

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

A Matter of Time

1850 140 Years Ago

► Water Street in St. Paul, the editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer* observed in July of 1850, "like the equinoctial line, is rather imaginary, being principally in the channel of the river at the foot of the bluff." The first actual street in town parallel to the river, he pointed out for those who wondered, is Bench Street on the bluff and the next, parallel to the river, is Third Street.

► Benj. F. Irvine had problems of his own. In a published notice he said that his wife, Teresa J. "refuses henceforth to live with me and has left my bed and board . . . and I therefore forbid all persons from harboring or trusting her on my account, as I shall [honor] no debts of her contracting. . . ."

► St. Anthony and St. Paul citizens gathered at 10 a.m. July 4 for a celebration at St. Anthony Falls. Festivities included music by the Sixth Regimental Band, reading of the Declaration of Independence, an oration "replete with original thought and powerful illustration" by W. H. Welch, Esq., dinner at the St. Charles Hotel, a steamboat excursion and a ball.

► Sergeant E. K. Thomas of Fort Snelling raffled off "two very superb paintings" of the celebrated Sioux warrior, Wah-ah-cor-dah, and a Sioux woman known as We-no-na.

► The steamboat, *Anthony Wayne*, with seventy ladies and gentlemen, ascended the St. Peter (Minnesota) river, "meandering a boundless extent of plains" and proving that the river was navigable for light draught steamboats for 150 miles.

1890 100 Years Ago

► July was a month of disasters. On July 15 the vessel, *Sea Wing*, capsized off Lake City during a storm on Lake Pepin. It became, in the words of the headline writer, a "Floating Sepulcher for the

Pleasure Seekers in Its Cabins." Then a tornado that cut a swath through Gervais, Snail, Turtle and Kohlman lakes almost wiped out Little Canada.

► The National Education Association held its 34th annual session at the People's Church in St. Paul. Papers included "Examinations as Tests for Promotion" and "The Effects of Kindergarten Training on Primary Work." Archbishop John Ireland's address attracted an immense audience. He favored public schools but insisted on separate religious instruction. The Reverend Dr. Rufus C. Burleson, President of Baylor University, Waco, Texas, advocated corporal punishment in the colleges "as a means of grace and a method of prevention from riot and wrong-doing." Baylor's president for thirty-nine years, Burleson said he'd had no student strikes or riots during his tenure.

► Elsewhere, the hotel, pavilion and boat house at Lake Elmo were destroyed by fire, a \$45,000 loss. Roomers and boarders, "the wealthy of St. Paul," lost \$10,000 to \$15,000 in jewelry, clothing, furniture and fishing tackle.

► Business reporters suggested a future alliance between the Great Northern and Chicago, Burlington and Northern railroads. The *Pioneer Press* pointed out that "heavy holders of stock in the C.B. & Q.

which owns the C.B. & Northern, also are large holders of Great Northern stock."

► A trio of reporters set out to explore the prevalence of opium dens in St. Paul and the Minnesota Supreme Court decided that a man couldn't divorce his wife on the grounds that she is a kleptomaniac.

► Frances Willard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union lectured in St. Paul on the sanctity of the home, along with a program on "The Moral Value of Art Education."

1915 75 Years Ago

► Things were quiet around St. Paul during the mid-summer of 1915. The Fourth of July ushered in the summer season and brought on a spate of social news headlined "Country Homes and Lakes to Claim Society." Mr. and Mrs. Roger S. Kennedy, Jr., were visiting Mrs. Kennedy's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence H. Johnston, at Casco Point, Lake Minnetonka, and Mary Livingston of Summit Avenue and Cable, Wisconsin, planned to join her mother, Mrs. Crawford Livingston, at their summer home.

► The Willis-Overland Company announced plans to build a \$250,000 west-

The Lake Gervais tornado, usually referred to as a cyclone, July 13, 1890, as seen from St. Paul.



ern distributing center in the Midway, and Bingham and Norton, successors to the Central Automobile Agency, opened "one of the largest garages in the Northwest" at Grand and Victoria avenues. It cost \$25,000.

► 25,000 people attended the Fourth of July celebration at Como Park, and in Europe, a Russian submarine torpedoed a German warship of the Deutschland class at the entrance to Danzig Bay.

► A German note defending the torpedoing of the *Luisitania* on May 12 was published on the front page of the July 10 *Pioneer Press*.

