

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.*

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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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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## 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

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# An Excess of Zeal and Boosterism — Few Holds Barred in Twin Cities'

*Virginia Brainard Kunz*

It was just 100 years ago this June that virtual warfare erupted between Minneapolis and St. Paul. The cause was an event that in itself was so mundane, so prosaic as to be almost dull; yet, it was weighted with the potential for conflict, and even for violence.

It was, of all things, the U.S. census. The rivalry between Minnesota's two major cities, which has enlivened history for more than 135 years, already had been simmering along for forty years when it broke out into the open with the head count of 1890.

It's interesting that even the potential for such rivalry was recognized by the canny and prescient political leaders of Minnesota Territory. Drafting the state's constitution, they saw clearly the need to distribute such political plums as existed in

the late 1850s.

St. Paul was awarded the state capital. Stillwater had a choice between the prison or the university. Peering into their crystal ball, the Stillwater delegates decided that the university would never amount to much, whereas crime always would, and chose the prison. The rest, as they say, is history.

Much of this historic rivalry was fueled by the colorful, untrammelled newspapers of that era and they spared neither invec-

tive nor ridicule as they lined up boisterously behind the commercial interests of their communities. St. Anthony, for example, was described as so lethargic that it was "the city of the unburied dead." Minneapolis visitors to St. Paul, on the other hand, were advised to set their watches back fifty years as they crossed the Mississippi.

Looking back, it is apparent that, while many ties actually bound the two cities, a number of major issues also divided them: transportation, urban growth, water power, agricultural resources, the need for population growth, expansion of manufacturing, social issues such as crime, even the Millers and the Saints.



*Lexington Park in 1916, remembered by old timers as a "fabulous" park. The Millers vs. Saints double-headers were highlights of the summer holidays.*

# Rivalries

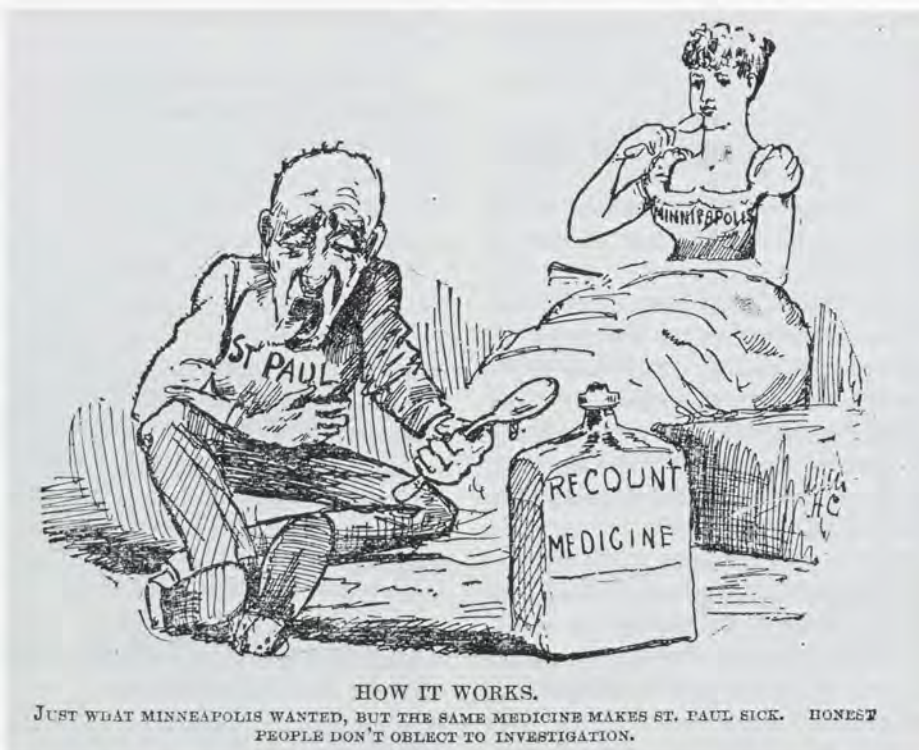
On September 9, 1861, the steamboat *Alhambra* docked in St. Paul with cargo that would sharpen the rivalry, yet bring the two cities together in a common economic cause. On board and on barges was the locomotive, the *William Crooks*, along with tracks and railroad cars.

