring, 1998**

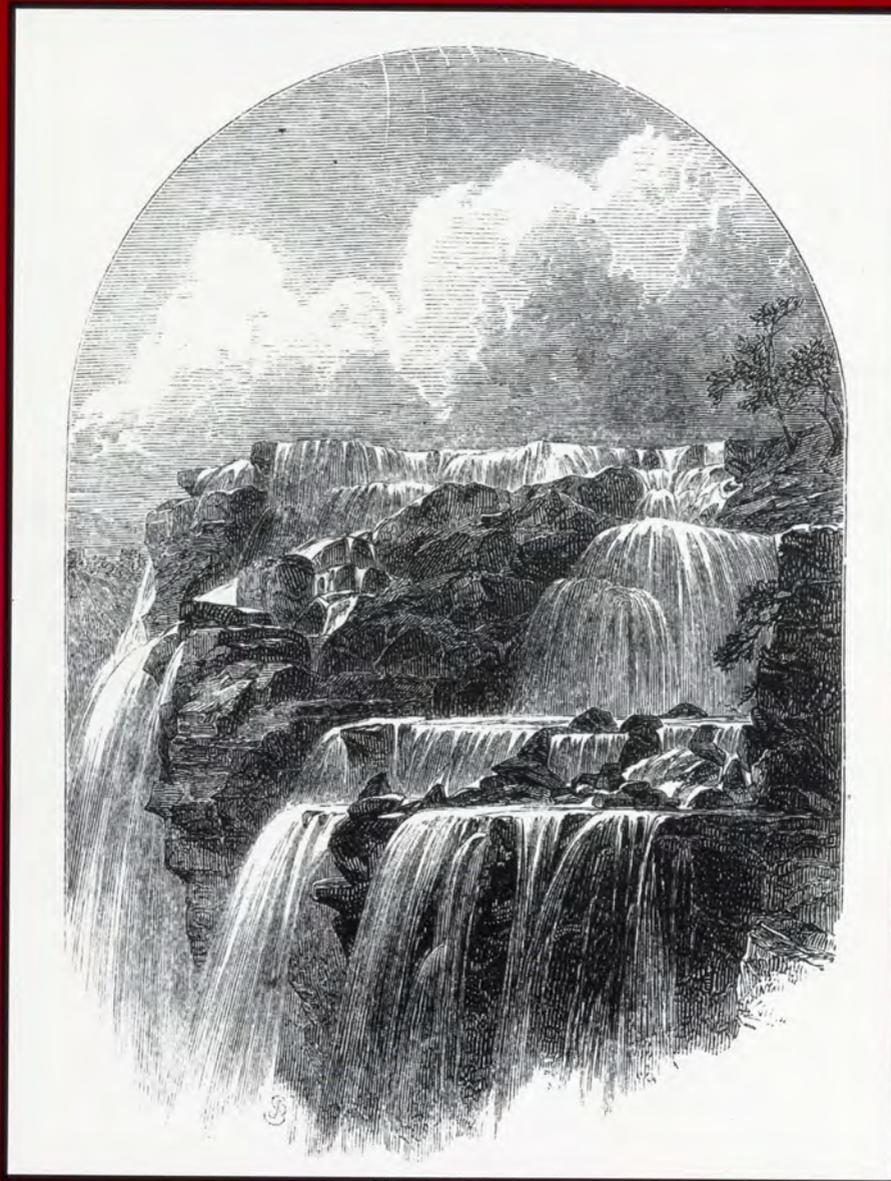
Volume 33, Number 1

Westminster Junction—  
Turn-of-the-Century  
Railroad 'Highway'

Page 9

*Stairway to the Abyss—*

*The Diverting Story of Cascade Creek—Page 4*



*Cascade Creek, from Harper's New Monthly Magazine, in 1860. The creek was named after a waterfall that was described in early travel literature about the St. Paul area. This engraving probably depicts the namesake cascade. The waterfall, now dry, can be seen today along the Mississippi bluffs near Colborne Street. See the article beginning on page 4. Photo from the Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

