

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Farmer's Fair:
The Birth
of the Ramsey County Fair
James Lindner

—Page 11

Spring 2014

Volume 49, Number 1

Neither Posters Nor Stamps: Poster Stamp Advertising in St. Paul

Leo J. Harris, page 3



"Poster Stamps" promoted the wide range of poster stamps printed by Brown Treacy & Sperry Company in St. Paul in the first decades of the twentieth century. A related printing company, the Harvey Blodgett Company, used a poster stamp to highlight its marketing of poster stamps to merchants. This particular poster stamp features a bill poster in overalls examining a poster stamp under his magnifying glass. The Brown Treacy & Sperry stamp is courtesy of Robert Bradbury and the Harvey Blodgett stamp is courtesy of Leo J. Harris.

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Volume 49, 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

Colorful and quirky—those adjectives could describe several articles in this issue. Lovely poster stamps advertised St. Paul businesses in the early part of the twentieth century. Leo Harris gives us a tour of this nearly forgotten art form, which was produced by several respected St. Paul printing establishments. It's a great illustrated read. Steve Trimble has provided us with Mike Sanchelli's vivid remembrances of the Italian community in Swede Hollow, where poverty coexisted with a great neighborhood spirit. He recounts his father's vivid rendition of "America, the Beautiful," which rang out every Sunday night from the bridge over Phalen Creek and signaled bedtime for the children playing outside. And Janice Quick reminds us that even in the 1920s, police were on the alert for cars without lights sitting in city parks after dark, which could mean (gasp!) covert affectionate activity. It's unclear whether such activity also occurred at the Ramsey County Fair, whose White Bear Lake origins James Linder traces for us in another article. But we know that a circus performed there, complete with trapeze artists. Ramsey County has always had its share of fun!

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Kisses in the Parks after Dark

Spooners in the News, 1921–1922

Janice R. Quick

James Clancy, St. Paul Commissioner of Parks, announced in April 1921 that he was “through with giving fruitless warnings to couples who drive their cars into secluded spots and turn out the lights (to hug and kiss in the dark). This season the park police will have orders to arrest such offenders. . . . We are determined to stop these darkened auto fiends. Last season we warned hundreds of these [spooners] but it did little good and we have decided we were too lenient.”²

A front-page headline in the next issue of the *St. Paul Dispatch* reported, “Four Spooners Arrested.” The article stated, “Four young swains who tarried for a few moments (with their girlfriends) in Como Park (last night) with their automobiles, lights out and supreme quiet reigning (while they necked), were the first victims of Commissioner J. M. Clancy’s order forbidding the parking of ‘dark’ automobiles in the parks at night.

(The drivers, all who were young males) were in police court today and all pleaded guilty. Judge J. W. Finehout warned the boys and gave each a fine of \$15, which he suspended on their promise not to turn off their lights in the park again.”³

Park police officers echoed Commissioner Clancy’s sentiments regarding “darkened auto fiends.” In a daily report to Assistant Park Commissioner Adolph

Sterk, Officer Joseph Patrick described a confrontation with one spooner:

Mr. Sterk:

I most respectfully request of you, to have this matter taken up with the Superintendent in the morning, in regards to the owner of this car. Car no. 286098, Ford tow [sic] pass [enger] roadster. I found his car parked without no lights and when I asked him why he not turn on his lights, he became very abusive towards us and said he knows the Supt. and said he can park all right in Como park without no lights and no Police can make him move. But he moved allright. I want that man’s name and have him brought to justice.

