

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Irvine Park in 1854:
*Its Homes and the People
Who Once Lived There*

See article on page 20

Spring, 2004

Volume 39, Number 1

'High and Dry on a Sandstone Cliff'

St. Paul and the Year of the Chicago and
Rock Island's Great Railroad Excursion

—Page 4



This postcard dated 1909 shows St. Paul's Lower Landing where the Great Railroad Excursion came ashore 150 years ago. From historian Robert J. Stumm's collection and used with his permission. See articles beginning on page 4 and page 20.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Editor

Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James A. Russell

Chair

Marlene Marschall

President

George A. Mairs

First Vice President

W. Andrew Boss

Second Vice President

Judith Frost Lewis

Secretary

J. Scott Hutton

Treasurer

Duke Addicks, Charles L. Bathke, W. Andrew Boss, Norlin Boyum, Joseph Campbell, Norbert Conzemius, Anne Cowie, Charlton Dietz, Charlotte H. Drake, Joanne A. Englund, Robert F. Garland, Howard Guthmann, Joan Higinbotham, Scott Hutton, Judith Frost Lewis, John M. Lindley, George A. Mairs, Marlene Marschall, Laurie Murphy, Richard Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Marvin J. Pertzik, Penny Harris Reynen, David Thune, Glenn Wiessner, Richard Wilhoit, Laurie Zenner, Ronald J. Zweber.

Richard T. Murphy, Sr.

Director Emeritus

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, *chair*, James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, Mark Eisenschenk, Tom Kelley, Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Paul D. Nelson, David Riehle, C. Richard Slade, Steve Trimble, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

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

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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

David Twa, 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, 2004, 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 39, Number 1

Spring, 2004

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 'High and Dry on a Sandstone Cliff'
St. Paul and the Year of the Great Railroad Excursion
Steve Trimble
- 20 Irvine Park in 1854: Its Homes and the
People Who Lived There 150 Years Ago
Robert J. Stumm
- 24 A Quilt and a Diary: The Story of the Little Girl
Who Rode an Orphan Train to a New Home
Ann Zemke
- 27 Growing Up in St. Paul
Mechanic Arts—An Imposing 'Melting Pot'
High School that Drew Minorities Together
Bernice Fisher
- 30 Books

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

Ramsey County Historical Society is celebrating two major events this spring. The first is the sesquicentennial of the Great Railroad Excursion in June of 1854 that heralded the completion of the railroad to the Mississippi River at Rock Island, Illinois, and the opening up of the trans-Mississippi west to settlement. In the lead article in this issue, historian Steve Trimble deftly reports what the historical record tells us about St. Paul in 1854. Then Robert Stumm, an avid collector of historic postcards, takes us on a tour of present-day homes in Irvine Park that have their origins in the era of the Grand Excursion and explains what those buildings tell us about the people who lived in them.

This issue of *Ramsey County History* completes forty years of unbroken publication. Begun in 1964 under the editorship of its founder, Virginia Brainard Kunz, our magazine has won two awards for excellence from the American Association for State and Local History. *Ramsey County History* has also demonstrated that local history, especially when it concerns the history of Ramsey County and St. Paul, can be a rich source of materials for authors, historians, and readers. Given the pleasure and enlightenment that this magazine has provided to all who have read it over the years, we thank the many authors who have contributed the fruits of their research and writing to RCHS. In addition Virginia Kunz deserves special thanks for her sterling editorship of this history magazine for the past forty years.

John Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Books

Grand Excursion: Antebellum America Discovers the Upper Mississippi

Steven J. Keillor
Afton Historical Society Press
260 pages, index
Reviewed by Timothy Glines

With the publication of Steven J. Keillor's new book, there should be no need soon to write again about the Great Railroad Excursion of 1854. On the other hand, we readers of history know that historians invariably reinterpret events for each succeeding generation. Until then, however, Keillor's retelling of the story is more than sufficient.

Of course, other writers previously recorded the Excursion's events. It started with the journalists and publicists who wrote immediately following the trip, and at least three articles have appeared in *Minnesota History*, the journal of the Minnesota Historical Society (in 1933, 1934, and 2004), and also in *Ramsey County History* (in 1995). The difference between the approaches of earlier writers and Keillor is that his focus is on the broader significance of the trip itself. Earlier writers were more interested in the Excursion's impact on Minnesota Territory, which was relatively minimal.

