

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Spanish Influenza in 1918:
The Year St. Paul Found
The 'Wolf' at Its Door

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Spring, 2005

Volume 40, Number 1

The Force that Shaped Neighborhoods
1890–1953: Sixty-three Years of Streetcars
And Millions of Dollars in Investments

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Selby Tunnel. A Selby-Lake car on its way downtown emerges from the east portal of the Selby Tunnel. Built to relieve the grade on Selby Hill and replace an awkward cable-counterweight system, the tunnel cost \$366,000 when it opened in 1907. The west portal of the tunnel on Selby has been covered over and sealed. The east portal is still visible, albeit in considerably deteriorated condition. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.

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Volume 40, Number 1

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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.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

The completion of the light rail line between the Mall of America and downtown Minneapolis within the past year and the possible construction of additional light rail in the metropolitan area have encouraged considerable discussion of the streetcar era. Without indulging in either nostalgia or finger pointing, transportation historian John W. Diers takes us through the complex history of the electric streetcar system in St. Paul in our Spring issue. His account is based on wide research into the predecessor systems, the economic pluses and minuses of streetcars, the human side of streetcar employment, and the ever-present competition from automobiles after 1920.

The Spring issue also includes an intriguing look at the effect of Spanish influenza on the city of St. Paul in 1918, a time when there was a world-wide influenza pandemic. Susan Dowd, a devoted researcher of old newspapers, shows us how St. Paul dealt with this deadly disease and survived far better than many other cities of that time. This issue of our magazine also includes another in our ongoing series, "Growing Up in St. Paul," with a delightful piece by historian James Bell that recalls his boyhood on Hague Avenue and Fry Street in the first half of the last century. Lastly, Steve Trimble supplies a look at St. Paul history through the eyes of four contemporary novelists who use St. Paul as the backdrop for their fiction. These novelists have steeped themselves in local history and used it to enliven and enrich their stories of the human condition.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Growing Up in St. Paul

Simple, Carefree Days—Hague and Fry— And the Center of a Boy's Universe

James B. Bell

My first sixteen years were passed in the house of my grandfather, Edwin Percival Bell, which had been built in the early years of the twentieth century. He had arrived in St. Paul in the early 1890s from Rochester, New York, and by 1895 was employed as a credit reporter for R. G. Dun and Company, later known as Dun and Bradstreet, located in the Manhattan Building on the southeast corner of Robert and Fifth Streets.

By 1902 he was serving as credit manager of the Stronge & Warner Company, a manufacturer of ladies wear at 261-279 East Fifth Street, on the northwest corner of Rosabel. He remained with that firm until his early death at age forty-nine in 1920. My grandmother, Edith Trafton Rockwell Bell, had migrated with her family from Massachusetts to Minneapolis in the early 1880s as her father had followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and was employed in the milling industry.

During my grandfather's first ten years in St. Paul, his wife, and daughter Dorothy (b. 1895) lived at several addresses. One was 495 Selby Avenue across the street from the Curling Club's headquarters and is today a house that has been handsomely restored to its late nineteenth-century style. After my father, John Chapman Bell, was born in 1905, the family moved to 1618 Hague Avenue, a block west of Snelling Avenue. He married my mother in 1926, Mabel Amelia Brugler, the oldest daughter of James Vance Brugler, who owned Consumers Milk Company, a company that supplied the milk for the Saint Paul Hotel, among others. It was in the house on Hague where my paternal grandparents spent the remainder of their lives and where my father was raised, attending Richards Gordon School and Central High School.

My memories of the house, yard,

neighborhood, and neighbors of my youth are of simpler and more carefree days: burning leaves from the elm trees that towered over the street in the autumn, removing snow amid blistering winds and freezing temperatures in the winter, and tending the lawn and garden during spring and summer. It was also the twilight years of the Citizen Ice Company trucks that delivered ice for iceboxes, and the fruit and vegetable peddlers with horse-drawn wagons or trucks.