Tracks were laid and on June 28, 1862, St. Paul mayor, William S. Prince, its aldermen and a crowd of about 100 boarded the cars for Minneapolis. It was the first run on the first rails that would become a vast northwestern network and change the course of empire.

Business interests in Minneapolis were at the time consumed with the development of water power at St. Anthony Falls and their attention wasn't focused on railroad promotion. St. Paul's railroad entrepreneurs, however, wisely realized that they scarcely could ignore the growing city at the Falls.

For one thing, Nicollet Island, located in the Mississippi just above the Falls, offered the best place to bridge the river. For another, the developing milling industries promised lucrative shipping contracts. The result was a mutually beneficial, if slightly uneasy, cooperation that was about to be jarred.

By 1865 Minneapolis was growing but it was no match for St. Paul whose population had jumped from 910 in 1849 to 9,973 by 1857 to 12,976 by 1870. But in 1880, for the first time in history, Minneapolis' population outdistanced St. Paul's 46,887 to 41,473. The *Minneapolis Tribune* announced that it expected the St. Paul newspapers to be seized with "gripes and conniptions" over the news. They were. They also were suspicious of the Minneapolis returns. Over the next decade, newspapers in both cities sniped at each other as they warmed up for the Great Census War of 1890. The problem then wasn't lagging returns; it was an excess of zeal in returning too many returns.



*Recount, bitter medicine to swallow. This cartoon in the Minneapolis Tribune for August 1, 1890, appears to assign the blame to St. Paul.*

St. Paul fired the first shot about 9 o'clock in the evening of June 17, 1890. Some Minneapolis census enumerators were working overtime in an office at Fourth and Hennepin Avenues. Suddenly, in walked a United States marshal armed with a warrant charging fraud in recording the Minneapolis census.

He arrested seven workers and hauled them off to St. Paul, along with six bags of census returns. Evidence for the warrants came from a private detective who said the Minneapolis Bureau of Information had told him to pad the census by 839 names.

The Twin Cities were not alone in trying to outdistance each other, by fair means or foul, in population. At about the same time, out in Washington Tacoma and Seattle also were fighting it out.

Back in Minneapolis, news of the arrests spread quickly. A delegation of Minneapolis citizens, carrying enough cash to bail out a regiment, arrived in St. Paul within an hour or so and freed the hapless enumerators. The Minneapolis newspapers were in a rage.

"It Means War!" they cried.

"The Mask of Hypocrisy Torn from the Malignant Face of St. Paul!"

"A Dastardly Outrage Committed on Minneapolis Citizens by the St. Paul Gang!"

"A Wave of Indignation Sweeps Over the City!"

St. Paul's papers were equally outraged.

"Arrested!" the *Daily News* trumpeted.

"Scheme to Swell the Population of the Flour City Knocked in the Head!"

A "villainous plot to pad the Minneapolis census by more than 100,000 names."

One newspaper deplored an association with "a city that stands degraded and ashamed in the eyes of the nation" and objected to a "forced marriage with a strumpet."

A delegation led by W. R. Eustis, mayor of Minneapolis, descended on St. Paul to reclaim the census records seized in the raid. The *Minneapolis Journal* reported that "they conducted themselves like gentlemen, but were assaulted and made to surrender at the muzzles of six revolvers."

Eustis declared that a policeman "kicked me for at least sixteen feet." A mass meeting was held amid demands that the capital be moved from St. Paul.

Delegations from both cities took their

cases to the United States attorney general in Washington. The upshot was that the original census in both cities was thrown out and a recount ordered.

St. Paul was incensed that it was included in the recount with "Pad City," adding that Minneapolis was a "Jezebel, whose dallying with sin is the jest or the scorn of a whole people."

Nevertheless, the investigation revealed that both cities had been flagrantly resourceful in padding their returns but St. Paul had been more imaginative. In adding 9,425 illegal names, St. Paul enumerated 325 houses that weren't on the city map, and listed fourteen families as living in the Bank of Minnesota Building, twenty-five living in a hotel barber shop, 245 in the Union Depot, 120 in one small house, and thirty-five in a dime museum.

Minneapolis had added 18,229 illegal names, including people buried in its cemeteries.