What Keillor does so well is to put the Great Railroad Excursion in the context of national history. He certainly recognizes the standard historical interpretation. As an event associated with the Chicago & Rock Island Railroad's connection with Rock Island and the Mississippi River, the Excursion represented a new phase in the extension of the frontier and anticipated the first transcontinental railroad. This was

the intent of the railroad men who organized it, and it was clear to the travelers themselves and to subsequent historians.

But Keillor takes us further. He uses the events of the summer of 1854 to describe late antebellum America. He shows us a volatile time in the United States. We see it not only in the shadow of the general debate over slavery, but specifically in the aftermath of the divisive Kansas-Nebraska Act, which President Franklin Pierce had just signed. Kansas-Nebraska was on the minds of almost all the excursionists as they traveled, first separately or in small groups to Chicago, then together by train to Rock Island and by steamboat up the Mississippi. Most of them were New Englanders who, if not abolitionists, opposed the expansion of slavery into new states and territories.

The means Keillor uses to provide the national context is an unusual one. A section called an "excursus" follows each chapter. (Dictionaries define the word as a lengthy appended exposition of a topic or point.) This clever contrivance allows him to write about law, medicine, politics, religion, gender roles, science, nineteenth century historical philosophy, travel, and tourism, the rise of private corporations, the economics and technology of steamboats and early railroads, and other subjects. Possibly, some readers may find such digressions a distraction from the main story, but Keillor writes so well and with such intelligence that others, as I did, will welcome them. It allows Keillor to tell us more about the luminaries on the Excursion, including writer Catharine Sedgwick, former President Millard Fillmore, scientist Benjamin Silliman, historian George Bancroft, and jurist John Dean Caton.

Keillor also has much to say about another important figure who was not on the trip: Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas, whose role in the Kansas-Nebraska Act had pit him against most of the New Englanders. Keillor concludes with a well-written epilogue describing the aftermath, including the Schuyler railroad fraud of 1854 and the anti-Nebraska movement in June and July. It also sets the stage for the Civil War, which so nearly sundered the United States in the next decade.

The day-by-day story of the Excursion is fascinating in itself. The steamboat trip was largely successful in spite of some initial confusion about stateroom assignments. The time of year meant that the water was high, and the boats did not have to deal with the low river levels that made travel on the upper Mississippi inconvenient and even hazardous later in the summer and fall. Food and drink were plentiful, and the conversation was intelligent and lively. In light of the major public events planned to observe the 2004 sesquicentennial of the Excursion,* it is interesting to note that the 1854 arrival in St. Paul was distinguished by a degree of miscalculation. The steamboats reached the territorial capital earlier than had been expected. The original plans were changed so the travelers, many of whom were devout sabbatarians, would not be aboard the steamboats on Sunday. The problem was that there was no way to let St. Paulites know about the new schedule. But everyone made the best of it, and the visitors were impressed by the buildings they found in such a new city on the edge of frontier.

The notables who welcomed them included names Minnesotans know today like William Le Duc, Harriet Bishop, and Henry Hastings Sibley.

Some visitors reconnected with former New Englanders who had settled in St. Paul. The welcomers also included many anonymous folk like those recruited to transport the visitors to the Falls of St. Anthony and Fort Snelling, sometimes at what the travelers considered exorbitant rates. Everyone wanted to see the fabled Falls, but they proved underwhelming to many Excursionists, some of whom had stopped to see Niagara Falls on the way west. One writer referred to St. Anthony Falls as a "ripple on the river." In fact, the Falls already were losing their wild nature as a result of lumbering and sawmill debris, and travelers noticed the waste products littering the area. Many visitors also stopped at Fort Snelling, but again with a certain amount of confusion. It did not appear that army officials knew the travelers would visit the Fort.

Steven Keillor's use of primary sources is inspirational. To write this book, he consulted libraries and archives throughout the United States, locating the papers, correspondence, and records of as many of the Excursionists as possible. There are just a few things that impair this otherwise excellent and attractive publication. I wish Keillor had done more with the Great Railroad Excursion as a symbol for the displacement of American Indians. Treaties with the Dakota and Ojibwa in the first half of the 1850s fundamentally changed the position of Indians in Minnesota Territory. Few Indians were encountered on the Excursion, and it is doubtful that those Indians would have given the experience much thought as a symbol for the massive immigration that would follow. But American Indians in Minnesota today surely are likely to view the symbolism of the Great Railroad Excursion in a different light than the descendants of Euro-Americans. But this was not Keillor's intention and it may be unfair to criticize a book for what it is not. There are editorial decisions that detract from the book. Curiously, in a well-illustrated book with such a geographical focus, there are no maps at all. The index is only a name index and therefore not very helpful. These are

minor quibbles, however, and I recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of the United States and the region during the crucial years of the middle of the nineteenth century.

