

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Colorful, Contentious —
St. Paul's 100-Year-Old
Neighborhood Press

Page 13

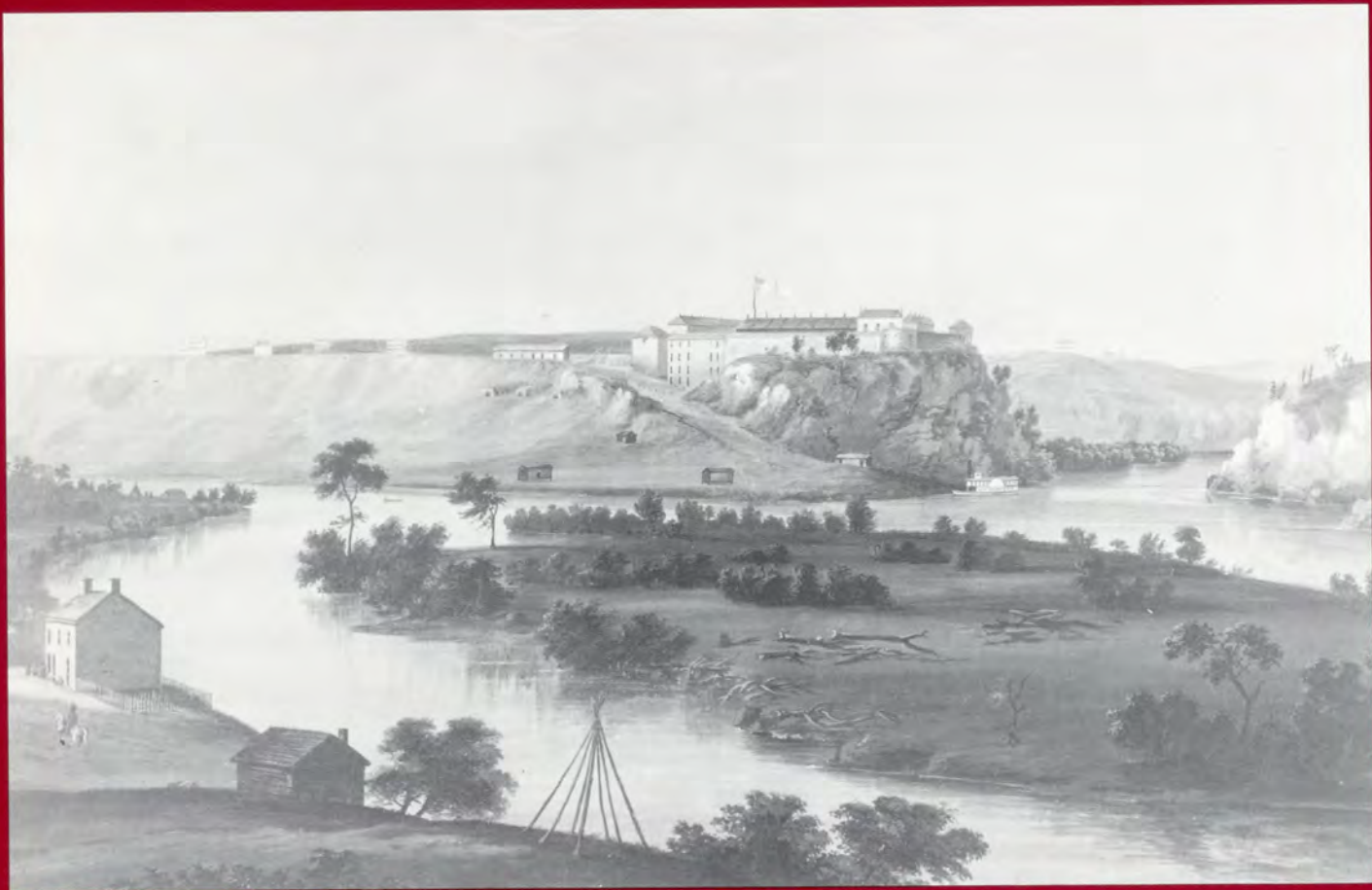
Summer, 1993

Volume 28, Number 2

Birth, Death, Reincarnation

The Story of Fort Snelling and Its State Park

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Old Fort Snelling in 1844. This water color and gouache painting by John Casper Wild shows the fort a few years before Minnesota became a territory. The many pitfalls in the effort to save, restore and rebuild the fort and create Fort Snelling State Park are described by an active participant, in the article beginning on page 4. Minnesota Historical Society photograph of the original painting, which is in its collection.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

In the past several months the Editorial Board has received requests to reprint articles published in back issues of *Ramsey County History*. This recognition of the editorial strength of our magazine is very gratifying to all members of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

The Editorial Board wants our readers to know that we respond promptly to these requests. We can sometimes provide additional copies of a particular issue when there is enough lead time involved in the request. The cost of reprinting or purchasing additional copies depends on the nature of the request.

