

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Spring 2011

Volume 46, Number 1

*For the Good of the Order:
The Ad Man Becomes
the “Senator from Ramsey”*

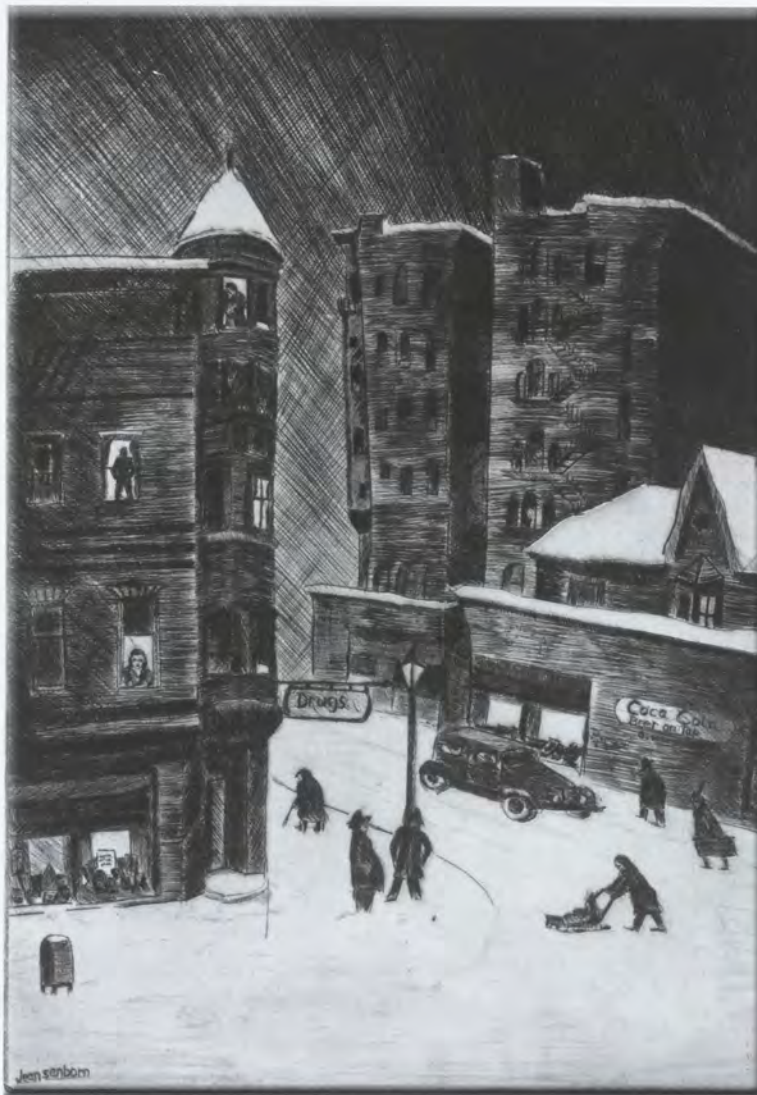
John Watson Milton

—page 13

“A Gentle, Kind Spirit Whose Life Was Art”

Jean Sanborn Gross: Artist, Painter, and Printmaker

Eileen R. McCormack, page 3



*In February 1943 St. Paul artist and printmaker Jean Sanborn made the drypoint print *Moto Perpetuo*. The scene is the intersection of Selby and Western avenues in St. Paul. When she exhibited it later that year, it won a prize and is her most acclaimed print. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.*

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Founding Editor (1964–2006)

Virginia Brainard Kunz

Editor

John M. Lindley

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Paul A. Verret

President

Cheryl Dickson

First Vice President

William Frels

Second Vice President

Julie Brady

Secretary

Carolyn J. Brusseau

Treasurer

Thomas H. Boyd

Immediate Past President

Norlin Boyum, Anne Cowie, Nancy Randall Dana, Cheryl Dickson, Charlton Dietz, Joanne A. Englund, William Frels, Howard Guthmann, Richard Heydinger, John Holman, Kenneth R. Johnson, Elizabeth M. Kiernat, Rev. Kevin M. McDonough, Nancy McKillips, Susan McNeely, Debra Mitts-Smith, Laurie M. Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Jay Pfaender, Jeffrey Slack, Ralph Thrane, Richard Wilhoit.

