

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

In the Beginning:
The Geological Forces
That Shaped Ramsey County

Page 4

Spring, 1999

Volume 34, Number 1

Special 150th Anniversary Issue
Ramsey County And Its Territorial Years

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"St. Paul in Minnesota," watercolor, 1851, by Johann Baptist Wengler. Oberösterreichisches Landes Museum, Linz, Austria. Photo: F. Gangl. Reproduced by permission of the museum. Two years after the establishment of Minnesota Territory, St. Paul as its capital was a boom town, "... its situation is as remarkable for beauty as healthiness as it is advantageous for trade," Fredrika Bremer wrote in 1853, and the rush to settlement was on. See "A Short History of Ramsey County" and its Territorial Years, beginning on page 8.

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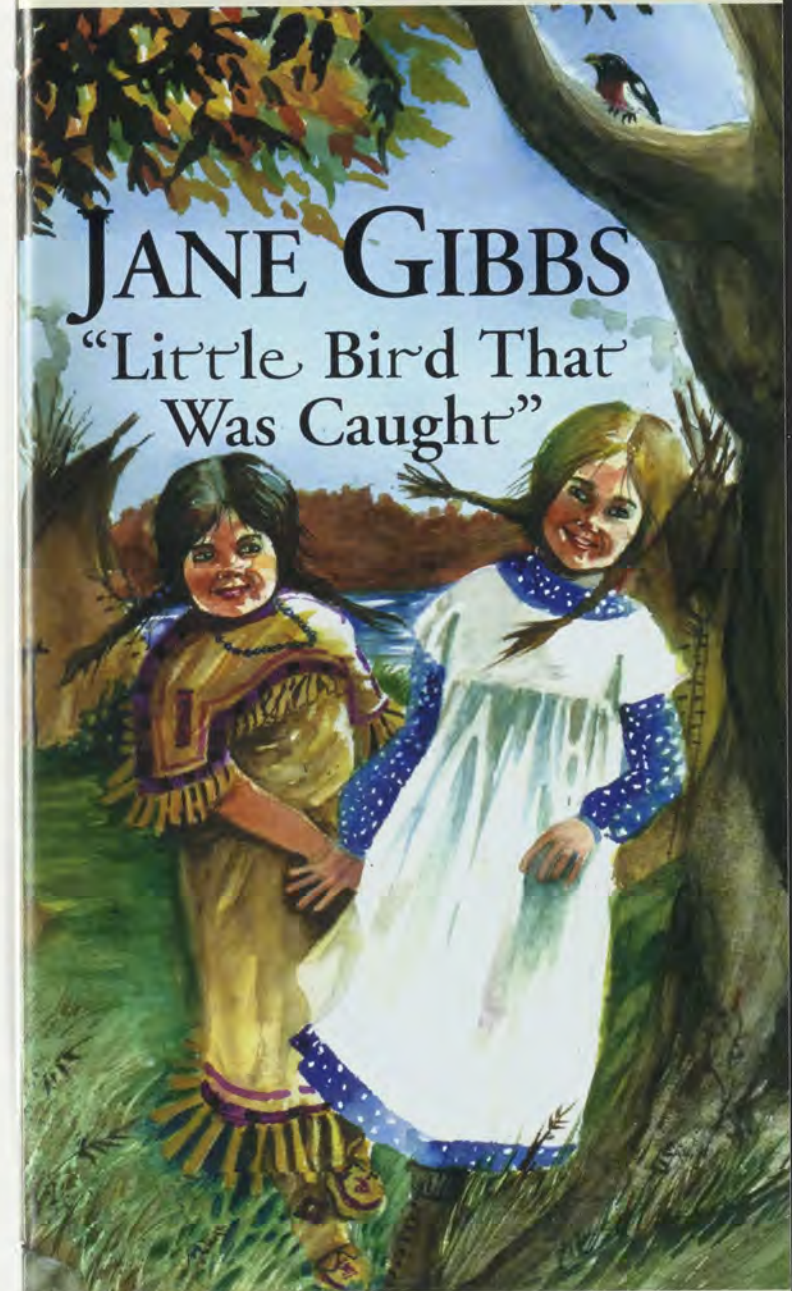
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PUBLISHED BY THE RAMSEY COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Short History of Ramsey County

The Territorial Years and the Rush to Settlement

The ninth of April in 1849 was a pleasant Monday, David Lambert recalled for the *Minnesota Pioneer* some weeks later. Toward evening, however, clouds gathered and by dark a violent storm swept into the small settlement perched on the bluffs above the Mississippi. Suddenly, during a lull in the wind, a steamboat engine could be heard. A flash of lightning illuminated the *Dr. Franklin No. 2* just rounding the bend of the river a mile below St. Paul. It was the first boat of the season and it bore the news that the bill for the organization of Minnesota Territory had passed the Senate on March 3 and had become law.

It had been a long wait, and the region that became Minnesota had a long history as part of both the Old Northwest Territory and the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Now the rush to explore and eventually to settle it was on.

In 1805 Lieutenant Zebulon Pike had been sent north from St. Louis to explore the headwaters of the Mississippi. Late in September of that year, he landed on the island at the mouth of the Minnesota River that is named for him. Here he

signed a treaty with the Mdewakanton bands of the Dakota nation, led by Little Crow, who ceded 155,520 acres of land along the Mississippi and Minnesota (then known as St. Peter's River) to the United States government as a site for military posts.

For the next forty and more years, the history of Ramsey County would go hand-in-hand with the history of St. Paul, its county seat. Not until after the territorial years would the history of county and city move along separate, even though similar, paths.

Pike knew he had not entered a uninhabited wilderness. Before he arrived, the flags of other nations had flown over the region that became Ramsey County: the Spanish, the French, the British each had claimed the land through exploration or conquest. It was the Dakotas who for centuries had lived in the region and had joined, first with the French, then with the British, in the rich fur trade. As was their custom, the Dakota bands did not establish permanent settlements. The territory that included Ramsey County was for them a vast trading area, a frequent

halting place for their war and hunting parties, a great "pantry" teeming with game and fish, a place to establish their summer villages. Their presence still marks the region around modern Ramsey County. Mendota at the confluence of the Minnesota and the Mississippi, and the mysterious Red Rock at Newport, down the Mississippi from St. Paul, are still known today as sacred gathering places where the Dakotas held ceremonies and councils. They established five villages in the region: Cloud Man's village at Lake Calhoun, the Black Dog, Good Road and Shakopee communities along the Minnesota, and Kaposia, located first on the east bank of the Mississippi below Dayton's Bluff and later on the west bank at today's South St. Paul.

An interesting picture has been left of Kaposia as it was when Pike visited. The village numbered about 200 men, women, and children, including some seventy warriors. Their homes were comfortable, with palisaded walls of tamarack poles and roofs of brush covered with bark, its lodges set up against the bluffs for protection. Their chief, Little Crow, one of sev-

1803: Louisiana Purchase negotiated between the United States and France under Napoleon, freeing land west of the Mississippi to eventual settlement.

1805: Lieutenant Zebulon Pike is sent to explore the headwaters of the Mississippi. He signs a treaty with the Dakota ceding to the United States government 155,520 acres of land surrounding the confluence of the St. Peter [Minnesota] and Mississippi rivers as a site for military posts.

1819-1820: Fort Snelling is built on a bluff above the meeting of the two rivers.

1823: Scottish, French, and Swiss settlers, forced by floods to leave the Selkirk Colony in present-day Manitoba, arrive to live outside the fort. They will become the first settlers of Ramsey County.

1834: Gideon and Samuel Pond arrive to teach the

Dakota to farm using a plow. They work with Chief Cloud Man's band at Lake Calhoun and develop a dictionary of the Dakota language.

1835: Henry Hastings Sibley takes over the American Fur Company's post at Mendota.

1836: Dred Scott is brought to Fort Snelling, free territory, from Missouri, a slave state. Wisconsin becomes a territory.

1837: A treaty with the Dakota opens to settlement lands in the triangle between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers.

1839: The Selkirk refugees and other squatters around Fort Snelling are expelled from the military reservation. They move down the Mississippi and establish new homes around Fountain Cave. Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant sets up his whiskey hovel near the mouth of the cave.

1840: After another survey of the military reservation, the settlers are expelled again. They take up claims in present-day downtown Paul. Parrant opens another saloon at the Lower Landing at the foot of Jackson Street. The hamlet becomes known as Pig's Eye.

1841: Father Lucien Galtier builds a small chapel on the bluff above the Lower Landing, names it for St. Paul, and asks that the community be named for the chapel. Pig's Eye becomes St. Paul.

1843: Stephen Desnoyer claims land, establishes Halfway House on site today of Town and Country Club. Isaac Rose takes up adjacent land. Rose Township will be named for him.

1844: The first of the Red River ox carts, hauling \$1,400 in furs, complete their journey from Pembina to St. Paul. Benjamin Gervais founds Little Canada in what

eral generations of chiefs bearing that name, lived in a large dwelling, thirty feet long, with two rooms.

