

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

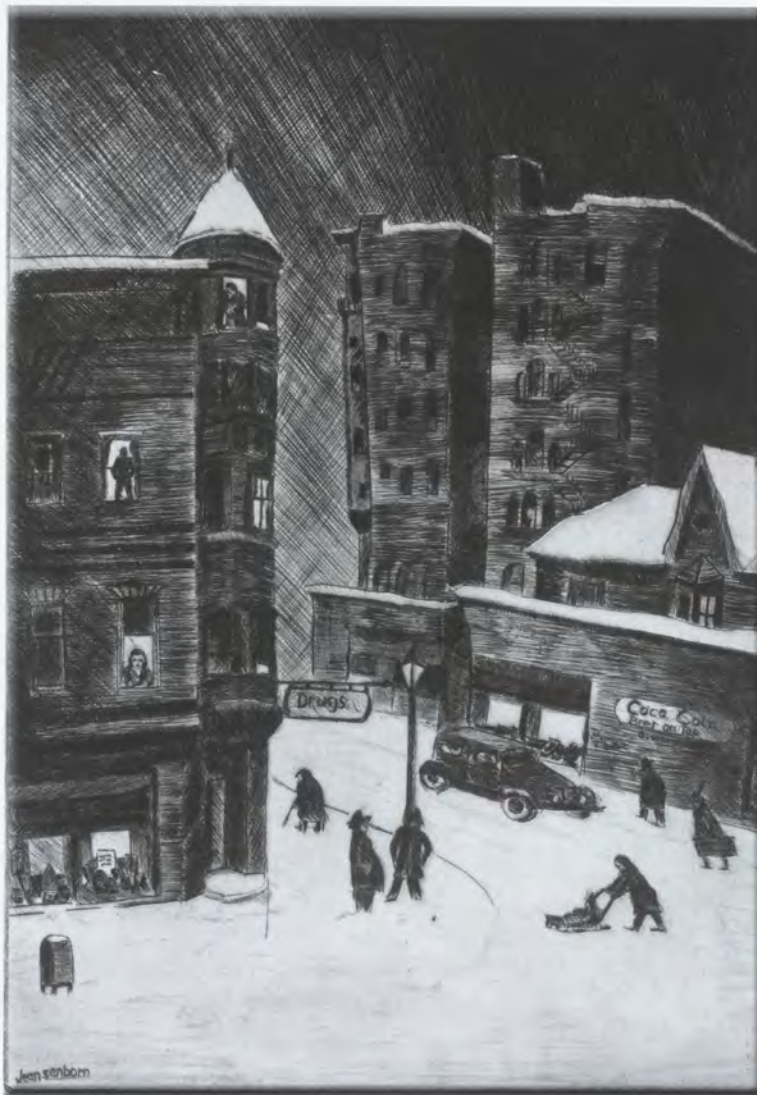
John Watson Milton

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“A Gentle, Kind Spirit Whose Life Was Art”

Jean Sanborn Gross: Artist, Painter, and Printmaker

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*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.*

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 46, Number 1

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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.

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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.

“A Gentle, Kind Spirit Whose Life Was Art”

Jean Sanborn Gross: Artist, Painter, and Printmaker

Eileen R. McCormack

Jean Sanborn Gross was a St. Paul artist who showed a considerable natural talent during the early 1940s when she studied and exhibited her art. Natural artistic talent is, like all gifts, something that grows, changes, and is refined over time. An artist's body of work shows the influences of other artists and art movements, as well as the time and place in which they lived. Because much of Jean's public work was done during her years at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art, the influence of her teachers, Cameron Booth and Lowell Bobleter, is evident. St. Paul was home to Jean almost her entire life; consequently her work reflects the city and the surrounding rural areas. These themes were also consistent with subject matter popular in printmaking, the main focus of Jean's art, in the 1940s. On April 28 at 6:00 P.M., the Ramsey County Historical Society will open an exhibit at the Landmark Center in St. Paul that honors the art of Jean Sanborn Gross. Examples of her work, the tools and supplies she used, and information about her artwork will be on display. The exhibit is free and open to the public.

Jean Sanborn was born in Great Falls, Montana, on December 6, 1919, to Hazel and Frederick Sanborn. Jean's father worked for the Great Northern Railway in Montana. When Jean was quite young, her parents divorced and Jean moved to Santa Barbara with her mother. Her father remained in Montana. After her divorce, Jean's mother had a difficult time making a home for herself and her daughter; so in 1926, when Jean was seven years old, her grandmother, Rachel Rice Sanborn, and her Aunt Rachel, daughter of General John B. and Rachel Rice Sanborn, went to California and arranged to take Jean back to St. Paul. Jean lived for a time with her grandmother, who was a widow, and her Aunt Rachel at 550 Summit Avenue.

