

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*



**Spring 2008**

Volume 43, Number 1

*From Swede Hollow to Capitol Boulevard*

**Bethesda Hospital Celebrates Its  
125th Anniversary (1883–2008)**

*Donald B. Swenson, M.D.*

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*A painting of Bethesda Hospital by artist Kairong Liu with the Minnesota State Capitol in the background.  
Photo courtesy of Bethesda Hospital.*



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 43, Number 1

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ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations  
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program  
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

### A Message from the Editorial Board

When we think of “family,” we often think of our close relatives. But this issue explores more inclusive definitions of “family.” Community values shape individuals, who in turn reflect those values. In early St. Paul, ethnic background provided a strong sense of family. Dr. Donald B. Swenson introduces us to the family of Bethesda Hospital—a group of caring people who came together to start a medical facility rooted in the Swedish Lutheran tradition. Swenson follows the rich history of the hospital, with portraits people who contributed their time and talent to the St. Paul institution, which is now celebrating its 125th anniversary. We all know the importance of neighborhood in defining family. Bernard Friel details the extended “family” of the business community at Selby and Snelling avenues, which gave him his first jobs in the 1940s and early 1950s. On the other hand, Janice Quick describes isolated loners like convicted murders Otto Wonnigkeit and Charles Ermisch, who were estranged from friends and relatives when they were executed in 1894. But Quick also provides snapshots of St. Paul community members who signed an unsuccessful petition against the death penalty, foreshadowing the Minnesota legislature’s prohibition of that penalty years later. Enjoy this spring issue, and write a letter to the editor to let us know your thoughts.

*Anne Cowie,*  
Chair, Editorial Board



## A Whirlwind of Crimes

### The Crimes and Times of Wonnigkeit and Ermisch

Janice R. Quick

Otto Wonnigkeit<sup>1</sup> emigrated in 1884 from Berlin, Germany, to New York City, then Detroit, Michigan; he traveled with his recently widowed mother and his six-year-old sister.<sup>2</sup> He was age ten and already known as a drunkard. Within a year, his mother remarried, and his new stepfather hired him out, to work in a neighborhood saloon, where the boy daily drank to excess.<sup>3</sup> At age seventeen, Wonnigkeit traveled with his family to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he became fast friends with Charles Ermisch<sup>4</sup>, a sixteen-year-old who had emigrated from Hamburg, Germany, in 1884, with his widowed mother and a sister.<sup>5</sup> Wonnigkeit and Ermisch did everything together. They drank together, thieved together, and murdered together. They were arrested, indicted, tried and sentenced together. In 1894, at ages twenty and nineteen, they were hanged together on a single scaffold at the Ramsey County jail and were buried next to each other at Forest Lawn cemetery.

That final episode in their lives might have been different if a petition circulated by a clergyman had been successful. The petition implored the governor to commute the death sentence for Wonnigkeit, who was believed to be mentally deficient due to long-term alcohol abuse.<sup>6</sup> Ermisch was not mentioned in the petition; even his mother offered no reason why her son should not be executed.

#### The Crimes

Wonnigkeit and Ermisch were first arrested in 1892. Together they were charged with the theft of a revolver and \$18 in cash from Hogan & O'Dowd, a saloon on Robert Street in downtown St. Paul. They were held for four months in adjoining cells at the Ramsey County jail, two blocks from the scene of the crime. They remained close friends. Following indictment by a grand jury, the teenage jail mates changed their plea from "not guilty" to "guilty," and were sentenced to imprisonment at the new St. Cloud State Reformatory.<sup>7</sup>

Wonnigkeit and Ermisch each served seventeen months in the reformatory. In April 1894, Wonnigkeit was paroled to

work on an Owatonna farm where the 1883 and 1884 Minnesota State Fairs<sup>8</sup> had been held; the farm was owned by a former Civil War officer who then served as a city alderman and member of the state prison board.<sup>9</sup> Ermisch was paroled to work on a farm near Lake Benton, Minnesota, where he agreed to

help with heavy chores for a wage of \$50 for six months.<sup>10</sup> Within a week, both young men had deserted their parole assignments and returned to St. Paul for a whirlwind of crimes.

