

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**

A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Summer, 1990  
Volume 25, Number 2



**FOR HER HONOR'S SAKE.**

There are cases where a brother must interfere in his sister's affairs.

*An acid commentary on the Great Census War of 1890 and the rivalries which have colored the history of St. Paul and Minneapolis. See page 4.*



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**On the cover:** The United States census of 1890 sparked virtual warfare in the unceasing rivalry between Minneapolis and St. Paul. This cartoon was published in the *St. Paul News* for June 28, 1890.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

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## A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

In May, 1988, the Board of Directors of the Ramsey County Historical society decided that they should develop a plan to broaden the appeal of *Ramsey County History*, redesign it, expand its coverage of the history of the county, and publish the magazine four times each year.

In bringing change to the look of *Ramsey County History*, the Editorial Board has tried to make sure that the strengths in content and features of its predecessors have not been abandoned. Thus we have the good fortune to be able to publish carefully researched and well written articles on a wide range of topics associated with the colorful history of Ramsey County. And we have added new features, such as "A Matter of Time" and "What's Historic About This Site?"

Throughout this process, the goal always has remained to produce the best possible magazine on the history of Ramsey County with the widest appeal within the resources available. The Editorial Board believes this new format meets those objectives. We hope you agree.

—John L. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board



# What's Historic About This Site?

## *Ramsey County's 'Poor Farm' Barn: Remnant of a Rural Past*



*Ramsey County's "Poor Farm" barn.*

For the thousands of people who pass the Ramsey County Fairgrounds each year, or call in at the county's extension service offices, the majestic barn at 2020 White Bear Avenue is a landmark, a reminder of the county's rural past, and much more.

Known as the Ramsey County Poor Farm Barn, it reflects early efforts throughout the country to help the poor through thousands of "poor houses" that once dotted the land. It was an effort so pervasive that the term itself is embedded in the English language.

In Ramsey County, much of it rural more than a century ago, county government attempted to deal with its welfare responsibilities by operating a paying farm. The first Poor Farm was established on what are now the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

By 1885, however, it was clear that its setting was becoming increasingly urban as St. Paul began to spread out into Ramsey County. The county donated the property as the permanent site of the state fairgrounds and the Poor Farm moved to its present location, then open countryside.

There the farm complex grew. In 1918 a smaller barn was removed and the present barn built on the same site to house the Poor Farm's livestock. Gradually, however, St. Paul pushed northward, welfare programs changed, and the Poor Farm was phased out and the cattle sold.

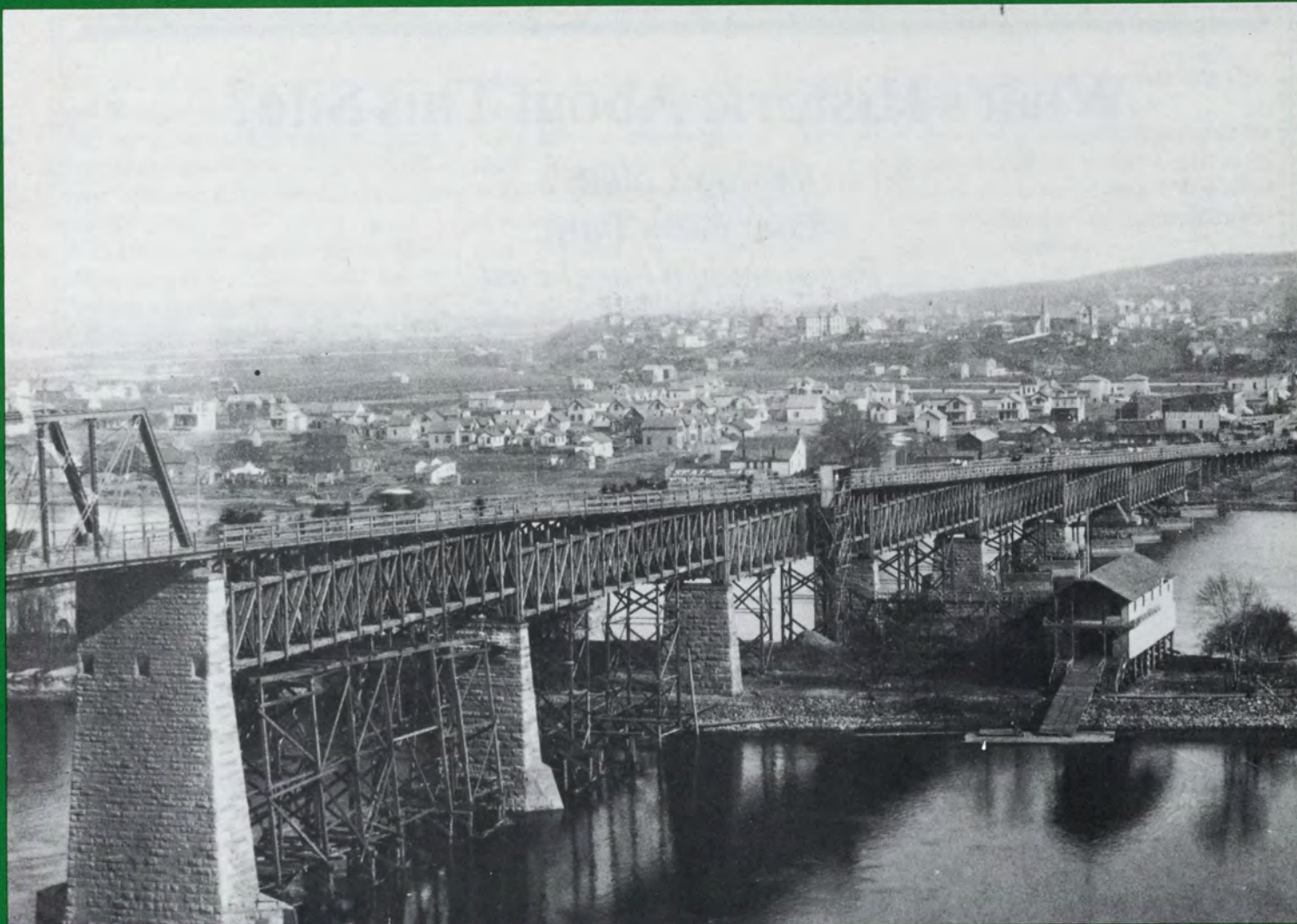
In 1950 the farm ceased to operate as the county moved into other means of social welfare. Over the years buildings housing the indigent were replaced with modern structures, but the barn remained

as the home of the Ramsey County Extension Service.

Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is one of the last remaining barns of its size in the Twin Cities area. The massive two-story brick building, 190 by 40 feet, supports an elaborately constructed gambrel roof and has two large brick feed silos, two smaller brick silos and an attached milkhouse. The building once housed seventy-five milk cows for the farm's dairy business, as well as horses and hogs.

The exterior has remained unchanged and the interior has been altered only by the construction of office and classroom space for county extension programs. The Ramsey County Fairgrounds surround the barn.





*The Minnesota Boat Club below the Wabasha Street bridge around 1890. The old clubhouse was replaced just before World War I and the island, once known as Raspberry Island, is now Navy Island. See story on Page 9.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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