While the Editorial Board wants to encourage a wide dissemination of our editorial material, we also are obliged to remind our readers that the magazine is copyrighted by the Society and under current copyright law cannot be photocopied and distributed without our permission.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

Old Fort Snelling: Its Birth, Death and Reincarnation And the Story of Fort Snelling State Park: Realiz

Samuel H. Morgan

The story of how Fort Snelling was created and how it served the frontier has often been told. Now it is time to tell the story of how dedicated citizens working with public officials rebuilt the old fort and created a 3,000 acre park in the heart of this rapidly growing metropolitan area.

In 1805, following the Louisiana Purchase which added the vast plains and mountains west of the Mississippi to the original United States, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike was sent to find the source of the Mississippi and secure the valley against the British and the Native Americans. Arriving at the confluence of the St. Peter's (now the Minnesota) River and the Mississippi, Pike saw the bold promontory at the rivers' junction as the perfect site for a fort.

On the island that now bears his name, he signed a treaty with the Dakota chiefs relinquishing to the United States not only the site of the future fort but substantial parts of what are now St. Paul and Minneapolis. Not until 1819, however, was any effort made to build a fort there. That August, the fort's first commandant, Colonel George Leavenworth, arrived with a detachment of soldiers from the United States Fifth Infantry which had been stationed at Detroit. Leavenworth, however, started out with a camp, not on the heights but down on the bottomlands with his cantonment New Hope, where in the first winter some forty of his men died of scurvy.

In the spring he removed his remaining force to high ground where he established Camp Coldwater, named for the spring found there. But it was time for Colonel Leavenworth to be relieved. His replacement, Colonel Josiah Snelling, arrived in 1820 and immediately put his men to work building on the promontory the strong fortress that now bears his name.

For more than thirty years, Fort Snelling served as the military, commercial, and social center of the region. Its officers included statesmen such as Zachary Tay-

lor, later to become the United States' twelfth president, and Jefferson Davis, destined to head the Confederacy; as well as artists such as the painter Seth Eastman, also a fort commandant. Dred Scott based his claim for citizenship before the Supreme Court on his sojourn at Fort Snelling in the service of the post's physician, Dr. Emerson. The explorer, Count Beltrami, and the mapper of the Mississippi, Joseph Nicollet, were among those who enjoyed the hospitality of the fort before setting forth on their explorations.

Lawrence Taliaferro, a friend of both the Dakota and Ojibway, served as the government's Indian agent for two decades from his office and residence just outside

the fort's walls. The American Fur Company's Henry Hastings Sibley built his stout yellow stone residence just across the Minnesota so the fort could serve as a place of refuge in case of Indian attack. Following the suggestion of George Catlin, the painter of Indian life, Fort Snelling became the destination of the popular "Fashionable Tour" up the Mississippi. One such traveler, Mrs. Elizabeth F. Ellet, wrote, "The distant view of Fort Snelling, flag gleaming in relief against the sky is startlingly fine . . . but the nearer one is yet more imposing . . . a situation more imposing than that of Fort Snelling can hardly be imagined. Its solid walls rise from the summit of nature's rampart of perpendicular rock more than 100 feet above the river."

Neglect, Decline, Death

This initial era of military, commercial, and tourist activity ended in 1857 after the



The Fort Snelling ferry crossing the Minnesota River around 1880. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

zing the Dream

troops that had guarded the frontier from Fort Snelling were moved out to more "forward" points, such as Fort Ripley on the upper Mississippi and Fort Ridgely on the Minnesota above Mankato. Did anyone propose that this magnificent set of stone buildings be turned over to the Minnesota Historical Society? No. While the Society had been established in 1849 by one of the first acts of the first session of the Minnesota territorial legislature, the infant territory had neither the financial resources nor the sense of history to take on such a project in that pioneering era.* The whole Fort Snelling reservation was sold lock, stock, and barrel to a real estate speculator, Franklin Steele, of Minneapolis.