The final official count listed Minneapolis' population at 164,581, St. Paul's at 133,156. The men connected with the frauds eventually went on trial but it was impossible to get convictions in St. Paul. In Minneapolis, two pleaded guilty, their fines were collected by subscription, and the other cases were dismissed.

The public apparently forgave those involved, chalking it all up to too much booster spirit. However, the *Northwest Magazine* predicted that the resulting bitterness would linger, since "cities, like individuals, remember their quarrels and often nurse their wrath to keep it warm."

An ironic footnote to the story is that a few years later the 1890 census forms were destroyed by a fire in Washington, D.C.

### Wandering State Fair

Five years earlier, the two cities had demonstrated some unity of purpose by resolving a spirited tug-of-war over the location of the state fairgrounds. The Minnesota State Fair originated back in the 1850s but for several decades it wandered about Minnesota.

In 1871 Colonel William S. King, a Minneapolis stock-breeder and founder of Northrup-King, entered the picture. The fair was held that year at Kittsondale, the million-dollar race track at what is now Snelling and University avenues. It was owned by Norman W. Kittson, pioneer St.

Paul fur trader and a partner of James J. Hill.

The use of Kittsondale suggested to King that St. Paul was to be the fair's permanent home and he was outraged. He and other Minneapolis leaders held a fair on the Hennepin County fairgrounds two weeks before the state fair.

St. Paul businessmen were in an uproar. They met the challenge by publicizing the fair with letters, news stories, circulars and an exhibit of a 120-pound squash, seventeen-pound beets and thirty-pound cabbages. Everyone but the Minneapolis zealots were satisfied.

The next year the fair was held again at Kittsondale. The first iron from the Mesabi range was exhibited and the railroads, which offered special excursion rates, had their first displays.

In 1879, after the fair had bounced between the two cities, two fairs were held on the same day, in Minneapolis and in St. Paul. Several years later, King resorted to trickery, announcing that he would hold no fair. After plans for a state fair at Owatonna were completed, he announced that he would hold a fair after all, and a week earlier. Apparently he intended to outclass the state fair, sending it into oblivion, but he had over-reached himself. His fair was a failure.

Now plans for a permanent site between the two cities were underway and, surprisingly, King favored it. Minneapolis was tired of an open air exposition and St. Paul was tired of supporting fairs outside of its area. A committee was formed of representatives from both cities.

The Ramsey County Poor Farm on Como and Snelling Avenues was suggested as a site and a resolution was adopted in 1885 providing that Ramsey County donate the farm as a permanent location. "Donate" seems to have been the operative word. Even the combative Colonel King was, if not pleased, at least resigned and the long struggle was over.

But the rivalry wasn't; it just moved to other arenas. In 1886 Minneapolis organized an exposition featuring industry and the arts and held at the same time as the state fair. The old Exposition Building, which stood for many years in the milling district on Minneapolis' east side, was built for the event.

The *St. Paul Press* pronounced the ex-

position the "offspring of a jealous brain." Not so, the *Minneapolis Tribune* declared:

"We said from the first that Minneapolis will support the St. Paul fair—otherwise called the state fair—and she will . . . We said Minneapolis will never take part in this fair as exhibitors, and she never will, not even if St. Paul, by some legerdemain, annexes Minneapolis to Ramsey County."

St. Paul answered the Industrial Exposition with the Winter Carnival, launched the same year. Minneapolis was said to have given the carnival the "cold shoulder" because St. Paul had slighted the Industrial Exposition, but St. Paul could hardly slight the exposition building.

In 1892 the building was the scene of the Republican National Convention that nominated Benjamin Harrison in his vain attempt to win a second term. This was the only national political convention held in the Twin Cities and it is significant that it was held in Minneapolis—a forecast of the more recent struggle over the convention center.

### Saints and Millers

Nowhere was the rivalry between the cities more visible than with the St. Paul Saints and the Minneapolis Millers. Twin Cities residents by the thousands trooped to Lexington and Nicollet ball parks to watch the teams play.

St. Paul's Lexington Park was one of the largest in the American Association and old-timers remember it as a fabulous park. But no more so than the intimate and well-loved Nicollet Park that opened in 1895 at Nicollet and 31st Street, across from the old streetcar barns.

The Millers vs. Saints double-headers were highlights of the summer holidays. On Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and Labor Day, one game would be played in St. Paul; then fans would board waiting streetcars, carry on the cross-city rivalry en route and disembark in Minneapolis for the second game.