During autumn and winter, the living room of our house sparkled with log fires; a Christmas tree decorated with ornaments from my father's childhood would fill a corner of the room; Tiffany chandeliers hanging from the dining room ceiling illuminated family gatherings at Thanksgiving and Christmas. My mother's father had insisted on introducing a state-of-the-art General Electric kitchen dishwasher, garbage disposal, and white metal cabinets that transformed the 1905 style kitchen and liberated me from washing dishes before I was old enough to do so.

The neighborhood of Hague Avenue and Fry Street was the center of my universe, the focal point of my earliest education, and the formation of a camaraderie of playmates.

In the neighborhood we were surrounded by families with such names as Carroll, Goswitz, Gregg, Meiners, Phillips, Popp, Rankine, and Yaeger. William W. Meiners and his wife Hilda lived in the house on the eastside of ours. He was a learned gentleman, a lawyer, ceaselessly writing a book on philosophy, and a former president of the University of Northern Iowa. To the west of our house, the Popp family lived with their three daughters, Dorothy, Jean, and Marjorie, and a son, Bill, Jr. While attending Macalester College, Bill, a star running back



James B. Bell in his University High School graduation photograph, 1950. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are from the author.

for the Scotsmen's football team, would pass to my sister Jean and me tickets to watch the Saturday afternoon games on the grassy knoll of the college's field.

The young boy delivering the *Pioneer Press* in the morning and the *Dispatch* in the afternoon was Donald Meisel, who after college and seminary became a Presbyterian minister, capping his career at the distinguished Nassau Street Church in Princeton, New Jersey, and Westminster Presbyterian Church in downtown Minneapolis.

Another feature of the area was the village-like character of the shops at the nearby intersection of Selby and Snelling. Such long ago but familiar names as Scott's Five and Ten Cents store, and



The third grade class at Richards Gordon School in 1941. The author is on left in the 2nd row.

Towey drugstore, the Liberty State Bank, my godmother Marie Rothfuss's Dance Studio, Lux Grocery Store, the Park Recreation and O'Gara's Bar and Grill, all vital parts of the neighborhood scene.

Among our playmates were Ozzie (Howard) Burke and his sister Barbara; Frank and Jack Goswitz; Bobby Spang; Kenny, Bob, and Roger Ellison; and Jack and Jim Holt. The two Goswitz brothers, who attended St. Mark's School and later Cretin, became star members of Cretin's baseball teams before attending Marquette University and medical school. During the long summer evenings we would gather after dinner to play sidewalk games like Hide and Seek, Red Light, Green Light, Kick the Can, and Captain May I?

Ozzie and Barbara Burke lived directly behind our house on Laurel Avenue and in their backyard there was a large walnut tree. Ozzie built a tree house with a roof for rainy days. Sandwiches never tasted so delicious as when they were eaten high above the yard in the privacy of that tree house.

My brother John, sister Jean and I attended the same grade school as our father, the Richards Gordon School on Dayton Avenue between Snelling and Fry. My memory triggers the names of

such teachers as Jane M. Kennedy in kindergarten, Mrs. Carroll, Mrs. Nelson, Audrey M. Lloyd, Lucille H. Lyons, in first, second, third and fourth grades respectively. The gym teachers for intermittent spells were Frank Zucco and Gertrude M. Jordan. A few days each week we were exposed to a rather limited introduction to music and art, led by Myrtle Dale, for music and Marion E. Boggs in art, a woman who exuded elegance, confidence, and style. Rather regal in appearance, she also drove an enormous Buick sedan. My eighth grade teacher, Helen M. Lynn, who also had taught my father, was a first-class mentor in American History. In no small way her efforts helped to shape my interest in history and current affairs that set the course for my successive levels of education. Her probing style of questions instilled a critical early design on my thinking about historical and political events.

25 Cents a Week

During my initial years at the Gordon School, the principal was Ella M. Roverud, a tall, erect, and white thatched lady who appeared to be older than God. I suspect from this distance in time that the last smile on her face appeared the day before she was born. She was suc-

ceeded by Alice D. Grendall, slightly more youthful, no less tall, but graced with an occasional smile, she obviously enjoyed what I considered as uncompromising authority.

