

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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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

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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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

## 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

# Growing Up In St. Paul:

## Mike Sanchelli Remembers Swede Hollow

*Edited by Steven C. Trimble*

**S**wede Hollow, a community once located in a large valley on the East Side of the city, was an entry point into St. Paul for several waves of immigrants. This is a unique first person reminiscence of life there in the 1920s and '30s written by a resident. Mike Sanchelli (1915–2003) is considered the premier storyteller of the Italian residents who lived in this community on the banks of Phalen Creek. His father Antonio (1884–1960) was a railroad laborer who had emigrated from Benevento, Italy, as had his wife Antoinette (1889–1961). Mike was born at 17 Phalen Creek in 1915. The family lived in St. Paul until early 1925 when they joined Mike's uncle and grandfather in Montana. They returned to the Swede Hollow neighborhood in 1926.

*This is a portion of manuscripts that can be found at the Minnesota Historical Society. The grammar and spellings have been left as written. It begins when the Sanchelli family moved back to St. Paul after their stay in Montana and bought their first house.*

We Sanchellis went to Montana right after Christmas 1924. My mother was sick, so they thought the mountain air would do her some good. After a disastrous 14 months there, we returned to St. Paul, Minn. with nothing but the clothes on our backs. We were lucky enough to have a chance to buy a house in Swede Hollow. The man who owned the house wanted to go back to Italy. My father had to borrow . . . the whole twenty dollars the house cost. The friends and neighbors gave us what extra furniture that they could spare and like the emigrants that my father and mother once were, we started our new life in Swede Hollow. The kids of the hollow . . . would become my life long friends . . . age would make little difference. 22 North Phalen Creek. . . . When we moved in, the house had a sink. That's all, just a sink. . . . There was no plumbing. For water to come in or out, I had to carry water from the Manocchio's spring, and when the pail under the sink got full, I emptied it into the creek. We fi-

nally got some pipes and the drain to the creek was put in.

...

### **Life in Swede Hollow**

We had two kerosene lamps, one for the kitchen and one for the living room. . . . We boys had two beds in our room. The girl's had one bed . . . . There was a trap door between the kitchen stove and the girls' bedroom. There was a small fruit cellar under there. My father would put his home brew and his wine down there. We always ate in the kitchen and, regardless of what my father had to drink for supper, he would give everybody a little in a glass according to their age if it was beer or wine.

...

As I stood in the yard one morning after we moved in, I took a long look around the hollow. We were back home, and we owned our own home. . . . "What a great place to be poor," I thought to myself and listening to the chatter of happy kids, happy chickens, excited dogs, and mothers talking to each other across one side of the hollow to the other. I carried the happy thought back into the house with me, as I entered the screen door. . . . Swede Hollow was a great place for play-



*The Sanchelli children when the family lived at 476 Bradley Street in the Railroad Island neighborhood above Swede Hollow, about 1919. On the left is six-year-old Nellie, who would soon die of measles. Two-year-old Noah is in the middle. Mike is on the right. In commenting on this photo as an adult, Mike said: "I with the long hair was four. We wore button shoes in those days." Photo courtesy of Michael J. Sanchelli.*

ing, no traffic to worry about, one class of people, even if there were different nationalities. . . . My father was digging a hole in one corner of the yard. "Whatta ya gona put there pa?" I asked. "Thissa gonna be de flaga pole, thissa my property in America," he said. . . . The flag would fly on all proper flag days without fail because my father knew them buy heart.

We weren't going to live high on the hog with my father getting his old job back—the railroads were not paying that good of wages—but we would be able to afford the necessities of living. We got into the old Italian way of life in Swede

Hollow. My father got to visit the old Italians like he used to, singing the Italian songs that they knew in Italy. In the day the Italian ladies would visit each other and after supper the men would do the same. Swede Hollow was going to have a great effect on mother's health, with all the friends old and new, she didn't have to worry about the house or the kids, someone was always there. I believe it was the love of these people that would help my mother to her health once more.

Former sheriff John Wagner owned the land our house was on. We payed him 20 dollars a year rent. He collected twice a year. My mother always made sure she had the ten dollars when he came for it. One time he sent his son-in-law for it. I was standing near the gate when he came by and asked for the rent. My mother went into the house and came out with a ten dollar bill. She waved it at him and said, "I save this for you but I got nothing for food this month and I got nothing in the house. . . . He continued towards the other end of the hollow. When he came back . . . my mother was standing in the yard. "Here Mrs. Sanchelli, you pay someday when you got it," and handed her the ten dollar bill. "God bless you, you got a heart," she replied as he reached over the fence.

