

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

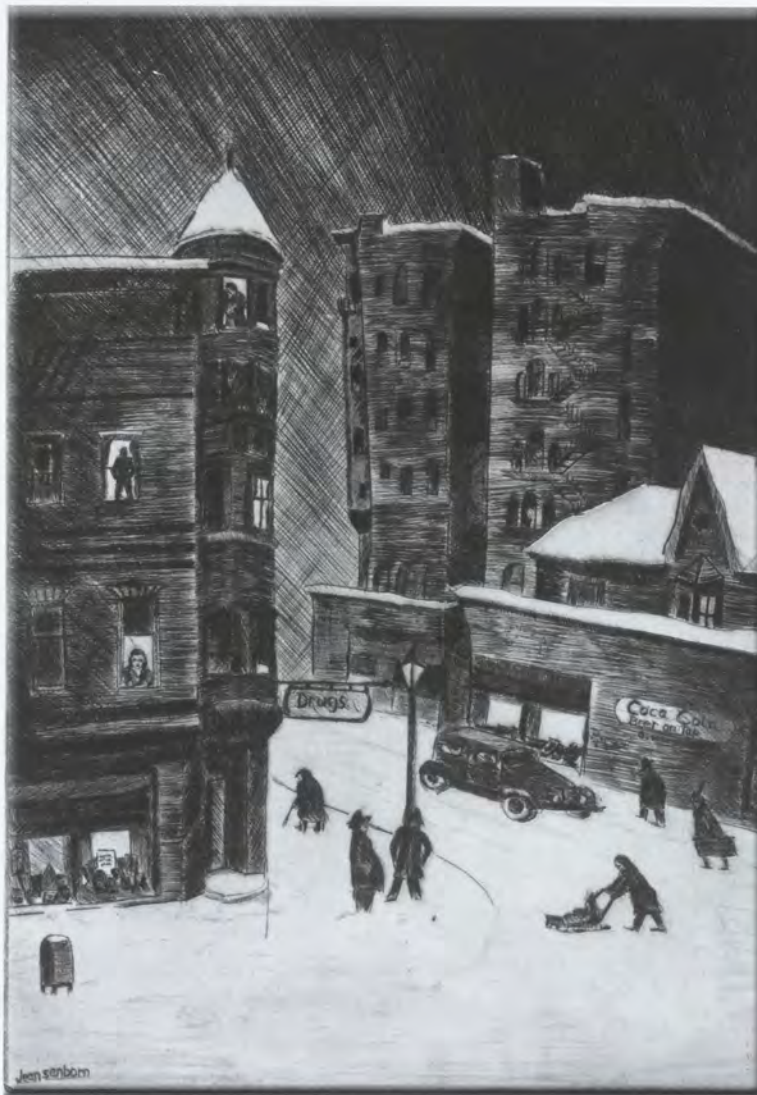
John Watson Milton

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“A Gentle, Kind Spirit Whose Life Was Art”

Jean Sanborn Gross: Artist, Painter, and Printmaker

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.*

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

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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.

For the Good of the Order

The Ad Man Becomes the “Senator from Ramsey”

John Watson Milton

John Milton has written a book-length biography of the late Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Nicholas D. Coleman, For the Good of the Order, to be published later this year. A St. Paul native and former state senator, Milton is a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Editorial Board and author of the award-winning historical novel The Fallen Nightingale; a political novel—Time to Choose; the afterword for Senator Allan Spear's memoir Crossing the Barriers; and the lead article in the Spring 2009 issue of Ramsey County History. This article is excerpted from Chapter 4 of Milton's biography of Coleman.

Nick Coleman was born on February 23, 1925, the oldest child of David and Hannah Coleman, who lived at the time in an apartment on the western edge of St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood. Given that location, their Irish heritage, and Catholic faith, the Colemans were parishioners of St. Columba Church, founded in 1914. Young Nick attended the St. Columba grade school and Cretin High, from which he graduated in 1942. Following service as a Navy signalman in the Pacific during World War II, he returned to St. Paul and, thanks to the G.I. Bill, attended the College of St. Thomas. He graduated in 1949 and was elected “Mr. Tommy,” the most popular member of the senior class. While at St. Thomas, he got his first taste of politics when Eugene McCarthy, a professor at the college, ran for and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

During the McCarthy campaign, Coleman met the late Bridget Finnegan, a bright, Irish-American pre-med student at Macalester College. After their wedding at St. Mary of the Lake (White Bear Lake), the young couple moved to Tyler, a small town in southwestern Minnesota, where Nick had accepted a teaching job at the high school. After two years in Tyler, during which time their son, Nicholas Joseph, was born, Nick concluded that he was not cut out to be a teacher, and, longing to be back with their family and friends in St. Paul, the Colemans returned to the capital city.

Nick's first commercial job, with North Central Publishing, was as a printing salesman. Within four months, he caught the attention of Kerker-Peterson & Associates, a small ad and art firm, who hired him as a salesman. The world of advertising, especially during its postwar heyday, was more

exciting, even glamorous—as portrayed in the work of large agencies along Madison Avenue in New York—and the so-called “ad men” were far better paid than small-town high school teachers. But Coleman's successful start was interrupted by spinal meningitis, which nearly killed him. “I barely lived through it,” he'd later recall, “but recovered sound of mind and body—some say—and then went on.”¹ His doctor told Bridget that when people were that sick they could not communicate, but she remembered that Nick never stopped making witty remarks and cracking jokes. “He had such a great zest for living, so he never gave up.”²

Soon after Nick's recovery, Bridget's mother died, leaving a seven-year-old daughter, Michelle, whom the Colemans took in along with her father, Abe Levinson, second husband of Bridget's mother; they raised Michelle until her graduation from

college. Two years after their second son, Patrick Kevin, was born in 1952, their first daughter, Maureen Bridget, arrived. Once again, the young family was shaken when Maureen died of leukemia before her third birthday. “My heart was broken,” Bridget said many years later, and Nick, whose witty remarks and zest for living had prevailed through earlier setbacks, was so profoundly staggered by grief that he would



SERGEANT
NICHOLAS D. COLEMAN

With his overwhelming personality, level head, and his great “line”, Nick should go far in his ambition to be a journalist.