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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. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**wo themes run through this spring issue of *Ramsey County History*. One theme is engineering; the other is people. Greg Brick's lead article, which tells the story of Cascade Creek, is another in our St. Paul Underground series, which was suggested some years ago by the late Reuel Harmon. Both this article and that by Andrew Schmidt on the local railroad area known as Westminster Junction represent historical research into little-known sources of St. Paul engineering and transportation history

The theme of people plays a secondary role in the stories of Cascade Creek and Westminster Junction, but this theme is foremost in Jean Hanna's account of her mother, Rose Hanna, and her journey from Palestine to St. Paul in the 1950s; in Joe Lepsche's article on the history and people of the Upper Levee; and in Charlotte McKendree Wright Lewis's reminiscence of the Fourth of July Extravaganza on Grand Hill. These writers convey vividly the enduring diversity of the area's people and how their individual stories are today a part of the larger story of St. Paul and Ramsey County.

*John M. Lindley*  
Chair, Editorial Committee

# The Story of Rose Hanna and Her Journey From Old-World Palestine to St. Paul

## *Rose Hanna as told to Jean Hanna*

When I was eighteen years old, I was living in Jerusalem, Palestine, and working in a doctor's office. One day I went with my cousins to have a cup of Turkish coffee at a local coffee shop. It is traditional to have your cup "read" to determine your fortune. When my cup was read, I was told that I would, in the near future, cross a huge body of water. We laughed about such an impossible event. To my amazement, however, at the age of thirty I was indeed crossing the Atlantic with my husband, his sister, and our three children. Our destination would be St. Paul.

I was born in Jifna, a village near Ramallah, a few miles north of Jerusalem. My parents also were born there, and we trace our Palestinian ancestry back hundreds of years. Our nationality was Palestinian Arab and we spoke the Arabic language; our religious faith is Christianity. I have fond memories of a land that is filled with historic and biblical significance.

The second eldest of four children, I was born in 1926. My name in Arabic is Wardeh, which means "Rose" in English. My parents, Ibrahim and Regina Awwad, were farmers and I grew up enjoying the fruits and vegetables we raised on the land we owned—oranges the size of grapefruit, figs, apricots, dates, lemons—and the acres of olive trees that were harvested to make olive oil. Although my parents wore the more traditional Arab clothing, I wore western clothes, due partly to the influence of the British who, from 1918 to 1948, held a mandate over Palestine.

As a girl, politics meant little to me. Not until I moved from Jifna to Jerusalem did I see firsthand some of the political unrest. Until then I had known only the peaceful coexistence among people whose religious beliefs differed. Most of the people in Palestine were Muslim, but

there also were Jews and Christians of many denominations—Greek, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Armenian. But the 1940s brought many changes to the Palestine of my ancestry as the Jewish people struggled to return to the land where we had lived for centuries.

In October, 1947, I married Najib Hanna, who had been born and reared in

When war broke out, my husband and I were forced, in May of 1948, to flee our home of six months, leaving behind all our possessions, including our wedding presents. We expected to return home, but the state of Israel was created that month and when we arrived in Amman, Jordan, we were Palestinian refugees, a status I never believed could befall us.

My husband struggled to find work in Jordan. Three of our children were born there: our eldest son, Nabil, in 1949; our only daughter, Najwa, in 1951, and our son, Nadin, in 1955. In 1953 my husband applied for training in administration and forestry practices under the auspices of Point IV, a United States government agency. He was accepted and came to the United States to attend the University of Minnesota at its St. Paul campus. Since he was a devout Christian, he looked for a church to attend and found St. Matthew's Episcopal Church during one of his daily walks through the St. Anthony Park neighborhood. There he became friends with another church member, Dr. Robert Hugh Monahan, who took a special interest in my husband's situation as a displaced person. My husband asked Dr. Monahan if it would be possible to sponsor us as immigrants to the United States under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. Dr. Monahan's response was favorable. A committee of the church vestry was appointed and for the next three years these committee members oversaw and helped expedite that sponsorship. Their responsibilities were to provide job assurances, guarantee housing, and provide railroad fare from New York to St. Paul. The United Nations Relief Agency for Refugees paid for our transportation from Jordan to New York.