Directors Emeriti

W. Andrew Boss

Richard T. Murphy Sr.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Anne Cowie, *chair*, James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, John Diers, John Milton, Debra Mitts-Smith, Laurie M. Murphy, Paul D. Nelson, Richard H. Nicholson, Jay Pfaender, David Riehle, G. Richard Slade, Steve Trimble, Paul A. Verret, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

William Fallon, William Finney, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, *chair*

Commissioner Tony Bennett

Commissioner Toni Carter

Commissioner Jim McDonough

Commissioner Rafael Ortega

Commissioner Jan Parker

Commissioner Janice Rettman

Julie Kleinschmidt, *manager*,
Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2011, 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 46, Number 1

Spring 2011

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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.

CONTENTS

- 3 "A Gentle, Kind Spirit Whose Life Was Art"
Jean Sanborn Gross: Artist, Painter, and Printmaker
Eileen R. McCormack
- 13 *For the Good of the Order*
The Ad Man Becomes the "Senator from Ramsey"
John Watson Milton
- 27 Book Reviews

Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

From etchings to booya, this issue showcases two Ramsey county residents who enriched our community in different ways—one privately, and one in a very public manner. Jean Sanborn Gross, the daughter of Helen and Judge John B. Sanborn Jr., grew up with an aesthetic perspective that she nurtured by attending the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art, where she studied drawing and printmaking. Although her work was shown in other locations, her carefully-etched portraits of St. Paul show a sensitivity and awareness of the local world that she passed on to her children and friends. Eileen McCormack's portrait of Gross includes a description of her preferred medium: drypoint etching. On the other hand, Nick Coleman, the former Minnesota State Senate majority leader, enjoyed a long public career, starting with his first election to the senate in 1962. His family and friends jumped in to produce an effective grassroots campaign that included phone banks and lawn signs, which helped Coleman defeat another longtime, Irish-Catholic senator. John Milton's article on Coleman furnishes a recipe for a time-honored political fundraising meal—booya! Enjoy the stories.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

The exhibit, programming, and article on Jean Sanborn Gross are supported by the generous support of Jennifer H. Gross, with assistance from her brothers, John and Richard Gross.

Books

My Flag Grew Stars: World War II Refugees' Journey to America

Kitty Gogins

BookSurge Publishing

[www.booksurge.com], 2009

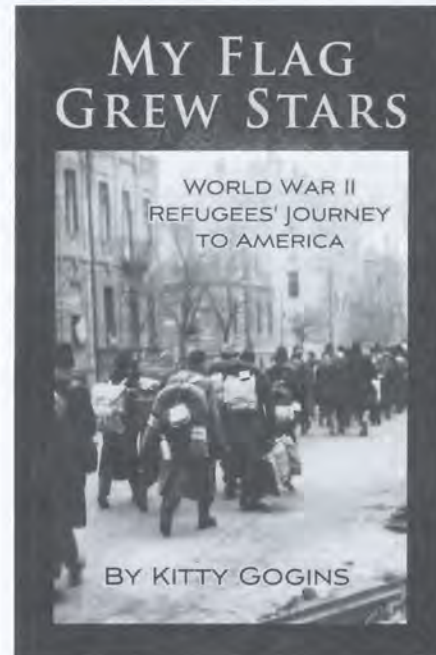
304 pages; \$18.99

Reviewed by David Riehle

According to movie-industry lore, famed film director Otto Preminger, while attending a Hollywood party, joined a conversation among a group of fellow Hungarian movie figures such as, perhaps, Peter Lorre, Michael Curtiz, Paul Lukas, or George Cukor.¹ Finding them speaking animatedly in their mother tongue, Preminger told them reprovingly: "Come on . . . we're in America. So talk German."

Preminger's point, if he had one, was perhaps the otherness of the Magyar people, speaking a non-Indo-European language in Central Europe surrounded by Slavic, Germanic, and Romance languages, cultures, and empires. And many, if not most of the myriad European émigrés populating Hollywood in mid-twentieth century had worked for a time in German cinema at Berlin's giant UFA studios prior to the Nazi takeover in 1933.