### Food and Drink

Like the other Italians in the hollow, we started to raise chickens, rabbits, and even had a pig. I remember the morning that Mr. Ferdinando Yekaldo came over to my house about four o'clock one Sunday morning with three of his favorite butchering knives. There were three other men there also. They were needed to hold the pig while Mr. Yekaldo plunged the knife into the pig's heart. The pig screamed and altho I felt a little pang, I knew it had to be done. My mother fried pieces of fresh pork that were eatable while the men continued to skin the pig. The carcass was finally hung in the shed to cool. . . . When the younger kids got up it was over and after a few tears they forgot about the pig that they had given a name. . . .

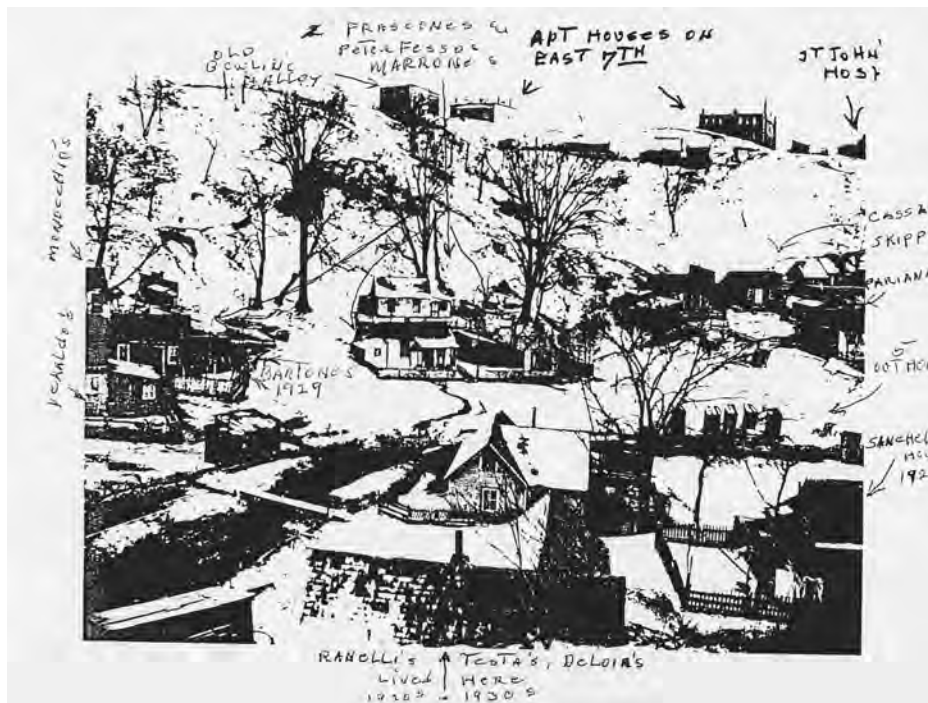
I got acquainted with Joe Damiani's brother who opened a butcher shop. . . . Gaetano was his real Italian name. I don't know why they called him George. . . . I

suppose like many Italian names it was difficult to pronounce. . . . My mother would say "Mikey, go to Gaetano and get 25 cents ruinda steaka," so across the

street I'd go. The butcher had sawdust all over the floor. . . . Into the cooler he went. . . . There were hooks suspended from the ceiling. There was also ice in



Swede Hollow in about 1910. Photo by Albert Charles Munson. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



A photocopy of the 1910 photo of Swede Hollow with Mike Sanchelli's handwritten notes identifying where his family lived (far right) and the locations of his neighbors in Swede Hollow. Photocopy from the Michael T. Sanchelli Reminiscences, 1991-1993 (P1937), Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn. Reproduced courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

there, they had no refrigeration in those days. George would come out with a hind leg over his shoulder and he dropped it on the large round table in the back of the counter, he then took a long knife and sharpened it. . . . He cut off a slice of the leg and then carried the leg back into the cooler. He wrapped up the slice of meat, of course he weighed it, but he always seemed to be right on the mark.

My Uncle Martin would introduce the hotta dogga to the Sanchelli's. . . . I didn't know what to expect being that I never heard of it. He went out and bought the wieners and buns, he even did the cooking. We all sat around the round table in the dining room. Uncle Martin came in from the kitchen with a large pan full of boiling water and wieners. He had mustard and ketchup ready. . . . He set the pan in the middle of the table and the Sanchelli's went American for supper. Everybody liked it, so every Wednesday we had hotta doggas. My father didn't care too much for the buns, so he used Italian bread instead.