Debate, '41, '42 . . . Glee Club, '40, '41
C.S.M.C., '39, '40, '41 . . . Dramatics,
'40, '41 . . . N.R.A., '38, '39 . . . Signal
Corps, '42 . . . Comment Staff, '41, '42
Choral Society, '42 . . . Chemistry Club,
'42 . . . Bowling, '41, '42

Nick Coleman's 1942 yearbook photo at Cretin High School. He later recalled being one of the few seniors that year who was not promoted to officer in the school's ROTC unit. Photo courtesy of Cretin-Derham Hall High School.

later say that Maureen's death was one of the greatest losses of his life.

Once again, the Colemans recovered from tragedy and their family grew with Brendan Xavier, born in 1957, Meghan Bridget ("Micki"), who arrived two years later, followed by Christopher Brien (1961), and Emmett Vincent (1966). From a small rented home in St. Paul's Highland Park neighborhood, near the Ford assembly plant, they bought and moved to a larger home to accommodate their growing family at 1018 Eleanor Avenue, in the West Seventh Street neighborhood. There they joined the parish of St. James Church, one of three that served the working-class and middle-income families of that area. It would prove to be a good base for a Democratic candidate for public office. "When we showed up at Mass," Bridget would later recall, "we filled an entire pew. People would ask me, 'Are they all yours?'"

Madison Avenue West

Coleman began his advertising career selling art and publicity (and anything

else he was asked to sell). Much of his time was devoted to cold calls, though he was salaried, not on commission. When he left Kerker-Peterson four and one-half years later, he had been promoted to sales manager. "I liked the work and the people," he later said, but Coleman had decided it was time to learn more about the advertising business than he could with a small shop, staffed "with a bunch of bright amateurs." When he was offered a job at the Minneapolis-based Campbell-Mithun, the state's largest agency, he quickly accepted. One of the successes that propelled the agency to the top ranks of the local advertising business had been the "Land of Sky Blue Waters" television campaign for St. Paul-based Hamm's Beer. This led to many other large accounts across the country. Coleman was on a much faster track now.

As an account executive, he was assigned to two clients, Zinsmaster Baking, in Minneapolis, makers of The Master Loaf and other bakery products, and Nash's Coffee, a regional roaster based in



After receiving the prestigious "Mr. Tommy" award as the most popular member of the graduating class of 1949 at the College of St. Thomas, Nick Coleman smiled for the photographer. Photo courtesy of the Special Collections, University of St. Thomas.



Eugene McCarthy (second from the right), a professor at St. Thomas, was elected to Congress for the first time in 1948 with the help of Nick Coleman and his energetic friends. In this photo McCarthy receives the gift of a suitcase from three colleagues at the college prior to his departure for Washington. Photo courtesy of the Photo Collections, University of St. Thomas.

St. Paul and known for its slogan: "Every Drop Delicious."³ He worked there for a little more than three years, gaining valuable experience at this major agency, though he did not consider Campbell-Mithun a place to stay forever.

Coleman then approached an old friend and colleague, Ed Ryan, an art director who had left Campbell-Mithun some months before. "I thought we could do well together, and after some negotiations we signed an agreement and I went to work with Ryan as a vice president and minor stockholder." Ryan and Coleman built the agency up to twelve employees, had their share of ups and downs, but they continued to work well together.

1958, when their partnership began, was a milestone year for Minnesota politics. Coleman's interest, going back to boyhood, was whetted when John Borden, a friend from St. Thomas, told him that Gene McCarthy, then ten years a Member of Congress, was going to run for the U.S. Senate. Borden asked, "Would Coleman come to the caucus?"⁴ "So I went to my precinct caucus," he later said. "In the good old days, they couldn't even get enough people to fill up the spots, so at my first caucus I was elected an alternate to the state convention, delegate to the



In 1960 Nick Coleman looked like the quintessential young advertising man. Two years later, he would launch his first campaign for public office. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

county convention, and treasurer of the ward club before the evening was over." These elections ensured that in his initial involvement, Coleman would gain a first-hand view of politics, from the grass roots to the state level. And the 1958 campaign for McCarthy would introduce the young adman to the city and state party leaders, all the way up to the iconic Hubert Humphrey, who was looking ahead to a run for the presidency in 1960.

Humphrey, best known nationally for his 1948 speech on civil rights, had distinguished himself in Minnesota for his work in combining the old Farmer-Labor party and the Democratic party, purging those members with ties to the pro-Soviet leftist movement, propelling the combination forward with the label "D-F-L," and serving as mentor to an extraordinary group of young men who would become prominent national leaders, including Don Fraser, Orville Freeman, McCarthy, Walter (Fritz) Mondale, and Martin Sabo.

Humphrey's opponent in 1948 had been Joseph Ball, a progressive young Republican appointed to the U.S. Senate in 1940 to fill the seat vacated by the plane crash that killed Ernest Lundeen. Ball ran for a full term in 1942 and won, despite being nearly as vulnerable as any one-term senator. Humphrey beat Ball to

become U.S. Senator in 1948, and was handily reelected in 1954. Minnesota's other seat in the Senate was occupied by a moderate Republican and former governor, Edward Thye, who had beaten Henrik Shipstead in the Republican primary in 1946 and won reelection in 1952. Thye, son of an immigrant Norwegian farmer, operated a dairy farm near Northfield for a number of years. He then got involved in agricultural politics, winning election as lieutenant governor of Minnesota in 1942. When Governor Harold Stassen resigned and went off to war in 1943, Thye moved into the corner office, and won reelection to a second two-year term. A sharp contrast between opponents in this 1958 contest was evident: the handsome and eloquent young Irish Catholic, McCarthy, and Thye, a solid but uncharismatic Scandinavian Lutheran, twenty years older. McCarthy defeated Thye by a comfortable margin of 73,000 votes.

Kennedy Elected President

1960 was an even more significant milestone. Humphrey, as expected, was a presidential candidate, and strongly contested the Democratic nomination, but he eventually lost to Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy. In November, voters elected Kennedy president of the United States. Although Humphrey lost this serious bid for the White House, he won his third term in the Senate. DFLer Orville Freeman, who lost his campaign for a fourth term for governor by less than 2% of the vote to Republican Elmer L. Andersen, joined Kennedy's cabinet as secretary of agriculture.