After European boundaries had been sliced and diced at Versailles following World War I, the new Hungarian state emerged deprived of nearly two thirds of its prewar territory and 30% of its Magyar speakers. Following the extirpation of the five-month-old revolutionary Hungarian Soviet Republic by the Romanian Army in 1919, the country came under the dictatorship of Admiral Miklos Horthy, a regime lasting until the occupation of Hungary by the Germans



in March 1944.² The Hungarian government, an ally of Nazi Germany, had been secretly discussing an armistice with the Allies, prompting the German invasion. But by September 1944, the Soviet Red Army had crossed the border of Hungary, driving the Nazis back toward Budapest. In December British and American warplanes began carpet-bombing Hungarian cities. This Allied strategy targeted industrial centers in order to destroy as many homes as possible. Working-class housing areas were to be targeted because they had a higher density and firestorms were more likely.³

In the midst of this juncture of deliberate and random catastrophe and mass murder the story of Ramsey County resident, Kitty Gogins' Hungarian-American family story opens as her teenaged parents-to-be seek shelter from American carpet-bombing in their native cities in

December 1944. The cities of Sopron and Győr, the homes of Olga Wagner and Tibor Zoltai, respectively, were and are minor industrial towns in western Hungary, less than fifty miles apart.⁴ As almost daily bombings of Sopron continued for months, "thousands of people died in the bombing raids, and more and more of the city was destroyed" (page 5).

"A half year before the bombing raids began, the horrors of the war shifted from a tangential impact of Olga's young life. . . ." On March 19, 1944, the Germans occupied Hungary and began deporting Jews to Auschwitz. Leaving her apartment on a summer day, Olga was startled to see "German soldiers, armed with whips, shepherd a line of bedraggled shuffling prisoners. The prisoners each wore a yellow cloth star identifying them as Jews. . . ." One of them "she recognized as her favorite secondary school teacher. . . . A German soldier near her teacher cracked his whip. . . . Biting leather ripped the teacher's clothes and skin. The teacher edged back into line without even raising her eyes. She trudged woodenly on to the railroad station. Never to be seen again" (pages 13-15).

Between May 14 and July 8, 1944, 437,402 Hungarian Jewish men, women, and children were transported to the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. It took 148 trains to carry them. More than 90% of the Jews were gassed immediately upon arrival. Hitler, having learned that Horthy planned to sue for a separate peace with the Allies, installed the native Hungarian fascist party, known as the Arrow Cross, in power, with its leader, Ferenc Szálasi, as prime minister. During this period, Jews were terrorized by bands of Arrow Cross thugs who roamed Hungarian cit-

ies beating, robbing, and killing. Olga's brother, Andy, came across dozens of dead Jewish bodies in the park near their home in the succeeding months. The troops of the Red Army were not able to liberate Budapest until the January 18, 1945. As the battles raged, Arrow-Cross pogromists murdered hundreds of defenseless Jews every day.

Tibor Zoltai, age eighteen, lived in nearby Győr, the first Hungarian city to be carpet-bombed by the Allies, on April 13, 1944, when 500 Flying Fortresses and Liberators, escorted by 200 fighters, flying from Foggia, Italy, devastated the city. On July 2, an even larger fleet of 620 heavy bombers, with fighter escorts, hit an aircraft plant in Győr on their way to other targets in Budapest. Although the factory in Győr, which built the Reggiao Hawk, a fighter plane of Italian design, was the target, "most of the deaths from the raid were not at the airplane factory, because of state-of-the-art cement bunkers that sheltered workers. . . . Most of the deaths were in the city, ordinary citizens who did not have access to bunkers, or other potent protection" (page 24). "That spring, [he and his fifteen-year-old brother] spent days . . . digging bodies out of the rubble, [helping to bury] the estimated 2,000 dead" (page 24).

The Zoltai and Wagner families, at that point entirely unknown to each other, began making urgent preparations to leave their homes, and ultimately Hungary itself, as the Red Army began to roll inexorably across their country. Both families undoubtedly feared the consequences of Soviet occupation, and no doubt memories of the short-lived Hungarian Communist government of 1919 reinforced the fears of the adults. Olga's father was the bourgeois manager of a textile mill, who "had helped to diffuse a few Communist sabotage plots in the plant he managed" (page 86); Tibor's father was a captain in Hungarian counter-intelligence, assigned to root out industrial saboteurs in local factories, some at least who would have been dedicated underground Communist workers. What the fate of

these antifascist workers was we can only conjecture. It is certain that many were sent to the death camps or summarily executed.

And as retreating Hungarian armed forces continued to battle the Soviet advance, and American warplanes made unending sorties over German-occupied Hungary, bombs rained from both sides. On March 28, 1945, as the Russians took their turn in bombing Sopron, the Wagner family and other employees of the textile plant departed westward on fifteen horse-drawn wagons and one donkey cart.