With the building of Fort Snelling in 1819–1820 at the junction of the two great rivers, the fur traders and trappers in the area, along with their Indian partners, were joined by the successive waves of white European explorers and traders, but the great region beyond the military reservation, stretching west to the “shining mountains,” remained in the hands of the Indian bands.

Henry Hastings Sibley, who would play such an important part in the history of the northwest, arrived at Mendota in 1834 to take charge of the American Fur Company’s post there. He became the first civil officer in the region when he was appointed justice of the peace in 1838. He built the stone house that still stands at Mendota, played a leading role in the congressional maneuvering that led to the creation of Minnesota Territory, served as the state’s first governor, and led the state’s military forces during the Dakota Conflict of 1862.

By the 1830s, a growing colony of hangers-on had settled illegally in the shadow of the fort, established homes and opened farms. Chief among them were French Canadian, German and Swiss refugees from the Selkirk Colony, near present-day Winnipeg. They would become the first settlers of Ramsey County, and they were the harbingers of an irresistible force, the surge of expansion that was driving hopeful new settlers



Henry H. Sibley in 1849, from an original photograph owned by the Sibley House Association. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

from the eastern seaboard to cross the Alleghenies and head for the vast lands that spread to the Mississippi.

Pressure for Territory

In 1837, the United States government bowed to the pressure to open more terri-

tory to white settlement and negotiated a treaty in which the Dakotas ceded lands in the triangle formed by the Mississippi on the west, the St. Croix River on the east and extending north to present-day Aitken and Crow Wing counties. For the Dakotas themselves, game was disappearing under the pressure of population growth and the “white men’s sicknesses”—measles, smallpox, typhus—were visiting their villages. They were promised annuities in money, goods and provisions, but even before payment began, cabins had sprouted on the bluffs across the Mississippi from Fort Snelling. These were the homes of a few refugees from the Selkirk Colony and a handful of retired fur traders. These earliest of Ramsey County’s residents included Joseph and Amable Turpin, Joseph Rondo, Francis Desire, and Donald McDonald, who claimed land between present-day Marshall Avenue and Interstate 94. McDonald opened a dram shop which he later sold to Stephen Desnoyer for “a barrel of whiskey and two Indian guns.”

A survey in 1839 of the military reservation and its expanding population brought the expulsion of the squatters, who were viewed as a drain on the reservation’s resources, including its scarce timber. The squatters’ protests were futile. In the end, they moved down the Mississippi and resettled around Fountain Cave. Among them were Abraham Perry, a Swiss watchmaker, and Benjamin and Pierre Gervais, who were

later becomes Ramsey County. Louis Robert arrives and opens a warehouse.

1845: New England Yankee entrepreneurs and traders begin to join what has been a French community.

1846: Henry Jackson establishes a trading post and becomes St. Paul’s first postmaster, the post office a two-foot-square box with pigeonholes. Iowa becomes a state.

1847: “Saint Paul Proper” surveyed; land around White Bear Lake surveyed, carved into lots. Harriet Bishop opens a log cabin school on the site today of the downtown St. Paul Library.

1848: Wisconsin becomes a state, its western boundary set at the St. Croix; the triangle between the St. Croix and Mississippi is left in political limbo; the push for territorial status for Minnesota gathers steam. The Stillwater Convention sends Henry Sibley to argue the

case before Congress.

1849: News reaches Minnesota on April 9: Minnesota Territory created with St. Paul its capital and Alexander Ramsey its governor; Ramsey County created October 27 and interim officials appointed. Rice, Irvine, and Smith parks created. Heman Gibbs is one of several to take up land in rural Ramsey County.

1850: First elected county board takes office; federal census lists Ramsey County population as 2,197; St. Paul’s as 1,294. County courthouse built on land donated by Vetal Guerin. First term of court held.

1851: Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota open land west of the Mississippi to settlement. Dakota people begin move to reservations along Minnesota River. The state Capitol is built on “Capitol Square.”

1853: Cholera epidemic invades St. Paul. St.

Joseph’s Hospital established.

1854: Reserve Township land sold at auction in Stillwater. City charter granted to St. Paul.

1855: 30,000 people pass through St. Paul, head out into Ramsey County and lands to the west. Real estate speculation rampant.

1857: Real estate bubble bursts with Panic of 1857. Speculators flee the territory; Ramsey County issues script. Minnesota prepares for statehood and Joe Rolette saves the capital for St. Paul.

1858: Word arrives on May 14 that Minnesota has become the nation’s thirty-second state. Henry Sibley sworn in quietly as governor; J. M. Cavanaugh and W. W. Phelps leave for Washington as representatives, Henry M. Rice and General James Shields as senators, and the “disunion cloud” darkens the horizon.

French Canadians. Already in residence was Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant, who would play a colorful role in Ramsey County's history. Parrant was one of those interesting characters who adorn Western history. A voyageur who arrived in Mendota in 1832, he apparently caused the authorities there no end of trouble. He was about sixty years old at the time of his arrival, and his personal appearance did little to inspire confidence. He was described as coarse looking, low-browed, and possessor of a blind eye that, according to historian J. Fletcher Williams, was marble-hued and crooked, with a sinister white ring around the pupil, giving him a kind of piggish expression. Having been barred from the fur trade for unspecified misdeeds, he had set himself up in the whiskey business, an occupation that caused grave problems for the frontier community.

The lovely Fountain Cave was well-known to travelers of the region. Its stream flowed into the Mississippi near present-day Barton Street. Among the first to discover the cave was Major Stephen B. Long, of the newly-created United States Corps of Topographical Engineers, who was exploring along the Mississippi in 1817. His party seems to



Fountain Cave, as it looked around 1875. Minnesota Historical Society collections.



A voyageur, backbone of the fur trade. Farmers and traders from the Selkirk Colony in Manitoba settled outside Fort Snelling in the 1820s and 1830s, and became the first settlers of Ramsey County. This sketch by F. B. Mayer dates from 1851. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

have spotted the little creek as it flowed through a gap in the bluffs into the river. Following the creek up a narrow ravine, very likely carpeted with columbine and bluebells, Long and his men emerged into a forty-foot amphitheater with walls of dazzling white sandstone. Beyond the amphitheater lay a large hall about 150 feet long that led into a circular room some fifty feet in diameter. Another passage led into more circular rooms.

Long described the "chrysal stream" a stream of icy water that thirty years later would serve a more mundane, perhaps slightly sinister purpose. Here, in his whiskey hovel near the mouth of the cave, the wily Pierre Parrant, his one eye on the main chance, drew upon that crystal stream to water down his product, a potent drawing card for travelers up and down the river.

The squatters evicted from the land around Fort Snelling were secure in the

belief that they now were beyond the reservation boundaries, and they were wrong. Dismayed and frustrated when they learned that they were still within the newly-surveyed reservation, they abandoned their cabins, picked up their goods and chattels and made one final move, to a point downstream where clefts in the bluffs above the river created two landing places at the water's edge—the Lower Landing (now called Lambert's Landing) at the foot of the future Jackson Street, and the Upper Landing at the foot of today's Chestnut Street. Here, high on the bluff above the Mississippi, they had by 1840 planted nine cabins and formed the small community that became St. Paul.

The site would be unrecognizable to county residents today. The river bottom, paved for years by railroad tracks, was studded then with ancient trees. A dense forest surrounded the Upper Landing and

a bog extended from Ninth Street to Seven Corners. A stream that closely followed today's Chestnut Street flowed into the Mississippi at the Upper Landing. Another stream drained a sizeable lake at what is now Eighth and Robert streets, created a small waterfall as it tumbled over a ledge at Cedar and Tenth streets, then flowed through a deep ravine along Jackson Street and into the river at the Lower Landing. Back of the little town's site and stretching toward the north, west, and east, were the broad prairies, an almost treeless savannah, a magnet for the Ramsey County pioneers who would transform the prairie into fertile farmland.

Even in those earliest years of the county's history, a few adventurous settlers had preceded the peaceful farmers from the Selkirk Colony. In 1839, John Hays, William Evans, and Edward Phelan, discharged soldiers from Fort Snelling and natives of Ireland, took up claims and built cabins on land that now is St. Paul—Evans on Dayton's Bluff and Hays and Phelan together on a tract that extended from Eagle to Minnesota Street. The two were an unlikely combination. Hays, apparently a decent man who had saved some money, Phelan, penniless and with a reputation for cruelty. The two soon had a falling out. Hays's body, the first recorded death in Ramsey County, was found floating in the river below Carver's Cave. Phelan, the most likely suspect, was arrested, hauled off to Prairie du Chien for trial, then released due to lack of evidence. He took up another claim on the creek that bears his name (now spelled "Phalen"), but disappeared from history on his way to the gold fields of California. Parrant had arrived at the Lower Landing also and, finding that the liquor trade continued to be lucrative, acquired a claim that extended from Minnesota to Robert streets. Near the foot of Robert, on a highly visible rise of land, he established yet another saloon as conveniently close to the river as possible. Because of his presence, the nameless hamlet took on the name of Pig's Eye until a young Catholic priest, Father Lucien Galtier, arrived in 1841, built a small chapel, named it for St. Paul and, mercifully, asked that the

village be named for the chapel. In 1844 Parrant sold his claim, took up another downstream and near a swampy area of the river known as the *Grand Marais* (now Pig's Eye Lake), lived there a few months. Then, he, too, disappeared during a journey to his home at Sault Ste. Marie.