Late in that year, there was an opportune shuffling of leading DFL politicians. Before his term ended, the outgoing governor, Freeman, appointed Fritz Mondale to be Minnesota's attorney general, filling the vacancy created when Miles Lord resigned in anticipation of a presidential appointment—after Kennedy took office—to be U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota. (At that time, there was little concern that presidential appointees would not be confirmed.) Mondale, who had managed Freeman's gubernatorial campaign, was just thirty-two and only four years out of law school; yet he was already a seasoned veteran in the political

arena. And not much younger than the mentor of the youthful flock of DFLers, Humphrey himself, who was, at age forty-nine, the state's senior U.S. Senator.

The nation elected its first Catholic president, and a major barrier had fallen for Catholic politicians all over the country. It was also a huge milestone for Irish-Americans who saw this as a sign that the days of "Irish need not apply here" were ending at the ballot boxes. And not only did Kennedy (and his brother, Bobby) reach the White House, Washington seemed overrun with Irish-Americans: Mike Mansfield, a Democrat who was the Senate Majority Leader; John McCormick, another Democrat



Nash's Coffee was one of Nick Coleman's larger accounts at the Campbell-Mithun advertising agency in Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of John Nash, Edina, Minn., a grandson of the founders of the Nash Finch Company.

who served as Speaker of the House; John Bailey, chairman of the Democratic National Committee; and George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO. Surely the significance of Kennedy's Irish wave was not lost on Nick Coleman.

In the spring of 1960, while the outcome of the nationwide battle for convention delegates between Kennedy and Humphrey was still in doubt, the voters of St. Paul held their "off-off-year" elections. Since 1932, every mayor of St. Paul had been Irish and Catholic; Joseph Dillon,

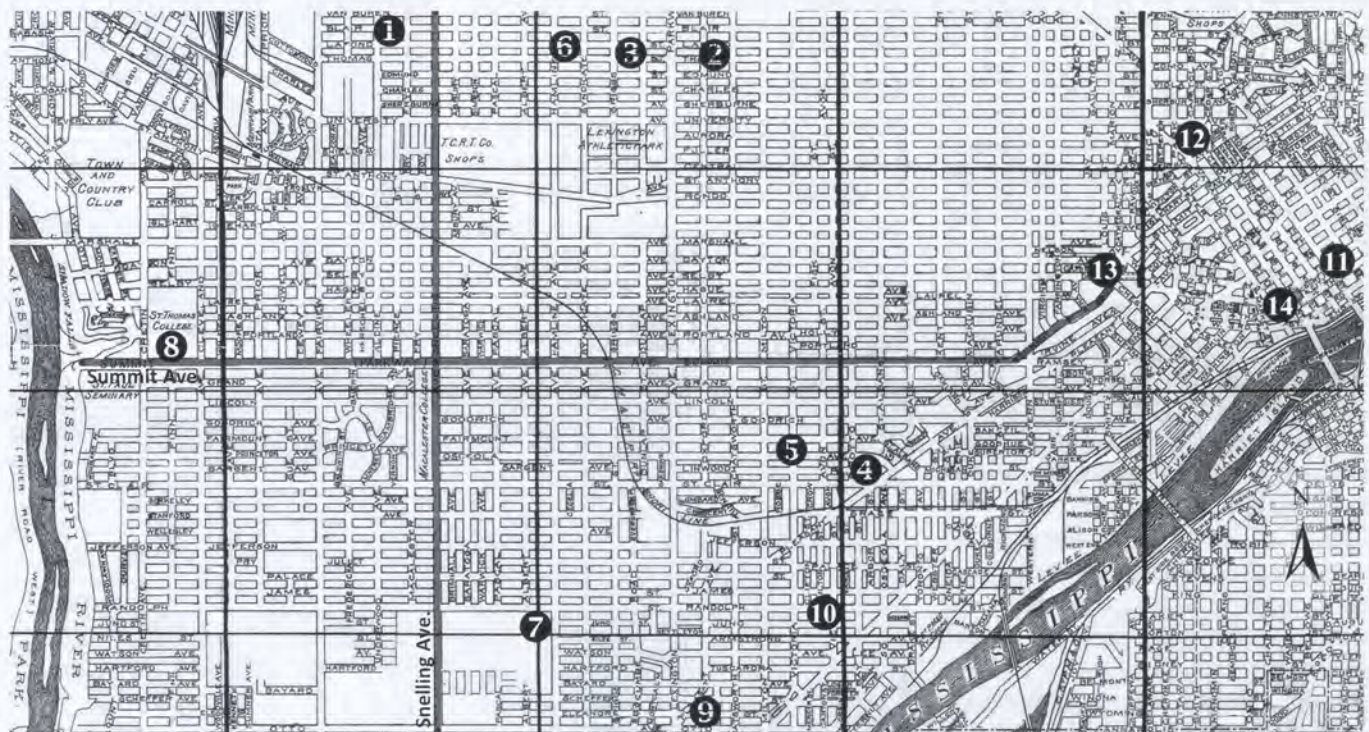
after three two-year terms, was not interested in running again. The Republicans were mostly united behind the candidacy of George Vavoulis, a florist of Greek ancestry, who described himself as an “independent,” better to avoid the stigma of the Grand Old Party in this strongly labor and Democratic town. But there was no consensus developing among Democrats. Consequently, some of the movers and shakers approached the young adman who had been getting to know DFL leaders citywide, if for no other motive than to sell them advertising. “I was offered a chance to run for mayor of St. Paul, and turned that down,” Coleman later recalled. “I really never did consider it much of an

opportunity, and other than enjoying, I suppose, the publicity, I never seriously considered it and never regretted it. I just didn’t want to be mayor. I never did think it was a very good job.”