Tibor Zoltai, a college student and still a teenager, along with about 750 Győr youth, was effectively conscripted into German military service in January 1945. Enrolled in German anti-aircraft service and sent initially to Munich, they were soon sent into the mountains north of the city, where they were assigned to operate barrage balloons protecting a hydroelectric station. Soon the group was on the move again, as the Americans closed in during the final days of the war in April 1945, fleeing on foot and eventually reaching the German-Czech border, where they were captured by American forces. After nine months as a POW, Tibor was released, in a turn of events that sounds almost like something taken from a Hardy Boys adventure. Who should arrive at the POW camp to say Mass but Tibor's old Scoutmaster, a Catholic priest from his hometown, who persuaded the camp commander to free Tibor and a dozen other former Győr Boy Scouts!

Tibor's family had also made a successful wagon-train exit from Hungary, and after much searching he was reunited with them in a refugee camp in Austria in late 1945. Shortly after the close of the war, there were at least 400,000 so-called displaced persons (DPs) of Hungarian nationality scattered throughout Western Europe. Many of them eventually resettled in the United States and Canada. According to one source, the DPs were generally from the middle and upper-middle classes in Hungary and from urban

areas. Many of them were lawyers, doctors, politicians, army officers, and educators.⁵ The Zoltai and Wagner families found a window of opportunity that they quickly seized to emigrate to Canada as indentured agricultural workers, already linked together by Olga and Tibor who had met each other in Austria, and were married in Alberta in 1950. Swiftly surmounting the anachronistic status of indentured labor, the young couple moved to Toronto and then to Boston, where Tibor acquired degrees in geology and where the author was born in 1958. In 1959 Tibor was offered an appointment to the geology faculty at the University of Minnesota. The family purchased a home in Roseville and at last this review has reached Ramsey County.

The Zoltais became a part of the small, but active, Hungarian community in the Twin Cities, and Olga became a leading part of the staff of the International Institute in St. Paul where she counseled immigrants, assisting them in finding employment and adapting to a new life.⁶ Her work included resettling the first Vietnamese and Hmong families to emigrate to Minnesota in the early 1970s.

In the late 1940s, Tibor's father and several other relatives had worked for a time at an Austrian tile and pipe factory, mixing asbestos, crushed rock and water. Eventually, every family member who had worked in the factory died from exposure to the asbestos. In 1975 Tibor was commissioned by the Minnesota Pollution Control Commission to study the risks of exposure from industrial waste. Tibor became a recognized pioneer in the study of asbestos, calling attention to the danger of the asbestos-like substances that were being dumped into Lake Superior by Iron Range taconite operations. In what *Time* magazine called "the longest environmental trial in history,"⁷ Federal judge Miles Lord's precedent-setting ruling stopped the discharge of taconite tailings from Reserve Mining's operation at Silver Bay, Minnesota, in the mid-1970s.

In 1982 the family moved to a somewhat rundown "mansion" on Summit

Avenue with six apartments, built by lumber baron Chauncey Wright Griggs in 1883, aspiring to make it a hostel for their extended families. The Zoltais worked on restoring the house for six years, their meticulous restoration featured in *Historic Preservation Magazine* in 1988.

This remarkable family seems to have lived happily ever after, adding their own weave to the texture of this community. Like the relatively small numbers of immigrants who settled here in the first decades after the war, the Zoltais and Wagners experienced a fundamental reshaping of their lives as a consequence of the war and unknowingly anticipated the stunning increase in immigration to the Twin Cities area in the last thirty years.

My Flag Grew Stars is, of course, presumably a comparison of the tricolored Hungarian flag (red, white, and green) to the starry banner under which the author first saw the light in Boston in 1958, although, of course, that flag did grow two more stars in 1959. For a book which is intentionally family-centered, *My Flag Grew Stars* has rich general historical content, viewing first hand, personally and at close quarters, titanic events in mid-century. Relying on far more than anecdotal teenage recollections from her parents, Gogin's narrative draws on diaries, the impressive photographs taken by Tibor on his treks through postwar Central Europe, even an interview with an engineer employed at the Győr aircraft plant in 1944, and, not least, a notably comprehensive bibliography. Finally, it is evident that Gogin's parents were creative, adaptive, and humane people who deserve to be remembered with appreciation for their contribution to and participation in this community.

David Riehle is a member of the Society's Editorial Board.