The community's first marriage introduced an element of romance into this outpost of what passed for civilization at that time. James R. Clewett, a young Englishman drawn to the west by a love of adventure, married Rose Perry, the young daughter of Abraham Perry, on April 9, 1839. The following September, the settlement recorded its first birth of a white child when Basil Gervais was born to Benjamin Gervais and his wife, Genevieve Larans.

Early Philanthropists

The newly-christened village was a French-speaking community in the 1840s. The men who built the cabins were for the most part voyageurs who spent part of the year working for Henry Sibley at Mendota and the remaining months farming small plots in what is now downtown St. Paul. Their wives had grown up on the frontier and were accus-



Vetel Guerin, fur trader and community benefactor. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

tomed to its demands. Abraham Perry's wife, Mary Ann, was an accomplished midwife and much in demand among the women at Fort Snelling. Soon they were joined by other men and women who were destined to become prominent in Ramsey County's history. Vetel Guerin, a native of San Remi, Canada, acquired Hays's claim and erected a cabin near the southeast corner of today's intersection of Kellogg Boulevard and Wabasha Street. Benjamin Gervais bought Parrant's claim, paying \$10 for land that is now in the heart of downtown St. Paul.

A year later, when Father Galtier was casting about for site for his chapel, "Mr. B. Gervais and Mr. Vetel Guerin, two good quiet farmers, had the only spot that appeared likely to answer the purpose," he remembered. "They consented to give me jointly the ground necessary for a church site, a garden and a small graveyard. I accepted the extreme eastern part of Mr. Vetel's claim, and the extreme west of Mr. Gervais'."

This wasn't the only instance of Vetel Guerin's commitment to his community. In 1849 he donated the land between Wabasha, St. Peter, Fourth and Fifth streets where Ramsey County's first and second courthouses were built. That year he built a finer house for himself and his family at Wabasha and Seventh Street, and across Wabasha he erected the city's first Market House. He provided the land known as "Cathedral Block," bounded by Wabasha, St. Peter, Sixth and Seventh Streets. In a sketch published in the *Northwestern Chronicle* in 1851, Father Augustin Ravoux noted that "aware of the necessity of securing some lots for the cathedral, I bought of Mr. Vetel Guerin twenty-one (21) lots for \$800 and for \$100 the lot on which now stands the cathedral."

In the winter of 1841, Guerin married Adele Perry, another of Abraham Perry's seven children. Their first home, unpretentious, to say the least, was typical of those around them at that time. The 16-by-20-foot cabin was built of oak and elm from the surrounding woods with a bark roof and a floor of split and hewed heavy logs. Supplies for these families were hard to find. Pork, flour, tea and sugar could be bought at Mendota but the set-



Red River ox carts on Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) in downtown St. Paul in 1859. Ramsey County Historical Society collections.

tlers relied on game, which was plentiful, and on their own garden plots. In the summer of 1841, Guerin enclosed a small field near his cabin and plowed it up for a garden, using Red River oxen. His wife joined him behind the plow. He raised grain, but with no grist mill in the region, he was unable to grind it for sale.

Joseph Rondo moved downstream in 1840 and acquired land near Seven Corners. John R. Irvine followed in 1843, bought Rondo's claim, and logged off much of the dense forest that once filled the bottom land around the Upper Landing. Richard W. Mortimer, usually known as "Sergeant Mortimer," came to Fort Snelling in 1835 as a quartermaster sergeant, saved his money and in 1842 bought eighty acres of Rondo's claim. Born in England into a family of some wealth and educated at Eton, he ran away from home when he was nineteen and settled in Canada, where he married. Unhappily, he was unfitted for the rough frontier life and died soon after moving to St. Paul.

However, with Mortimer's arrival and that of Henry Jackson in 1846 the French

character of the future Ramsey County began to change. With a small stock of goods, Jackson opened a trading post and prospered. He became the village's first postmaster, the post office in his store, a two-foot-square wooden case with pigeonholes. Louis Robert came up the river from Missouri, opened a warehouse and built the first frame house in the hamlet. Joseph R. Brown, fur trader, lumberman, land speculator, legislator, newspaper editor, joined the expanding community and became another of the major players in the establishment of the territory. Henry M. Rice, fur trader, Indian trader, sutler at a handful of military outposts, including Fort Snelling, and one of Minnesota's eminent politicians, settled finally in St. Paul and became one of the early town-site owners and donor of land for civic purposes. By 1845, with thirty cabins scattered from Seven Corners to Lake Phalen, Ramsey County's first residents had begun to buy, sell, and trade their claims with bewildering rapidity.

The first trains of Red River ox carts arrived in 1844, carrying \$1,400 in furs and leaving some \$12,000, spent for sup-

plies, in the tills of the town's merchants. The Native Americans, the Ojibwe, but particularly the Dakota, were a continuing presence in the region. They gravitated in considerable numbers not only to St. Paul but also to Mendota, Kaposia, and Red Rock, and the furs, game, fish, and cranberries they sold or traded for supplies helped enliven the meager diets of the settlers.

Trade in general was growing, spurred by the continuing pressure to push settlement to the Mississippi. The region was becoming a powerful lure for adventurous entrepreneurs, to the point where some of the earliest settlers, evidently feeling crowded, began moving out into the reaches of what would become rural Ramsey County. Following Indian trails from St. Paul to the north, Benjamin Gervais had come upon a lovely lake and in 1844, having sold the last portion of his claim to Louis Robert, he launched a new adventure at the relatively advanced age of fifty-five. He took up a quarter-section of land north and west of the lake that is named for him. He built a large log cabin on the north side of a stream that flowed



Mrs. James R. Clewett and her son. Rose Ann Perry Clewett, one of Abraham Perry's daughters, starred in a pioneer romance when she married Clewett, in the settlement's first wedding. Rose's sister Adele married Vetal Guerin. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

from Lake Gervais to Lake Vadnais, established a grist mill and ground cornmeal, and other French-Canadians began to cluster around him.

It's not surprising, then, that the story of the establishment of Minnesota Territory and the creation of Ramsey County begins as early as 1846. The drive for territorial status was being powered, in part, by advancing statehood on the east and south. Iowa had become a state in 1846; Wisconsin, a territory since 1836, was on the verge of statehood. The Minnesota region had been part of both territories. In setting its northern boundary, Iowa's constitutional convention had cast its collective eyes on two proposed lines that would have sliced off southern Minnesota—one line running through present-day Brainerd, another through the Twin Cities, capturing St. Anthony Falls, with its "incalculable water power," for the "Hawkeye State." Wisconsin Territory's western boundary extended to the Mississippi, with Stillwater as the seat of St. Croix County, the land lying between the St. Croix and the Mississippi. This accident of politics would figure hugely in the territorial maneuvering that followed.

Town Site Surveyed

In 1846 Wisconsin Territory's delegate to Congress introduced a bill to organize Minnesota as a territory. It failed, but some historians see the fine hand of Joseph R. Brown behind the attempt. A justice of the peace for St. Croix County, he had been a Wisconsin legislator but, resourceful and versatile, he was an ardent worker for Minnesota Territory. The region was little more than forest and prairie and thinly populated—even in 1849, the territorial census listed a population of 4,000, with 910 of those living in St. Paul. The town site of "Saint Paul Proper" had been surveyed in 1847, but not until two years later would the ninety-acre plat be entered and lots deeded to each owner. However, the ambitious pioneers were undaunted, pinning their hopes on the possibilities of their future, rather than the realities of their present.

The drive picked up steam in 1848 when Wisconsin became a state, with its western boundary beginning at the St. Louis River and following the St. Croix



St. Paul in 1851, still a ragged frontier settlement. This view toward the east shows First Baptist Church, left, on Baptist Hill, now Mears Park. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

to its juncture with the Mississippi, leaving in political limbo the land between the rivers. An intense debate began. Alarmed at the prospect of life in an unorganized region without law or government, a delegation of eighteen met at Henry Jackson's store. St. Paul historian J. Fletcher Williams wrote later that "It couldn't have been a large group, for there were scarcely twenty English-speaking men in St. Paul." And an old settler recalled that most such meetings actually were held in the street where there was more room and plenty of logs for seats.

In any event, the men organized the famous Stillwater convention, a gathering of sixty-two delegates whose purpose was to examine the issue of just who was now in charge of the "disenfranchised" areas east and west of the Mississippi that had been part of the Iowa and Wisconsin territories. A letter from John Catlin, secretary of state for Wisconsin, was read stating that, in his opinion, the Territory of Wisconsin was still in existence and if a delegate to Congress were elected, he would be permitted to take his seat.