Sports rivalry dates back to the baseball boom in America after the Civil War when it was teams vs. teams, players vs. players, players vs. fans, and sometimes fans vs. fans, and the newspapers took up the rivalry. In the 1890s the *Minneapolis Tribune* charged the Saints with "dirty ball."

The Saints, the paper said, would be no-

Premiums and purses for the 1885 Minnesota State Fair. Home at last, the fair settled down on its permanent site and the rivalry cooled slightly. St. Paul Daily News photograph.

tified that “the Minneapolis club will not play today’s game unless guaranteed that there will be no spiking of Minneapolis players, no interference on the part of the crowd, no throwing of rocks, no throwing of dust and dirt in the eyes of the Minneapolis players and a few other tricks . . . .”

Between 1902 and 1923 the Saints won the championship six times and from 1915 to 1924 they won the season’s series. On the Fourth of July, 1929, a brawl between the two rivals exploded at Nicollet Park. It was, one writer said, the “most vicious affair witnessed at Nicollet.” It “required

fully a dozen policemen to quell the disturbance.”

A truce was just over the horizon, however. By the 1950s big league fever was running high and the Twin Cities cooperated for a time in the interests of demonstrating support for a big league team and an adequate stadium. They fell out over its location.

Each, predictably, built its own—Metropolitan stadium in Bloomington and Midway stadium in St. Paul. And each, after those heady days of spirited controversy, became a white elephant, Midway torn down and the Met the site of an

eventual shopping mall.

When it was all over, the Twins had come to town. Local wags suggested naming them the Minnehaha Twins—“Minne” for Minneapolis and “haha” for St. Paul.

### Railroads and Milling

In the early years the Mississippi was the vital element in the development of both cities. Minneapolis’ chief resource was St. Anthony Falls and its water power. St. Paul’s position at the practical head of navigation made it an important transportation center. St. Anthony’s water power was so coveted that the local newspapers were quoted as saying that, “Man made St. Paul but God made St. Anthony.”

Throughout their history St. Paul lusted after water power and Minneapolis lobbied incessantly for state and federal money to improve river navigation so that shipping could by-pass “the gauntlet of St. Paul” and come to Minneapolis.

In 1880 when James J. Hill bought controlling interest in the Minneapolis-St. Anthony Waterpower Company, St. Paul papers gleefully reported that “St. Paul is buying out Minneapolis for \$425,000.” Minneapolis responded:

“The superior advantages of Minneapolis are irresistibly attracting St. Paul men of brains and capital. Before another decade passes away we shall doubtless witness the wholesale emigration of St. Paul’s leading business men to this metropolis. They will receive a warm welcome.”

When the federal government granted funds to build reservoirs above the cities so that water levels could be regulated to more evenly power Minneapolis’ turbines, St. Paul opposed it as a cheap attempt to get federal dollars to improve river navigation to Minneapolis. A Minneapolis newspaper responded:

“St. Paul is a collection of picayunish peddlars whose jealousy of Minneapolis is so blind that they are willing to deprive St. Paul of the benefit which that place must reap the system in order that Minneapolis may not secure its advantages. . . . It is well-known that St. Paul would prefer to have the Mississippi run into a cave at Fort Snelling and disappear forever from sight.”

The coming of the railroads was a mixed blessing for both cities as they competed. Sometimes they joined forces to

thwart intrusions by rival centers, such as Chicago, but left to their own devices they quarreled over locations of tracks, terminals, shops and depots and they fought for the area trade. The *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* slyly predicted that St. Paul might in time be renamed "South Minneapolis."

But willy-nilly, better transportation drew the cities together. Engineers laid out University Avenue, hopefully called Union Avenue at first. There was talk of a new metropolis midway between the cities.

After the state capitol burned down in 1881, Colonel John Merriam, developer of Merriam Park, hoped the new capitol would be built there. After all, his son was governor. Archbishop John Ireland toyed with the idea of building the new St. Paul cathedral in the same area, not far from his St. Paul Seminary. Both plans came to naught.