► In Glen Cove, Long Island, Frank Holt attempted to assassinate J. P. Morgan but succeeded only in wounding him. Holt was holding Morgan's wife and children hostage and threatening to kill them with dynamite unless Morgan used his influence to stop the exportation of war munitions. Vice President Thomas R. Marshall also received death threats. A bomb exploded in the reception room off the Senate chamber within a few feet of Marshall's desk. Secret Service surveillance of President Wilson was stepped up. Holt himself died in jail of a fractured skull. His death, termed "a riddle," was marked down as a suicide.

1940 50 Years Ago

► At the Democratic Party convention held in July in Chicago, President Roosevelt announced that he would run for a third term against Wendell Willkie.

► Newspaper columnist Joseph H. Ball described Minnesota Governor Harold Stassen's pivotal role in helping Willkie win the Republican nomination in Philadelphia and praised Stassen's "great keynote speech."

► The newspapers were full of war news from Europe. The Nazis sent a large fleet of German bombers to Rumania, strengthening the feeling that the Reich was backing Rumania against further Russian encroachments after the Russians seized Bessarabia and Bukovina. At the same time, the Germans ordered American and other diplomatic missions to leave newly-occupied Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

► Jews were beaten and shot in a wave of anti-Semitism as street rioting broke out in Rumania. King Carol, who had ap-

pealed to the Nazis for help to save his kingdom, tried to abdicate. A *Pioneer Press* editorial labeled him an "opportunist" who backed the wrong side.

► The first German and Italian prisoners of war began arriving in Canada but more than 1,000 died when a German U-boat sank the British steamer, *Arandora Starr*, off the Irish west coast.

► Back in St. Paul, merchants and theater operators began collecting new taxes levied by the federal government as part of the national defense program. Twenty-five-cent theater tickets rose to 28 cents and 40-cent tickets to 44 cents.

► Major Bowes brought his Anniversary Unit to the RKO Orpheum theater in conjunction with "Twenty Mule Team," Wallace Beery's latest film. "Rebecca," with Joan Fontaine and Laurence Oliver, was playing at the Strand.

► Two members of St. Paul's royal family (Winter Carnival royalty, that is) celebrated birthdays at the summer home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Shiely at Prescott, Wisconsin. They were Mrs. Shiely, whose husband was King Boreas, and Joseph L. Shiely, Jr. Others present were Mrs. W. J. Hickey and her husband, Winter Carnival Association president, and Mrs. Ernest Reiff and her husband, who was Vulcan.

Book Reviews from page 20

knew almost everything about architecture and should control our own destiny."

Hammel's account, told from the perspective of a family member, is filled with charming anecdotes like this one. They put a human face on the grand scale in which architecture works.

Working in a historical society, I am quick to recognize that buildings are one of the most important common threads that join generations. The work of one generation lives on through hundreds of years, proving true the advice of John Ruskin: "Build as if it would last forever."

The work of Hammel Green and Abrahamson has shaped life in the Twin Cities for the last thirty-five years and their work will last for many more. In reviewing some of their projects, I was struck by the inventiveness and beauty of the St. Bede's Priory, completed in 1967; the Phillips Plastic Headquarters in Phil-

lips, Wisconsin; and the charming Canterbury Downs race track.

The firm is currently responsible for the new Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, giving us the prospect of two of the great celebrations of the human spirit rising in one structure.

Little Canada, A Voyageur's Vision.

Gareth D. Heibert, editor.
Stillwater: The Croixside Press, Inc., 1989.