For what it was worth, James B. Buchanan, then United States secretary of state had responded, ducking the ques-

tion of the government-less region. He stated that,

It is clear to my mind that all the local officers residing in the Counties [outside of] the state line, such as judges of probate, sheriffs, justices of peace, and constables may exercise their appropriate functions as heretofore. Whether the general officers such as governor, secretary, and judges appointed for the whole of the former territory are authorized to perform their duties within what remains of [a territory] presents a question of great difficulty, on which I can express no opinion.

The delegates decided to petition Congress to organize the Territory of Minnesota and to send Henry H. Sibley to Washington as their unofficial delegate to press their requests. Somewhat to his surprise, it seems, Sibley, who lived at Mendota in what had been Iowa Territory, was in fact given a seat in the House as a delegate from Wisconsin Territory. (An obscure representative from Illinois named Lincoln voted to approve him.)

Sibley's lobbying of the federal government proved effective. Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois introduced the Minnesota bill a few days after Sibley took his seat. It passed but en-

countered opposition in the House where Whigs (who would become the Republican party in 1854) wanted to postpone enactment until the new Whig president, Zachary Taylor, took office. Sibley persevered. The measure passed on March 3, 1849, and the Territory of Minnesota was created with St. Paul as its capital. Its northern, eastern, and southern boundaries were established as identical to today's but its western boundary stretched to the Missouri and White Earth Rivers. Taylor, who had been commandant at Fort Snelling in 1828 and 1829, took office two days after the bill was signed and appointed the new territory's governor. He was thirty-four-year-old Alexander Ramsey of Philadelphia who, as chairman of the Pennsylvania Whig state central committee, had worked to elect Taylor.

Ramsey was well-suited for his assignment—so well-suited, in fact, that he would live the rest of his life in Minnesota. He had studied at Lafayette College, a Presbyterian liberal arts and engineering school founded in 1826 at Easton, Pennsylvania; practiced law and served two terms in Congress. A biographer described him as “social, cool, cautious and given to practical business.” Moreover, he possessed political sagacity, was willing to accept responsibility, and understood the possibilities inherent in a frontier community and the vast, rich lands that lay before it.

The news of the creation of the territory did not reach St. Paul for another month (after the worst winter in many years) but when it did, the effect on the settlement was profound. Within three weeks, the village doubled in size and almost a hundred new buildings went up, putting an end to its Arcadian period, with its isolation and primitive simplicity. Ramsey and his young wife stepped off a steamboat at St. Paul on May 27. (Mrs. Ramsey had exclaimed: “Minnesota! Where upon earth is it? In Denmark?”) Ramsey proclaimed the admission of the territory, set up judicial and legislative districts and called for the election of a legislature (nine councillors and eighteen representatives) and a delegate to Congress. (Sibley received all of the 682 votes.)



Alexander Ramsey, first governor of Minnesota Territory and second governor of the state. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

Ramsey County Created

Organization of the territory was soon under way as other territorial officers drifted in, all of them from elsewhere: Aaron Goodrich from Tennessee, chief justice; Charles Kilgore Smith from Ohio, secretary of state; Colonel Alexander M. Mitchell, also from Ohio, marshal; Henry L. Moss from New York, district attorney.

Seated on beds or trunks in a small room at the Saint Paul House on Third Street, and using a washstand as a desk, the men drew up the “First of June Proclamation” announcing the territorial government organized. On September 3 the legislature met for the first time in its first “capitol,” the Central House, a two-story frame inn on Bench Street near Minnesota.

Ramsey County was created, on October 27, 1849, along with eight other counties the legislature carved out of the new territory, with St. Paul as the county seat. Ramsey County was the largest of the new counties with its northern boundary extending north of Lake Mille Lacs and its southern boundary following the Mississippi until it met with the Minnesota River. It encompassed all of

what is now Anoka, Isanti, and Kanebec counties, as well as parts of Washington, Pine, Carlton, Aitkin, Mille Lacs, and Hennepin counties.

Ramsey then appointed the county's interim officials, all of them already residents: Andre Godfrey and Louis Robert, both of whom had been delegates to the Stillwater Convention, county commissioners; David Day, register of deeds; C.P.V. Lull, sheriff; and Henry A. Lambert, judge of probate. They were to serve until January 1, 1850. In the meantime, they held their first meeting on November 16, 1849. Ten days later, their first election was held. Louis Robert and Benjamin Gervais were two of the first three elected county commissioners. Roswell P. Russell, who up to then had played a virtually unknown role in the county's history, was the third elected commissioner. Russell had been a sutler's clerk at Fort Snelling and it was he who bestowed on Pierre Parrant the nickname of “Pig's Eye.” (The French Canadians called Parrant *O'eil de Cochon*.)

Immigrants to the newly-created territory began to arrive. They were, St. Paul historian J. Fletcher Williams, noted, “principally professional men, politicians, office seekers, speculators and traders (mostly from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania), pursuing the opportunity now afforded for the acquisition of wealth or political fame.”

Among them was James M. Goodhue, who founded the *Minnesota Pioneer*, often regarded as the territory's first newspaper. However, he was barely edged out by Dr. A. Randall and John P. Owens who published the *Minnesota Register* in Ohio and distributed it in St. Paul on April 27, 1849, a day in advance of the *Pioneer*. Goodhue became an ardent booster for Minnesota; Owens continued his newspaper career as editor of the *Minnesotan*, and Randall, evidently a restless sort, headed out for the California gold fields. The Reverend Edward Duffield Neill came up the Mississippi from Galena, Illinois, to establish the First Presbyterian Church. The Methodists arrived and with the help of James Thompson, an African American who had been a servant at Fort Snelling, then freed from slavery, built the Market



Ramsey County's first courthouse at Wabasha and Fourth Street in 1857. The county's first jail can barely be seen on the left behind the courthouse. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

Street Methodist Church. Thompson contributed 15,000 shingles, 2,000 feet of lumber, some money, and much labor. Father Augustin Ravoux administered to his Catholic parishioners at the Chapel of St. Paul.

Harriet Bishop had arrived in 1847 and established a school in a log structure near the present-day site of the downtown St. Paul library. Harriet Island is named for her. Widely recognized as St. Paul's first school teacher, she actually was preceded briefly by Matilda Rumsey who established a small school in a log

building near the Upper Landing and taught there for several months. They were among a number of extraordinary women who shared the hardships of the frontier. Mary Turpin married Captain Louis Robert in St. Louis when she was thirteen and came to St. Paul with him in 1844. She often accompanied him on his fur trading expeditions, camping out in a tent or cabin. Mrs. Jeremiah Selby arrived with her husband in 1849 to open a farm on the site today of the St. Paul Cathedral. Angelina Bivens married Henry Jackson in Buffalo, New York, in

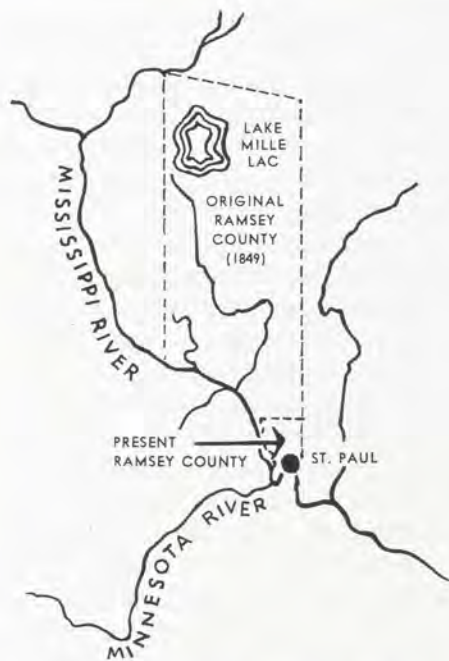
1838 and moved with him to Minnesota four years later.

Martha Brunson, a daughter of the Reverend Alfred Brunson of Prairie du Chien, married Jacob W. Bass, also of Prairie du Chien, when she was fourteen and came with him to St. Paul in 1847. They opened the village's first hotel, the St. Paul House, on the northeast corner of Third and Jackson streets, just up the street from the Lower Landing. Martha described it in her memoirs as a "log house about fifty feet square that had just been built and only just plastered between the logs, one story and a big loft." They built partitions that created two bedrooms and a kitchen on the first floor and set up four beds in the attic. With groceries and other provisions they acquired from Galena, they were open for a thriving business created by the influx of people who were anxious to gain a foothold in the territory-to-be.

Jane DeBow Stevens and her husband, Heman Gibbs, stepped off the steamboat, *War Eagle*, in the spring of 1849. Because of her unusually colorful early life, Jane Gibbs was perhaps the most extraordinary, as well as the earliest, of those



Jane DeBow Stevens Gibbs and her husband, Heman. They arrived in St. Paul in 1849, a year after their marriage in 1848 and more than ten years after she was brought to the Minnesota region as a child by a missionary family. Ramsey County Historical Society photo.