*The sesquicentennial celebration planned for late June and early July does not, of course, coincide with early June dates of the original trip. But the later dates of the celebration certainly allow for much more public participation; and communities on the Upper Mississippi have a chance for commemorative activity at time when neighboring states observe an arguably more significant milestone—the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Timothy Glines has worked for the Minnesota Historical Society for seventeen years and is currently manager of outreach services in the historic preservation, field services, and grants department.

Legacy of Violence

John D. Bessler
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
Reviewed by Michael Fetsch

The recent gubernatorial and legislative calls for reinstatement of the death penalty make this book required reading for anyone interested in the social, political, and moral ramifications of executions, whether *de jure* or extra-judicial. Bessler's thorough research surveys the historical origins of the anti-death penalty movement, beginning with Casare Beccaria's 1763 tract *On Crimes and Punishment* and how the battle between the pro and con forces was shaped by executions, within and without the bounds of the law in the United States generally as well as in Minnesota.

His analysis is interspersed with a wealth of related facts, which he weaves into his treatment of events in an interestingly fluid manner. His focus encompasses the dynamics of extra-judicial executions of Native Americans, African-Americans, and white settlers to famous state-sanctioned public executions, and includes the thirty-eight Dakota Indians in Mankato, as well as other well-known and lesser known incidents of capital punishment in our state's history.

The irony was that the public's

involvement, which created such macabre spectacles at executions, state sanctioned or not, motivated the legislature to require that executions be private, non-public affairs, and this is carefully recorded. Advocates of the death penalty realized that making a state-imposed execution private drained the event of its claimed deterrent value. Bessler is at his best in comparing the motivations, the history, the claims of capital punishment's opposing factions and the interplay of society, the legislature, the judiciary, and the press. Whatever one's view, Bessler's work is exquisitely timely and apposite to the current debate.

Michael Fetsch is a Ramsey County District Court judge.

ALSO IN PRINT

Another offering by Afton Press, *Mississippi Escapade, Reliving the Grand Excursion of 1854*, is a 128-page "learning and activity book" designed for young readers. Written by Paul Clifford Larson and Pamela Allen Larson, the book intersperses narrative of the history of the Mississippi as it relates to the Grand Excursion with sidebars suggesting activities for readers.

Vivid color reproductions of paintings, postcards, and early photographs of St. Paul (some of them colorized) of scenes along the river and in the city, as well as other more contemporary images, enliven the text. Appendices include more ideas for student activities, lists of books suitable for classroom use, additional books on the upper Mississippi, and other "River Resources."

Inexplicably, the Ramsey County Historical Society is missing from all these lists. This is despite the fact that the Society has published innumerable articles on the Mississippi and St. Paul, as well as the *Mississippi and St. Paul* booklet; walking tour brochures on the river; conducted a day-long forum on the river and its relationship to St. Paul; and has an exhibit in Landmark Center of the Bosse photographs of the Mississippi. *VBK*

Certificate of Stock - Shares \$100 each.

CHICAGO & ROCK ISLAND RAIL ROAD CO.

To bear interest, to be paid in semi-annual payments, at the rate of
No. 485. Ten per cent. per annum. Five Shares.

This is to Certify that *S. + C. Clark* are
entitled to *Five* Shares of \$100 each in the Capital Stock of
the Chicago and Rock Island Rail Road Company. The said Stock is trans-
ferable only on the Books of said Company, at the office of their Treasurer
in the City of New York, or at any Transfer agency established by the Company,
at the pleasure of the holder, by the said *S. + C. Clark*
in person, or by their Attorney, on the surrender of this Certificate.
In Witness Whereof the said Company have caused this Certificate
to be signed by the President and Treasurer.

Dated at the Transfer office, in the City of NEW YORK, this,
First day of *February* 1853.

A. C. Flagg
TREASURER

John B. Jervis PRESIDENT

Collins, Dorner & Co. No. 114 & 116 Pearl St. N.Y.

Int July 1st 1854 \$70.82

Stock certificate for five shares at \$100 par value, each issued in 1853 by the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad Co., organizer of the 1854 Great Railroad Excursion. The certificate is signed by John B. Jervis, the railroad's president, and its treasurer, A. C. Flagg. Both Jervis and Flagg were New York investors. The \$100 that a share cost in 1853 would be equal to \$2,244 in 2004. Also from Robert J. Stumm's collection.

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