Your respetfully [sic], Jos Patrick⁴

Raymond Munson of St. Paul seated in his two-passenger Model T Ford Runabout, about 1917. Although Munson was not one of those arrested for parking his car in one of the city’s parks after dark without his lights being on, the Model T Ford seen here was typical of the vehicles that other drivers used when they wanted to have some time alone in a park with a girlfriend. Albert Charles Munson photograph. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



The belligerent spooner probably received a warning from the Parks Commissioner. Others were not so lucky. Park police records from April 1921 through August 1922 disclose the names and addresses of 65 male drivers who were arrested for “parking without lights” at Como Park, 21 who were arrested at Phalen Park, and one who was arrested at Mounds Park.⁵

In a typical instance, an amorous lad parked his two-passenger Model T Ford at the edge of a leafy lane for an affectionate moment in the dark with his gal, but they were unceremoniously discovered by a park police officer, or a team of two officers, who stormed upon the scene on foot or on horseback. At least one high-spirited officer on the park police force relished such opportunities to boisterously remind young spooners that they had violated a city ordinance whereby drivers of automobiles in city parks were permitted to park only in designated parking areas and were required to display two lighted headlights and at least one tail light after dark.⁶

The portion of the ordinance which addressed the nighttime display of headlights and tail lights was likely intended to promote safe driving habits in an era when there were relatively few autos on the roads and there were few regulations governing the safe operation of autos. Violation of that part of the ordinance might have been termed “nighttime driving without lights.” In the Parks Department’s record of arrests, and in the municipal court criminal dockets, a violation termed “parking without lights” signified nighttime spooning.

The Bureau of Parks in 1921 and 1922 did not provide park officers with an automobile or even a horse-drawn wagon for patrol duties or for transportation of lawbreakers to a city police station. Protocol for a grievous offense, such as “discharge of a firearm,” usually for hunting in a city park, prompted park officers to telephone the St. Paul Police Department for assistance. For an arrest on the charge of “parking without lights,”



St. Paul park police officer on patrol, about 1925. At the time, park police officers dressed for long hours of outdoor work that required considerable walking or horseback riding. Hence the high leather boots, unadorned uniform, and soft cap seen here. Photo courtesy of the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.

a park officer could only record the driver’s name and address (and sometimes age) in the Parks Department’s register of arrests, and instruct the young man to report to the Prior Avenue police station. Of the 87 spooners who were arrested in 1921 and 1922, only one failed to report to the station, and he seems to have been inadvertently pardoned, as no further action was noted in park records or court records.⁷

Three who reported to the station were warned and released. One of the three was only age 16, the youngest spooner arrested in St. Paul that season.⁸ Another was an out-of-town visitor who was unaware of the city ordinance. A third young man was one of eight spooners who re-

ported to the station one warm spring evening, and the desk sergeant was too busy or too annoyed to book another spooner; the park register of arrests states the man was “turned away, warned.”

The others who reported to the station were booked and were scheduled for a hearing in municipal court, also known as Police Court. Each posted bail of \$3, \$4 or \$5 which would be refunded to them if they attended the hearing. Most “young swains” forfeited bail rather than appear before Judge John Finehout, but those who appeared received only a warning and a fine which was equal to, or less than, the amount they had already posted in bail.

Stephen Murnane, age 26, was not arrested when he was discovered spooning with his gal at Como Park one April evening in 1922. His uncle Patrick Murnane was a police lieutenant at the Prior Avenue station. His father “Big Jim” Murnane was a respected veteran detective at St. Paul police headquarters. Park police records indicate this case of “parking without lights” resulted in a discreet “hearing at the [Park] Commissioner’s office.”⁹

Arthur Gebhardt, age 18, received no such leniency when he was arrested in June 1922 for spooning in Como Park. His father, St. Paul Police Captain Michael Gebhardt, was slated to be named Chief of Police the following year.

By early July 1922, newspaper focus had shifted from moonlight spooners to daylight auto spooners. A grainy photo on the front page of a Sunday edition of the *Pioneer Press* portrayed a male auto driver with one arm around the shoulders of a female passenger. The photo accompanied an article titled “Police Open War on One-Armed Auto Drivers Who Attempt Public Wooing.” The article decried “shameless public spooning in automobiles.”¹⁰ The writer contended:

Driving an automobile properly and wooing properly are impossible at the same time.

Hence one-armed drivers are doing more than their share to increase the appalling number of traffic accidents and the resultant toll of maimed and dead.

Shameless wooing of young women in public by automobilists has become so common as to constitute a warning of moral decay among the youth of today.