Ramsey County in 1849, the largest of the new counties created by the territorial legislature and with a northern boundary that extended beyond Lac Mille Lacs. This skeleton map was handdrawn for Ramsey County History by the late Edward J. Lettermann, former curator of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum.

sturdy women who settled permanently in Ramsey County. She lived there for the rest of her life, and when she died in 1910 she was thought to have been the oldest surviving pioneer settler. Born about 1828 near Batavia, New York, she was taken from her family and brought to Fort Snelling in 1835 by a missionary, the Reverend Jedediah Stevens, and his family. Stevens, along with Gideon and Samuel Pond, worked with Chief Cloud Man's Dakota people at their village between Lake Harriet and Lake Calhoun in what is now south Minneapolis, and Jane grew up playing and attending school with the children of Cloud Man's band. She moved later with the Stevens family to Illinois where, in 1848, she married Heman Gibbs, a native of Jericho, Vermont, and a teacher for the lead miners around Galena.

The next year they joined the throngs of immigrants crowding into the new territory. Gibbs purchased the land rights of a Mexican War veteran, Henry Cosmitz, whose payment for volunteering for ser-

vice entitled him to 160 acres of public land or \$100 in scrip at 6 percent interest. Because it was originally a war payment, Gibbs's certificate was reportedly the only land claim in Ramsey County that was signed by President Millard Fillmore.

The 160-acre tract of land Gibbs chose lay northwest of what is now the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus. Here he built a log-walled, sod-roofed, half-underground shanty, their home for the next five years. Later he would complete the farmhouse that still stands as part of the Gibbs Farm Museum.

Jane and Heman Gibbs weren't the only settlers in what then were the far rural reaches of Ramsey County. Gibbs was among seven who claimed land in Rose Township: Stephen Desnoyer, Isaac Rose, Louis Bryson, S. B. Folson, Lorenzo Hoyt (for whom Hoyt Avenue is named), and W. B. Quinn, and their stories help illumine early Ramsey County history.

Halfway House

During the years following 1844 when the first Red River ox cart trains began arriving, St. Paul was a collecting point for the lively trade in furs which extended throughout Minnesota and into what is now North Dakota and Manitoba, Canada. The carts that reached St. Anthony ambled into St. Paul along a route that followed—roughly—present-day Interstate 94. The trail passed the 320-acre claim that Stephen Desnoyer bought in 1843 from Canadian fur trader Donald McDonald. When the ox cart dri-

vers paused to rest at Desnoyer's farm home, halfway between St. Anthony and St. Paul, he built the inn known as the Halfway House near the site today of the Town and Country Club. The ox cart trail became a stagecoach road and the Halfway House a popular "place of public resort, especially for Sunday driving." Desnoyer evidently prospered. When he died in 1877, he left an estate of \$150,000.

Isaac Rose, for whom Rose Township was named after its organization in 1858, became Desnoyer's neighbor shortly after Desnoyer acquired his own land. Rose was born in 1802 in New Jersey. He moved to the newly-christened hamlet of St. Paul in 1843, and built a log cabin on the Mississippi River at Shadow Falls, about a block north of where Summit Avenue now ends. Later that year, Rose's daughter married L. S. Furnell, who also took up land in the area.

In 1847 Rose acquired 160 acres of land at the intersection today of St. Anthony Road and Fairview Avenue. He sold it and bought for \$1.25 an acre another tract that today is the site of Macalester College. Here he lived until 1859 when he bought 160 acres at Cottage Grove and another forty acres of timberland on Grey Cloud Island, but he eventually moved back to Marshall and Western avenues in St. Paul. He died at Ottawa, Minnesota, in 1871 when he was sixty-nine, but he was one of those builders of Ramsey County and St. Paul. When the federal land survey was made in 1850, he helped map the area. He sent



Steven Desnoyer's Halfway House, opened in 1843 and photographed in 1894 by B. J. Sturdevant. The site is now part of the Town and Country Club golf course. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

his two sons to the first school built in Rose Township, a one-room structure near St. Anthony and Fairview, perhaps on his own land. When Reserve Township was organized, also in 1858, he served as an elected judge and was later elected a town supervisor.

Simeon P. Folsom, who was born near Quebec, came west in 1839 and settled at Prairie du Chien before landing in St. Paul in July, 1847. He promptly acquired land, filed a claim in Rose Township, became a Ramsey County surveyor and, in 1854, the first city surveyor for St. Paul; he worked for the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad and served on the St. Paul school board from 1858 to 1860.

Lorenzo Hoyt, the twenty-year-old eldest son of Benjamin F. Hoyt, was sent to "the then much talked about region of St. Paul" by his father in 1848 "to spy out the land." The reports must have been glowing. The entire Hoyt family promptly set off for Minnesota, arriving in St. Paul the following August. Benjamin Hoyt, a devout Methodist, and Sunday School teacher who helped found the Market Street Methodist Church, soon began to acquire huge tracts of land in "Saint Paul Proper," in Ramsey County and in Red Wing and Cannon Falls. The claim Lorenzo Hoyt filed extended from what is now the Minnesota State Fairgrounds east to Como Lake. He would serve as a Ramsey County commissioner from 1871 to 1873, and be elected to several terms in the state House of Representatives.

Not much is known about W. B. Quinn, the last of the seven to file claims in Rose Township in 1849. However, in 1859 he was a candidate for the House of Representatives on the Independent ticket in an election that never was held.

South of Rose Township, Reserve Township's boundaries extended from Marshall Avenue on the north, Dale Street on the east and the Mississippi River on the west and south. Its name is a reference to its origin as part of the military reservation surrounding Fort Snelling. Early maps show a number of cabins strung along the river opposite the fort. They belonged to Selkirk Colony refugees and retired fur traders. Several clustered together were labeled "Old Rum Town," perhaps a reference to

Donald McDonald's dram shop and the availability of illicit liquor that caused so many problems for the Fort Snelling commandants.

In 1848, William Finn became the first permanent settler of the area. A native of Ireland and a veteran of the Mexican War who arrived in Minnesota in 1844, Finn had been stationed at Fort Snelling. When he retired from the army, he was granted a section of land extending from present-day Marshall south to St. Clair, east to Fairview and west to the river—now the University of St. Thomas campus.

Although Reserve Township was not officially named until its organization in 1858, the land was surveyed in 1849 and would-be settlers began staking illegal claims. In September, 1854, the land finally was sold at auction in Stillwater. In one of those engineered feats of history that was typical of the frontier, the claimants gathered two months earlier to decide who should bid on what property and set a minimum price of \$1.25 an acre. J. Fletcher Williams described the scene:

The claimants dressed in red shirts, all armed, and having clubs in their hands, were arranged in a circle so large as almost to prevent outsiders from being heard, even if disposed to bid. One outsider only made an attempt to bid, and he was soon disposed of.

Approximately 5,000 acres were sold in only forty-five minutes. Among the buyers were men whose names would remain on the city streets of today's Highland Park. John Ayd bought a quarter section of land between Lexington, Victoria, St. Clair, and Randolph and built the township's only mill near the street named for him in Highland Park. William Brimhall established a farm with twenty-five acres of apple trees near St. Clair and Snelling. William Davern claimed 160 acres near St. Paul Avenue and Davern. Friedrich Rudolph Knapheide, a progressive farmer, settled near Randolph and Cleveland, then sold some of his land to one of his farm workers, Frederick Spangenberg. The Daverns raised hay and grew grain, among other crops; others opened dairy farms or grew fruit and vegetables.

Shelter and food were necessities the pioneers had to provide for themselves,

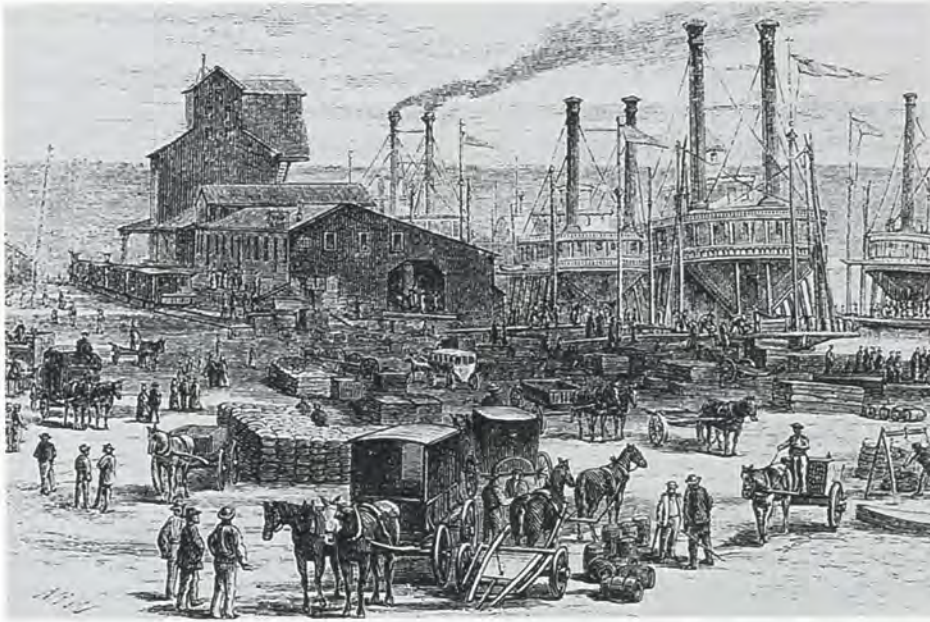
particularly during the earliest years in Ramsey County's history. Most people, sometimes with the help of neighbors, built their own cabins, usually of bark-covered tamarac logs from nearby swamps. Some had little more than the most rudimentary of shelters. Heman Gibbs's claim shanty, a half-underground sod-house, was unusual for the St. Paul area but was common farther west where the prairie replaced the forests. Soddys were said to be warm in winter, cool in summer but heavy rainstorms would send dirt and water from the roof onto the dwellers below.