There are other memories: the need to bring twenty-five cents a week for a half-pint of milk each morning, and the annual fund drives for the Red Cross and the St. Paul Community Chest. During World War II, defense stamps were sold through the classroom and pasted in a small handbook for eventual conversion to a Bond. I recall an early Halloween costume party, perhaps when I was in the kindergarten, and my outfit as that of a brown bear. Snow days were always welcomed—a reprieve, or was it a parole?—from attending classes at least for the day. While in the eighth grade I joined the ranks of the school police patrol, proudly wearing the Sam Browne belt and gleaming silver-plated badge of authority. The annual police boy's picnic at Harriet Island was a splendid reward for the year's duty and a note that the school year was approaching an end.

There was a released-time program on Wednesday afternoons during sixth through eighth grade of which I always took advantage, as I was delighted to be excused from the usual classroom routine. The arrangement was to allow students a modest level of Protestant religious instruction. One year the sessions were held at Olivet Congregational Church while the last two years the site was the Calvary Evangelical Church. The experience was so unimpressive that I remember neither the content nor the names of the teachers.

In addition to school, my routine was punctuated with weekly outside lessons. I was enrolled briefly in a tap dancing class conducted by my godmother Marie Rothfuss at her studio at 1568 Selby. She had a remarkable reputation as an outstanding ballet and dance teacher with several of her students going on to careers with ballet companies in New York City and elsewhere. I recall her as a gentle, gracious, but no-nonsense instructor. Once she came to our house for a visit after she had returned from several months in Paris. She described the return voyage on an ocean liner and a stop in a distant city called New York, both adventures

beyond my reckoning. I can see her now sitting on the sofa in front of our living room windows, as she passed to me a memorable gift that I cherish today, a Mickey Mouse wristwatch.

As a boy in grade school, Marie Rothfuss arranged for me to model winter coats at an annual event for local clothing manufacturers. I walked the runway at the St. Paul Auditorium for the Butwin Sportswear Company, located at 287 East Fourth Street, and the H. Harris Company, a near neighbor at 174 East Fourth. For my efforts I was allowed to keep the coats that were custom made for me—a terrific reward.

After school and until high school, my sister and I had weekly French lessons under Madame Charlotte Huot at her apartment at Goodrich and Milton. She was an elegant, cultivated person, a superb teacher who instilled in me an interest in the language, culture, and history of France. On cold St. Paul winter days she would always serve us a cup of hot chocolate and cookies before we began our work. Occasionally her two granddaughters, Adele and Ruth Sargent, would join us at the lesson table in the living room.

My mother enjoyed playing the piano.

Early on she took my sister Jean and me around to meet her former teacher, Clara Thorson, who taught piano at the Conservatory at Macalester College. I can't recall how many years we took lessons from her, but I can't remember a precept, note, or composition that she taught me. I was really influenced by my next teacher, Alice Rosenfeld, who lived with her mother in a duplex at 294 Pleasant Avenue. A professional musician, she gave lessons in her living room that was dominated by two enormous concert grand pianos. I recall everything she attempted to teach me—the scales, compositions by Bach, Schumann, Chopin, and so forth. Once a year her students were marshaled to perform in an annual recital in the Edyth Bush "Little Theater" on Cleveland Avenue. Whenever I am near a keyboard I sit down and play the Bach prelude that was my offering at one of the programs. On another occasion, a concert of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (as it was known then) at Northrup Auditorium, she took me backstage to introduce me to her teacher—"The Maestro"—Dimitri Mitropolous. I was in awe of meeting the tall, gracious man who had just conducted the orchestra's program entirely from memory.

Summer vacations were enriching. As a younger boy, I attended the two-week Vacation Bible School at Calvary Evangelical and United Brethren Church at the corner of Saratoga and Laurel, a congregation served by the Reverend Frank Spong, my playmate Bobby's father. I suppose I was exposed to some rather basic Protestant instruction, but I can't recall today a whit of the curriculum. For me the main enjoyment was spending time with my friends. As it was also the season for mowing the grass at home and for neighbors, I earned some pocket money for ice-cream cones, the movies and comic books.