By 1961, Coleman had been noticed by the party movers and shakers. He was offered the chairmanship of the Ramsey County DFL, but having observed that county chairmen seemed to come and go every four to six months, he declined. “I didn’t want to be county chairman, I guess. I think part of it was that I intended to run for the [state] senate and didn’t want to be another one of the four-month chairmen. They went through Dave Marsden and Joe Gabler

and Bill Carlson and Jerry Schaller and Harry McCarr, and I think Jim Levi, too. Everybody was county chairman in those days.” Indeed, the political newcomer, always a quick study, had sniffed out the distinctions between local and state government, between legislative and executive, and he set his sights on winning a seat in a place where he could make a difference. Being mayor, even of the state’s capital city, was not that place, nor was it the DFL party structure, where the daily turmoil of grassroots politics could apparently grind even the best intentioned of activists to fine dust. So, with all he had been able to gather about where the best opportunity lay,

Nick Coleman’s Neighborhood



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Coleman home at 1694 Blair Ave. (1925–1934) | 8. College of St. Thomas, Summit Ave. between Cleveland and Cretin Aves. |
| 2. Coleman home at 993 Thomas Ave. (1934–1943) | 9. Home of Nick and Bridget Coleman at 1018 Eleanor Ave. (1954–1968) |
| 3. Coleman home at 1198 Lafond Ave. (1945–1949) | 10. St. James Roman Catholic Church, 496 View Street (near Randolph) |
| 4. Coleman home at 700 Linwood Ave. (1968–1972) | 11. Coleman advertising agency, Pioneer Building, 336 N. Robert St. |
| 5. Coleman home at 835 Osceola Ave. (1975–1981) | 12. Minnesota State Capitol |
| 6. St. Columba Roman Catholic Church, 1327 Lafond Ave. | 13. St. Paul Cathedral |
| 7. Cretin High School, Randolph Ave. at Hamline | 14. St. Paul Hotel |

Source: The base map above is extracted from the first aerial map of St. Paul, which was made in 1923 using photographs taken by Kenneth M. Wright (1895–1964), who had served in the U.S. Army Air Service in World War I. The plane used for this photography was piloted by Major Ray Miller and Captain Trevor Williams. The photographs were taken in sections, here represented by the horizontal and vertical black lines. For the complete map, go to http://map.lib.umn.edu/aerial_photos/stpaul1923/. This map is in the collections of the John R. Borchert Map Library at the University of Minnesota.

where the action might be, the thirty-six-year-old ad man turned his attention to the Minnesota Senate, and followed progress by the 1961 Legislature in reapportioning the districts for the upcoming 1962 elections.

Until the early 1960s, state legislators were elected from districts that were widely disproportional in numbers of residents and voters. No accident, this arrangement gave more power to the rural areas and less to the cities and suburbs. Rural legislators loved that and understandably were reluctant to give up power. Minnesota did not embrace the concept of "one man, one vote" until the early 1960s, just prior to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the historic case of *Baker v. Carr*. Until that case was

handed down in March 1962, both houses of the Minnesota Legislature were dominated by rural officeholders, even after the population of the Twin Cities surpassed that of greater Minnesota.

Prior to the reapportionment of 1961, the Colemans' home was in District 39, whose state senator was DFLer Karl Grittner. After the new districts were established, the incumbent senator was Harold J. O'Loughlin. Twenty-five years older than Coleman, this graduate of St. Thomas and the University of Minnesota's law school was a resident of St. Luke's parish and worked as assistant editor of *The Catholic Digest*, a position that gave him visibility and stature in the strongly Irish Catholic district. O'Loughlin had won with comfortable margins in the non-

partisan elections of 1954 and 1958. He had won those contests without having to defend his Republican loyalties. In establishing the new districts, his Conservative caucus brethren—who controlled the Senate by a comfortable margin of 45 to 22—made sure not to carve out a district where O'Loughlin would have to face an incumbent Liberal senator, like Grittner. So Grittner inherited a friendly new district made up of the West Side and the Lower East Side, and was reelected twice more in that solidly DFL and labor district. That result left O'Loughlin apparently home free in the new District 45, until he heard rumors that young Coleman might challenge him.

Two veteran DFL House members, Peter Popovich and Donald Wozniak,

The Illusion of Party Identification

For most of the twentieth century, the two major caucuses in the Minnesota Legislature were known as Liberals, mostly consisting of Democrats, and Conservatives, mostly Republicans. But no labels identified them with the major political parties. This so-called nonpartisanship began as a fluke in 1913, when both major political parties were in dispute and their leaders sought anonymity. That year a bill that came before the legislature to designate all elections for judges, auditors, coroners, and similar types of local officials as nonpartisan was amended to include legislators. Sponsors of the amendment hoped that would kill the bill. Instead, it passed. So until the elections of 1974, when the Legislature was controlled by the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL), there was no identification on the ballots to inform voters of a legislative candidate's party alignment.

During this time, elected officials were able to avoid identification with the differing values and issues of the major parties. Having these races "nonpartisan" afforded Republican candidates in Democratic districts plenty of cover to be self-described "Independents" or

to fill their campaign brochures with slogans like "He votes for you; not for what the party tells him to do" or "He's his own man; free from party control" or "He'll listen to you; not to the party bosses." In 1962, however, most knowledgeable voters in St. Paul knew that Harold O'Loughlin was a pro-business, Catholic, conservative Republican, and, from his visible involvement in campaigns, most Democrats knew that Nick Coleman was a DFLer.

In rural districts, without daily news coverage, anonymity could be beneficial. Gordon Rosenmeier of Little Falls, leader of the Senate Conservative caucus for three decades, never joined the Republican Party, and was often disdainful of colleagues who were active in the GOP. He claimed to be a "liberal independent." He was the prime mover in creating progressive agencies such as the Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, all the while protecting business interests at the Capitol. And Wayne Olhoft of Herman, at age twenty-one the youngest person ever elected to the Senate, was a committed evangelical and conservative, yet he found himself

regularly identified in the Twin Cities daily newspapers as "Senator Olhoft, Liberal-Herman."

Realizing that party identification would be in its best interest, the DFL tried for years to change the law, but the party was not successful until it took control of both houses in 1973. When the first elections occurred under the new law, there was a sea change. For legislators from the Twin Cities and suburbs—without any significant demographic alterations in their election districts—the division of seats had previously been 26 Liberals and 60 Conservatives. In the first elections after the law was changed, the division was 75 DFLers and 17 Republicans. This pattern extended to the city councils of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the Hennepin and Ramsey county boards.

For more information on Minnesota politics in 1913, see G. Theodore Mitau, *Politics in Minnesota* (1960), pages 57–79 (the chapter is titled "A Nonpartisan Partisan Legislature") or Carl H. Chrislock, *The Progressive Era in Minnesota, 1899–1918* (1971), pages 60–61.

were well established in that part of St. Paul. Wozniak was not interested in running for the Senate, but Popovich was. He and Coleman campaigned for the party endorsement, and when Coleman defeated him at a DFL Central Committee meeting in downtown St. Paul, Popovich decided to retire from the Legislature.