Crimes committed during the last half of April included two home burglaries; at one home, the thieves escaped with \$8; at another home, they collected shoes, a coat and vest, two silver watches, and a pair of opera glasses, which were immediately pawned. They held up a Dayton's Bluff man who Wonnigkeit described as "that farmer near the fish hatchery." From him, they took \$5 and a silver watch; from a man on the Hudson road, they ran off with \$63. The two burglarized a West Side grocery store where they took groceries and a shotgun, and they broke into a general store where they stole cigars, canned goods, and knives.<sup>11</sup>

Then, on the night of May 2, 1894, Wonnigkeit and Ermisch met at 10:00, as planned, near the corner of Wabasha and today's Tenth Street. Each tied a handker-



St. Cloud Reformatory records at the Minnesota Historical Society include 1892 glass plate negatives of Otto Wonnigkeit, left, and Charles Ermisch. Photos courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



chief across his mouth and nose. Each carried a revolver. At Ermisch's instruction, Wonnigkeit entered the side door of Kohlmann's saloon and, with revolver drawn, demanded the bartender surrender the contents of the cash register. The bartender reached for a gun in a drawer. As Ermisch entered from the front door, Wonnigkeit fired three shots at the bartender and Ermisch fired four more. The dying bartender slumped to the floor as the would-be burglars fled.<sup>12</sup>

That night, the fugitives slept in a barn behind the home of former governor William R. Merriam, on University Avenue, near today's capitol. In the morning, they followed the riverside railroad tracks to the village of Red Rock, near Newport, where they hid for three days in a deserted shanty. Ermisch developed a nasty case of pneumonia and, on the fourth day, dragged himself to his mother's home on Blair Avenue in St. Paul, where he was treated by a doctor and moved to the county hospital, then promptly arrested. Wonnigkeit was soon arrested near a downtown levee.<sup>13</sup>

Wonnigkeit and Ermisch were held in the Ramsey County jail while a court-appointed attorney collected affidavits in Wonnigkeit's defense.<sup>14</sup> In one affidavit, Wonnigkeit's mother stated her son's father, uncle, grandfathers, and at least one great-grandfather were "habitual drunkards" who each "lost the right use of his mind" and died of chronic alcoholism. She declared her son was the victim of hereditary drunkenness and was unable to control his thoughts and actions.<sup>15</sup> With phrasing supplied by the attorney, she said the defendant "during the whole of his life" had been "of an irritable, morose disposition and temperament, becoming enraged and made wildly mad, and angered at the least provocation; that at times he showed signs of malice and extreme hatred towards his best friends and relatives; that on several occasions he has endeavored and attempted to take his sister's life to whom he was passionately attached, and was restrained from so doing by physical force, . . . that he is afflicted with insane delusions; that his education was rendered impossible by his apparent inability to use his mind and memory with any degree of success, . . .

that during the times when he was in his right mind and not under the influence of liquor . . . , he has exhibited remarkable traits of love and affection for . . . his family and friends."<sup>16</sup>

An affidavit by Dr. Charles T. Miller provided a medical opinion based upon the affidavit of Wonnigkeit's mother and a similar one by his sister. Dr. Miller stated that chronic alcohol abuse caused Wonnigkeit to be "not a free moral agent; that he has not at all times the right use of his mind and mental faculties, that his mind and memory has been impaired, weakened and rendered incompetent to perform the functions of an ordinary free moral agent; that his knowledge of what is right and wrong has been rendered uncertain. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

A second affidavit by Dr. Miller described the doctor's two visits to the jail to assess Wonnigkeit's physical and mental condition. He stated he had made measurements of the defendant's "beaked face"<sup>18</sup> and remarkably low narrow forehead. From those measurements, he determined Wonnigkeit had "a weak, undeveloped brain; that he has an irritable and excitable disposition; an almost total want of good sense and judgment; that [he] would be easily influenced, coerced and led astray by evil companions and associates," that alcohol abuse had caused his mind to be "weaker than it would otherwise have been and . . . his moral sensibilities stunted to such an extent that he might not understand and know the consequences of his acts." He added that, upon examination, he found that the roof of the defendant's mouth "was high and arched, a characteristic usually found in people of a low degree of intelligence."<sup>19</sup>

An affidavit by Dr. James Markoe stated that in his "thorough and personal examination of the mental and physical condition of . . . Wonnigkeit . . . who was then in jail in custody of the sheriff of Ramsey County," he determined that Wonnigkeit was "imperfectly developed mentally and of a low moral intellect," with an asymmetric cranium and a low receded forehead; "that his criminal responsibility [was] very much modified by his low mental capacity; that he would be easily influenced and led astray by others."<sup>20</sup>

An affidavit from a downtown saloon-keeper confirmed that Wonnigkeit had been drinking alcohol for several hours on the day of the murder.

In court, the jury was not swayed by affidavits and testimony relating to Wonnigkeit's mental state.<sup>21</sup> Wonnigkeit and Ermisch were found guilty of murder and sentenced to be hanged.