Endnotes

1. In 1996, the Associated Press reported that of the 136 Oscar nominations since 1929, Hungarians had won 30 of them. Most of the Hollywood Hungarians were of Jewish origin, including actor Peter Lorre (born László Löwenstein in 1904); di-

rector Michael Curtiz (born Manó Kertész Kaminer in 1886); actor Paul Lukas (born Pál Lukács, 1891); and director George Cukor (born György Cukor, 1899). Among other places, the Preminger anecdote is repeated in Kati Marton, *The Great Escape: Nine Jews Who Fleed Hitler and Changed the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

2. The only large body of water in landlocked post-Versailles Hungary was Lake Balaton, but Horthy's naval service had been prior to World War I in the service of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which operated primarily in the Mediterranean but had dispatched warships as far as China.

3. John Terraine, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939-1945* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 262.

4. The village of Kolontar, site of a catastrophic spill of toxic alumina sludge in October 2010, together with Sopron (on the west) and Győr (on the east), forms the southern point of an equilateral triangle encompassing much of northwest Hungary.

5. In February 2011, a lawsuit was filed in Federal Court in Chicago against the Hungarian State Railways on behalf of victims of the Hungarian Holocaust.

6. Cecil D. Eby, *Hungary at War: Civilians and Soldiers in World War II* (University Park, Penna., Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998; 2007).

7. *Time*, May 6, 1974.

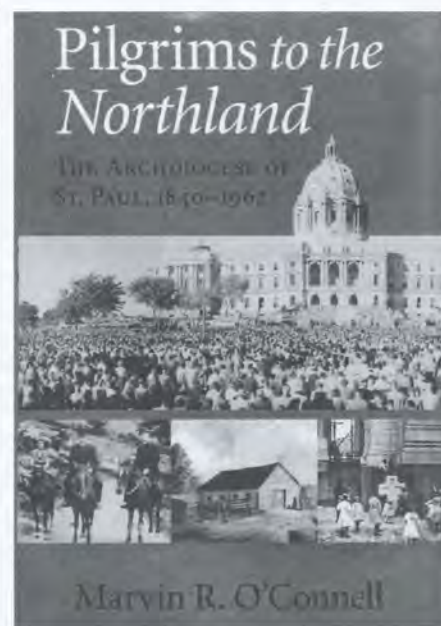
Pilgrims to the Northland: The Archdiocese of St. Paul, 1840-1962

Marvin R. O'Connell
Notre Dame, Ind.:

University of Notre Dame Press, 2009
642 pages; \$70.00

Reviewed by Carrie Essig

A quick drive through St. Paul, or a glance from the east side at the city's western skyline, visually cements the legacy that dynamic Catholic leaders and their followers left to Minnesota's capital during its first 120 years. Marvin O'Connell's detailed and comprehensive history of the Archdiocese of St. Paul marries both the ecclesiastical politics and the religious history that built both Minnesota and St. Paul. From the early missionaries looking to serve settlers, many of whom spoke French and had emigrated from Canada, to priests zealous to convert the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples to Catholicism, to the complicated network of parishes, and the relationship of local diocesan



leaders to the Vatican, O'Connell studies each transition of church leadership with thoroughness. In St. Paul today, there are churches, schools, hospitals, and neighborhoods that are still defined by their Catholic roots and the unyielding faith of believers.

Both a priest and a historian, Marvin O'Connell is an emeritus professor at the University of Notre Dame and the author of numerous books on the history of American Catholicism. He grew up in the Twin Cities, was ordained by Archbishop John Gregory Murray in 1956, served for a time in a small parish in southwestern Minnesota, studied at Notre Dame, and taught at the College of St. Thomas and the St. Paul Seminary. Thus O'Connell is an observer within the church who knew and served with several of the archbishops who led the archdiocese in the twentieth century.

O'Connell takes a chronological approach to the history of the Archdiocese of St. Paul. He begins with the early efforts of the Catholic Church to bring its faith to the head of navigation on the Mississippi River (briefly known as Pig's Eye and renamed St. Paul by Father Lucien Galtier) and the creation of the Diocese of St. Paul in 1850. First served by Bishops Joseph Cretin and Thomas L. Grace, the diocese became the Archdiocese of St. Paul in 1888, shortly after John Ireland became

its leader. Following Ireland's death in 1918, Austin Dowling (1919–1930), John Gregory Murray (1931–1956), and William O. Brady (1956–1961) led the archdiocese. Minneapolis was not formally added to the canonical title of the Archdiocese of St. Paul until 1966. O'Connell ends his account with the death of Archbishop Brady in 1961, on the eve of the opening of the Second Council of the Vatican (1962–1965), which would bring profound changes to Roman Catholicism around the world.