First Campaign for the Senate

In a 1970 interview, Coleman recalled how his interest in the Senate race evolved. Grittner had a new district, so the two DFLers would not have to face each other. "There was nobody there except Harold O'Loughlin, the incumbent, and people asked me if I wanted to run for his seat, and I agreed to, and I got a good volunteer committee that included Tom Byrne, Mary Lou Klas, Peg McGinley, John and Mike McLaughlin, Terry O'Toole, and a few neighbors."⁵

Bridget Coleman remembered it differently, recalling that her husband was less than eager to leap into the fray. "A little known fact, Nick never really wanted elected office," she said in the 2007 interview. "He never believed he could achieve his ideal job, which was to be companion to the president of the United States. He dreamed of being the one or two men who went everywhere with the president, stood behind and were always at the president's shoulder. Wherever the president would be, he'd be there. He also loved smoke-filled rooms and air travel. So he qualified for that dream job. That, of course, was when Kennedy was president. I doubt if he would feel that way today."

Perhaps the model that Bridget was describing for this dream job was the one that the late Ted Sorenson had as special counsel and advisor to JFK. But if that was part of Coleman's dream, the reality was a chance to get elected to the Minnesota Senate, and there was pressure from party leaders as well as close friends who were geared up for him to take that leap. And while Bridget Coleman recalled her husband not being "filled with burning ambition" to run for elected office, it may have been her own interest in politics and willingness to sup-



Nick and Bridget Coleman with five of their children during his first run for election to the Minnesota Senate in 1962 (clockwise, left to right): Nicholas Joseph, Pat, Brendan, Chris, and Micki. Their youngest, Emmett, would be born four years later. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

port him that nudged Coleman toward a decision to run.⁶

O'Loughlin appeared to take Coleman's challenge seriously, but he did not have (nor had he ever needed) anything resembling a political organization. Furthermore, his own Conservative caucus in the Senate was largely responsible for drawing the new district lines for the 1962 elections, and though they spared him an encounter with Grittner, they had done him no great favors. His old District 40 was reconstituted and he was now the senator for the new District 45, whose southern boundary had been extended, from Grand Avenue to West Seventh Street, picking up many voters who did not know him and were not particularly conservative.

Conversely, Coleman's young war-

rriors had learned, from several local campaigns, how to do the nitty-gritty tasks needed to win: lawn signs, constructed in someone's garage and pounded into the ground all over the district on the same day; a group of phone callers—to raise money, fill up the rooms for special events, and get out the vote; campaign literature, to sharpen the voters' perception of differences between the candidates; volunteers to go with the candidate to knock on doors and attend events in the district; endorsements from labor organizations and a panoply of civic groups; and a few financially successful contributors to pay for everything. So the Coleman campaign was ready, willing, and clearly capable of presenting a strong challenge to O'Loughlin. But the

new candidate faced two unexpected obstacles in his path to victory which no amount of youthful energy could resolve: his ad agency partner, and his mother.

The first to throw sand in his gears was Ed Ryan, a Republican and friend of O'Loughlin; his clients were mostly Republicans who were backing Coleman's opponent. "When I started to run for office," Coleman later recalled, "my partner came to me and said his friends convinced him that a Democrat in the firm would be

St. Paul, Coleman managed to hold onto a few small accounts of his own, and his political alignment was an asset, not liability, to keeping their business, so he was not out of business, just hearing the wolves howling from closer range. Nick had chosen to run for a seat in the Senate that—if elected—would pay just \$300 per month. To be sure, a part-time job with legislative sessions only every other year, but one that required constant attention year-round, with phone calls to be returned promptly,

Thomas, and, more importantly, a relative. In the Irish community of St. Paul, it was not unusual to be related, by birth or marriage, to hundreds of people, some neighbors and parishioners, some obscurely connected and seldom seen.

So-called "shirt-tail" relatives, the ones known to be connected, however marginally, often with the implication that "they're the ones we're not especially proud of."⁷ Hannah had met O'Loughlin, and thought him a decent man, more than adequately Irish, involved with his church, and devoting his life to *The Catholic Bulletin*. It was not fitting, then, for her son to run against him. But, according to the lore about this encounter, passed down in the family, Nick Coleman thought he had the trump card. Bridget Coleman recalled Nick telling his mother, "But he's a Republican, Mother. A RePUBLICan!" And that should have been more than sufficient reason to take this guy out.

So the battle was on for the seat in Senate District 45. Herb Cook was one of those neighbors recruited for the campaign. He'd gone to Cretin, graduating in 1947, five years after Coleman. He recalls that he "missed World War II but served during the Korean War." He wasn't identifiably of Celtic origin (the original family name was Koch), but his father was half Irish. He was born and spent his first five years in St. Columba parish; then his family moved to the neighborhood in St. James parish where he still lives.

Cook went to work for his father, laying bricks, and stayed with the family brick and stone construction business for forty-eight years, then turned the firm over to his son. He met Coleman at the St. James Church Men's Club (which raised money for the St. James School athletic teams), and saw him weekly at Sunday Mass. "He was a regular guy," Cook later recalled, "and we had a good time, though neither of us were athletes." He remembers visiting the Colemans at their home on Eleanor Avenue: "always lots of kids there." When the Colemans' daughter Maureen died, Cook went with Nick to pick out the casket.⁸

Cook's family was not involved in politics, and he did not know Harold



In a scene that evokes memories of Jack Kennedy's early campaigns in Massachusetts, volunteers gathered at the Coleman residence at 1018 Eleanor Avenue (clockwise from left to right): Marty Norton, Lavern Gleason, Mike McLaughlin, John McLaughlin, Tom Byrne, Coleman, Mary Lou Klas, John Borden, Bob Young, Peg McGinley, Ed Alter, John Michaud, Terry O'Toole, and Herb Cook). Photo taken by Bridget Coleman. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

ruination of the firm and he wanted to buy me out. So he bought me out. So I was running for [the Senate] and had an office for my advertising business that was very small, and a pool secretary that served about four small businesses. I was going door-to-door every night and trying to keep the wolf away in the day time."

Things were tight for quite a while, and by the summer of 1962 there was a growing family to feed at home. From his tiny base in the Pioneer Building in downtown

and endless meetings in the district to attend. It was by no means a trivial interruption in Coleman's advertising career, and it proved to be major disruption for his growing family. It was a risky choice, with no predictable outcomes.