After a short time it was decided, within the Sanborn family, that since Jean's father could not provide a home for her, she would live with her uncle and aunt who had no children of their own. This childless couple, John and Helen Sanborn, adopted Jean and gave her a stable home and loving environment. Jean was educated in St. Paul, married a St. Paul man, and raised three children in St. Paul. So, although she began her life in the West, she would call St. Paul home for the rest of her life. St. Paul held deep historical roots for Jean, a descendant of the Sanborn and Rice families. Jean's fraternal great-grandfathers were Edmund Rice (1819–1889) and General John B. Sanborn (1826–1904), both early settlers in St. Paul. In 1926, the Rice and Sanborn

families were prominent members of St. Paul's business and social life and their descendants are still active in the city's civic and cultural affairs.¹

The Sanborn Family

John Benjamin Sanborn Sr. was born in Epsom, New Hampshire, and studied at Dartmouth College. He moved to St. Paul in 1854 where he opened a law office and was a leading member of the first Minnesota House of Representatives following statehood (1859–1860) and later the State Senate.

Following the Confederates' attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, Governor Alexander Ramsey appointed Sanborn Minnesota's adjutant general. He quickly organized, equipped, and sent five infan-



Brevet Major General John Benjamin Sanborn Sr. This photograph was made by N.A. Giguere (also known as N.A. Giguere), a Canadian-American photographer who operated a studio on Wabasha Street in St. Paul between 1891 and 1908. The photograph, which was reproduced as a carte-de-visite on paper, may have been a copy of a Whitney's Gallery photo of Sanborn that had been made about 1863. Photo courtesy of the collections of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

try regiments to join the Union army. Late that year he became colonel of the Fourth Minnesota regiment. Sanborn and his men hurried south to Mississippi, where they were caught up in the bloody fighting at Iuka and Corinth. As part of the 7th Division, Seventeenth Corps in U.S. Grant's Army of the Tennessee, Colonel Sanborn and the Fourth Minnesota not only participated in the siege of Vicksburg, a key Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi

River, but were among the first Union forces to enter the city on July 4, 1863. Sanborn later wrote that this victory was "a scene of life and joy and excitement such as is rarely seen on this planet."

Francis D. Millet's painting, *The Fourth Minnesota Entering Vicksburg*, which decorates the Governor's Reception Room at the Minnesota Capitol, celebrates this heroic triumph and shows Sanborn riding into the city at the head of his troops. The fall of Vicksburg placed the entire Mississippi River firmly in Union hands and split the Confederacy in two. In recognition of Sanborn's superior leadership and his role in helping to turn the tide of the war in favor of the Union, he was subsequently promoted to brigadier general in August 1863 and brevet major general in 1865.

After the war, Sanborn remained in the army until 1869 when he returned to his law firm in Minnesota and again served in the Minnesota House and Senate. In 1870 General Sanborn invited his nephew, Walter H. Sanborn, to join him in his St. Paul office. Sanborn & Sanborn grew to be a respected and prestigious law firm, and in 1892 President Benjamin Harrison nominated Walter to fill a vacancy on the Federal Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. Judge Walter Sanborn served in that capacity until his death in 1928.

Twice made a widower, in 1880 General Sanborn married Rachel Rice, daughter of Edmund Rice. The couple had four children, Lucy Sanborn Clapp, John B. Sanborn Jr., Rachel Sanborn, and Frederick Sanborn. General Sanborn died on May 6, 1904. Rachel Rice Sanborn died January 18, 1936. About 1908 Minnesota again honored General Sanborn by commissioning Minneapolis sculptor John Karl Daniels to cast a bronze statue of the general for the rotunda at the state capitol.²

Edmund Rice and General Sanborn had similar histories in early St. Paul, both arriving prior to statehood and both practicing law and serving in the legislature. Edmund Rice was born in Waitsfield, Vermont, and moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1838 to study law. In 1847 he enlisted in the U.S. Army and fought in the Mexican-American

war with the First Regiment, Michigan Volunteers where he was a first lieutenant. His brother, Henry M. Rice was living in Minnesota and working with the territorial government in its efforts to gain statehood for Minnesota.

In 1849 Edmund joined his brother's law firm in St. Paul and also took a position as a clerk on the Minnesota Supreme Court's Third Circuit. Rice's political career was long and varied. He served in both the Minnesota Territorial and State legislatures, was a U. S. senator and representa-



Jean Sanborn made this drypoint print in January 1942. She originally called the print St. Paul, but later gave it the title *Rainy Night*. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

and also served as mayor of St. Paul in 1885. In 1848 Rice married Anna Marie Acker and the couple had eleven children, including daughter Rachel. Edmund Rice died on July 11, 1889, in his summer home at White Bear Lake, Minnesota. In 1913, Anna Acker Rice died at her home at 534 Laurel Avenue.

John B. Sanborn Jr. (1883–1964), the eldest son of General Sanborn

and Rachel Rice Sanborn, graduated from the University of Minnesota and the St. Paul College of Law (now the William Mitchell College of Law) and practiced law in the firm headed by Pierce Butler and William D. Mitchell. Sanborn served in the Minnesota House of Representatives (1913–1915) and as State Comptroller of Insurance and on the Minnesota Tax Commission. In 1907, Sanborn married fellow University of Minnesota student, Helen Clarke. Helen was the daughter of an attorney from Algona, Iowa. John and Helen Sanborn, who had no children of their own, adopted their niece, Jean, shortly after her arrival in St. Paul in 1926.