We would also go to the freight yards near Fourth Street and see if there was anything good to eat in the fruit cars. They sure hauled a lot of cabbage in those days. It seemed like we ate cabbage 5 times a week. . . . In those days whenever someone had a baby, relatives or friends would bring a live chicken or two so that the mother would get proper nourishment. I remember my father tossing the chickens down the fruit cellar below the trap door in the center of the kitchen. We had chicken soup for quite a while.

It was about at this period of my life that I would witness an old Italian way of making wine. I walked in the front door of my house one evening and there were two Italians kneeling by my father who was seated in a chair. They were trimming his toenails and washing his feet, then they picked him up and carried him across the big bridge to the Barilla's front yard. They stood him up in a great big wooden half barrel. . . . Two men would dump crates of dark blue grapes in the barrel. My father was mashing the grapes with his bare feet and singing at the top of his voice, songs of Italy.



A copy of the page in the 1929 edition of the St. Paul City Directory which listed the residents of Phalen Creek along with their house numbers. Note that the Sanchelli name at #22 is spelled as "Sauchelli." Sometime after this edition of the directory was printed, the family changed its name to "Sanchelli." Photo courtesy of the Research Center, Ramsey County Historical Society.

## Boyhood

We had no playground except for the old lot. Nobody had a ball and bat, so we played around the railroad tracks, the binder dump, in the street or play on the wagons that Vanderbies [Vanderbies was an ice cream factory located at 496 Partridge, just off Payne Avenue] parked in the empty lot. . . . We knew just about when the mainliners [passenger trains] would come by. We would sit on the bank above the tracks and wave to the people as they all went by.

It was Fats Tarlizzo who suggested that that we go down to the binder dump; we walked down the tracks on the west side of Railroad Island till we got to the old 6th street bridge. . . . the dumping had started at the lower end of 5th street. There wasn't too much garbage generated by the people those days, so the only junk being dumped was paper clips, rubber binders—stuff that was swept up from the downtown businesses. . . . We

spent enough time at the dump to pick up some binders and clean out enough snuff boxes to fill one copenhagen snuff box. We had enough for good chew, we didn't realize how good. Before we took a chew though, we had to get something that we could eat after the chew so as to kill the taste and smell of the tobacco before we went home. We took 4th street . . . to the St. Paul Union Depot and ended at up at the Chicago Northwestern yards where most of the fruit and vegetable box cars were unloaded. Cabbage was the only thing available that day so we took what we thought was enough. . . . It was a good thing we started early in the day because it took all day to recover—boy were we sick. . . . We spent quite a bit of time at the dump, nothing like rummaging thru a dump if you didn't have too much at home to play with and had a lot of time. If we weren't rummaging, we were shooting big sewer rats with our slingshots or when Joe Daloia got his B. B. gun we took turns with the gun.

## The Brave Teachers of Lincoln School

Lincoln School [*Lincoln School was located on Collins Street near Burr Street one block west of Payne Avenue. It was built around 1874 and condemned in 1930.*] . . . I can close my eyes and see everything as clear as a picture, kids running around and waiting for the school bell to ring and to start a new day in the class room. Yes, I could hear the kids yelling and screaming and as they disappeared into the school and the doors closed without a sound, a silence that was almost ear-shattering would come over the area. Then the silence was broken by a rooster crowing in Swede Hollow and a dog would bark. . . . We survived the soot from the coal burning furnaces, naturally they also had a lot of cinders. They solved that problem by dumping the cinders on the playground. Rain from the school building would carve many troughs in the surface and they would be filled with the cinders. We had to make sure that when we fell, we had long sleeves on our shirts—there were some nasty bruises when we played football.

We school kids that lived in Swede Hollow would have to cross some railroad tracks and there were times the freight trains would block our path. Sometimes we got desperate and would crawl under the boxcars to cross. I knew it was dangerous, but we were fearful of being late for school! Why? Well for me to go back home to get an excuse wasn't too bad, but many others had parents whom could neither read or write. They would have to get . . . an x marked on the excuse or ask someones parents who could write. The kids . . . spoke two languages, Italian when they were home and English when they were in school. When we kids were outside we would even talk broken English, when need be, because some Italians came from different parts of Italy and spoke different dialects.