The second obstacle was his mother, Hannah Kennedy Coleman—and always a force to be reckoned with—who declared her opposition to her son running because Harold O'Loughlin was a good Irish-Catholic man, a graduate of St.

O'Loughlin. When Coleman asked him to help with his first political campaign, he agreed. "It was a new experience for me, and it was the only one I ever worked on. I met a lot of active Democrats." He wasn't recruited for his political moxie; more likely, it was for his garage. He soon was asked if the campaign could use his large, three-car garage for assembly of lawn signs, and he agreed, though at the time he did not realize that he had given up his garage, for most men not an inconsiderable sacrifice, for the duration of the campaign.

By the time Coleman took the leap into politics, the home that was large enough for their growing, extended family was also located in a neighborhood that could be counted on to vote Democratic. And it could offer volunteers to help on Democratic campaigns. "Our neighbors were like extended family and we liked them all," Bridget recalled. "They became our first campaign committee and were with us all through the years. They were our booya cooks, sign makers, and fundraisers: the Buzickys, Cooks, Karels, Korlaths, O'Tooles, Preams, Ryans, Joe Summers, and John Michaud."

And the campaign had its own priest: Patrick J. Hessian, assistant pastor of St. James Church. "He was one of our gang," according to Bridget. "He would often stop in and try to keep the proceedings civil." She remembered him as "the toughest kid on West Seventh."⁹ So with Coleman's parish priest and his friends and neighbors eager to disrupt their lives to help him win a seat in the Senate, it was "all hands on board," and the former Navy signalman was well prepared to ship out into unknown waters.

Chuck Korlath, a retired St. Paul firefighter, later remembered that the tall elm tree in their yard was struck by Dutch Elm disease, and after it was felled, cut, and hauled away, the neighbors came over to help gather the branches and build a bonfire. It was a neighborhood event, like the Saturday night parties held in the Korlath basement, and the Colemans were usually there. "There was one job per household in those days," he later recalled, "and everybody took care of everybody else. That included watching the kids and the dogs, regardless of whom they belonged

to. It was a great time." Chuck's late wife Gerry recalled that Coleman's first campaign for the Senate was their political debut. "We never touched politics until he ran," Gerry said, "and then we were all gung-ho. The kids had more fun than we did . . . they'd go out door-knocking [with ten-year-old Patrick Coleman], handing out campaign literature."¹⁰

The Importance of Booyas

"We were," Chuck said, "thrilled to be able to help. We made \$50-\$70 for that one booya," the one for which he was the master chef. "What you do," he elaborated, "is you start off with bones. And some stock. And oxtails. At that time, you'd get the bones and the tails—no pork, it was all beef—from the butcher, and after the booya, you'd sell the bones back to the butcher. You know, recycled bones. Then there was chicken, or turkey. Your vegetables were onions and celery.

"No squirrels. No dogs—we kept them tied up. It would stew for a long time. We'd use bowling pins to make the fire, they were maple and burned a long time . . . and we'd put on some coke, and that would keep the fire going . . . and rain or shine, you'd have your booya. Sounds crazy, but it was a neighborhood affair. Lots of people came."¹¹ As for Coleman, Chuck Korlath reflected, "Everyone knew Nick. He really got around. He was real down-to-earth, a regular guy, a good guy and a good neighbor."

To run an energetic campaign against a well-known and not unpopular incumbent required dozens of volunteers with time to pay attention to the myriad of details involved in a senate district campaign: setting up a phone bank staffed with volunteers, ideally in an office where there were a dozen or more phones. The phone bank was the nucleus of the "asking" effort: asking people to host coffee parties where the candidate could have face-to-face contact with voters; asking people if they would let campaigners put a "Elect Coleman to State Senate" sign in their front yard; organizing a crew of sign makers who would also take the signs out to the yards, and pound them into the ground; asking people to schedule door-knocking time with the candidate; asking people to go with the candidate to events

in the district and hand out Coleman literature; asking people to "stack the hall" when the League of Women Voters and other civic organizations held debates for the candidates; and, to pay for all the printing, ads and signs, asking people for contributions.

The "manpower" to accomplish all of these tasks came mostly from women. In other words, the early 1960s were more like an extension of the '50s, and in the majority of households in District 45, the men left home for their jobs in the morning and returned in the evening, and virtually everything else was the responsibility of the women. To be sure, they were already busy, but being in the neighborhood most of the day gave them time for "extracurriculars," and even if they were involved with the church, school, Girl Scouts, or garden clubs, their colleagues in these activities were bound to be potential voters.

Campaigns for local and state government all over Minnesota were enabled by women whose busy days did not begin or end by punching a clock. Staffing volunteers followed a certain pattern: if one were asked to take on a project, it meant calling friends and neighbors to join the team. And children, even very young ones, could be assigned jobs such as folding, stuffing envelopes, and licking stamps. Whole families would be brought on board, and photos of volunteers working around dining room tables evoked images of the early campaigns of the Kennedys, when JFK was running for the Congress and later for the Senate and finally for the presidency.

O'Loughlin, the incumbent senator, was a smart, well-educated man who was well-respected in his church and in the senate district. Undoubtedly he recognized that the Coleman crowd was popping up everywhere. Lawn-signs, larger signs on the main streets, calls from allies reporting that Coleman himself had knocked their doors, Coleman stickers in windows along St. Clair and Randolph avenues, and a swarm of Coleman fans at community events.

O'Loughlin had his own friends, neighbors, and supporters, mostly Republicans who lined up behind him despite the oxymoron of this "nonpartisan" campaign between opposing parti-



To raise money for Nick's 1962 campaign, next-door-neighbor Chuck Korlath, left, organized a booya, here being admired by the candidate. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

san camps. Perhaps—since nearly half a century has passed to blur memories—Harold O'Loughlin simply underestimated what it would require to hold onto his seat, or, even if he did understand, he did not have the same access to eager, energetic, and unpaid volunteers. And finally, the kind of energy needed to defend a position in public service is less intense than what inspires the underdogs who have much less to lose.