In 1922, Sanborn was appointed to the Ramsey County District Court. Three years later, Judge Sanborn was appointed to the Federal District Court for Minnesota. In 1932 he followed his cousin, Judge Walter Sanborn, on the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, where he served until 1959, when he retired from active service. His years on the federal bench were a time of high criminal activity in Minnesota and across the nation. As one historian of the federal judiciary noted, "In the twenties in the District of Minnesota there existed a general laxity in the enforcement of certain Federal criminal laws."

Following his retirement, Judge Sanborn continued to participate as a senior circuit judge until his death in 1964. In the memorial held in the courtroom of the Eighth Circuit in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 11, 1964, Sanborn's fellow judges met in session, "to recall and pay tribute to the outstanding service and the notable character of one of its late members, Judge John B. Sanborn." The printed proceedings talk of not only a noted jurist, but also of a "... quiet and kind man of culture ... [who possessed a] constant quest for truth ... blended with qualities of humbleness and simplicity." Jean's daughter remembers her grandfather in a similar way; reading Kipling to her as a child and his love of nature and the outdoors, which he passed on to her mother.³

Jean Sanborn's personal story in Minnesota's capital city begins with her

arrival in 1926. Once settled in her adoptive home, Jean attended Summit School in St. Paul and lived with her parents in a residence apartment at the Angus Hotel, on the corner of Selby and Western avenues, a location that would later serve as the subject matter for Jean's most public, and critically acclaimed, print *Moto Perpetuo*, done in 1943. Summers were spent at the Sanborn home on the St. Croix River that John had purchased in 1915.

For an aspiring artist, these two locations supplied Jean with an awareness of urban landscapes and people, as well as the opportunity to experience nature in a thoroughly rural setting, both of which would certainly influence her later art. The Sanborn home on the St. Croix was a constant in Jean's life. John and Helen's first residence at the river burned down in 1941. The family then built a seasonal cabin nearby where they spent every summer.

A less tangible influence on Jean Sanborn's early development was the great appreciation for art that she gained from her family. After General Sanborn died, his wife and daughter Rachel travelled widely in Europe and China. They brought home a number of beautiful paintings and other works of art that served to inspire Jean. At a young age, Rachel Rice Sanborn and Aunt Rachel, along with Helen Sanborn, encouraged Jean to draw and explore her artistic talent. This exposure to beautiful works of art in her formative years and her family's support for developing her artistic sensitivity and skill served Jean well throughout her adult life.

In 1965, after Judge Sanborn's death, Jean and her husband built a new home, on the foundations of the original summer house. This St. Croix house included an art studio for Jean, providing her with a place to create, in a place she loved. Jean spent most of her summers in the country and her daughter felt that is where she was the happiest, "As children, she [Jean] took us hiking, canoeing, boating, birding. We went to caves and we would look for arrowheads. She enjoyed visiting the many people she knew along the Saint Croix . . . and after her studio was built

she drew, etched and spent hours outside doing watercolors."⁴

Art in St. Paul

If Jean Sanborn had been a generation older, she would have been exposed to art in school or through "drawing instruction." Perhaps her grandmother, Rachel Rice Sanborn, would have arranged a time to take Jean to the gallery at James J. Hill's Summit Avenue home with its collection of European masterpieces, mainly of the Barbizon School.

would certainly have experienced art in New York or Europe when the art world of the 1920s was filled with excitement, unbridled experimentation, and unmitigated optimism.

Jean's generation, entering their teens in the early 1930s, saw a thriving, vibrant art scene in St. Paul. In addition to the public art galleries and art schools for aspiring artists, public spaces were displaying art sponsored by the Federal Art Project (FAP), which was a program sponsored by the larger Works Projects



In 1943 Jean Sanborn created this drypoint print and called it *Bleak Hill Road*. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

By 1908 the Saint Paul Institute of Arts and Sciences offered art classes and had exhibit space. Saint Paul Art School, the forerunner of the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art where Jean was a student in 1942-1943, opened in 1924. In Minneapolis art was also found in private collections such as that of lumberman T.B. Walker. The Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, founded in 1883, held exhibitions in the downtown public library until the Minneapolis Institute of Art opened in 1915. If Jean had been a student of art in the years following World War I, she

Administration (WPA), one of the many federal programs that made up the Roosevelt administration's New Deal.

The WPA made it possible for artists to earn money producing paintings, sculpture works, and prints. Their work was often on public display, inside and outside public buildings and in poster art. The New Deal's WPA included a construction program that resulted in the building of public institutions, schools, bridges, and other structures and infrastructure projects, across the country.