Elephants and the Circus

Another attraction was playing baseball with my pals and listening to the St. Paul Saints radio broadcasts announced by Marty O'Neill on WMIN. I closely followed the team's progress through the season. On Sunday afternoons it was great fun for my sister and me to watch a doubleheader at Lexington Park and lunch on hotdogs, certain that we were getting our money's worth. It was an era of young ball players who later would become major league stars with either the Brooklyn or Los Angeles Dodgers—Don Zimmer, Duke Snider, and Ralph Branca. I also recall arising at dawn on a summer morning and walking with my sister and Bobby Spong to Dunning Field to watch the circus staff erect the tents with the aid of a band of elephants.

A high point was a month spent at the house of my maternal grandfather, James V. Brugler, on Hodgson Road at Turtle Lake, over the road from the ffoliott's tree farm. At the time his house seemed to be at the end of the world—at least a half-hour drive from our house and twelve or fifteen miles into the countryside. It was a delightful place for swimming, picnic meals with cousins, playing softball on the lawns, riding the pony, and just being carefree.

My grandfather was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1884, of old stock. His ancestors for more than 150 years had lived in Plymouth, Massachusetts as the progenitor, Francis Cooke, had arrived on the *Mayflower* in 1620. Nicholas Byram, a grandfather several times removed from



The Consumers Milk Company at 500 North Grotto around 1925.



Grandfather Brugler at his desk at the Consumers Milk Company ca. 1935.

my grandfather, had served as treasurer of the Colony during King Philip's War (1675–76). However, one of the later ancestors, involved in some unclear religious dispute with local authorities, hived off to New Jersey about 1750 and there many relatives remain.

One of several children, my grandfather's mother died when he was quite young. The task of raising the family was too much for his father and fell to two of his mother's sisters and a brother. In time he attended Newark Academy and later Blair Academy in Blairstown, New Jersey, an institution that he held in high regard later in life. A few years ago my wife and I visited the campus, to walk the paths and visit the buildings that had been familiar to him. The Academy was long a feeder school for Princeton University with a tradition of strong teaching and close links to the Presbyterian Church. After graduating from the Academy, my grandfather worked in the Manhattan law office of the father of one of his classmates, William G. McAdoo, railroad executive, lawyer, and investor, chief promoter of the construction of the Hudson Tunnel in New York City, and later as Secretary of the Treasury in President Woodrow Wilson's cabinet.

About the turn of the twentieth century, my grandfather, joined the United States Marines, serving for a period in the

Philippine Islands and later in St. Paul as recruitment officer. There he met my grandmother, Mabel Johnson, of Hudson, Wisconsin. After his discharge from the Marine Corps, he worked for a year or two at Swift and Company in South St. Paul, then established a dairy farm in St. Paul Park to market his products. In 1915 he established the Consumers Milk Company that flourished in St. Paul until his death in 1969.

A Horse and Buggy

In many ways my grandfather remains a person I never really knew. Despite the fact that I carry his name, my recollection of him is of a quiet man, reserved and remote, who seldom was able to meet in conversation or playfulness another person, particularly a grandchild, across generational lines. He was not given to small talk under any circumstance regardless of the age of the audience.

In any event, during spring, summer, and fall at my grandfather's house, especially on Sunday afternoons, a horse would be hitched to a vintage buggy to pull us through a well-trimmed trail in the woods; in the winter months a sleigh was pressed into service. We'd also clear the snow off a section of the lake and ice-

skate until chilled or the afternoon sun had set, and was followed by a bountiful table prepared by my grandfather's second wife, Aunt Clara (Hanselman).