Besides creating a shelter, these pioneers were kept busy clearing land, grubbing out stumps and brush, and raising a crop that would feed their families and perhaps provide a little extra produce to sell in St. Paul. Francis Larpenteur sold fruit, corn, peas, potatoes, wheat and beef at Vetal Guerin's Market House. A Mrs. Kessler, who lived in Little Canada, drove an ox cart laden with produce to sell at the Market House, thereby becoming the town's first market woman. Heman Gibbs found a ready market for his vegetables at Fort Snelling.

In a memoir in the Minnesota Historical Society's collections, Amelia Ullman, whose husband, Joseph, was a liquor merchant, has left a poignant account of life in St. Paul in the early 1850s. It was a time when immigrants were pouring into the territory, when hotels and boarding houses were so crowded that people camped in the streets, and food supplies were scant:

Only a conscientious housewife, only a devoted mother who had lived in St. Paul in those days knows all the inconveniences and miseries I was forced to endure. Every drop of water used had to be carried across the prairie from a well in a livery stable. . . . My child was ill much of the time from lack of proper nourishment, for good wholesome food was difficult to obtain. Fresh vegetables and fruit were unknown. Things being brought up from St. Louis by the boats, they were often in such a condition upon their arrival in St. Paul that their use would have been deleterious to health.

While most of Ramsey County was farmland, and much of northern Ramsey



A steel engraving of St. Paul's bustling Lower Landing as it looked in 1853 when steamboat travel on the Upper Mississippi was beginning to boom. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

County would remain farmland until after World War II, "Saint Paul Proper" was filling up so rapidly it either was not farmed at all or only briefly, except for individual garden plots residents planted in their yards.

In 1850, when the first elected county board took office, the federal census listed Ramsey County's population as 2,197 people—1,337 men, 860 women, 834 homes, 257 families and 458 acres of improved land. Of the 1,294 residents of St. Paul Proper, about ninety listed Canada as their birthplace, more than sixty listed Ireland, and twenty each listed England and Germany. Most of the county's early settlers were from the East Coast or New England, but there was "Isabelle Edes," who was born in Norway, and "Mary Leolter," who was born in Spain and her husband, Charles, in Ireland.

The first term of court was held on April 28, 1850, with forty-nine cases scheduled for hearing. Prisoners were held at Fort Snelling because Ramsey County had no jail. With Vetal Guerin's gift of land on which to build a courthouse, the county commissioners advertised, on January 16, 1850, for plans for both a courthouse and a jail. David Day,

who was clerk of the county board, in addition to being register of deeds, produced the most acceptable plan and was paid \$10 for a design that resembled a Greek temple. Bonds in the amount of \$5,000 were offered on the Boston market to finance the buildings. Construction began in November of 1850, with Freeman & Daniels as contractors. The dignified little brick courthouse cost \$9,000 to build and played an important role in the early history of Ramsey County. Political conventions, public meetings, even religious services were held there until the 1880s when it was torn down to make way for a massive castle-like structure that would combine the functions of the county courthouse with those of the city hall, erected in 1857 on the site of Landmark Center.

The county jail, the first prison in Minnesota except for the lock-up at Fort Snelling, was another matter. Completed a few years after the courthouse, it was a miserable huddle, a small log building, weather-boarded, "about fit for a pig-pen" and "about as secure as if made of pasteboard," as one writer described it. For a time, some of its inhabitants were imprisoned there for debt, a curious phase of territorial law that lasted only

four years. The jail was replaced in 1857 by a new jail constructed for \$75,000 by "Messrs. Day & George." (Three years later, Annie Bilansky, convicted of murdering her husband and the only woman to be executed in Ramsey County, was hanged there in 1860.)

The territorial legislature plunged almost immediately into a spirited controversy over the capital's permanent location. The act creating the territory made St. Paul its temporary capital only and provided that the legislature choose a permanent location. William R. Marshall, a future governor but then representing St. Anthony, pushed through a bill establishing the capital there, but the bill failed. It was the first of several debates over moving the capital that would arise in coming years. In 1851, the eager legislators compromised. The capital was fixed at St. Paul, the state university at St. Anthony, and the state penitentiary at Stillwater.

The legislators then drafted plans for the building that was erected on 1851 as the first of two capitols on the site that even today is sometimes referred to as "Capitol Square." Bounded by Tenth and Exchange streets, Wabasha and St. Peter, the land was donated by Charles Bazille, another civic-minded citizen and brother-in-law of the equally generous Vetal Guerin.

St. Paul in 1851 was still a cluster of log and frame structures, its baffling street grid platted in 1847 by surveyors Ira and Benjamin Brunson who laid it out along the Lower Landing in Lowertown. Several years later Henry Rice and John Irvine developed a plat for Upper Town that followed the bend in the river.

A Labyrinth of Trails

"The two plats appear to have taken a running jump at each other," James M. Goodhue complained in an 1852 issue of the *Minnesota Pioneer*. Historian David Lanegran has observed that the early surveyors' maps reveal "a labyrinth of old Indian trails." Some of these became ox cart trails, fur trade trails, wagon trails, then stagecoach lines, before they emerged as city streets. The now almost-vanished Territorial Road that for a few blocks still runs parallel to University

Avenue followed the major ox cart trail from St. Anthony to St. Paul. The old military road that ran almost due north from Fort Snelling became Snelling Avenue and these old roads, two of Ramsey County's earliest routes of overland travel, met near what is today Snelling Avenue and I-94.

With their early trails, the Dakota had left an ineradicable mark on the county. Snelling Avenue might well have originated as an Indian trail that led from Fort Snelling north to the lakes where they gathered wild rice. Another trail that paralleled it closely ran from a Dakota crossing of the Mississippi at Marshall Avenue through present-day St. Anthony Park to the farm of Heman and Jane Gibbs. There the Indians would pause for a rest and a visit with Jane, their childhood friend from Cloud Man's village, before heading north again for the rice lakes. For more than a century the marks of their travois could be seen in the back yards of neighborhood homes.

For the Dakota, however, their days as familiar visitors to St. Paul and Ramsey County were numbered. Without question, the rush to settlement was on and in the 1851 Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, the Dakota gave up most of their land, and slowly began leaving the Ramsey County region for two narrow reservations, the Upper and Lower reservations which stretched along the upper Minnesota River in western Minnesota.

In the meantime, the people of Ramsey County began to organize their communities. Land for three public parks—Rice Park, Irvine Park and Smith Park—had been given to St. Paul in 1849. When Henry M. Rice and John R. Irvine filed the plat for their addition, which was bounded by Washington, Main, West Fourth and West Ninth streets, they designated one block as a "public square," now Rice Park. It was scarcely the leafy oasis it is today. The square was almost barren. The *Minnesotian* commented ruefully that "It is a fact, ascertained by actual observation, that at least one, if not two, of the shade trees in the City park are alive." Sometime in the early years, a florist was permitted to raise flowers and vegetables in return for caring for the square. The



St. Paul in 1857. The territory's first state Capitol is the domed structure, center top of the photograph. The long building, upper left with the row of windows, was the Market House built by Vetal Guerin at Seventh and Wabasha. Guerin's own home is the low, dark structure across Wabasha from the Market House. This view is from B. F. Upton's 1857 panorama of St. Paul photographed from the roof of the courthouse. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

H. H. Smith American Circus exhibited there. Neighborhood women beat their rugs there until prohibited by law. Even though a fence was installed, cows got into the park despite turnstiles at the entrances so spikes were placed on the arms of the turnstiles. At the same time, Smith (now Mears) Park was established in the center of Lowertown, the village's warehouse, trading and transportation center, and Irvine Park in Upper Town in the midst of what would become one of the city's elegant residential neighborhoods.

In 1854, David Day notified his legislative colleagues that he intended to introduce a bill granting a city charter to the town of St. Paul. The community was prospering. Its population stood at 4,000, with new settlers arriving weekly and flooding out into the environs of Ramsey County. New county officers soon would be added.

Vestiges of civilization began to appear. One of the newspapers announced that a Public Entertainment held the evening of January 5, 1854, at the City Hall, was "comfortably filled by an intelligent and appreciative audience" gathered to hear the amateur musicians who composed the Philharmonic Society. The concert was a benefit for a Professor Collins who "having been at great expense in preparing to give musical instruction during the winter and having

failed in procuring a class" must have been the grateful recipient of the proceeds. A pity, since the Mississippi was frozen solid that winter and Ramsey County and St. Paul were isolated, probably with not much to do and little news from the outside world, despite the four newspapers now being published in the county.