For many people, the most visible ex-

amples of art produced via the FAP were the posters and murals in public buildings, such as those in St. Paul's Ramsey County Courthouse, built in 1931. In the St. Paul City Council Chambers, on the third floor of the building, there are four large murals that tell the story of the founding of the city. John Norton, a Chicago artist, painted these murals in a style that became known as "WPA Moderne."⁵

In Minnesota, the state director of the Federal Art Project was Clement Haupers (1900–1982), who was born in St. Paul and studied art at the Minneapolis School of Art and in Paris. Haupers administered the FAP from its inception in 1935 until 1942. Many of the artists hired by the FAP "also served as teachers in art centers . . . the goal . . . was not only to promote artistic creativity, but also to build a larger audience for it." The art centers, set up around the state, had the distinct advantage of being staffed by accomplished artists hired by the government. "From 1935 to 1943 the project established 103 community centers nationwide, offering classes for people of all ages, lectures on art, and exhibition space." These art centers "made fine art available to the masses; people . . . wouldn't go to museums, but they went to these WP art centers."

Printmaking became more popular in Minnesota through the WPA projects by giving students access not only to good instruction, but also to materials and presses. The government sponsored art centers around the state and other small centers grew up in cities and towns. They offered graphic workshops that encouraged students to use regional themes, history, familiar city and rural scenes, and people working and playing as subject matter in their prints.

In Robert Crump's book on Minnesota printmakers (1900–1945), he supplies biographical information on printmakers from Aalby to Zeigler, 196 artists in all. Many of the artists listed in this authoritative study became well known, and many more, like Jean Sanborn, had very brief public careers. What is important is that the enhanced opportunities for artistic expression that these federal programs initially offered during the 1930s and '40s gave many people a chance to learn and prac-

tice their art and hopefully added to their enjoyment for their entire lives. Haupers' work with the FAP was seen as the "greatest single factor toward the development of the younger artists [in Minnesota]." Jean Sanborn benefited not only from greater access to art, but also from the experience and expertise of the FAP artists who later became her instructors.⁶

Jean Leaves Home

Although the Great Depression and World War II provided the broader context for Jean's formative years, the threat of violence and lawlessness at home in

those years affected her life most directly. For her safety, John and Helen decided that Jean should leave St. Paul and Summit School and enroll at Stephens College, a boarding school in Columbia, Missouri, for her senior year in high school. Given Judge Sanborn's position in the legal system, which made him the target of death threats, the Sanborns' decision to send Jean away from the city was considered prudent.

Beginning in the early 1900s, the "O'Connor System," named for St. Paul Chief of Police John O'Connor, made the city a safe haven for gangsters. The



In 1945 Jean Sanborn Gross made a drypoint print that she called No. 5 Sherburne. George G. Benz built this stately home in 1888 and his descendants still owned it when Jean made her print. The house, along with a number of other great mansions on this part of Sherburne, was demolished in the flurry of construction around the Minnesota Capitol in the early 1950s. Although the land on the south side of Sherburne was turned into the Cass Gilbert Memorial Park, the north side of the street, where No. 5 was located, became a parking lot for state employees. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

chief of police and his brother Richard, a prominent city politician, made it known that criminals would not be arrested in St. Paul if they "obeyed the law." What may have begun as merely a place where one could stay "until the heat was off" became something entirely more threatening in the 1920s when Prohibition was the law of the land. The payoffs to city officials for providing a sanctuary for criminals caused families such as the Sanborns to take steps to protect their children.

Attorney and historian Thomas H. Boyd writes that while Judge Sanborn served on the Ramsey County District Court, he "became known as being tough on crime. He believed that individuals convicted of crimes should be dealt with firmly and in accordance with the penalties prescribed by the Minnesota Legislature. This was particularly true with respect to violators of the liquor laws. . . . Judge Sanborn made it clear to members of the bar as well as to the community at large that he would enforce the liquor laws as rigorously as any of the state's other criminal laws."⁷

In 1929 the New York stock market crashed and four years later Prohibition was repealed. With bootlegging money disappearing, some criminals turned more and more to robbery and kidnapping. Bank robberies were regular occurrences; however it was the kidnappings that made the city an especially frightening place for many of its leading citizens. Judge Sanborn, recognizing that his position and reputation made his family potential targets for this type of criminal behavior, decided to send his daughter to Missouri to finish school.⁸

Studying Art

When Jean returned to St. Paul in 1939, after graduating from Stephens College, she enrolled at the University of Minnesota to pursue a liberal arts degree with a major in art and a minor in music. She remained at the university for two years before leaving to attend the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art in 1941. Jean had plans to travel to Paris to study art after receiving her college degree. The world, however, was changing dramatically as a result of the war in Europe.

Even though America did not offi-



Jean Sanborn, left, and her friend, Sally Benson, were students at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art in 1942 when this photo was taken. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

cially declare war until 1941, from the time Jean began her studies at the university, any plans she had for studying art in Europe were becoming increasingly uncertain. After Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939 and France and England's subsequent declarations of war against Germany, the European conflict escalated rapidly. When France fell to the German blitzkrieg in May 1940, the opportunity to study in Paris ended and studying art in St. Paul became her alternative.

During the hardships and sacrifices of the war years, Jean no doubt found comfort in her studies. Art classes at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art, from 1941-1943, put her in the company of well-known instructors and enthusiastic fellow students at an institution that was respected by the art community. In 1924 artists of the Art League of Saint Paul, founded the Saint Paul School of Art.