A summer highlight was my mother's youngest sister, Jean Kirchen and her husband Charles, and their children, Susan, Christopher, and Sarah, and their arrival in St. Paul from Memphis. My grandfather's first wife, Mabel Brugler, lived around the block from our house, and the Kirchen cousins were frequent guests. The bonding of relations was cemented and we remain in contact with each other sharing the moments of joy and sadness that punctuate everybody's life.

My early religious affiliation was at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, located at the corner of Laurel Avenue and Howell Street and served by its longtime rector, the Reverend Frank Zoubeck. One of my church associations was with the boy's choir, directed by one of my grandfather's early love interests, Mrs. Paul Bremer of the brewery and banking family. My fuzzy recollection is that she was especially considerate of my participation in the choir. The usual round of Sunday school classes was forgettable, although probably led by well-intentioned men and women, and a young



Grandfather's house at Turtle Lake and Hodgson Road in 1933.



One of the Consumers Milk Company's early delivery wagons.

people's organization. The walk to and from church usually was with Bill Popp and a vivacious young lady whose eyes seemed to be set on him—Elaine Polski. Others from that era were Sally and Joan Keogh, Bill Boyle, John Relf, and Dick and Shirley Hatch.

My scouting experience was limited and essentially unsatisfactory. Most interesting was a Cub Scout Pack under the auspices of Unity Church, at Portland and Grotto Street. Den Master was the father of one of my grade school classmates, Jim Morrison, and he and his wife engaged us all in a goal-oriented program. Later I joined the Scout troop at St. Paul's-on-the-Hill Church on Summit Avenue with a Mr. Carpenter in charge. When he left, I closed my scouting career.

After completing eighth grade at the Gordon School I entered University High School at the University of Minnesota. A small school of about 360 students, it attracted students from the wider Twin City community. As a laboratory school for the University's College of Education, it provided student teaching opportunities for the men and women seeking to enter the profession. There were many gaps in the learning process that for me required

intensive revisiting while a graduate student several years later.

Yet the school's strength was its students—attractive, congenial boys and girls, many of whom have been life-long friends: Larry Hexter, Gracia Klein, Barbara Mogilner, Diane Johnson, Mary Engle, John Mulliken, Tom Harmon, and Ted Anderson. With this circle of friends, I attended autumn football games at Northrup Field, and dances, and parties at one another's homes. In a vain attempt to parade my athletic prowess before my children, I wear from time to time my high school letter sweater as a member of the school's baseball team.

My U-High experience helped me overcome an early shyness and interact with persons from a broader background of interests and on a wider stage. My experience as a class president, student council president, the school's delegate to the American Legion's First Minnesota Boy's State sponsored by the Calhoun Post of the American Legion instilled a sense of community understanding, purpose, and service that I have valued ever since.

The high school principal was Maynard Stout who later became president of the University of Nevada at Las

Vegas, assistant principal was Sterling B. Mitchell, the first principal of Edina High School. Among my teachers was Jonathan McLendon who reinforced my interest in history and current affairs. His course in ancient history my freshman year and the weekly discussions on the *Minneapolis Star Journal's* Current Affairs test were stimulants for a fourteen-year-old boy seeking to find an academic compass. Although I have not seen him since I graduated in June 1950, he is one of the handful of teachers who made a real difference. He later became a member of the faculty at Northwestern University.

The momentous move of the family from the house on Hague Avenue to Highland Park during my high school years must have been a wrench for my father. Although he never mentioned it, the house had been his home for more than forty years and a place stuffed with a lifetime of memories. However, as my sister and I were at U. High, our associations with the neighborhood were less frequent. The new neighborhood at 1950 Bayard Avenue was packed with engaging young people our age. Our house was directly behind the campus of St. Catherine's College.

Across the street lived Ed and Lucille Finley and their daughters—Joan, Rosellen, and Sally; next door were the Carleys, Tom, Dick, and Midge; across the street were Janet and Lindy Dahlstrom; Edward and Janet Rose resided on the east side of our house. He was of the venerable Rose Brothers Fur Company in St. Paul, while John Wilson, whose father played such a pivotal role in the development of the area, was nearby.

