

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*The St. Paul Volunteer
Fireman and the Battle
of Gettysburg*

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Spring, 2003

Volume 38, Number 1

An 'Attempt' on His Life?

Sitting Bull's 1884 Visit to St. Paul

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Sitting Bull around 1880, just before his 1884 visit to St. Paul. Minnesota Historical Society photograph. See article beginning on page 4 on Sitting Bull's visit and an alleged attempt on his life. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

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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, 2003, 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

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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

The Society regrets an omission from the 2002 Donor Recognition Roll in the Winter issue of *Ramsey County History*. The list of supporters should have included the name of Albert W. Lindeke, Jr., a generous and loyal supporter. We apologize for this omission.

A Message from the Editorial Board

In 1884 the Lakota Indian leader Sitting Bull visited St. Paul. Our feature article in this issue focuses on the circumstances of his two brief stays in the city that year and whether during the latter visit there was an attempt to assassinate the man who embodied so much of the conflict between the white settlers and the native inhabitants of the American West. This issue also includes Civil War historian Patrick Hill's account of Wilson B. Farrell, a St. Paul volunteer fireman, who gave his life as a member of the First Minnesota Regiment in the Battle of Gettysburg and a brief salute to the sesquicentennial of the founding of St. Paul's Oakland Cemetery, where Farrell is now buried. This issue concludes with Helen Miller Dickison's history of today's Fairmount Methodist Church, Minnesota's first German Methodist church, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2002.

Readers of *Ramsey County History* and anyone interested in the history of Ramsey County and St. Paul now have a new resource for history searches: the Society's web site at www.rchs.com. On the site's home page, the researcher can click on several links that are of value. One is "Ask the Historian," which provides questions and answers about the area's history that recently have come to Society staff members. Another briefly profiles the histories of some of St. Paul's neighborhoods. All the information on this link comes from the Society's *Ramsey County Historic Site Survey Report*, a major resource in the RCHS library. The final link on the Society web page connects the user to information on the contents of the most recent issues of *Ramsey County History* and ties to a complete listing of articles published in the magazine since its initial publication in 1964. We hope this new link will get many hits from users and increase awareness of the richness of the content of our magazine's back issues.

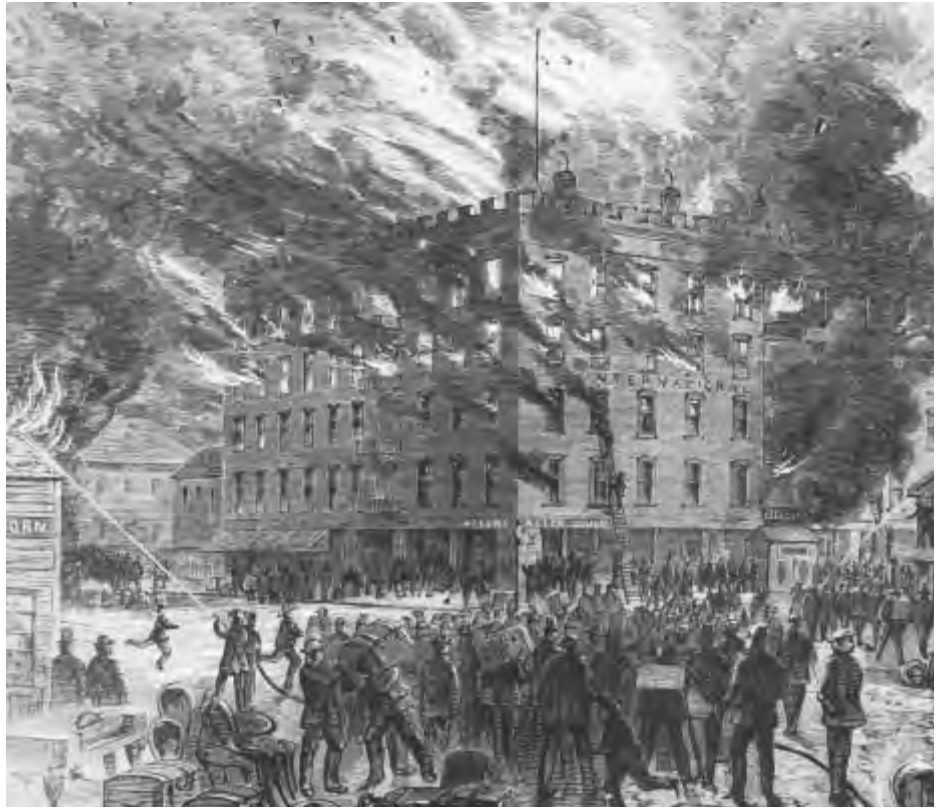
John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

The Volunteer Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company

Although fires destroyed buildings with frustrating regularity during St. Paul's earliest years, the volunteer Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company, to which Wilson Farrell belonged, was not officially established until 1854, when its constitution and by-laws were adopted on November 6. Even so, the company, formed by carpenter R. C. Knox, maintained the American tradition of the bucket brigade.

In an article titled "Fire on the Frontier—Tradesmen, Merchants: The Men Who Ran With the Machine," published in the winter, 1990 issue of *Ramsey County History*, Thomas J. Kelley wrote that cold winter nights, with homes barely heated by fireplaces or stoves, produced a rash of residential fires, and arson, sparked by the lure of looting, often sent commercial buildings up in smoke. Back in 1838, Pierre Parrant's whisky shack at the mouth of Fountain Cave, had burned down, a blaze blamed on a disgruntled customer. In 1850 the chapel built by the Reverend Edward D. Neill across from Rice Park, went up in flames. The town council passed an ordinance requiring building owners to have on hand two buckets marked "fire," but did little else.

Frustrated, Knox organized thirty of his friends into a volunteer bucket brigade. He raised money for a set of ladders, which he personally made. Unfortunately, the source of water, the Mississippi, often was too far away. The splendid, new Daniels Hotel at Seven Corners burned down. So did Norman Kittson's Sintomine Hotel in Lower-town. The city council granted the volunteer company power to destroy property to prevent a fire from spreading, but no money. The volunteers dug into their own pockets for \$75 to buy ladders, buckets, ropes, and axes and, carrying the buckets and ladders, they raced to the fires.



Volunteer firefighters attempted to put out the burning of the International Hotel on February 3, 1869, as sketched by St. Paul artist R. O. Sweeny and published in Harper's Weekly on February 27, 1869. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

In 1857, the entire block of buildings on the north side of Third Street between St. Peter and Market Streets burned down. The fire had been set. Two weeks later, arson again destroyed several saloons, two hotels, the Galena House and the Canada House. Engines began to arrive that year, and more volunteer companies were formed: Hope Engine Company No. 1 in 1857 and Minnehaha Engine Company No. 2. These two companies, along with the Pioneers, formed the backbone of the St. Paul Fire Department for the next twenty years, Kelley noted.

"A description of what it took to become and remain a member in good standing of a volunteer company," he

wrote, "is found in the minutes of the Minnehaha Engine Co. No. 2 written in 1859 by the company's secretary, James J. Hill. The future Empire Builder was then a clerk in the office of a steamboat line."

"It was not enough for a citizen to volunteer to serve in a fire company. He also had to be elected, and five blackballs would result in rejection. Each member paid monthly dues of 50 cents. Although some reports suggested that volunteers could be held criminally liable for not showing up at a fire, Hill's report shows that the volunteers provided their own enforcement by fining members 50 cents when they failed to appear at the scene."

V.B.K.



"Little Sure Shot," Annie Oakley. Photograph from the Annie Oakley Foundation Collection, Greenville, Ohio. See article beginning on page 4.

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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