The school was housed in various buildings in the city until 1939 when it found a permanent home in the former Chauncey Griggs residence at 496 Summit Avenue. The Griggs home, designed by celebrated architect Clarence Johnston in 1883, was used by the school

until 1964. With a new home and a new name, the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art, served the cultural needs of St. Paul by hosting concerts, exhibits, and other events.

In 1942 the school's Board of Directors included many more women than men. "Miss Jean Sanborn" and her Summit School friend "Miss Patricia Ordway" were listed as board members, as were Alice Brill, Helen Bunn, Mrs. Milton Griggs, Elizabeth Dorsey, Mrs. Walter Kennedy, Mrs. Horace Irvine, Mrs. Edward Sanford, Mrs. Arthur Savage, Mrs. Francis Butler, Mrs. Hendrie Grant, Mrs. H. Lindley Hosford, and Mrs. David Raudenbush. The male Board members were architect Thomas Ellerbe, Albert Felsted, prominent attorneys Samuel Morgan and Roger Shepard, Charles Turck, and William West.

During Jean's years as a student, the exhibits mounted at the school were impressive. In 1942 the "November Portrait Show" included portraits of Minnesota people loaned for the exhibit. Miss Rachel Sanborn, Jean's aunt, was one who contributed portraits of family members to the show.

Two exhibits in 1943 were national in scope. In October the Gallery season opened with "Four American Watercolorists" from the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Brooklyn Museum, featuring watercolors by American artists Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, Charles Burchfield, and Adolf Dehn. In November the exhibit, "Contemporary French Paintings," containing works from various New York galleries, featured works by Pierre August Renoir, Odilon Redon, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Amedeo Modigliani, Marc Chagall, and others. It is impossible to underestimate the benefits for Jean and her fellow students in being able to see these artists' works.⁹

The curriculum at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art offered classes in drawing, painting, composition, graphic art, ceramics, fashion drawing, advertising art and commercial design. There were classes for young people on Saturday mornings and evening classes for those who worked during the day, including a "Business Men's Class" and



Jean Sanborn Gross called this 1963 drypoint print U.S. Post Office—Uptown Station. She executed it as a gift to Judge John B. Sanborn upon his retirement from the Federal District Court for Minnesota, which at the time was in this building along with the Post Office. Today this familiar building is known as the Landmark Center. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

one in “Advertising Art.” The instructors included well-respected local artists in the fields of commercial art, ceramics, painting, and graphic arts as well as a number of artists with strong national reputations such as, Cameron Booth, Walter Kuhlman, and Lowell Bobleter.

Although these three men had their work hanging in galleries, museums, and private collections throughout the United States and Europe, “[they] showed their work frequently in public places such as the St. Paul Public Library. He [Booth]

explicitly challenged the traditional association of art and the social elite and the conception of the art gallery as a lifeless place, ‘I want the working man to come in his work clothes. I want the housewife to put down her ladle, lower the flame under her stew, and visit the exhibit.’”¹⁰

Jean Sanborn was fortunate to have both Booth and Bobleter for instructors during her studies. During her first year, 1941–1942, Jean took the painting composition class taught by Cameron Booth. Cameron Booth (1892–1980) was born in

Erie, Pennsylvania, and moved with his family to Moorhead, Minnesota, when he was in high school. He went to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and studied in Paris after serving in World War I. He returned to Minnesota in 1921 to teach at the Minneapolis School of Art “and remained a teacher for the rest of his life . . . he influenced many of the artists educated in Minnesota between 1921–1960 in the classroom, in the studio, and by example.”

Booth taught at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art from 1929–1942, and served as the director from 1931–1942. Awarded three Guggenheim fellowships from 1940–1943, he resigned from the school and used the award funds to travel and paint in the American West. Booth taught in New York from 1944 to 1948. In 1948 he returned to Minneapolis and joined the faculty of the University of Minnesota. In a retrospective exhibit held at the Minnesota Historical Society in 1974, Booth was honored as an artist who “. . . gives us glimpses and images of his life and his particular awareness of it. Happily, the state of Minnesota has provided him with much of this inspiration. . . .”¹¹

Booth’s recommended book list for Jean’s class included George Besson’s volume, *Les Artistes Nouveaux*, a collection of biographies, and reproductions of artists from Braque to Van Gogh. He knew how important the study of all artists’ work was to the development of one’s own art.

In her class notes Jean writes, “To find one’s own style, it is more than likely necessary to go thru various stages of being influenced by other great painters, then, to go beyond; one must study them, seek basis of their painting, learn and then benefit without imitation. . . .” These notes indicate an understanding of Booth’s teachings regarding the intangibles that can impact the “feel” of a piece of art:

Mr. Booth talked about the formal, impersonal painting, and the personal; naturally the personal type is that which comes into everybody’s understanding and experience, and the formal and impersonal, that which may have much beauty and appeal, but re-

mains distant and cold. (Picasso does that frequently) The division line is very slight sometimes . . . and most of the great painters enter both qualities into their work, striking a happy medium, which is most satisfactory.

There are many extremes in painting that one must take care to avoid, (especially the above), "Be free, without being sloppy, be neat without being tight."