The condemned youths were held for 112 days in an isolated corridor of the Ramsey County jail. They remained friends as they awaited execution. Every evening they were visited by a fervent assortment of missionaries and matrons. At the end of each business day, W.H. Jones closed his barber shop on Jackson Street and went with his wife to the jailhouse, where they prayed and read scripture for the two young murderers. The Reverend Niclaus Bolt, pastor of the German Presbyterian Bethlehem Church, conducted daily religious services, in English and German. Miss Acker, the jail matron, played a melodeon as hymns were sung by Sheriff Charles Chapel and his wife, Chief Deputy George Irish and his wife, and an occasional newspaper reporter. Wonnigkeit cried. Ermisch scoffed.<sup>22</sup>

Ermisch's mother visited once. She smuggled a revolver past the guards and into her son's cell. Ermisch fired the gun in a desperate effort to escape, and shot a deputy through the wrist. Guards rushed to the scene; Ermisch was subdued. Mom was arrested and soon moved to the county workhouse for a lenient sentence of only thirty days.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, in a jailhouse courtyard, carpenters nailed together a 20-foot by 30-foot scaffold with two trap doors in the floor, and with twin nooses suspended from a crossbeam above the doors. One pull on a single lever would simultaneously release both trap doors so Wonnigkeit and Ermisch would be hanged at the same moment and the bodies would fall from sight into a basement cell. The St. Paul Pioneer Press enthusiastically described and diagramed details of the scaffold construction, and sensation-seekers crowded the site for a view of the celebrated gallows.<sup>24</sup>

At approximately 5:00 A.M. on October 19, 1894, Otto Wonnigkeit and Charles Ermisch silently stepped onto



separate trap doors in the platform of the scaffold. Each man was then solemnly fitted with a hood and noose. Sheriff Chapel pulled the lever. The trap door opened under Wonnigkeit, and the body of the twenty-year-old fell from view. The door under Ermisch failed to open, and the *Pioneer Press* reported that a police officer "darted down the stairway beneath the scaffold, released the weight (which triggered the trap mechanism) and in an instant the erect body of Ermisch disappeared down the trap. All was over."<sup>25</sup> In the cell below the scaffold, all was not over. Wonnigkeit and Ermisch did not die instantly; they remained suspended until attending physicians pronounced the prisoners had died of strangulation.<sup>26</sup>

The bodies of Wonnigkeit and Ermisch were placed in unadorned caskets and moved to Forest Lawn cemetery.<sup>27</sup> The Reverend Bolt and Missionary Jones conducted a brief service as the caskets were placed side by side in unmarked graves. Only Wonnigkeit's sister and the jail matron attended the service.<sup>28</sup>

### The Times

During the summer of 1894, the Reverend Edward Edwards, pastor of the Nelson Avenue Church of Christ, authored a petition to commute Wonnigkeit's death sentence. The petition begged Governor Knute Nelson to reduce Wonnigkeit's sentence to life imprisonment. The petition emphasized Wonnigkeit's youth and simplicity. It detailed the young man's alcohol abuse. It declared, "Wonnigkeit ... is a person of weak mind and memory. His personal appearance, especially as to the formation of his head, indicate stupidity, weakness of intellect and entire unappreciation of the awfulness of the crime. . . ."<sup>29</sup>

Rev. Edwards carried his petition through the streets of St. Paul and secured the signatures of physicians, attorneys, businessmen, public servants, shopkeepers and laborers. His first stop was at the downtown office of his neigh-

bor, Dr. Charles T. Miller. Rev. Edwards probably admired Dr. Miller's knowledge of phrenology, the new European science used by doctors and police investigators to detect criminal traits in a per-



*Charles Ermisch, 1894. This photo was taken at the jail and presented to Ermisch's mother following her release from the workhouse. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

son, by measuring the size and shape of a suspect's forehead, cheeks, chin, ears, and other cranial features. Gentlemen, workingmen, housewives and domestics reveled in the discovery of this wondrous new tool for cracking criminal cases. In 1893, the *Pioneer Press* had published a lengthy feature article titled "Identifying Crooks." The article described phrenology measurements and provided sketches of facial features, which readers likely used to size up their neighbors.<sup>30</sup> In the Wonnigkeit case, Dr. Miller had made careful measurements of Wonnigkeit's skull, and employed tenets of phrenology to determine that the young man

"would be easily influenced, coerced and led astray by evil companions."<sup>31</sup> As a neighbor and friend, Dr. Miller had encouraged the pastor in drafting the petition and he hoped his signature might influence the governor's decision, but since the close of the trial, his attention had returned to his dream of establishing a local hospital with free care for poor patients. He died before his dream was realized, but in 1917 his widow bequeathed the \$1,400,000 that established the Charles T. Miller Hospital.<sup>32</sup>