Moreover, Coleman had a number of advantages going into the campaign. He was thirty-seven, compared with O'Loughlin's sixty-one, and his youthful energy was immediately evident. He looked like an Irish kid who went to Cretin and St. Thomas before becoming an adult. To the voters in District 45, Nick Coleman offered a new face to go with the new energy and new ideas. In the area south of Grand Avenue that had been added by reapportionment, Coleman's legislative proposals resonated with the working-class and middle-class electorate in that part of St. Paul.

Yet, O'Loughlin backers could ask:

what had Coleman—vulnerable to be tagged as a “callow youth”—ever accomplished? Well, he was a World War II veteran, and in the 1960s that was an important item on his résumé. (O'Loughlin, born in 1900, had not served in World War II, probably due to his age.) Coleman had been elected “Mr. Tommy”; if nothing more, the most popular senior in the College of St. Thomas Class of 1942. O'Loughlin had two children, and a fine family, but Coleman had five, from Nick, age twelve, down to one-year old Chris, with perhaps more to come. Coleman had worked for the largest advertising agency in the Upper Midwest, and now owned his own small agency. He was a businessman; O'Loughlin was assistant editor of a small magazine. Finally, Coleman had gathered a team of DFL activists who had already cut their teeth on state and local campaigns, and were looking for a new challenge.

To the casual observer of local campaigns in that era, it may have appeared that an excessive amount of money and volunteer hours were devoted to build-

ing, installing, repairing, and replacing lawn signs. But in an urban campaign for the Minnesota Senate, establishing the name of a candidate was not affordable by buying time on the radio or TV, and only print ads, placed in the last few days, would make effective use of campaign funds. As a result, lawn signs were the essential medium for placing a candidate's name where the simple message could be readily absorbed: “Vote Coleman to State Senate.” If repeated often enough, perhaps voters would remember to pull the lever for Coleman in the voting booth.

The strategy took on added significance if a forest of lawn signs for the challenging candidate was perceived to put him at parity with the incumbent. In Senate District 45, placing lawn signs on residential streets, those with light traffic, was a dramatic way to suggest: “The good folks of this block like this guy; so join us in voting for him.” And since most cars were traveling more slowly through the neighborhoods full of children and pets, the smaller signs were all the more visible. If Coleman's signs were more numerous than O'Loughlin's, and they were, it created a kind of subliminal momentum. And if campaigners' memories nearly fifty years later can be trusted, the practice of knocking down or removing the signs of the opponent—though viewed as bad sportsmanship—was, if used selectively, a way to feed the momentum.

Voters went to the polls for the primary election on September 11, which was the second Tuesday that month, and the results revealed that Coleman, with 3,963 votes, had bested O'Loughlin, with 3,113, and an independent candidate, Lloyd T. Hayes, who garnered 634. Beyond the obvious conclusion—that Coleman was a serious contender—the science of predicting the final outcome in November was still evolving (later, there'd be exit polling to determine who showed up for the primary, but not in 1962). One could speculate that, since Republicans were thought to be more likely to vote in primaries, perhaps the impressive total for Coleman indicated that some Republicans, especially those who admired his business credentials or his being a veteran, might have been



To communicate his advantages over the other candidate, Coleman drew upon his advertising expertise to produce a campaign piece, called the *New Times Press*, in newspaper format. This montage samples some parts of this campaign literature. Photo courtesy of John Watson Milton.

comfortable abandoning the incumbent. And since there would be campaigns for statewide offices and the Fourth District Congressional seat, more interest in voting was anticipated for the general election in November. In District 45, a better turnout would favor Coleman.

But there was no time to enjoy the primary results. Eight weeks remained before the general election, with many opportunities for hits and misses. Through what is now known as “networking,” it was learned that the third candidate, Hayes, who had been critical of O’Loughlin and was now out of the race, might be persuaded to openly declare his support for Coleman. He soon agreed to do so.

Selling the Candidate

Through the home stretch, the Coleman campaign pushed hard for a strong finish, and the candidate’s experience in the media led to the idea of publishing a mailing piece, and distributing it to every home in the district. It was named *New Times Press*, and organized to resemble a local newspaper. Articles and photos in the publication addressed every one of the advantages that Coleman had over his opponent: youth, energy, a new face for new times, lots of people supporting his “time for a change” theme, lots of his children (working for their father), his Irish-ness, and his successes. Coleman’s brochure proclaimed: “The present State Senator, Harold O’Loughlin, has a negative record that hurt you . . . hurt

Minnesota . . . held back progress for our State and its people! IT’S TIME FOR A CHANGE!”¹²

Also on the first page of the *New Times Press*, next to the photo of Coleman introducing himself to a voter at a front door was the first segment of the “name ad,” a long listing of people who’d declared themselves in his camp. Friends and neighbors, Coleman volunteers, and a few names to add luster: former Minnesota House member Bill Carlson; U.S. Congressman Joe Karth; Sandy Keith, DFL candidate for lieutenant governor; U.S. Senator Gene McCarthy; Nick Mancini, owner of the celebrated steak house on West Seventh Street; the DFL’s candidate for governor, Karl Rolvaag; and State Representative Don Wozniak. In Coleman’s literature, O’Loughlin was referred to as “the incumbent,” or “the present State Senator,” only rarely by his name. This was another proven tactic for a newcomer to use when he started behind in the contest for name identification.

The *New Times Press* included every asset that gave Coleman an advantage. The page one photo of Coleman could have been composed by the Irish Tourist Office: white shirt, conservative tie, dark suit, a smile—but not a cheesy grin, and repeated use of “The Right Man Is Coleman” theme. On the second page, below the headline “Past Record Shows Coleman Leadership Ability,” a collage of news clippings, artfully arranged with “Nick Coleman Named Mr. Tommy” in

the center, and another “Nick Coleman To Journey To Ireland”—in case anyone forgot his ancestry. Across the page, a declaration that Coleman had signed the “Code of Fair Campaign Procedure—And He Always Practiced It!” (as if suggesting that his opponent was somehow less than fair). Below the collage of clips was a large photo of Coleman surrounded by his campaign team and the caption: “Many, many Coleman Volunteers worked tirelessly, with no thought of reward other than that which comes from good government.” Very Kennedyesque.