The drawings and paintings Jean produced at this time document that she was a diligent student, applying the theories and techniques regarding form, color, movement, and subject matter presented in class. Many entries in her notes show the emphasis Booth placed on color, and in her painting, *Visitor at the Angus Hotel*, Jean shows how she used his color concepts. In her notes, Jean wrote extensively about color theory, the importance of blending colors, and how to place colors on the canvas in order to get a particular desired result, be it movement or balance, as well as how different artists have used color.¹²

Printmaking

In 1942, in Jean's second term at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art, she shifted her focus from painting to printmaking and enrolled in an etching class taught by Lowell Bobleter (1902–1973). Jean's daughter remembers, "Lowell Bobleter was the primary influence on Mom's works, as she preferred etching." Born in New Ulm, Minnesota, Bobleter studied at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art from 1923 to 1925. During the 1920s and 1930s, he became a well-known printmaker, who specialized in drypoint and won numerous awards and medals. Some of Bobleter's prints were exhibited or appeared in art-related publications, either locally or nationally. His best works are now part of the permanent collections of a number of major American art institutions. In 1940 Bobleter was named one of the twelve outstanding American printers. He joined the faculty at the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art, and in 1940 was appointed its executive director.

Miss Helen Bunn, president of the board of directors, in announcing Bobleter's appointment said, "He brings



400 Summit Avenue is another drypoint print that Jean Sanborn Gross made as a gift. In November 1969 she gave it to her friends, the Ordway family, who lived in this home on St. Paul's most celebrated avenue. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

to the St. Paul institution not only his attainments in the fine arts field, but also experience in business, organization and civic work. In the fine arts field his work has gained for him a position as one of the leading contemporary American printmakers." Needless to say, it was quite an exciting opportunity for Jean to study under one of the foremost American printmakers of the day.¹³

Robert Crump, in the introduction of his book on printmakers, writes:

The decades [between 1914 and 1941] witnessed a dramatic transition in American

graphic arts from provincialism to the beginnings of a national school. During these years Americans began to create and purchase prints with local and regional subjects—known as American Scene or Regionalist themes—in preference to images with European and foreign subjects.¹⁴

Bobleter certainly exemplified this new philosophy in his own art, and Jean's prints definitely show that she assimilated this new thinking as well. Of the many printmaking techniques, etching and drypoint were the two preferred by both teacher and student. Both tech-

niques are types of “intaglio” printing, a name which comes from Italian and means “to cut in.” In both techniques, the artist “cuts” the image into a metal plate using either a sharp tool (drypoint) or a sharp tool in combination with an acid bath (etching). Using the drypoint technique, the artist scratches the image directly onto the metal plate with a sharp tool, creating a ragged burr on either side of the line. The burr and the line hold a lot of ink and the result is the feathery line characteristic of this technique.

To make an etching, the artist must first cover the metal plate with an acid-resistant ground onto which the image is scratched. The artist then places the finished plate into an acid bath. The acid bites into the scratched areas of the plate, leaving the portion of the plate covered by the ground untouched. The longer the plate remains in the acid, the deeper the lines will be, creating a darker print.

In both cases, the printing technique is the same—the artist covers the plate with printer’s ink and then wipes it clean, leaving ink pooled in the recessed lines of the design. A damp piece of paper is placed over the plate and the plate is run through a printing press which exerts tons of pressure on the plate, and in doing so pushes the paper into the grooves where the ink is and transfers the image onto the paper. Obviously printmaking is not for everyone—it poses many technical and physical challenges for the artist, but ultimately, for those artists who choose to pursue it, the aesthetic and commercial possibilities outweigh the difficulties.

Jean’s class notes, entitled “Etching, 1942–1943, Lowell Bobleter, Instructor” include detailed, step-by-step instructions for acid etching, aquatint, drypoint, and soft ground etching techniques as well as a list of books on etching and etchers. In all likelihood, this class was Jean’s first attempt at serious printmaking. Just from a practical standpoint, it is difficult to imagine a young artist having access to the supplies and equipment required to produce prints outside of the classroom or studio setting. Also, if she had any prior printmaking experience, she probably would not have needed to

take such detailed notes on all of the various techniques. Jean’s art supplies to this point would have been drawing pads and pencils, watercolors, oils, and canvas.

Bobleter’s class opened a new creative door for Jean by providing her with an introduction to the tools and techniques of printmaking and set her on a lifelong path. The quality of Jean’s early work is remarkable given that she had only just begun to study the drypoint/etching craft. This is a testament both to her talent and passion for the medium and the skill of her instructor. Jean’s prints, most of which were done during her time studying with Bobleter, reflect his style, preferred techniques, and choice of Regionalist themes that were popular with print artists in the 1940s.

As part of the curriculum, instructors at the St. Paul School of Art held critical assessment classes and encouraged the production of sufficiently advanced works that could be submitted for exhibition. During 1942 and 1943, Jean completed thirteen plates. The majority were drypoint, although a few were also produced using acid etching or aquatint.