Rev. Edwards walked from Dr. Miller's office on the corner of Wabasha and Seventh Streets, to the office of Dr. James Markoe on Fourth Street near the courthouse. Dr. Markoe was another of the Reverend Edwards's neighbors, and another of the physicians who had testified to Wonnigkeit's "low moral intellect." Dr. Markoe's signature was easily and enthusiastically obtained; the doctor was a native of St. Paul and was well-known as the attending physician for St. Paul Seminary, College of St. Thomas, Little Sisters of the Poor, and St. Joseph's German Catholic orphanage. Dr. Markoe's family and friends were naturally proud that he had received the second medical license issued in Minnesota. The doctor chuckled, though, when he explained that in 1883, Dr. Jay Owens was the first chairman of the new state medical examining board and issued to him-

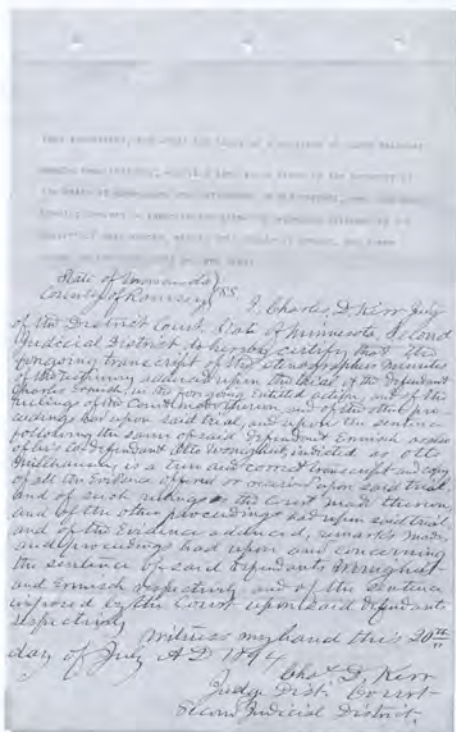
self the first state license. He then handed license #2 to his friend Dr. Markoe, who later served as president of the Ramsey County Medical Society. Dr. Markoe was also a life member of the Minnesota Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, a charter member of the Junior Pioneers Association, and one of the first members of the Minnesota Boat Club and the White Bear Yacht Club.<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Markoe's partner, Dr. Christopher Woolway, paused between patient appointments to add his signature to the petition. As an active member of the Masonic lodge, he might have thought his signature would spur signatures from



fellow lodge members such as city attorney William Pitt Murray, famous in 1894 for representing the city in a case against the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway.<sup>34</sup>

It was a short walk to the Court Block on Fourth Street, where Rev. Edwards went to the fourth-floor office of William Pitt Murray. The lifetime career of this attorney included: Territorial House of Representatives, 1852–1853 and 1857; Territorial Council, 1854–1855; state Representative, 1863 and 1868; state Senator, 1866–1867 and 1875–1876;



A portion of the trial transcript of Wonnigkeit and Ermisch. Judge Charles D. Kern added a handwritten note certifying that the transcript was a true copy of the court stenographer's minutes and his pronouncement of the defendants' death sentences. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

St. Paul councilman for at least sixteen years; manager of the State Reform and Training School, fifteen years; director of the St. Paul Work House, ten years. In discussing the Wonnigkeit case, the influential attorney likely expounded on the history of prohibition law in Minnesota and the treatise he intended to write on the subject; in 1908, the Minnesota Historical Society published the attorney's

recollections of early territorial legislation, including prohibition law.<sup>35</sup> He signed and underlined his name on the Wonnigkeit petition.

With signatures in hand from three respected physicians and a prominent attorney, Rev. Edwards must have moved confidently through the halls of the Court Block. On the eighth floor, he secured the signatures of trial attorney Rollo Noyes and his partner James McCafferty, the first of several attorneys appointed to represent Wonnigkeit in the murder trial. In McCafferty's brief acquaintance with Wonnigkeit, he had witnessed the young man's inability to understand that he could be granted a reduced sentence in return for testifying against Ermisch.<sup>36</sup>

Outdoors, probably at lunchtime, Pastor Edwards walked along Fourth Street. At Market Street, he stopped at the business office of Frank Doran, owner of a fuel supply company. They doubtlessly discussed the price of coal and wood, and Doran added his name to the pastor's petition. Doran had been an infantryman during the Civil War. The *Pioneer Press* later reported, "While trying to reach his brother, John Doran, who was ill with the Union army in the South, he was captured by the Confederates and sent to the notorious Libby prison. He was held for twenty-six months. It is believed that he was incarcerated longer by the Confederates than any other soldier in the Union army."<sup>37</sup> In 1894, Doran was defeated in the race for mayor of St. Paul; in 1896, he was elected mayor on the Republican ticket.