However, old forts like old soldiers don't die! They just fade away. Almost ninety years elapsed from the fort's sale to Steele in 1857 to its "de-commissioning" in 1946. The Civil War brought the fort again to life as a military post serving as the mustering-in center for troops leaving to put down the Great Rebellion or to fight in the Dakota War of 1862 in our own Minnesota River valley.

Where more dramatically than at Fort Snelling could one witness the tragic end of one era and the coming of another—from Indian outpost to the transportation hub of a modern metropolis? Mary Newson, who spent her childhood at Fort Snelling, recalled how, following the Dakota War, "as the black cap was about to be drawn over the head of Chief Shakopee, a railway whistle woke the echoes along the bluffs and the first train of cars pulled into Mendota. With a tragic gesture of dignity the Chief raised his arm across the river and said, 'As the white man

* The society did, however, in 1864 ask Historian Edward D. Neill to write a paper on the history of the fort.



The Minnesota State Fair held at Fort Snelling in 1860. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

comes in the Indian goes out.' The next moment the trap fell."

By 1870 the government had reacquired title to the Fort Snelling reservation and soon new headquarters, officers' quarters and barracks began to be built outside the old fort, which gradually fell into decay. A decade later the first Fort Snelling bridge replaced the early ferry across the Mississippi.

As the building of the railway below the fort in the 1860s had begun the destruction of the walls and towers on the Mississippi River's side of the bluff, the later paving of the streets and the running of streetcar tracks within the old fort and past the round tower made it impossible for the visitor to imagine he was inside the walled fortress Colonel Snelling had built less than a century earlier. In fact, right by the round tower a "dummy" trolley to the "new fort" area connected with the streetcar line that ran between the Twin Cities and through the fort.

The first well-articulated plea for the old fort's restoration and preservation was at a celebration on September 10, 1895, commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the laying of the fort's corner stone. It came from the post's then commandant, Colonel E. C. Mason, who said:

If the people of Minnesota would preserve old Fort Snelling for coming generations, they should make haste; for sooner or later the buildings so dear to every Minnesotan will be torn down to make room for needed

improvements. In the War Department there is neither romance nor sympathy. In this old fort we have one of the most interesting places in the frontier history of our country. I suggest that either the historical society or the twin cities secure from the general government the control of this place; having done this, restore the old wall and the demolished bastions, . . . convert these buildings into storehouses for the display of such articles as may yet be collected illustrating the way in which the Indians and the white men lived and traveled when this beautiful state was a wilderness.

But alas, though the pleas of Colonel Mason and others did help preserve fragments of the fort, such as the round and hexagonal towers, the few other remaining parts of the old fort, the commandant's house and the officers' quarters, were further transformed into first mansard and then "American Spanish" forms.

The "new" and larger Fort Snelling continued as an active military post through both the First and Second World Wars, including use as an induction and training center during both those periods, and as the base for the Japanese Language School for many of the nisei soldiers of our armed forces during the latter war. But civilization continued its encroachments. The 1926 opening of the Mendota Bridge, replacing the former ferry across the Minnesota River, brought additional traffic through the fort. The development of



A passenger train chugging along the Mississippi below Fort Snelling around 1900. The old Fort Snelling bridge looms in the background. The building of the railroad in the 1860s began the destruction of the walls and towers on the Mississippi side of the fort. Minneapolis Journal photograph, Minnesota Historical Society.

Wold-Chamberlain air field took land and buildings from the new fort area and added not only more automobile traffic but the almost continuous roar of planes overhead.

All this and the final de-commissioning of Fort Snelling in 1946 seemed to spell the doom of any plan for restoring the old fort or creating a three-county park at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers.

Birth of a State Park

The year 1956 marks the beginning of steps to preserve and restore the fort. As is so often true, it took a dire threat to bring action. Although the council of the Minnesota Historical Society throughout the decade after the fort's 1946 de-commissioning discussed ways to preserve the old fort, it was the proposal of the Minnesota Highway Department to build a new bridge with a freeway and cloverleaf interchange right on the site of the old fort that finally brought action.