Two of the prints Jean made while in Bobleter’s class, *Country Farm* (1942) and *Desolated* (1942), were reprinted as Christmas cards and sold at the school’s annual holiday art sale. Jean’s records indicate that she sold twenty-four cards priced at 25¢ each. The students participated in community events held at the school and war-related activities such as this one noted in the December 1942 Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art bulletin:

Jean Sanborn and Nancy Hatton, advanced students, painted gay and clever murals to cover the walls of the Service Men’s Center, 72 W. 7th St., for the Halloween night party. Witches, cats, ghosts and caricatures in stunning design lined many feet of wall space and brought forth much appreciative comment.¹⁵

Encouraged by Bobleter, Jean submitted seven works for exhibition between 1942 and 1943. Five prints were accepted. On December 16, 1942, the *St. Paul Dispatch* pictured one of Jean’s prints under the heading “In Eastern Exhibit,” the caption read:

“The Recluse,” latest etching by Jean Sanborn, young St. Paul artist, is shown



On August 21, 1944, Jean Sanborn, third from the right, married William Gross in St. Paul. Their parents, Arthur and Helen Gross, left, and Helen and Judge John B. Sanborn, right, celebrated that joyous day with the happy couple. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

above. Miss Sanborn is the only Minnesota artist represented in the annual exhibition of the Yonkers Art Museum of New York, where "Rainy Night" and "Winter Evening" are displayed. Miss Sanborn has been studying at the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art and has specialized in etching.

Rainy Night (1942) and *Winter Evening* (1942) were in the Yonkers Art Association exhibit at the Hudson River Museum in November 1942. *Winter Evening* and *The Recluse* (1942) were in the Society of American Etchers exhibit at the galleries of the National Academy of Design in New York City in January 1943. Jean exhibited *The Recluse* twice more, at the First International Print Show held at the Nye Museum in Austin, Texas, in February 1943 and at the Minnesota State Fair in August of the same year.

In the 1940s, the Fine Arts Exhibitions included many more prints due to the WPA/FAP efforts and the community art centers where workshops, classes, and facilities were available to artists. Lowell Bobleter was the superintendent of the State Fair Exhibit in 1943 and Jean, in addition to *The Recluse*, exhibited *Bleak Hill Road* (1943) and *Moto Perpetuo* (1943). In the August 26, 1943 edition, the *Minneapolis Star Journal* reported "City Artists Take Awards." In the listing of "Cash Awards," Jean Sanborn's print, *Moto Perpetuo*, is shown as winning second prize (\$5.00; the equivalent of about \$63.75 today). *Moto Perpetuo* was Jean's most critically acclaimed print. After the State Fair, it was exhibited, along with the other award winners at Donaldson's Department Store in Minneapolis. Jean also had this print accepted for exhibitions at the Seattle Art Museum for its Northwest Printmakers Exhibit and the Society of American Etchers Exhibition held again in New York City in December 1943.¹⁶

In addition to exhibiting her work publicly, Jean sold several prints to private collectors and gifted others to family and friends. After Jean left the Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art in 1943, she executed one print, *No. 5 Sherburne*, in 1945. In 1963, Jean produced *U.S. Post Office—Uptown Station* as a gift for Judge John Sanborn on the occasion of his retirement from the bench. Six years



One of the last drypoint prints that Jean Sanborn Gross made was *The River* (early 1970s), which captures her affection for the home that she and her husband built adjacent to the St. Croix River. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

later, at the request of the Ordway family, Jean executed *400 Summit Avenue* [Ordway House] as a gift for her friends. Jean produced three more prints throughout the 1970s before a neck injury and resulting surgery made it impossible for her to continue making prints. Although Jean was no longer able to produce prints, she continued to find a creative outlet in sketching, executing commissions in oils, and painting watercolors.¹⁷

Marriage and a Family

In 1944 Jean married William Gross, a St. Paul businessman, and the couple had three children, John, Jennifer, and Richard. As noted Jean did continue to draw and paint and produce some drypoint prints after her marriage. Oil portraits were done of her children and some friends. She had her printing press set up in the basement of her home on Goodrich Avenue before it was moved to the studio space on the St. Croix River. During the years when she was raising her family, Jean's art was never put entirely away; it was just often expressed in different ways that infused her children's lives with creativity and culture.

Jean Sanborn Gross displayed her artistic talents and sensitivities beyond just making sketches and painting during the years when her children were growing up. During their youth, she educated her children to the importance and value of art and beauty in much the same way that the two Rachels and Helen Sanborn had increased Jean's appreciation for and awareness of the role that art plays in life. Jean often displayed her artistic talent in her taste in clothes and accessories, her sense of fashion, the display of artwork in her home, and her keen sense of design that permeated the home that she and her husband had built in 1965 on the St. Croix. Upon its completion, Jean decorated the home herself by filling it with colorful and vibrant furnishings as though she considered her home was another of her artistic creations. Consequently, Jean's enthusiasm for great music, art, and literature as well as her love of nature infused her life, her home, and her love for her family.