Prospects looked up with the coming of spring. The *Daily Minnesotian* reassured its readers that,

The capital of Minnesota Territory, although unheard and unknown of six years ago, is now attracting the attention of the merchant, the manufacturer, the capitalist, and the speculator . . . The future of St. Paul can be easily foretold, situated as it is at the head of navigation on the Mississippi, [it] must command the trade of the whole country north and northwest of it. The Minnesota River flowing into the Mississippi six miles above St. Paul is navigable one hundred and fifty miles, but not for the large class of boats that reach St. Paul. St. Paul must then be the point of transshipment for the future thousands who are to people the magnificent valley of the Minnesota. Is it difficult then to predict that in ten years it will be the largest city on the Mississippi north of St. Louis?

The arrival of the sternwheeler, the *Galena* with nine of its passengers

deathly ill with the much-dreaded cholera, did little to dampen such boundless optimism. A cholera epidemic in 1853 had dramatized the need for a hospital, which Bishop Joseph Cretin, St. Paul's first Catholic bishop, decided to build on land donated by Henry M. Rice. It opened the following year and still stands at its original location.

Steamboats nosing in at the landing were disgorging thousands of immigrants seeking land in Ramsey County and beyond. A train of 187 Red River ox carts laden with furs arrived late in July of 1853. The drivers, loading up their carts with supplies for the coming year, found that St. Paul markets had livestock for sale: "Beef on foot, 8 cents per lb. Cows, \$30 & \$50. Work oxen from \$90 & \$150 per yoke." "On foot" was literal. Live animals were purchased, driven back along the trail and butchered as needed. So much for refrigeration.

Fresh meat was advertised: "Retail Beef, 8c & 12c. Mutton, 10c & 12. Pork, 17½. Veal, 12½. Chickens \$3.20 per dozen." General grocery provisions also could be had: Lard, 12½c., Flour Superfine, \$6.25 extra, \$7.00 per barrel, Corn Meal 75c. Potatoes 30 & 35 [cents per] bushel. Butter, 15c. & 25 c. per lb. Cheese 12½c. lb. Eggs, 15c. doz. Oats 45c. Corn 70c. Barley 65c."

Glitch in the Gala

In the midst of such mundane matters, considerable excitement was generated by "the most notable event" of the year, "the Great Railroad Excursion" that celebrated the completion of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, the first line in the Northwest to reach the Mississippi. Almost 1,000 guests, mostly Easterners, traveled west from Chicago to Rock Island, Illinois, where they piled aboard steamboats to complete the journey up the river to St. Paul. One of the guests was former President Millard Fillmore, who was completing a tour of the South and Northwest and whose brother, Charles DeWitt Fillmore, was a real estate speculator in St. Paul.

There was a slight glitch in the gala. Five or more steamboats laden with upward of a thousand celebrating guests ar-



The Fuller House, where Joe Rolette was living during the 1857 territorial legislative session and where he "hid" the bill that would have moved the state capital from St. Paul to St. Peter. Actually, the story goes, Rolette locked up the bill in the safe of Truman M. Smith's bank, conveniently located on the Fuller House's first floor. From Ballou's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion, Vol. X11, No. 15, October 120, 1857, Minnesota Historical Society collections.

rived at the Lower Landing a day early, creating chaos among the unsuspecting and unprepared citizens. Rallying bravely, however, they managed to entertain the visitors at a supper in the hall of the House of Representatives, followed by speeches in the Senate chamber by Fillmore, territorial Governor A. Gorman, and historian George Bancroft. After music and dancing in the Supreme Court chamber until close to midnight, the happy celebrants climbed back on their steamboats to return to Rock Island.

When Ramsey County held its election on October 10, 1854, the Democrats elected Reuben Haus, D. F. Brawley, C. S. Cave, Joseph Lemay and William Davis to the House of Representatives; the Whigs elected Abraham Bennett and Richard Fewer. Allen Pierse, a Whig, replaced Louis Robert as county treasurer, and William H. Jarvis, a Democrat, was elected county coroner.

It was a season of unprecedented prosperity for the city, the county, and the territory, with such heavy immigration pouring in, J. Fletcher Williams wrote years later. The enormity of the immigration problem, however, can be seen in newspaper accounts of 1,500 passengers arriving within one week. The *Galena* alone carried 500. The *Pioneer* noted that

We are pleased to see that most of the passengers arriving in the Territory are good substantial farmers. Already those who have arrived this season more than double the number of any preceding year, and the rush is unabated. There is room and land for all.

But there wasn't. The *Pioneer* also reported that,

Yesterday morning six steamers lay at our levees, all having arrived on Sunday or Saturday night—bringing with them upwards of ten hundred passengers besides an im-

mense amount of freight. . . Among the things now most needed . . . are a few more good hotels and boarding houses.

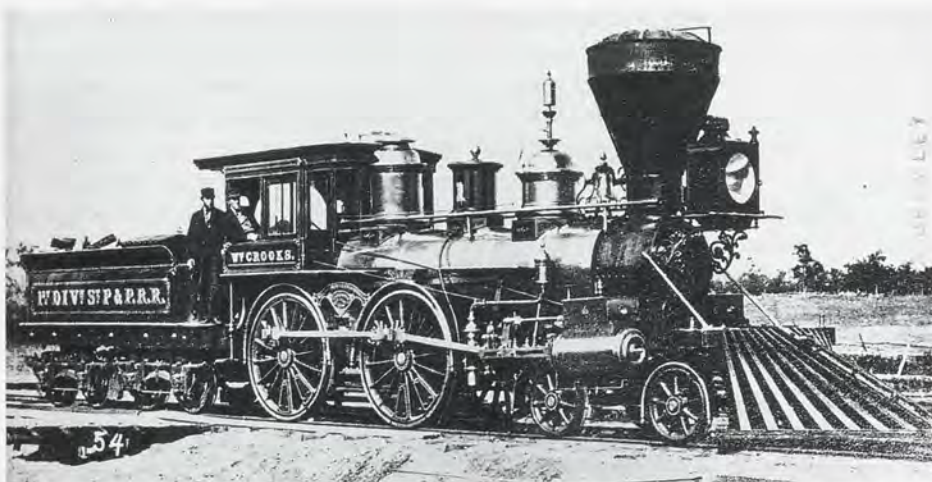
New arrivals were compelled to sleep on their boats. Lumber was scarce, with "twenty or thirty buildings that are stopped for want of it."

The wild speculation in real estate that characterized the middle 1850s was the inevitable result. In 1854 speculator Henry McKenty bought several thousand acres of prairie in Ramsey County for \$1.25 an acre and sold it a year later for \$5 an acre. (Two years later he was bankrupt.) In 1855, 30,000 people were reported to have passed through Ramsey County. St. Paul's population in 1857 was close to 10,000 and the real estate mania was at its height. The cost of money stood at 42 percent interest for working capital. Some real estate dealers were mere shysters, with the sidewalks their offices and no capital except for a roll of town-site maps and a package of blank deeds.

A railroad was chartered when Henry M. Rice, Minnesota territory's delegate to Congress, secured a 4.5-million-acre land grant which would have permitted construction of six rail lines. One of them was a ten-mile stretch of road between St. Paul and St. Anthony.

In 1857 the bubble burst. The bankruptcy on August 24 of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company, a financial institution in far-off New York, precipitated a financial debacle that was nationwide. In Ramsey County, cash dried up, banks closed, real estate speculators and merchants were ruined, people were thrown out of work, and St. Paul lost half its population as people fled back East. The Ramsey County government issued script. Work on the railroad between St. Paul and St. Anthony was halted, not to be resumed until 1861 when the first locomotive, "William Crooks," named for its chief engineer, arrived by steamboat. The first rails in Minnesota would be laid the following year and the railroad named the St. Paul and Pacific.

Meanwhile, the Panic of 1857 had begun to subside as the territory achieved statehood. County officials approved a substantial discount for people who paid



The "William Crooks," shortly after its arrival in Minnesota in 1861. From a postcard in the collections of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

their taxes on time, and county officials promptly turned the money over to the new state government. Robert A. Smith, who served twelve years as county treasurer from 1856 to 1868, noted in a letter that described the county board's action:

In 1858 the board of commissioners of Ramsey County purchased state orders and paid into the state treasury the full amount of the state tax of 1857 and prior years, and at that time there was a large amount of delinquent taxes for those years. In 1862 the legislature enacted a law giving the state auditor and county commissioners the power to abate a portion of all of [the] taxes of 1861, and prior years. The result was that the taxes of 1859 and prior years were abated in no instance less than 50 percent and in many cases 75 percent, and the taxes of 1860 and 1861, 33 percent.

State treasurer Charles Scheffer commented later that he didn't know what would have been done had it not been for the taxes paid in by Ramsey County.

