

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Temporary Shelter for
Six Children Under 12:
St. Joseph's Orphanage

Page 10

Spring, 2002

Volume 37, Number 1

'The Best School in the City,' 1896–1916

Mechanic Arts High School: Its First 20 Years

—Page 4



The first Mechanic Arts High School building, right, shares the site at Central and Park Avenues with the old Madison School, left, where grade school pupils are playing. This spectacular 1911 photo by Charles P. Gibson also reveals a long-vanished neighborhood in downtown St. Paul. Minnesota Historical Society collections. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Editor

Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Howard M. Guthmann

Chair

James Russell

President

Marlene Marschall

First Vice President

Ronald J. Zweber

Second Vice President

Richard A. Wilhoit

Secretary

Peter K. Butler

Treasurer

Charles L. Bathke, W. Andrew Boss, Peter K. Butler, Norbert Conzemius, Anne Cowie, Charlotte H. Drake, Joanne A. Englund, Robert F. Garland, John M. Harens, Scott Hutton, Judith Frost Lewis, John M. Lindley, George A. Mairs, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Richard Nicholson, Marvin J. Pertzik, Glenn Wiessner, Laurie Zenner, Ronald J. Zweber.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chair; James B. Bell, Henry Blodgett, Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Mark Eisenschenk, Pat Hart, Thomas J. Kelley, Tom Mega, Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Paul D. Nelson, G. Richard Slade.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, William Fallon, Otis Godfrey, Jr., Robert S. Hess, D. W. "Don" Larson, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Robert Mirick, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome Plunkett, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner James McDonough, chairman
Commissioner Susan Haigh
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt
Commissioner Janice Rettman
Commissioner Jan Wiessner

Paul Kirkwold, manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 2002, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. **All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.** The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address admin@rchs.com.; web site address www.rchs.com

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 37, Number 1

Spring, 2002

CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** 'The Best School in the City,' 1896-1916
Mechanic Arts High School: Its First 20 Years
John W. Larson
- 10** A Memoir
A Temporary Shelter for Six Under 12—
St. Joseph's Catholic Orphan Home
Janet Postlewaite Sands
- 14** Donations and Their Own Pockets
An Orphanage's Roots in 1869 St. Paul
Paul D. Nelson
- 16** Growing Up in St. Paul
The War to End All Wars:
A Schoolboy's Recollection of World War II
Ray Barton
- 19** The Fire Insurance Patrol: Gone But Not Forgotten
John S. Sonnen
- 20** Doing History in Ramsey County and St. Paul:
A Review Essay
John M. Lindley
- 24** Book Reviews

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

In this issue historian John Larson takes us back to the turn of the twentieth century to the founding and early years of one of St. Paul's best known educational institutions: Mechanic Arts High School. Founded in 1896, Mechanic Arts High School exemplified the educational philosophy that identified vocational education and training is a prerequisite for the citizens of a nation that was rapidly undergoing industrialization. Using materials such as the high school's own student publications, Larson chronicles the first two decades of the school's history, its years under the leadership of Principal George Weitbrecht, who was an extraordinary educator.

Janet Postlewaite Sands shifts our attention to another kind of institution in a memoir of her months living at St. Joseph's Orphan Home in 1945-46. Although she was only seven at the time, Janet Postlewaite's recall of the events in her family's life that forced her and her brothers and sisters to take up temporary refuge at the orphanage is both clear and vivid. Paul Nelson follows Janet Sands's memoir with a brief essay that provides the background and history of St. Joseph's Catholic Orphan Home. In light of current newspaper headlines that raise probing questions about the function and value of orphanages today, Janet Sands's family story asks us to consider these issues in a broader context and complexity than we might first have thought necessary.

Newspaper headlines and world events are a theme that's present in Ray Barton's account of how he reacted to the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. As Barton explains, the events in New York, Washington D.C., and western Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, helped bring back his own recollections of his youthful years between 1941 and 1945 when the United States was fully committed to war with its Axis foes.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Letters to the Editor

Who Was Jacob?

I really enjoyed G. Richard Slade's St. Paul banking history article. The article refers to "brewer Jacob Bremer" when discussing the recapitalized Empire National Bank. I am familiar with Adolph and Otto Bremer, but not Jacob. Can you give me some information about him?

Ronald J. Zweber, St. Paul

Author Slade says, "Must have been Otto. Slip of the author."

1790? 1792?

In the biography of Lucius Ordway that was published in the fall issue, two different dates were given for Aaron Ordway's birth: 1790 and 1792. Which was it?

Louise Schofield, Maplewood

It was 1792.

Where Was It?

My grandparents lived in St. Paul many years ago. I'm now eighty, but I remember that they talked often about attending the Church of St. Mary. Apparently it was in the downtown area, not far from where they lived. Can you tell me more about it?

Mary Louise Ryan
Fargo, North Dakota

St. Mary's was the first Catholic church established in St. Paul after the Cathedral itself. The city was growing, and so were its churches. In 1935 the Reverend James M. Reardon published a little history of the church. It was built, he wrote, in 1866 on the northwest corner of Ninth and Locust Streets in Lowertown, then a residential neighborhood "in the center of a plateau lying between the upper town and what is now known as Dayton's Bluff." (The railroads had not yet arrived to pave the area with their tracks.) The church was an English



The Empire National Bank of St. Paul at 360 Robert Street around 1929 after the bank changed its name from the National Exchange Bank. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

Gothic structure built of dressed blue limestone, Reardon wrote, and "ornamented at the southwest corner with a campanile," a square tower that was a downtown landmark for many years.

The Family Bank

G. Richard Slade's article in the winter issue on the struggles of St. Paul's banks revived several memories. I particularly remember talk about the National Exchange Bank where my father banked. I was too young to remember much about the 1920s, but I do recall his fears that the bank was "a bit shaky." Slade's article explained it all for me—how the bank was saved from failure in 1926 and, moreover, how and why it changed its name to the Empire National Bank of St. Paul. I hadn't realized that the Empire was our old National Exchange. Nice to piece that together. Interesting article.

Jane Sheffield, Lake Elmo

Jimmy Griffin's Memoir

I found your excerpt from Jimmy Griffin's memoir in the spring issue fascinating. I think I was part of the crowd at Seventh and Wabasha that he was trying to subdue. I remember coming out of a late movie and waiting for a streetcar in front of the St. Francis. I was only sixteen and I got out of there fast!

Lew Morton, St. Paul

A Magnificent Mansion

News of the redevelopment of the old Hamm Brewery site reminds me of that magnificent mansion that stood on top of the hill just above the brewery. Steps down the hill linked it to the brewery. Whatever happened to that house?

Marty Lewis, Shorewood

That was the mansion built by William Hamm, Sr., about 1887. Larry Millette describes it in his book, Lost Twin Cities, as a "Queen Anne confection with a round corner tower, a profusion of gables, and large arched windows on the second floor that echoed those of the brewery down below." After family members moved elsewhere, the house became a nursing home, then stood vacant until it burned down in 1954, victim of an arsonist.

Flandrau or Flandreau?

I'm writing a paper for my high school history class, and I need to know the correct spelling of Charles Flandrau's name. I've seen it Flandrau and Flandreau. Help!

Constance Harvey, St. Paul

We've seen it both ways too. Most historians spell it without the "e"—Flandrau. However, Flandreau, South Dakota, uses the "e."



Fredrick McGhee, family and friends on the porch of the McGhee home at 665 University Avenue, St. Paul, around 1910. Minnesota Historical Society photograph. See "Doing History in Ramsey County and St. Paul" on page 20 and a review of Paul Nelson's biography of McGhee on page 24.

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

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

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

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