Jean's daughter Jennifer saw her mother as a woman who exhibited a strong artistic personality. Jean passed her talent on to her children by having art classes

for Jennifer and her friends “. . . drawing . . . and teaching about light and composition, perspective, etc.” Jean had a large circle of family and friends and an active social life. She knew artists of all kinds, both painters and musicians. She was a member of an artists’ guild, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the Minneapolis Symphony. Jean and her husband were active in the Rotary and Kiwanis organizations, and were avid curlers at the Saint Paul Curling Club on Selby Avenue. Jean and her family

were active members of their church, St. John the Evangelist at Portland and Kent streets, throughout their lives. And, during the summers, Jean had the St. Croix River to return to where she, “. . . was the happiest.” Jean Sanborn Gross died in St. Paul on September 26, 1983.¹⁸

Jennifer remembers her mother as one who, “opened up the world to me as a child; to nature and the beauty around me. She brought a great love of art and museums, nature, music, reading, and so much more into my life. She had a great

love of beauty and a gentle, kind spirit whose life was art.”¹⁹

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Endnotes

1. The author acknowledges the personal memories and information contributed by Jennifer H. Gross, daughter of Jean Sanborn Gross. Jennifer was interviewed on numerous occasions and this narrative could not have been written without her assistance.
2. The quotation is from John B. Sanborn’s “Memories of Vicksburg” in his *Sanborn Family in the United States and Brief Sketch of John B. Sanborn: with Speeches and Addresses* (St. Paul: H.M. Smyth Print Co. 1887), 21. Biographical information on General Sanborn is from Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 418–19; Kenneth Carley, *Minnesota in the Civil War: An Illustrated History* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), 97, 119–23; and Thomas H. Boyd, “Walter Sanborn and the Eighth Circuit Court,” *Ramsey County History*, 26, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 22–27.
3. *In Memoriam, John B. Sanborn, 1883–1964* (United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit Proceedings, September 11, 1964) Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul Minn., 2; Thomas H. Boyd, “The Life and Career of The Honorable John B. Sanborn, Jr.,” *William Mitchell Law Review*, 203, no. 2 (1997): 203–312; and author interview with Jennifer Gross, January 20, 2011.
4. Author interviews with Jennifer Gross, January 20, 2011, and January 26, 2011.
5. Robert L. Crump, *Minnesota Prints and Printmakers, 1900–1945*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009), 20–27. This book has information on the WPA/FAP in Minnesota as well as on printmaking in the state; Kenneth E. Hendrickson Jr., “The WPA Federal Art Projects in Minnesota, 1935–1943,” *Minnesota History*, 53, no. 5 (Spring 1993): 170–183; City of Saint Paul Official Website, www.stpaulgov, “Saint Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse, Overview.”
6. Crump, 102–03 and 52–179; Martha Davidson, “Regional Review: Minneapolis-St. Paul 1943,” *Art News*, January 15–31, 1943, pp 9–11; Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., 170–183; Una E. Johnson, *American Prints and Printmakers* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc.), 65–66.
7. Boyd, 217; Paul Maccabee, *John Dillinger Slept Here: A Crook’s Tour of Crime and Corruption in St. Paul, 1920–1936* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press). Maccabee provides a detailed history of the “O’Connor System”; Virginia Brainard Kunz, *St. Paul the First 150 Years* (St. Paul: The Saint Paul Foundation, 1992), 78–81.
8. Maccabee discusses the 1933 kidnapping of William Hamm Jr., a brewery executive, and the 1934 kidnapping of St. Paul banker Edward Bremer, 141–165 and 182–205. In Billie W. Young with Eileen R. McCormack, *The Dutiful Son: Louis W. Hill; Life in the Shadow of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill* (St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society, 2010), 285, there is an account of how reports of these events so worried railroad leader Louis W. Hill that he cautioned his son and his wife to remain in Europe.
9. Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art materials, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.; and Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art Bulletins, December 1942–October 1943, Private Collection.
10. Nina M. Archabal, “In Memoriam, Cameron Booth, 1892–1980: A Chronicle from His Scrapbooks,” *Minnesota History*, 47, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 100–110.
11. Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art Catalog Collection, 1928–1929—1962–1963 and other associated records and materials, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.; Archabal, 100–110.
12. Jean Sanborn class notes, “Composition 1941–1942, Cameron Booth, Instructor,” Private Collection.
13. Author interview with Jennifer Gross, October 7, 2010; Crump, 62–63; Kremena Spengler, “Brushstrokes from the Past,” *New Ulm Journal*, April 26, 2009; S. J. Milne, “Bobleter Moves Up the Ladder,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press-Dispatch*, unknown 1940 date.
14. Crump, xi, xiii–xiv.
15. Jean Sanborn Record of Plates, Private Collection; Saint Paul Gallery and School of Art *Bulletin*, December 1942, Private Collection.
16. “In Eastern Exhibit,” *St. Paul Dispatch*, December 16, 1942; Crump, 28–30; Jean Sanborn Record of Plates; “City Artists Take Awards,” *Minneapolis Star Journal*, August 26, 1943.
17. Jean Sanborn Record of Plates.
18. Author interviews with Jennifer Gross, September 22, 2010 and January 20, 2011.
19. Author interview with Jennifer Gross, September 22, 2010.

R.C.H.S.

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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.