My sister and I played golf with Dick Carley at the Highland Park Golf Course during the summer vacations. He was delightful and easy company. As his mother's family had produced a number of physicians, Dick followed in the footsteps of his grandfather Dr. Jerome Hilger and became one of St. Paul's leading Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat specialists.

Hamburgers and Pie

The neighborhood held other attractions too: the Highland Theater, the Highland Drugstore managed by Harold Shapiro and his wife, Lee's Village Kitchen for hamburgers and pecan pie, the Italian Village, Cecil's Delicatessen, presided over by Cecil J. Glickman and his wife Faye, and Hove's Supermarket.

After graduating from University High School in 1950, I entered the University as a student in the College of Science,

Literature, and the Arts. It was an enormous transition from a high school of 360 students and where I knew almost everybody by name, to a large impersonal campus of about 17,000 students. I look back on the 1950s and wonder if it was the University's "Golden Age" for several departments. For example, the Department of History included such luminaries as Clarke Chambers, Ernest Osgood, David Noble, Rodney Loehr, and George Anderson. Theodore Hornberger and Louis Coxe were American literature stars in the English Department and George Amberg and Ralph Ross were sparklers in the Humanities program, as were George Tselos in Fine Arts, and Johann Rhodell in Music. Each had a remarkable impact on my academic development, broadening my literary, music, and artistic horizons that enrich my life today.

I remember the lectures on Bach by Rhodell, an excellent musicologist and a credit to any first-class university. As a history major, I was well served by Clarke Chambers as my advisor. Ernest Osgood was a brilliant lecturer. When he settled in Wooster, Ohio, we reestablished our friendship when I was moonlighting from the faculty of Ohio State University, teaching a history course at the College of Wooster and being courted to join the college's faculty. It remains an excellent

liberal arts college and I think my career would have been fulfilled had I accepted the job rather than going on to Princeton. Theodore Hornberger's introduction to American literature has stood me in good stead; George Tselos's course in Art History introduced me to a field that continues to nourish my interest while visiting art museums in America or Europe.

For the Bachelor Cotillion Dance in December 1955 at the University Club I invited Miriam Seeger Reay, a longtime friend. The dance was an annual highlight that introduced the new set of debutantes to friends who, ironically, they probably had known since childhood. She and I attended the same church, Messiah Episcopal, on Ford Parkway at Macalester Street, where her uncle, Robert M. Wolterstorff, was rector. Later he became rector of a church in La Jolla, and subsequently the first Episcopal Bishop of Southern California. Miriam and I were married at the church by her uncle in August, 1957.

James B. Bell has written four major articles for Ramsey County History, including histories of Norwest Bank St. Paul, Yoerg's Brewery, and The St. Paul Daily News. A member of the RCHS Editorial Board, he currently is working on a history of St. Paul's Seeger Refrigerator Company.

A Novel Look at History

Novelists and poets can serve as true guides to local historians. As historians rarely do, they penetrate the inner, more subtle and sensual sides of human experience. When successful, poets and novelists make the particular . . . beautiful and universal.

—Joe Amato

Steve Trimble

It's clear from the passage above in his recent book, *Rethinking Home*, that Minnesota writer Joe Amato thinks that novels can provide a valuable resource for historians. Feeling that literature is an overlooked historical source, he often used it in his classes at Southwestern State University. Such an often-debated position

is hardly new. In the 1960s, pioneer urban historian Richard Wade told students that the *Studs Lonigan* novels by James T. Farrell resurrected the sights, sounds, and smells of the city and provided a better feel for the Irish experience in Chicago than most scholarly works.

People interested in considering the

value of fiction as a historical resource may want to sample four recently published novels in each of which the past plays a major role. While all are based either on personal experiences or extensive historical research, each has a unique approach. What the four literary works share is a belief that using the city as a



Another view of Wildwood Amusement Park on the south shore of White Bear Lake. This postcard view was mailed to Mrs. H. Freedland of Red Wing, Minn., on August 12, 1912. From historian Robert J. Stumm's postcard collection and used with his permission.

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