. . . I really wanted to see what the attraction down at the Hope was. [*The old Hope Chapel was bought for the Italia Hall and the Christ Child Center, a Catholic social settlement house that was started in 1911 to serve the residents of Swede Hollow and the surrounding*



*This photo is from the summer of 1929, when a group of kids from the Swede Hollow neighborhood gathered in the Sanchelli yard with members of the Sanchelli family. Tony Sanchelli is in the back row, third from the left. Antoinette Sanchelli, Mike's mother, is second from the right. Mike is the tall young man directly in front of Tony. He was 15 at the time. In the front row on the left are Nellie and Mary Sanchelli. Brother Joe is on the far right. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

*Railroad Island neighborhood. Its long-time director was Eleanor Dowling.*] . . . Right after school let out I went down with some of the boys. . . . The first one I met was Miss Dowling. . . . Miss Dowling was strict but she had a great heart. She was to contribute much to the character of the young growing up Italian boys. . . . Boy this was neat. Instead of sliding down Sal's Hill on pieces of cardboard, . . . we could play inside during the winter months. . . . The boys were given a basketball and as long as no one could afford tennis shoes, we practiced shooting baskets in our stocking feet! . . . The Italian boys became organized into teams for playing inside or outside, clubs were organized, scouts and girl organizations. . . . We Italians finally had a direction! . . . Our lives had some sort of a schedule to follow. . . . I come from a musical family, so one of the most remembered nights at the Hope Chapel was monday nights-community singing and follow the bouncing ball on the screen. Good singers and bad singers, we all had a chance to unwind, and we kept up on the popular songs, also.

The year 1926 turned out to be a happy year for us. We were in the swing of things with the rest of the people of Swede Hollow, or it could have been called happy hollow. . . . Christmas eve we heard somebody singing Christmas carols outside our door. We opened the kitchen door and there was Miss Dowling of the Christ Child Community Center with some of the boys I recognized. . . . They had brought a basket of food, we even got a basket from the Salvation Army, the little boost we needed. It was a great Christmas. Everybody was singing Christmas carols, Italian ones and English ones. We ate in the living room at the big round table we got from somebody.

Holidays. They are not what I had always looked forward to when I was a youngster. . . . In our days there were no presents. It was the routine that we cherished going to midnight mass, singing christmas carols, . . . coming home and continue eating codfish, smelts pasta with olive oil and anchovies, lupino (Italian popcorn) and nuts and peanuts, Custagnia (chestnuts), oranges, sliced with oil and pepper. I even managed to get a half a



*A youthful Mike Sanchelli played the accordion while laundry dried on the line behind him. Photo courtesy of Michael J. Sanchelli.*

glass of wine. No pop. . . . We had cocoa and water, hard Christmas candy wasn't too expensive in those days. We did a lot of visiting the neighbors, in Swede Hollow more so, because it was like a village all by itself. We'd crank up the phonograph and put on a Christmas record and listen to the great tenors of our era. I had a little guitar and next door Deloias had a mandolin. Joe and I had our own little orchestra, and we pretty well made the rounds of bringing our own music to the neighbors.

My father never gave up on his singing, even when he was sick, he still gave it his best when he was in the mood. Every Sunday night before he would come in and go to bed, he would go out to the middle of the big bridge and sing "America the Beautiful." I still remember the time when Mrs. Steele who lived way down the other end of the Hollow, commented to me one day, "I was telling my kids it was time to go to bed one Sunday night, when my son Donald piped up, 'Oh no ma, Tony Sanchelli didn't sing America yet,'" so the voice of Swede Hollow also became the time piece on Sunday night.

I used to get a nickel every Sunday for washing the dishes. Juzzy, Buff, Fats

and a few others would go down to the Unique or the Frances Theater to see a wild west show. . . . We had no sound in those days and the guy that played the organ was in front so that's where we all sat. The more exciting the picture got the louder he would play and the noisier we got. Sometimes we would we would go down to the Christ Child Center . . . to play basketball or just shoot baskets. Mondays we would go down for the community singing . . . during the summer we stayed in the hollow. We had a lot of work to do anyway, like getting ready for the next winter. We sawed and split railroad ties, which we used . . . in the kitchen stove. We had to pick up the coal that fell off the gondolas up on the truck, scrub the kitchen floor on Saturdays. . . . Things were going fine for the Sanchelli's. We weren't getting rich, but we were making it, we were all happy.