On page three, the publication took a lighter, softer touch. In the top left corner, a photo of Coleman with President Kennedy, who is looking back admiringly, and Senator Gene McCarthy. A photo taken at one of the coffee parties showed the candidate and a group of nicely dressed residents of District 45 in one of their living rooms, with this caption: “Voters remarked that his candor and his willingness to maintain a position in face of opposition was one of the reasons they were attracted to him and would support him.” Here the appeal is to middle-class voters who might have objected to his progressive stands on taxation, lobbyists and conflicts of interest, and basing old-age assistance on need (rather than arbitrary maximums).

On page four of the *New Times Press* was a large photo of Coleman volunteers with a stack of lawn signs ready for installation, and a predictable but suitable caption: “So great was the demand that in the closing weeks of the campaign the Committee actually ran out of signs. Many voters who requested signs said they, too, thought it was ‘TIME FOR A CHANGE.’”

Next to the sign photo were two short stories, headlined: “Coleman Volunteers Cut High Campaign Costs” and “Coleman Impressive At League Debates.” Below those was a photo of Chuck Korlath stirring a steaming pot of booya, with the candidate looking on approvingly. The largest photo on that page was of the Coleman family, with Bridget by Nick’s side and three of his sons—Nick, Pat, and Brendan—around him and their daughter, Meghan, in front of her mother. The baby, Chris, seems to have caught the mood with a wide grin. The caption read: “No candidate for office

can succeed without support on the home front. Nick Coleman's wife, Bridget, was one of the hardest workers in the entire campaign. His older boys, Nick and Pat, folded and stuffed literature and distributed invitations. Brendan and Meghan cheered Dad on, and the youngest, Christopher, just kept smiling."

The polls closed at seven o'clock on Tuesday evening, November 7, and as reports began to come in from each precinct of District 45, there were lots of smiling faces. Not just baby Christopher's.

In the late afternoon, with darkness enveloping the city, Mike McLaughlin stopped at Coleman's house on Eleanor Avenue to recruit someone "to help with some last minute things." The escape—as recalled by the recruit, Nick's son Pat, many years later—was to drive around the district in Mike's pickup truck, and, under cover of darkness, to pull the O'Loughlin signs out of the ground and load them onto the truck. When their stack of signs had filled the back of the pickup, they returned to Eleanor Avenue and un-

loaded them, forming a tall stack in the Colemans' back yard. Then, as the returns from the polling places were tallied, and victory assured, McLaughlin and others set the stack of signs ablaze, and began to chant: "He'll never run again! He'll never run again!" Mike McLaughlin enjoyed this tribalistic ceremony; his score with O'Loughlin for the 1958 defeat he had suffered to Coleman's opponent had been settled.¹³

After most of the crowd had stumbled out into the brisk November night, O'Loughlin's son, Terry, then a second year law student at the University of Minnesota, drove over to Coleman's house. "I was in charge of lawn signs and pamphlets for my Dad's campaign," he recalled in a 2009 interview. "Those were what decided elections in those days. Our signs kept disappearing. We'd put them up one day and they'd be gone the next, and it made me very angry. On election night, after I knew we'd lost, I was so angry that I went down to Coleman's house on Eleanor Avenue and walked up to the

front door. I could see Nick Coleman in the living room with John Connolly, and decided to knock on the door. They were very nice to me, I let off some steam, and when I left I really liked Nick Coleman. I wasn't so sad about my father's loss."

Coleman beat O'Loughlin on that election day 9,159 votes to 7,660. He received 54.5% of the total vote (versus 51% in the primary) and the incumbent received 45.5% (versus 40% in primary). Because Lloyd Hayes, the independent candidate, had been eliminated in the primary, no data is available to identify which candidate his voters supported in the general election, though he did endorse Coleman and it can be assumed that most of his 634 votes in the primary went to the winner.

In early January 1963, Nick Coleman would enter the State Capitol with his election certificate, and, along with sixty-six others, would be sworn in as the duly elected senator from his district. When that ceremony took place, he would not yet be thirty-eight.

Endnotes

1. This and subsequent quotations from Nick Coleman in this article are taken from a 1970 interview that Lila Johnson and Lori Sturdevant conducted with Coleman. The transcript for this interview is available at the Research Library at the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

2. This and subsequent quotations from the late Bridget Finnegan Coleman in this article are taken from an interview she did with the author on November 7, 2007.

3. Jim Henson, creator of the TV cartoon "The Muppets," made 179 commercials for Wilkins Coffee in the Washington, D.C. market. They were so successful that they were adapted by other coffee companies, including for Coleman's account, Nash's Coffee.

4. From the late 1940s to the present, major parties in Minnesota have begun their selection of candidates for state and federal offices with precinct caucuses. These take place on the second Tuesday night in February, in even-numbered years, and have been likened to the town hall meetings that were the original foundation of the U.S. electoral system.

5. Byrne, later elected mayor of St. Paul, and O'Toole had been in the Coleman coterie since college days; Mike McLaughlin, later the long-term 4th Congressional District DFL chairman, had run against O'Loughlin in 1958 and lost, so Coleman's 1962 campaign offered a chance to even the score.

6. This is confirmed, in part, in an interview with George Rumsey, a classmate of Coleman at Cretin, who also worked as an art director at Kerker-Peterson and Campbell-Mithun. Rumsey did much of the artwork for Coleman and, though a Republican, admired Coleman "as a natural leader." He said that "Bridget Coleman was a positive influence in Nick getting into politics."

7. According to O'Loughlin's son, Terry, in a 2009 interview with the author, "Nick Coleman was a shirt-tail relative of ours. The O'Loughlins came from the area of Le Sueur [Minnesota], where Nick's father was born and raised."

8. From a 2007 author interview with Herb Cook.

9. Patrick J. Hessian, after serving as assistant

pastor at St. James for ten years, joined the chaplain's service for the U.S. Army paratroopers. When he completed his service as a major general, he was the army's chief of some 3,000 chaplains and had been awarded a Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Distinguished Service Medal, and the Soldier's Medal.

10. From a 2009 author interview with Chuck and Gerry Korlath, who still lived in the house next to the one the Colemans had lived in on Eleanor Avenue.

11. Booya makers are in charge of concocting the enormous vats of booya served at community events (and in Minnesota, especially at political rallies). Booya makers are very competitive, to the point of accusing rivals of throwing dead squirrels and feral cats into their vats.

12. From the *New Times Press*, in the Nicholas D. Coleman Papers at the Minnesota Historical Society.

13. From author interviews in 2007–2009 with Nick Coleman's son, Patrick.

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.