Still on Fourth Street, the Reverend Edwards entered the establishment of Wyckoff, Seamens & Benedict, where there was a sales display of Remington typewriters<sup>38</sup> and where he won the signature of sales clerk William Puff.

In the Globe building at Cedar and Fourth Streets, he might have found attorney Robertson Howard Jr. writing an essay about his hunting and fishing excursions; in 1904, a published collection of magazine articles for hunters and fishermen included a preface by the attorney.<sup>39</sup> The attorney signed the minister's petition and maybe returned to his writing. It could have been at a newsstand



Following the execution of Charles Ermisch, Ramsey County Sheriff Charles E. Chapel notified the state of Minnesota that he had carried out the capital sentence. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

outside the building that the pastor then acquired the signatures of George Burke, a cashier for the Soo Line Railroad, and William Perry, a clerk for the same rail line. If they discussed headline news, the conversation undoubtedly included the Hinckley forest fires.

In the New York Life building, on the corner of Minnesota and Sixth Streets, he collected the signatures of attorney James Barnard and his partner Owen O'Neill. In 1894, O'Neill was the city attorney for West St. Paul; he was later the first Assistant Ramsey County Attorney. In the hallway, Rev. Edwards earned a fussy signature from Eugene Dougherty, a clerk with the New York Life Insurance Company. On the street corner, he snagged a hurried signature from police officer James Heeny.

At the Lawyers Commercial Building, at Robert and Third Streets, the minister visited the office of attorney Lynas Barnard. He was a delegate to the 1894 Republican state convention, where Knute Nelson was renominated for Governor. Nelson would run against Populist Sidney Owen and Democrat George Becker.



At the end of what must have been a long day of gathering signatures, the Reverend Edwards received the signature of James Kennelly, clerk for Yerxa Bros. grocery and meat market, at Cedar and Seventh Streets. The pastor may have purchased a few dinner ingredients before driving his horse and buggy to his home on Ashland Avenue.

On the pastor's second day of stumping for signatures, he acquired signatures from his neighbors Victor Gilman, a mortgage loan officer, and Andrew Gilman, a law librarian.

His next visit was with Dr. Asa Goodrich, a homeopathic physician whose office was in the new Germania Bank building, at Wabasha and Fifth Streets. Dr. Goodrich was the examining physician for life insurance policies offered by fraternal organizations. He later served as a physician for the state National Guard.<sup>40</sup>

Rev. Edwards then went to the office of attorney Frederick Zollman, on the third floor of the Manhattan Building, at Robert and Fifth Streets. The attorney was a committee chair with the Republican Party and a Second Ward delegate to the 1894 caucus.<sup>41</sup> The minister's visit possibly interrupted a news interview, as the signature which immediately followed the attorney's was that of Joseph Hawks, a reporter for the *St. Paul Dispatch*. Hawks was a member of the St. Paul Press Club. In spare time, he penned *Thornton's Redemption*, a moralistic love story which was published by the Press Club in 1893.<sup>42</sup>

Pastor Edwards then collected the signatures of three lawyers in neighboring offices: Albert Tyler, National German American Bank building, at Robert and Fourth Streets; William Moore, in the Gilfillan Block at Jackson and Fourth Streets; David Peebles, in the Rogers block on Fifth Street. Peebles's office was likely brimming with documents related to the murder trial of Philip Rice. In an attempted robbery of a St. Paul saloon, Rice shot and killed a man. He was sentenced to life imprisonment by the same judge who sentenced Wonnigkeit and Ermisch.<sup>43</sup>

It could have been at lunchtime that the Reverend Edwards encountered Charles

Bunker and received his signature. Bunker painted scenery for vaudeville shows at the Grand Opera House, at St. Peter and Sixth Streets.

In the Globe building, at Cedar and Fourth Streets, the clergyman gathered signatures from eleven attorneys; three were especially noteworthy. The office of Edmund Bazille might have been strewn with campaign signs. Bazille was the 1894 Republican candidate for the posi-



*A fragment of the rope used to hang Charles Ermisch. Spectators at executions clamored for such souvenirs. Minnesota Historical Society Collections. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

tion of chief abstract clerk. He was later the judge of Ramsey County probate court. The office of William McMurrin could have been littered with maps and real estate ads. The attorney practiced real estate law and was active in real estate development. The *Pioneer Press* later stated, "He developed much of St. Anthony Park in St. Paul, subdivisions in South St. Paul, and the Beaver Lake Heights district at the end of the Seventh Street trolley line."<sup>44</sup> He was one of the first agents in St. Paul to register real estate titles under the Torrens land title act. The office of trial attorney Edward Darragh was probably refreshingly empty of records related to the Philip Rice trial.