Young women who permit themselves to be embraced within the view of pedestrians and other autoists in broad daylight or on well illuminated streets indicate a moral decrepitude. . . .¹¹

The reporter stated he had posted himself at the corner of Sixth and Jackson Streets for ten minutes on a Sunday night, to take a census of automobile wooing. He reported:

Total number of autos passing . . . 134. Number in which some form of intimacy was being shown between male and female passengers . . . 36. Number in which amorous activity was visible in both front and rear seats . . . 13. Some automobiles contained as many as eight passengers, and arms of men and maidens were so mutually entwined about the persons of each other that, to the reporter standing on the corner, it appeared that everybody in the autos must love everybody else.¹²

Despite the fervor and censure of this article and the previously mentioned articles on the subject of auto spooning from April 1921 through July 1922, there were no articles on spooning from August 1922 through at least December 1923. There were no news items in August 1924 when the city council authorized the Parks Commissioner to appoint volunteer deputy park police officers with “the power to preserve law and order



Captain Charles Gerber, St. Paul Police Department, at the Prior Avenue Police Station in 1922. Spooners who were arrested in one of St. Paul's parks for parking a “dark” auto might have met Captain Gerber when they reported to the Prior Avenue station for booking or a warning. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

in the public parks . . . and the power to make any arrests necessary. . . .”¹³ There were no headlines in July 1926 when the “parking without lights” ordinance of 1921 was amended by adding:

And no vehicle shall be parked upon any parkway or within the limits of any park, with the front, side, or rear curtains pulled down or anything placed or hanging in lieu thereof; and vehicles must be so parked that an unobstructed view into the interior of the vehicle may be had at all times.¹⁴

There is no explanation why local newspapers seemingly lost interest in

auto spooning after July 1922. There is also no explanation why the last entry in the park department’s record of arrests occurred in August 1922. Young couples still parked in leafy lanes after dark to do a little necking, and park police officers still arrested them or chased them away. Some things don’t change.

Janice R. Quick enjoyed “parking” at Phalen Park in the 1960s. She is an occasional employee of the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department. This is her third article in this magazine.

Endnotes

1. As prescribed by city ordinance C.F. No. 35646-Ordinance No. 5643; Compiled Ordinances of the City of St. Paul, Minnesota, compiled by George G. Chapin, of the Ramsey County Bar; Corrected and Revised to January 1, 1922.
2. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 26, 1921; p.14.
3. *St. Paul Dispatch* April 27, 1921; p.1.
4. Record of Arrests, 1915–1922, City of St. Paul Department of Parks, Playgrounds and Public Buildings; Bureau of Parks, Division of Park Police; March 25, 1921; archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.

5. Record of Arrests, 1915–1922. The last entry in this record was dated August 19, 1922. There is no explanation why there were no further entries.
6. C.F. No. 35646-Ordinance No. 5643.
7. St. Paul Municipal Court Criminal Dockets. MHS 126A6.6(F), Box 46.
8. Some ages were included in the Record of Arrests, 1915–1922. Other ages were found in the U.S. Census of 1920.
9. Record of Arrests, 1915–1922.

10. *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, July 2, 1922, p.1.
11. *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, July 2, 1922, p.1.
12. *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, July 2, 1922, p.1.
13. C.F. No. 54519-Ordinance No. 6321; Proceedings of the Council of the City of St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota 1924 (Review Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minn.); 1924.
14. C.F. No. 66651-Ordinance No. 6686; Proceedings of the Council of the City of St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota 1926 (Review Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minn.); 1926.

R.C.H.S.

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About 1935 artist Jacob Theodore Sohner painted this scene of the Phalen Creek neighborhood in Swede Hollow. Although the colors Sohner used here are primarily shades of brown, black, and other dark tones, the reminiscences of Mike Sanchelli, who was born and grew up in Swede Hollow in the 1920s and '30s, largely reflect other, more colorful shades of an artist's palette. Photo of Swede Hollow by Jacob Theodore Sohner courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. For more on Mike Sanchelli and Swede Hollow, see page 17.