Russell W. Fridley, the Minnesota Historical Society's executive director, called a meeting on May 18, 1956, of concerned groups to look at the highway staff's plans. There was a spontaneous outpouring of citizen support for saving the old fort site. George Selke, the state's Commis-

sioner of Conservation, and U. W. "Judge" Hella, the director of the state parks system who had long promoted the preservation of the fort, strongly supported this effort. Finally, Governor Orville L. Freeman asked the Highway Department if it could not build a tunnel under the area between the round tower and the chapel so as to leave the old fort site intact and accessible. This was done at an additional cost of more than a half million dollars—the first major financial commitment to the fort's preservation.

The next seminal year in this story is 1960. On May 3 of that year, the landscape architect, A. R. Nichols, submitted a report to Judge Hella for a proposed 2,400 acre park. He referred to the "population explosion" taking place in the Twin Cities region and pointed out that the whole area at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers was a strategic point for a large recreational park incorporating a rich, historical background. Nichols' map became the basis for the great Fort Snelling State Park we have today.

Actually, Nichols' plan was based on one Theodore Wirth, the Minneapolis parks superintendent, had submitted back in 1934 to Governor Floyd B. Olson and envisioning a park extending for some

thirty miles up the Minnesota valley. While that plan, like so many before and since, was destined to gather dust, the Nichols plan came out at just the right time to secure the publicity such dreams needed to be realized.

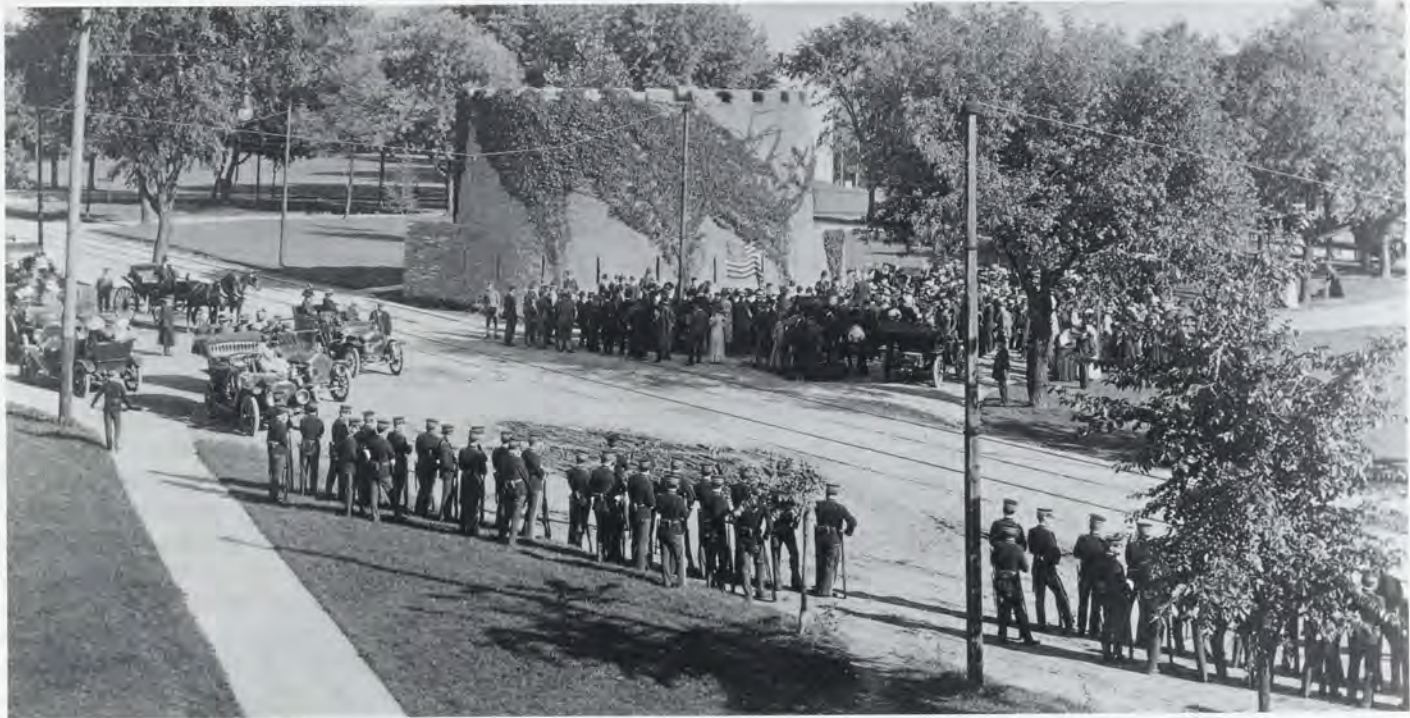
The *Minneapolis Star* of November 14, 1960, published a story headlined "Metropolitan Park Plan Advanced by Twin Cities Group; Area at Junction of Rivers is Sought." The story about a couple of dozen planners meeting together aroused the interest of a private citizen, Thomas C. Savage, who had already become dedicated to causes for improving our environment. Tom called on State Park Director Hella and asked what could be done to make this Fort Snelling Park dream a reality. Judge Hella said: "Tom, the thing to do is to organize a group of supporters into an association dedicated to such a park."