Darragh had represented Rice until the accused murderer attempted to escape from a screaming courtroom; Darragh withdrew from the case and was replaced by David Peebles.<sup>45</sup> In 1895, Darragh was nominated for the position of St. Paul city attorney.

Rev. Edwards visited the office of attorney Uri Lamprey, on Third Street, near the courthouse. Lamprey had retired from real estate law in 1883, to focus attention on his real estate holdings, including a hunting lodge and today's Holman Field. He was president of the state Game and Fish Commission, 1901-1906.<sup>46</sup>

At the National German American Bank building, at Robert and Fourth Streets, the minister garnered signatures from six attorneys. It was perhaps with some trepidation that he entered the ground-floor office of the contentious attorney James Manahan, first graduate of the University of Minnesota law school. Rev. Edwards would certainly have read newspaper accounts of Manahan standing on chairs to harangue courtrooms with arrogant speeches. He was removed from a case involving railroad freight rates when he attempted to subpoena railroad magnate James J. Hill to the courtroom. Manahan was later active in the political careers and presidential campaigns of William Jennings Bryan, Democrat; Theodore Roosevelt, Republican; Robert LaFollette, Independent.<sup>47</sup> Manahan added a bold clear signature to the pastor's petition. It was probably in an attorney's office that Rev. Edwards then secured the signature of Frank Dolenty, the law student who had notarized affidavits from Wonnigkeit's mother and sister.

On his way home for dinner, the pastor again stopped at Yerxa Bros. grocery and meat market, where he received the signature of the market's barn manager, George Gunter.

On the last day of the pastor's route through the heart of the city, he stopped at the engineering business of Bramblett & Beygeh, on St. Peter Street. He might have discussed details of the Wonnigkeit trial with William Bramblett, who had been one of the jurors. Bramblett's signature on the petition was followed by that of Herbert Bowen, an engraver



in the firm's photo and art department, and Peter Peterson, an etcher in the same department.

Rev. Edwards collected signatures from salesmen and clerks in shops along Sixth Street, then Fifth Street. In the Merchants National Bank building, at the corner of Jackson and Fifth Streets, the pastor visited the office of attorney Percy Godfrey, who was slated to be a member of the Saint Paul Board of Park Commissioners.<sup>48</sup> In the 1890s, the city's Parks Department constructed bicycle paths from the city to Como Park and Phalen Park. Bicycling clubs became popular, and on weekends, groups of young couples biked to picnics in parks. The minister might have expressed concern about young ladies donning split skirts and inadvertently exposing their stockings while bicycling.

Probably at lunchtime, the Reverend Edwards called at the home of Rev. Nielaus Bolt, the minister who daily visited the jail to comfort and counsel Wonnigkeit and Ermisch. Rev. Bolt was the first pastor of the German Bethlehem Church, where he conducted services in German.<sup>49</sup> Ermisch's mother was a member of the church. It may have been with mixed emotions that the Reverend Bolt signed the Wonnigkeit petition; there was no public petition to reduce Ermisch's sentence. Still at the home of Rev. Bolt, signatures were received from the host's brother Gregory Bolt, bookkeeper for the real estate firm of Oppenheim and Kalman, and from the Reverend Frederick Leach of Immanuel Baptist Church.<sup>50</sup>

The clergyman returned to the business center of the city and stopped at the furniture store of William Yungbauer & Sons, on west Third Street. Yungbauer learned the art of handcrafting fine furniture in Vienna and Paris and had come to St. Paul in 1891 to decorate the James J. Hill mansion.<sup>51</sup>

Still on Third Street, Pastor Edwards visited the home and music studio of Marcel Guibert. The French-born musician conducted an orchestra at the Metropolitan Opera House, 1894–1939.

At the downtown residence of Captain Joseph Burger, the pastor entered the quarters of an honored Civil War

veteran. Burger left home at age thirteen to join the Union Army as a drummer boy. At age sixteen, he was commissioned as captain. He was presented the Medal of Honor and the Medal of Valor by President Lincoln. After the war, Burger practiced law in Mankato and served two terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives. He came to St. Paul in 1882 and served for many years as military storekeeper for the St. Paul and Minneapolis units of the National Guard.<sup>52</sup>

The Reverend Edwards collected many more signatures. Foremost among them was that of William Bruster. He signed his name in a strong, decisive script. Next to his name, he added, "Secretary Republican Committee." In an election year, it seemed a clear message to the renominated Republican governor.

Despite the petition and its message, the death warrant was not rescinded.<sup>53</sup> Otto Wonnigkeit and Charles Ermisch were hanged on October 19, 1894.