In May of 1956, eight years after losing our Palestinian homeland, my husband and I, his sister, and our three chil-



*Rose Hanna in 1995. All photographs with the article are from the author.*

Jerusalem. He had a degree in agriculture and forestry administration and could speak and write Arabic, Greek, and English. We moved to the "twin cities" of Ramieh and Lydah, west of Jerusalem. Within six months the British ended their mandate and Palestine's destiny was now in the hands of the United Nations. The country was to be divided into two sections, one for the Jewish people, the other for the indigenous Palestinian people. It was a terrible and stressful time for us.



Wedding day, 1947. Najib Hanna is second from left.

dren boarded the Greek liner "Olympia" for America. I actually was going to cross a huge body of water after all. It was extremely difficult saying good-bye to family and friends, but I was going on faith and trust in my husband who had promised that life would be much better for us in America. We had lost so much and had encountered so many hardships between 1948 and 1956 that I, too, thought the future could only be better.

Traveling with young children aged six and four years and thirteen months for

fifteen days aboard ship was not easy, especially because of the need for clean diapers (disposable diapers weren't available then). When we arrived in New York on June 4, 1956, our sponsor's brother and his wife met us and took us to their home. Seeing the badly stained diapers, our hostess took them to be washed. When they were returned, they were pure white again. I was amazed. I asked how she managed this. She said she used bleach. I turned to my husband and said, "I think I am going to like this country."

Two days later, on June 6, 1956, we arrived at St. Paul's Union Depot where we were met by members of St. Matthew's Church. They took us to our first home, an apartment above a small grocery store on Eustis Street in Lauderdale. My husband found employment as a chemist with 3M and my sister-in-law went to work at West Publishing Company. Since there was not a Greek Orthodox Church nearby for us to attend, we made St. Matthew's our permanent church home.

In September, 1958, we moved into our own home in the Como Park neighborhood. Our fourth child, George, was born in January, 1959. The house had three bedrooms and a large yard and here all four of my children were raised. They attended Chelsea Heights Elementary School and graduated from Murray Junior and Senior High School in St. Anthony Park. My husband was fond of the public education system and wanted our children to seek knowledge and higher education.

One of the biggest events in our new life was the day we became naturalized American citizens at a ceremony in the Federal Courts Building (now Landmark Center) in downtown St. Paul in October, 1961. (George was automatically a citizen because he had been born in the United States.) My husband was asked to give a speech at the reception after the ceremony. Now he decided it also would be best for us to change our names. I was disappointed, as these were our cultural names, but it was a way of making it easier for us to assimilate into the midwestern culture of our new home. His name was changed from Najib to Jim; mine from Wardeh to Rose; my eldest son from Nabil to Bill; my daughter from Najwa to Jean; and my sister-in-law from Badia to Betty.

Life was different for us in Minnesota, and I missed my family back in the Middle East. We tried hard to assimilate, to learn about our neighbors, and to share our culture with them. One of the hardest adjustments was the change from a warm, semi-dry climate to Minnesota's four-season weather, with its longest season being winter. Now, however, I love winter and I wouldn't move to any other part of the country. I had to learn English



*The Hannas' first home in America, an apartment above a grocery store in the northern St. Paul suburb of Lauderdale.*

rather quickly, since my children were beginning to forget their native Arabic. My husband and I spoke to them in Arabic at home so they at least would understand the language even though they chose not to speak it anymore.

On weekends my husband would pile all of us into the car and we would explore areas near our home. We visited the state

Capitol, the Minnesota State Fair, the Como Park Zoo, and the Minneapolis lakes.