### Stockyards Competition

Sharing little of the milling and lumber industries that were making Minneapolis boom, St. Paul decided to claim livestock marketing and meat packing as its own. Stockyards were established on the site of the present Amtrak depot in the Midway, near what is now Shepard Road and 35E, and on land owned by A. B. Stickney in South St. Paul. The St. Paul Chamber of Commerce predicted that the yards would make St. Paul "one of the most important cattle markets in the country."

Stung, William D. Washburn and other Minneapolis business men formed the Minneapolis Stockyards and Packing Company, located it in New Brighton and competed hotly with South St. Paul. St. Paul interests won this round but when the United States government established the federal reserve system in 1913, Minneapolis outpolled St. Paul 365 to 93 as the location for the bank.

St. Paul both won and lost as the air age dawned. In 1926 Northwest Airways was organized in St. Paul by Colonel Lewis H. Britten, vice president of the St. Paul Association, and William H. Kidder, an aircraft dealer. That year, also, they established the St. Paul Downtown airport (Holman Field) across the river from downtown St. Paul because St. Paul business men had complained that Wold-Chamberlain field was too far from St. Paul. However, as the site of the Twin Cit-

ies' major airport, St. Paul lost to Minneapolis.

The first station in the country to generate electricity from hydroelectric power began operation at St. Anthony Falls in 1882. In 1917 the federal government completed the High Dam and its locks, which finally extended river navigation into Minneapolis, but St. Paul won the ensuing competition for hydroelectric power when the Ford Motor Company built an assembly plant at the dam within St. Paul's city limits.

However, building of the dam signaled the beginning of a successful battle to revive Mississippi river navigation. It was followed by the dredging of the nine-foot-deep channel and the establishment of the series of locks that passed traffic down the river from the Twin Cities to St. Louis. In 1963 locks and a canal built around St. Anthony Falls created a harbor in the heart of Minneapolis.

### Square vs. Center

Redevelopment of their cities began for Minneapolis and St. Paul as early as the 1850s. For St. Paul, nothing was more pressing than opening up its streets but there was a problem. According to one account, St. Paul was platted "with the same lawlessness the bird exemplifies in its path through the fenceless air."

Blasting, grading and draining its rugged terrain made the pioneer community look like the "vicinity of Etna after an eruption—ditches, ponderous piles, fearful precipices, yawning chasms and mountains of volcanic rock make it the very picture of desolation and ruin." Minneapolis was more hospitable to city planners, established as it was on the flat prairie.

St. Paul soon was strewn with public buildings—the territorial capitol, county courthouse and city hall. Minneapolis acquired a courthouse. Both had jails, suggesting the difficulty of preserving the peace.

But the problems besetting the two cities in their infancy were nothing compared with those that befell them after World War II. Both faced dying downtowns and they also had to confront the suburbs, to say nothing of each other.

Tensions grew. The *Minneapolis Tribune* declared in 1957 that the city was now surrounded with suburbs "if you include

St. Paul in that category." The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* retorted that its city was "possibly a little too big to be classified as a suburb." When a Minneapolis firm acquired St. Paul's Hilton Hotel, the *St. Paul Dispatch* deplored the "Minneapolisization" of St. Paul.