Governor Knute Nelson was reelected on November 6, 1894, and began his new term on January 1, 1895. His opening address to the 1895 Minnesota State Legislature reflected upon the devastation of the Hinckley forest fires, and it lauded the construction of the new state capitol; there was no mention of capital punishment.<sup>54</sup>

Nelson remained in the office of Governor for only twenty-three days of his second term; he relinquished the office of governor on the day he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Lieutenant Governor David Clough became Minnesota's new governor, prior to the close of the state legislative session.

As legislators debated boring bills which received scant newspaper coverage, the *Pioneer Press* and *Minneapolis Journal* regaled readers with details of the Harry Hayward murder trial. Hayward was a professional gambler who convinced his fiancée to name him as beneficiary on two \$5,000 life insurance policies. In December 1894, he badgered and blackmailed an accomplice into savagely shooting the would-be bride, on a lonely stretch of road near Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis.

In March 1895, the Minnesota House of Representatives, Committee on Crimes

and Punishment, recommended passage of a bill to abolish the death penalty.<sup>55</sup> Legislators had not yet had an opportunity to discuss the recommendation when a jury found Hayward "guilty of the crime of murder in the first degree."<sup>56</sup> A judge reluctantly sentenced Hayward to execution by hanging. He stated to Hayward, "I am not favorable to the punishment that is awarded for capital offenses, but, as I told the jury in my charge, I am not responsible for it, neither are they; we are to execute the law and that is our duty, whatever our opinions may be in reference to it. . . . I wish I could avoid the duty which now devolves upon me—that of pronouncing sentence upon you—but which I now proceed to do. . . . (I sentence you to) be hanged by the neck until you are dead."<sup>57</sup> Later during March, the bill to abolish the death penalty was tabled, and the legislature adjourned.

In May, Governor Clough signed the warrant for the execution of Harry Hayward. The warrant was drafted by making handwritten changes on the 1894 order to execute Charles Ermisch. Ermisch's name was crossed out and Hayward's name was inserted. After a lengthy appeal and a second warrant, Harry Hayward was hanged on December 11, 1895.

There had been no public petition to commute Hayward's sentence. There had been no letters to the editor to protest the death penalty, as there had been in the Wonnigkeit case.<sup>58</sup> The public applauded the Hayward verdict and sentence.<sup>59</sup> The calculated brutality of the Hayward crime strained the convictions of those who wished to abolish the death penalty. It curbed the benevolent fervor aroused by Wonnigkeit's plight. It blurred the bungling in the Ermisch execution. Minnesota governors signed warrants for ten more executions before the public again rallied against capital punishment and the 1911 legislature voted to abolish executions in Minnesota.