In addition to fascinating details of our local history, O'Connell's exhaustively researched history explores a number of issues, such as relations with Protestants and other religious denominations or the role of the laity within the church, which sometimes produced agreement and, at other times, discord within the Archdiocese—both among church leaders and between the leadership and its many congregations.

Of particular interest to readers who are not familiar with parish life are the stories of German, Irish, Polish, Italian, Czech, and other ethnic groups who settled in St. Paul in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each established a community within the city and "national" parishes within the denomination, which typically were served by priests who spoke the native tongue. Reverend O'Connell tells a rich story of people bound by their common faith and yet separated by language and cultural differences.

Although these stories of churches that were so closely tied to the customs and traditions of the Old Country are not unique to St. Paul, what sets O'Connell's account apart is his careful analysis of the role that Archbishop John Ireland played in the larger debate within American Catholicism over the question of Americanization. Archbishop Ireland was an ardent patriot. He had served for a brief time as a chaplain in the Union Army and had seen the horrors of war and knew first-hand the cost of maintaining the Union. Yet Ireland also perceived the dilemma of how to wean the children of immigrant Catholics away from

the customs and traditions of those former countries without subjecting these same young people to the perils of old-fashioned Protestant proselytizing or an equally dangerous secularism in their new country.

This book is not for the casual reader. Anyone interested in the complicated relationship between establishing a community and a political state on the frontier will relish the stories of early missionaries. Academic historians and those interested in the details of the history of the Archdiocese will welcome the history of Bishops Cretin, Ireland, and their successors, and appreciate the skill with which O'Connell places each of them within a broader historical context. This narrative is also a resource for scholars and students of history. Spanning over a century during which St. Paul went from nothing more than a few buildings upon the river bluff to Minnesota's capital and a bustling center of commerce and government, O'Connell's narrative also places the Archdiocese within the context of its ecclesiastical relations with the Vatican. There were times when these relations were not always the most cordial because American Catholic leaders chafed under Vatican strictures that may have made sense for Catholics in European countries but not in the United States.

Already a long and comprehensive account, there is one aspect of the history of the Archdiocese that deserved more extensive treatment in *Pilgrims to the Northland*: the role that women religious played in the schools, hospitals, and other institutions founded and operated by the church. Women religious, such as the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet who founded St. Joseph's Hospital in St. Paul in 1854 and the College (now University) of St. Catherine (founded in 1905), are present in this history, but their service to the church and the broader community of St. Paul deserves more than the few pages that O'Connell devotes to them.

Pilgrims to the Northland addresses all of the fundamental questions (who, when, how, why, and so forth) a reader might have concerning the Archdiocese between its founding and 1962. The one

question that is not addressed, but might occur to some readers, is what scholar of the stature of O'Connell will write a history of the Archdiocese that carries the story forward into the twenty-first century?

Carie Essig holds a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Minnesota. She is the Development Manager for the Ramsey County Historical Society and a long-time resident of St. Paul.

Also in Print

Through No Fault of My Own: A Girl's Diary of Life on Summit Avenue in the Jazz Age

Coco Irvine with an Introduction and
Afterword by Peg Meier
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 2011
104 pages; \$12.95

In 1926 Clotilde Irvine (1914–1975), who was named after her mother but known as "Coco," received a blank diary as a Christmas gift. Coco's father was a wealthy lumberman, Horace Irvine, and the family lived in a great mansion on St. Paul's Summit Avenue. Over the next twelve months, Coco recorded her adventures, problems, and romances in that diary. Her musings in this very personal keepsake express Coco's natural talent as a writer and a young person's energy, joy, and, sometimes, regret when she tells her side of what went on in her life. Frequently, her entries begin with, "I'm in deep trouble through no fault of my own," as she explained her most recent escapade or scrape with her parents, school authorities, or friends.

Coco and her sister, Olivia Irvine Dodge, subsequently grew up and went on to have much more substantial lives than the diary foretells. As adults, Coco and Olivia donated their family home to the state of Minnesota, and since 1966 it has served as the governor's official residence. Peg Meier's sprightly Introduction sets the stage for Coco's diary and her Afterword briefly recounts how Coco's life changed dramatically following her fashionable marriage in 1936.

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

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



St. Paul artist Jean Sanborn painted this self-portrait in 1942. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross. The oil on canvas painting, known as Self Portrait (Jean Sanborn), is part of an exhibit of Jean Sanborn's paintings and prints in the Ramsey County Historical Society's exhibit space in Landmark Center. For more on Jean Sanborn Gross, see page 3.