### **The Depression Years**

I was 14 when the Depression hit. . . . In order to feed the chicken and rabbits, my father would carry a gunny sack and a whisk broom in his pocket. As he walked along the grain cars that were unloaded he would get in the car and sweep up the remains on the floor. . . . Some times I would find frozen lettuce and cabbage

at the dump for the rabbits in the winter time. Most of the Italian families had grocery bills at the store. . . . when they first got here, being short on cash they would charge groceries until they found work to pay for it. . . . During the Depression things got a little out of hand. The bill would creep up a little at a time . . . and you almost had to beg for a little more credit because you had little kids at home to feed. . . . We had charges at nearly all the stores. . . . We owed Frisco's 400 dollars. We paid every dime we owed back. Mrs. Dora Frisco's mother would sometimes be in the store when my mother was getting some groceries. . . . My mother never left the store without her stuffing some extras in my mother's grocery bag, a can of peas or corn or beans, she never failed to give my mother something.

There wasn't any such thing as Welfare. It seemed that money disappeared from the face of the earth. I . . . was ready to go to Johnson High School. I came home and cried because I had no money for books, no decent clothes, there was nothing to make a lunch, so I didn't eat at noon hour. . . . The local governments did start a relief plan—it was more a pain in the neck than relief. We had to go to the old Hamm's residence on Cable St. right above . . . Swede Hollow. You would get



*Mike attended Lincoln School at 511 Collins Street, near Burr, along with other children from Swede Hollow. This photo shows the school's milk station in 1936. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*



*Hope Chapel, located on the northwest corner of Bradley and Partridge streets, was the home of the Italia Society and the Christ Child Community Center when Mike was growing up. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

a grocery order. . . . It was dried prunes, dried apples, apricots and peaches, dried navy beans, sometimes a can or so of corn, peas or string beans . . . one large bag, that was for the month! The store that the order was made out too, was nowhere near home. I had to borrow a coaster wagon and go to Alexander's food market on Como and Western to get an order. Streetcar fare I think was 7 cents at that time, but we didn't have 14 cents for the round trip. If we did have it, I'm sure my mother would have bought meat with it. . . . Thank goodness we had rabbits and chickens; old porky had long since been gone.

Clothes, that was another big problem, shoes even worse. You were a marked individual when you put on a pair of pants that you got from the relief places; welfare gray, starchy. . . . Most of the kids in the Hollow went barefooted after school was out for the summer . . . nobody bought tennis shoes, they wore out too quick. . . . I learned how to repair the soles and heels of my shoes. . . . We found some heavy conveyor belting and used it for soles and heels; leather was tough to get. . . . Remember the old saying "soles of my shoes were so thin that I could step on a dime and tell if it was heads or tails"? Well we had holes in our shoes so large that if we stepped

on a dime, we could pick it up with our toes. When we couldn't repair our shoes, we would go down to the binder dump and look for some old linoleum, this we would cut to size and put on the inside of the shoe, as an inner sole. Linoleum was always available.

It was still early 1935 when we started hearing about the new program, W. P. A., Works Progress Administration [*The W. P. A. was a New Deal federal agency that hired unemployed people to carry out public works projects such as constructing public buildings and roads.*] . . . In spite of the bad publicity the W. P. A. did accomplish much. The workers were given 60 dollars a month, which was better than any grocery order which consisted of surplus that nobody wanted. . . . When I went to work on W. P. A., it really felt good to see my mother not having to skimp and worry about the family. It did get a little hard to break her habit of going to the Goodwill for shoes and clothes.

I always thought of the first 25 years of my life as a distinct and different pattern of life. My joining the Army in the 26th year, I had intended to change all the old and begin with a new outlook on life.

...

According to his son, Michael J. Sanchelli, Mike Sanchelli's "new outlook" on life included joining the 116th Engineer Combat Battalion of the U.S. Army in 1941. He and his unit served in the South Pacific during World War II. Mike returned to St. Paul in September 1945 and married Sue Barilla, who lived in the old neighborhood and they continued to live on St. Paul's East Side where they raised two children. As a veteran, Mike received civil service preference, which aided him in getting a job as a clerk in the city's central post office. He retired from the post office in 1974. He then began a new career as a talented storyteller and writer of numerous stories about life on the East Side, some of which you have just finished reading.



*Mike Sanchelli in his dress uniform of the U.S. Army in November 1941. He served in the 116th Combat Engineers in the New Hebrides Islands in the Southwest Pacific in World War II. Photo courtesy of Michael J. Sanchelli.*

*Steven C. Trimble is a member of the Society's Editorial Board and a frequent contributor to this magazine. The editor thanks Steve for bringing these reminiscences to our attention, the Minnesota Historical Society for permission to reprint this excerpt from the original manuscripts that are in the Sanchelli Papers at the Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, Minn., and Michael J. Sanchelli for providing several family photos of his father.*



**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.*