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## Endnotes

1. Also spelled Wonnigkeit, Wenigkeit, Wonnighiet, Winnighiet. Also known as Otto Milhausen.
2. Ira A. Glazier and P. William Filby, editors, *Germans to America: Lists of Passengers Arriving in U.S. Ports* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1988–2002).
3. Affidavit of Adeline (Adelheid) Milhausen, mother of Otto Wonnigkeit. Exhibit B, District Court, Second Judicial District, State of Minnesota, County of Ramsey; June 1, 1894. Ramsey County Jail inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
4. Also spelled Karl Irmisch.
5. Glazier and Filby.
6. Execution records 1889–1910, State of Minnesota: Governor. MHS 110.I.17.7B
7. St. Cloud State Reformatory, inmate records, box 9; file 335 Charles Ermisch; file 336 Otto Milhausen. MHS 120.A.6.1B
8. Ray P. Speer and Harry J. Frost, *Minnesota State Fair: The History and Heritage of 100 Years: A Brief History of the Early Years of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society and a More Complete History of the Years from 1910 to 1964* (Minneapolis: Argus Publishing Company, 1964), 15–16; see also Merrill E. Jarchow, "Early Minnesota Agricultural Societies and Fairs," *Minnesota History*, 22 (1941): 263.
9. *Minneapolis Journal*, July 31, 1919, p.17: Col. Clarke Chambers.
10. St. Cloud State Reformatory, inmate records, box 9, file 335 Charles Ermisch. MHS 120.A.6.1B
11. *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 15, 1894, p. 3.
12. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 3, 1894, p. 1.
13. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 15, 1894, p. 1.
14. A news article stated Wonnigkeit entered a "plea of insanity." *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 29, 1894, p. 8. The term "insanity" does not appear in affidavits.
15. Wonnigkeit's mother made no statement as to whether she abused alcohol. She stated that of her four children with Wonnigkeit's stepfather, two were "of weak mind and memory." Affidavit of Adeline Milhausen, June 1, 1894. Ramsey County Jail inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
16. Affidavit of Adeline Milhausen, June 1, 1894. Ramsey County Jail inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
17. Affidavits of Dr. C. T. Miller, June 1, 1894. Ramsey County Jail inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
18. St. Cloud State Reformatory, inmate records, box 9, file 336. MHS 120.A.6.1B
19. Affidavits of Dr. C. T. Miller, June 1, 1894. Ramsey County Jail inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
20. Affidavit of Dr. James C. Markoe, June 1, 1894. Ramsey County Jail inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
21. In court, affidavits were presented and additional testimony was presented.
22. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 9, 1894, p. 5; see also *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 17, 1894, p. 8.
23. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 9, 1894, p. 5; see also *Annual Report of Workhouse Directors, 1894*, p. 719.
24. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 16, 1894, p. 5.
25. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; October 19, 1894, p. 1.
26. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; October 19, 1894, p.1; see also Forest Lawn interment records.
27. Known in 1894 as Forest Cemetery.
28. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 20, 1894, p. 2; see also Forest Lawn interment records.
29. Execution records 1889–1910, State of Minnesota: Governor. MHS 110.I.17.7B
30. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 16, 1893, p. 3.
31. Affidavits of Dr. C. T. Miller; June 1, 1894. Ramsey County Jail, inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
32. *The Charles T. Miller Hospital* [pamphlet], MHS RA982.S14 C55 1927
33. *St. Paul Dispatch*, November 29, 1941, p.1; see also Minnesota Medical Examining Board, minutes 1883–1895 (MHS 128.E.4.2F) and Minnesota Medical Examining Board, official register of physicians, Minnesota, 1883–1890 (MHS 120.G.2.4F).
34. "Golden Jubilee of Ancient Landmark Lodge No. 5." MHS HS539.S22A55 1904. See also *City of St. Paul vs. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Company* (St. Paul: D. Ramaley & Son, Printers, 1888) (MHS HE554.S15 S2).
35. William Pitt Murray, "Recollections of Early Territorial Days and Legislation," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society*, 12 (1908).
36. Ramsey County Jail, inmate records, box 19, file 2925. MHS 113.H.107B
37. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; February 2, 1914, p. 1.
38. R. L. Polk & Co.'s *St. Paul City Directory*, 1894.
39. Christy Heard, *Adventures of a Sportsman* (St. Paul: Warwick Publishing Company, 1904). MHS SK33.H43 1904
40. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 30, 1918, p. 9.
41. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 5, 1894, p. 8.
42. Jonathan J. Conway and Harry W. Wick, editors, *Stories Told for Revenue Only by the St. Paul Press Club* (St. Paul: The Club, 1893). MHS PS571.M6 S86 1893
43. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 17, 1894, p. 5.
44. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 12, 1936, p. 5.
45. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 17, 1894, p. 5.
46. Marie Jones, *Uri Lamprey: Father of the Minnesota Game Conservation Movement* (St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 1998). MHS SK411.M62 L364 1998
47. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 31, 1932, p. 7; see also Carlyle Beyer, *The People's Lawyer: A Study of the Life of James Manahan and His Part in the Progressive Movement of the Middle West* (1937). MHS KF373.M35 B4 1937
48. J.A.A. Burnquist, *Minnesota and Its People* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1924), v. III.
49. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 16, 1916, per aperture collection of St. Paul Public Library; see also *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 21, 1921, per aperture collection.
50. Ermisch's two attorneys submitted to the governor a brief, lackadaisical petition which included only their own signatures.
51. William Yungbauer, "New Views Through an Old Door," advertising brochure. MHS TS887.W59 1936
52. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 3, 1921, p. 14.
53. Execution records, 1889–1910, State of Minnesota. These records document only the executions that were carried out. Thus there is no way to measure the number of commutations of death sentences granted by individual governors without examining each case in which the sentence was capital and then determining if a commutation was granted.
54. *Biennial Message of Governor Knute Nelson to the Legislature of Minnesota* (St. Paul: The Pioneer Press Company, 1895). MHS J87.M62 1895
55. *Journal of the Minnesota House of Representatives, 1895*. MHS KFM5418.A13. See also: H.F. 371, 29th Legislature, 1st session, Minnesota, 1895.
56. *The Ging Murder and the Hayward Trial. The Official Stenographic Report*. Minnesota Tribune Company, 1895, p. 495. MHS HV6534.M6 H2gb
57. *Ibid.*, p. 496.
58. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 8, 1894, p. 4, and other dates.
59. *Minneapolis Journal*, March 9, 1895, p. 4, and other dates; see also John D. Bessler, *Legacy of Violence: Lynch Mobs and Executions in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) and Walter N. Trenerry, *Murder in Minnesota: A Collection of True Cases* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1962), 135–153.





*Paul Granlund's sculpture of the Bethesda Angel in place on the east side of the hospital. Photo courtesy of Bethesda Hospital. See Dr. Donald B. Swenson's article on page 3.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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