In November, 1962, after having lived in the United States for only six years, my husband suddenly was diagnosed with acute leukemia and in January, 1963, he passed away. I was left with the responsibility of fulfilling his dream and raising

our four young children alone. They were thirteen, eleven, eight, and three years old. Our minister at St. Matthews Church, the Reverend D. S. Pitts, and his family became a second family for us. He asked if I would remain in St. Paul or return home. I reminded him that I had no home to go back to, as we had lost everything. My main goal was to keep my family together, and, with the grace of God, give them the opportunity to grow and become educated, my husband's and my dream.

First I had to learn to drive and get a driver's license so I could be independent and self-reliant. Although I had wonderful neighbors and friends who helped us in many ways, this was my family and my responsibility. When my youngest child started school, I took on some part-time work for a dear neighbor who had her own catering business. My chief task was to cut up and arrange fruit baskets on large lighted trays filled with ice for wedding receptions. The fruit tray always was the center of attraction at the receptions.

My love of cooking and baking expanded in many ways. I found that I not only was cooking for my family, but for many other people who hired me to cater for special occasions. I even taught Middle Eastern cooking classes through the Community Adult Education Program sponsored by the St. Paul Public School system.

By the early 1970s, Middle Eastern foods were becoming popular items in the American diet. My children would say, "Mom, you don't have to make yogurt anymore. They sell it in the stores now." But I've always made my own yogurt and my own pocket bread. My children's school friends would ask them to trade sandwiches because I made my children's sandwiches with my homemade pocket bread, which was unusual at that time.

I tried to stay involved in my children's activities and to provide the support they needed as they were growing up. The key ingredients, I truly believe, in raising happy, successful children are love and self-sacrifice. I provided the necessities in life, and gave my children lots of love and encouragement along the way. As soon as they were old enough, they took on part-time jobs to supplement our family income. I tried to instill in



*A house of their own in the Como Park neighborhood of St. Paul.*

them the importance of working and studying hard. They also found time for sports. I grew into a true baseball and hockey fan from going to their games.

My husband's greatest desire was that our children would go on to higher education. In keeping with his wish, I encouraged them to do so. All four attended the University of Minnesota. Their college educations had a financial impact on our family, but they were a worthwhile investment. They all have graduated from college, are successfully employed and doing well. We remain close, and I am proud of them.

During the years from 1970 to 1980, when they were in college, we became acquainted with other Arab Americans and with students from Middle Eastern countries. We befriended many and shared with them our own experiences in the United States. I helped organize an annual Palestinian dinner with traditional Middle Eastern foods. Homesick students appreciated this. They would thank me, and call me their "adopted American Arab mother."

At the age of forty-nine, I was diagnosed with colon cancer. What a shock! Fortunately, with good doctors, my faith in God, successful surgery, and two years of chemotherapy, I emerged with a clean bill of health. It has been twenty-five years since then and I have had no recurrence. I thank God each and every day.

A public and volunteer event I have participated in throughout the years, and that has allowed me to share my cultural background with the American community in which I live, is the Festival of Nations. The festival, sponsored by the International Institute of Minnesota, is held in St. Paul. Our Palestinian community has a café booth where we sell shawima and falafel sandwiches, hummus dip with pocket bread, spinach pies (pastry filled with spinach, onions, and spices, then baked), and sweets such as baklawah (baklava). We also take part in the cultural booth, bazaar booth, and folk dancing with our Palestinian dance troop. It is satisfying to share our heritage with people who come from all over the surrounding five-state area.

Two of my children have married and I have two delightful grandchildren who

are interested in our ethnic background and my cooking and baking. They insist on eating only pocket bread and the special sweets I make.

Many have asked me through the years if I wished to visit my homeland, but the injustices visited upon the Palestinians caused me such anguish that I had preferred to remember the land and the people as it was before 1948. Then my son Bill suggested that if I wanted to visit my family, he would take me there so he

passed away. Now only my younger brother and I are left of my generation in my family. In 1973 I sponsored him, his wife and family in emigrating to the United States. They now live in Florida. All four of his children have graduated from universities and are doing well.

The United States is truly a land of many opportunities. It is rich in the diversity created by the many immigrants who have enhanced this land called America.