Trauma of another sort might have diverted the residents of Ramsey County in 1857. A bill to move the capital from St. Paul to St. Peter had, to the dismay of the county's residents, passed the legislature. It was on its way to enrollment and signature by the governor when Joe Rolette, Jr., the representative from Pembina, intervened.

Rolette was a popular, intelligent, well-educated, full-blooded French Canadian.

His father, the first Joseph Rolette, a successful and also well-educated fur trader, was head of the American Fur Company's operations in the upper Missis-



Joe Rolette in Indian garb, a pastel on paper by an unknown artist and dating from around 1900, long after Rolette's death. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

Mississippi region in the 1820s, operating out of Prairie du Chien. His mother, Jane, had married Hercules Dousman, Rolette's partner and another major figure in the fur trade of the Northwest, after the elder Rolette's death.

Joe Rolette, the younger, was educated in a private school in New York City, then journeyed west to work for Henry Sibley in the vital northern plains boundary area around Pembina. His ties to the Pembina community stemmed from his marriage to Angélique Jerome, who was a métis. A successful trader himself, Rolette helped initiate the Red River ox cart trade between the Red River region and St. Paul. The story of his capture of the bill transferring the state capital from St. Paul to St. Peter has lost nothing and probably gained much in its passage into legend.

Rolette, a colorful man who wore Indian garb at home, possessed a well-known sense of humor but, most importantly, he was sympathetic to St. Paul's cause. To put the story simply, Rolette is said to have tucked the troublesome bill into his pocket, walked over to Truman and Smith's bank, locked it in the vault and hid out in a room in the Fuller House in Lowertown. Reportedly, he whiled away the hours playing cards while friends helpfully reported him heading north on his dog sled. When the time came for the bill to become law, Rolette appeared with it, setting off a storm of legal wrangling over whether or not the bill had or had not passed. Eventually, cooler heads prevailed and St. Paul remained the capital of Minnesota. There was one last gasp. During an adjourned session of the legislature in July, 1858, an attempt was made to move the capital to Nicollet Island in Minneapolis. Probably weary of the controversy, legislators displayed little enthusiasm and nothing came of it.

By this time Minnesota had become a state. When word arrived in St. Paul on May 14, 1858, that Minnesota had been admitted to the Union as its thirty-second state, there were no celebrations. Perhaps the heavy hand of the recent Panic still lay upon the populace. Henry Hastings Sibley was quietly sworn in as the new

state's first governor. J. M. Cavanaugh and W. W. Phelps prepared to leave for Washington as representatives and Henry M. Rice and General James Shields as senators. Within the year, prosperity made a tentative effort to return, but J. Fletcher Williams described a certain sense of forboding:

"The disunion cloud was darkening the southern horizon," he wrote, "and the utterings of war were heard in the distance."

SOURCES

This short history of Ramsey County has been adapted from a number of sources. The Ramsey County Historical Society's Editorial Board wishes to thank, in particular, County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt for sharing with us her paper on county history and Paul A. Verret, president of The Saint Paul Foundation, for allowing us to adapt material from the first two chapters of *Saint Paul—The First 150 Years*, written by Virginia Brainard Kunz and published by the Foundation in 1991.

Other sources have included *Minnesota—A History of the State* by Theodore C. Blegen published in 1963 and reprinted in 1975 by the University of Minnesota, and *A History of the City of Saint Paul to 1875* by J. Fletcher Williams, published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1876 and reprinted in 1983. In addition, much of the material in this article and elsewhere in this issue has come from the Ramsey County Historical Society's own publication, *Ramsey County History*, and the several hundred articles on the county's history which the magazine has published throughout the thirty-five years of its existence.

Ramsey County's Heritage Trees

At least sixteen stately reminders of St. Paul's and Ramsey County's past are scattered about the region and they are not bridges and buildings. They are trees, and they are

identified and described in a guidebook, *Heritage Trees of St. Paul, MN*, developed in 1998 by thirteen-year-old Joe Quick, a member of Boy Scout Troup 85, Indianhead Council, as an Eagle Scout community service project.

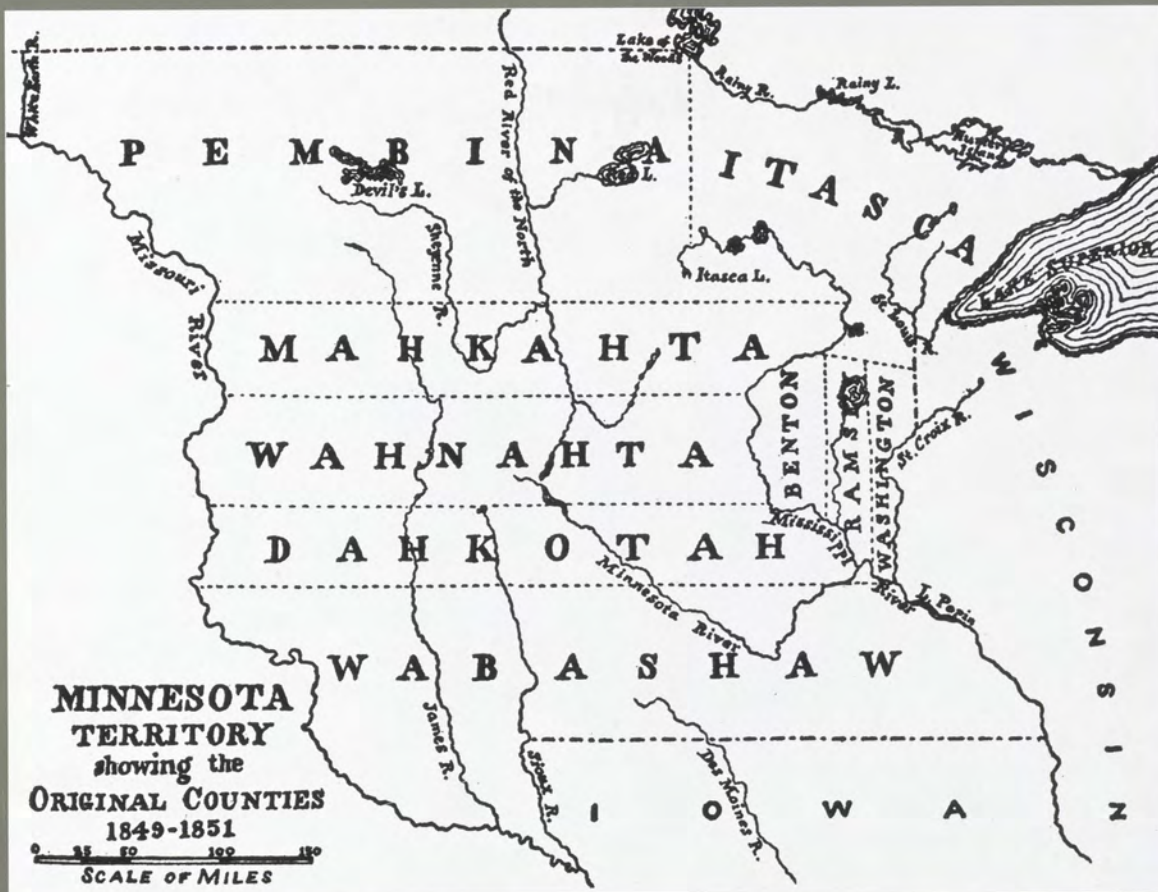
It is startling to learn from Joe's guidebook that even before Father Louis Hennepin passed through the region in 1680, two Eastern Cottonwood trees had put down their roots on Harriet Island; that around 1700 another Eastern Cottonwood was growing in the garden of a row house on St. Paul's West Side and that sixty years later a Black Willow had established itself northeast of the south parking lot at Como Lake.

Joe Quick began his research with a questionnaire he distributed to branch libraries in St. Paul and Ramsey County. Residents were asked to nominate Heritage Trees.

The result is some fascinating and little known facets of history. For instance, the description of the 1835 White Oak on Goodhue Street, nominated by Sean Kershaw, notes that "In the mid-1880s, this White Oak grew at the western edge of what then was the city limits. It grew near Grove Street, which was later renamed Goodhue Street. The tree was spared during construction of a home which was built in the Greek Revival style of architecture. The home is believed to have been built by John Hassell."

Then there is the story of Don and the 118-year-old burr oak nominated by Jack and Linda Brewer. Don was a war horse owned by William R. Marshall, Minnesota's fifth governor. Marshall, a brigadier general during the Civil War, acquired Don in 1864 in Missouri and brought him home with him at the end of the war. When Don died in 1886 at the age of twenty-nine, Marshall buried him on the "sunny side of an oak"—the burr oak—on his country estate north of St. Paul, the site today of Roselawn Cemetery in Roseville.

Joe Quick's guidebook has now been printed by the St Paul Pioneer Press with the help of the Ramsey County Extension Service and the Ramsey County Historical Society.



Map of Minnesota Territory showing the original counties as they existed from 1849 to 1851. Minnesota Historical Society collections. See "A Short History of Ramsey County," beginning on page 8

R.C.H.S.

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