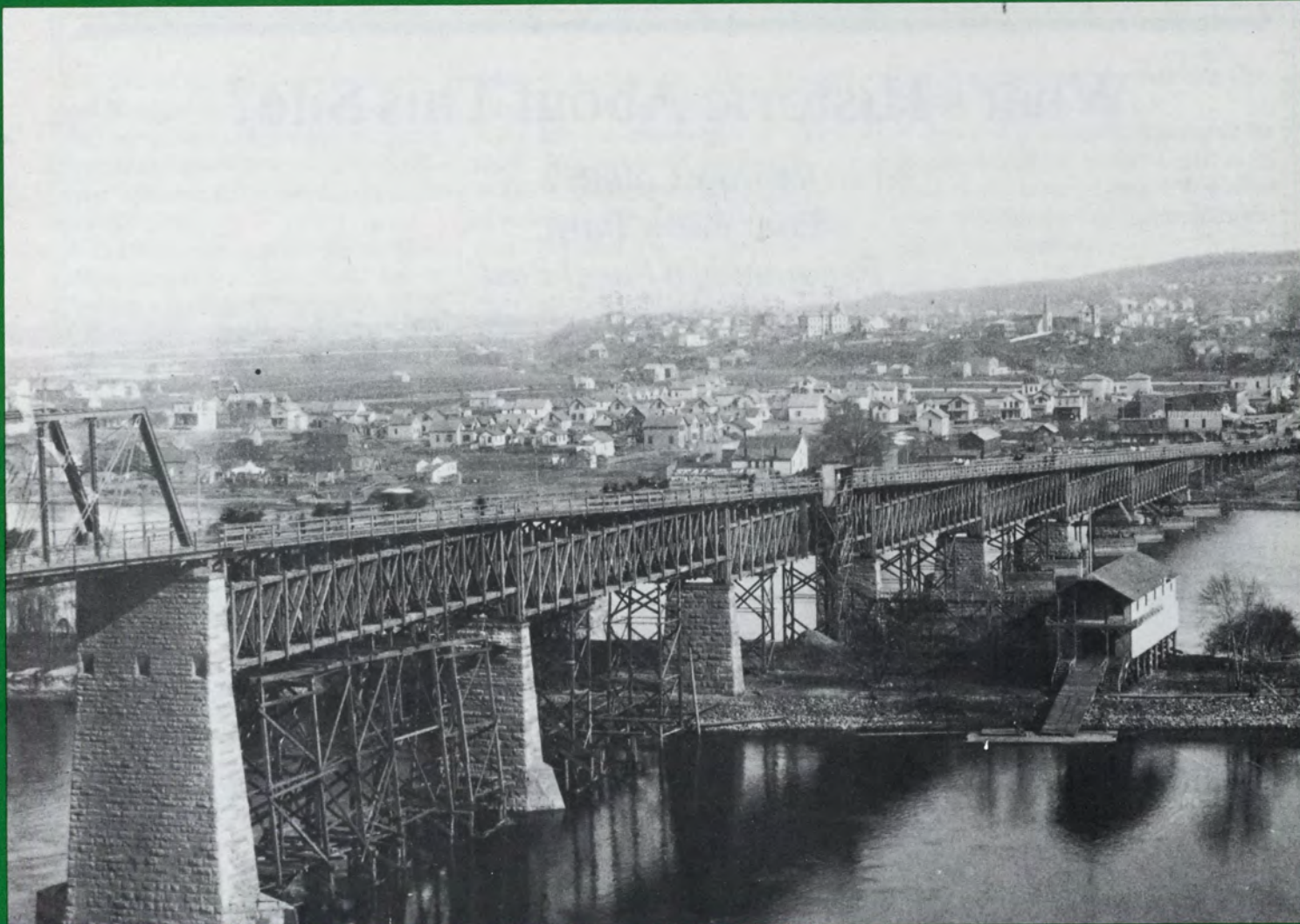
With all their energies, both cities turned to the regeneration of their downtowns. Minneapolis led the way, and there were notable losses. The grand old Metropolitan building was razed during the tear-it-down frenzy of the 1960s, but Minneapolis became the first Minnesota city to create an historic preservation commission, four years before St. Paul recognized the need and followed suit.

St. Paul, however, saved its stately Old Federal Courts Building and turned it into Landmark Center, a home for cultural agencies. On the other hand, "super hole," which seemed to symbolize all the redevelopment plans that went awry in all American cities of that era, was a cavity in the heart of downtown St. Paul that was vacant so long that it was eligible for historic designation, as former Mayor George Latimer once remarked. Plan after plan came and went until finally, in 1980, Town Square arose out of the rubble.

Some called Town Square "a study in soaring granite and angular glass that marks the city's comeback." Others called it a fortress, a concrete bunker. But Minneapolis had its counterpart in City Center.

In 1960, during ceremonies at the Town and Country Club, Joseph Maun, president of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, and Philip Harris, vice president of the Minneapolis Chamber, joined in a wry little ceremony of burying the hatchet of rivalry between the two cities. It was an optimistic gesture. The not-so-long-ago furor over the location of the new convention center indicates that the hatchet might still have been in active use.

*Virginia Brainard Kunz, executive director of the Ramsey County Historical Society from 1973 to 1989, is editor of Ramsey County History and the author of ten books on local, state and American history. Others contributed to this article: Lucile Kane and her pictorial history of the Twin Cities; John Baule of the Hennepin County Historical Society and the 19th century newspaper editors.*



*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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