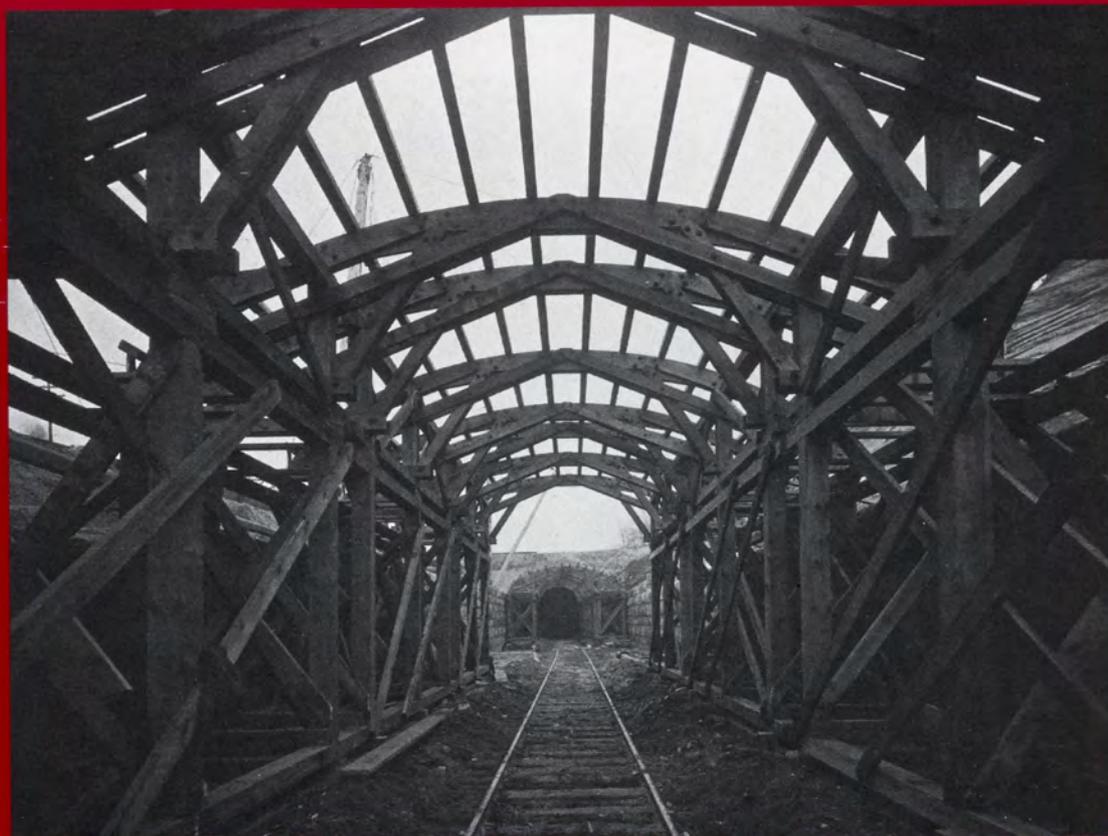


*A visit to the state Capitol, ca. 1958.*

could meet his cousins. I decided I must take my son back so he could learn about the culture and traditions we left behind. In 1995 I made my first trip back to the Middle East in almost forty years.

It was an amazing trip. I had changed much, as had the relatives and friends I left behind, but after a few hours it seemed as though we had never been separated. My son felt an immediate closeness to his cousins. I saw my brother, who was ailing, and my 106-year-old uncle. A year after I returned to St. Paul, they both

*This article is based on oral interviews Jean Hanna has conducted with her mother throughout the past twenty years. The author also has based part of the article on a file she discovered which contains correspondence between her father and his sponsor, Dr. Robert H. Monahan.*



*Centers for the flat arch of the Westminster tunnel. This view, taken on April 9, 1886, is looking toward the south. Photo courtesy of the National Railway Historical Society, North Star Chapter. See article beginning on page 9.*

**R.C.H.S.**

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

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