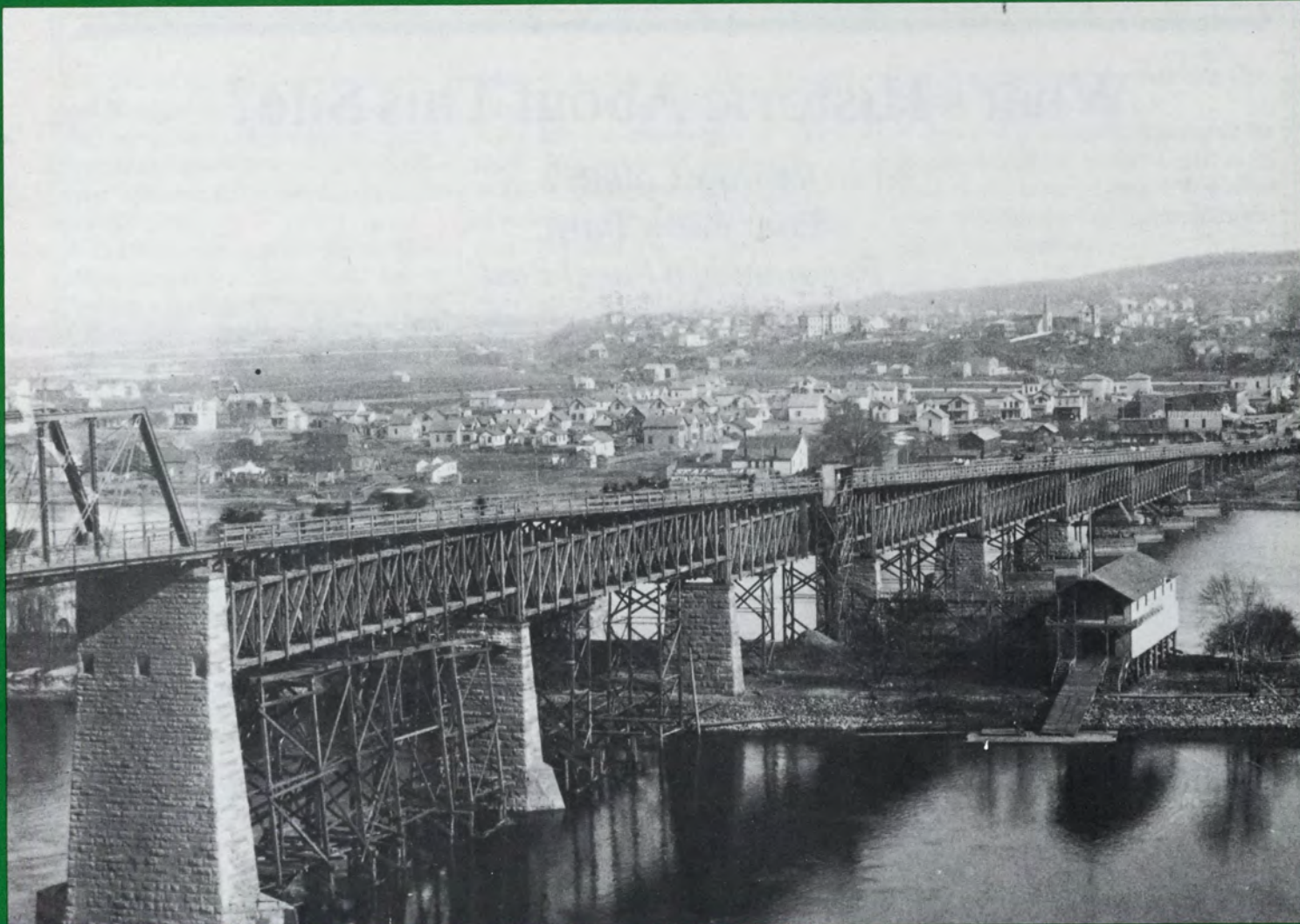
The Little Canada Historical Society, under the guidance of Johanna Meath, has produced a handsome history of their community and its development: the story of "Petit Canada." This story is told as the combination of many stories written by many authors. One of the unique elements of the book is that families wrote their own chapters, bringing an immediacy and pride to their work.

For example, we learn about Paul and Louis Bideau. Louis had nine children and accepted Paul's offer to move in with him in 1847. But, they didn't get along and Louis moved out to a barn, which he fixed up. Or the tale of Salvatore LoBaido. As a boy, he visited Italy with his family. "You will know Grandma Vitale," his father said. "She is a short lady wearing black." Many of the older women, he said, ended up being short and wearing black and he hugged the wrong grandma.

The starting point for the story, though, must begin with Benjamin Gervais, the founder of Little Canada. Gary Brueggeman authored the long chapter on Gervais, who bought land along a creek in 1844, apparently based on a recommendation from local Indians. His brother, Pierre, moved there two years later. His grave is marked in St. John's cemetery. On a local level, it becomes clear that one man and his choices can have a significant effect on history.

The Society is to be commended for its hard work. The sections on local churches, clubs, and civic organizations make it a valuable tool for anyone wanting to learn about the community today. But as historians, we know that any understanding must begin in the past.

—Daniel John Hoisington



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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