Tom went right to work, with meetings of a number of interested citizens. The decision was made to organize a Fort Snelling State Park Association as a nonprofit corporation qualified to accept tax deductible gifts of land and money to assist the project. At a meeting on January 19, 1961, Tom was appointed to serve as chairman of a committee that would support legislation to establish the park. The committee also hosted a large public meeting the next evening at the Minnesota Historical Society.

That memorable gathering, which included among the speakers Sigurd Olson of Ely, the eloquent author of so many books on the wilderness, inspired a number of those attending, including this author, to come forward and offer their help for this cause.

At the same time, the just-elected new governor, Elmer L. Andersen, told the legislature in his inaugural address,

We must make the necessary investment to increase total available park facilities. I would like to put special emphasis on the opportunity now afforded to add a new park of outstanding appeal located in the heart of the Twin City area. It is almost incredible that such a possibility could still exist. Some 320 acres . . . of Fort Snelling's reservation, have been declared surplus property by the federal government and can be acquired through your action. Below Fort Snelling



The round tower in its crenellated medieval mode, around 1900. This was a ceremony at the unveiling of a tablet on the tower's history, but the photograph also marks the passage of an era. Both horse-drawn and horseless carriages are drawn up beside streetcar tracks that ran through the old fort. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

along the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers lie other tracts which if put together could make a state park of more than 3,000 acres notable for its natural beauty, rich in historical lore, easily accessible by private and public transportation. I do hope that everything will be done to implement the formation of what well may be known as Fort Snelling State Park."

Bills to establish Fort Snelling State Park were soon introduced in both houses of the legislature, with Senator Les Weston of St. Paul the chief Senate author, and Representative Peter Popovich, also of St. Paul, the chief author in the House. But like so many proposals that have seemed to enjoy such unanimous support as to have clear sailing, the Fort Snelling Park legislation soon ran into obstacles that threatened to derail it.

While there was no opposition to preserving the old fort itself, private landowners, including particularly a hunting group that used the Gun Club Lake area, opposed acquisition of the lands they owned in the Minnesota valley flood plain. They argued that the \$675,000 figure in the

bill for land purchases was totally inadequate, claiming values for the private lands in the millions. The requested appropriation was not picked out of the air but was based on the realistic estimate given by Chandler B. Davis, a highly qualified professional appraiser who contributed so much to the effort in the early years to establish the park.

As a result of the landowners' cost concerns, the House Appropriations Subcommittee, headed by Sam Franz of Mountain Lake, disallowed the bill. The session neared its end with passage of any Fort Snelling Park bill becoming dimmer by the day. It became apparent that no bill with any substantial money in it had a chance.

At this critical time, two suggestions were made by the park's supporters. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* pointed out that it was important to pass the bill establishing the park's boundaries, even if there was no appropriation, so that the 320 acres of the fort area declared surplus by the federal government could be acquired as a donation. On April 10 Representative Sally Luther of Minneapolis wrote the Fort Snelling State Park Association, which

had been formally organized in February, suggesting that the association request a second hearing and produce evidence "as to what the people of Minneapolis and St. Paul will do to match any efforts the State will make." The Fort Snelling State Park Association adopted both of these suggestions. While no formal agreement between the state and the Association was made, the Association indicated that if the bill was passed it would undertake during the forthcoming biennium to raise from private sources a quarter of a million dollars towards land acquisition. Key legislators stated that if the Association was successful, at the next session in 1963 at least a matching appropriation could be expected.

Also at meetings between representatives of the landowners and the Association, held at the suggestion of Governor Andersen, Tom Savage and the author, pointed out that as much as ten years could pass before actual acquisition of private lands would be completed by the state. However, they stated, if some landowners wanted to be bought out early, the Association might enter into early purchase con-

tracts with substantial downpayments in advance of the state appropriation, providing the Association could raise money to establish an adequate land acquisition fund.

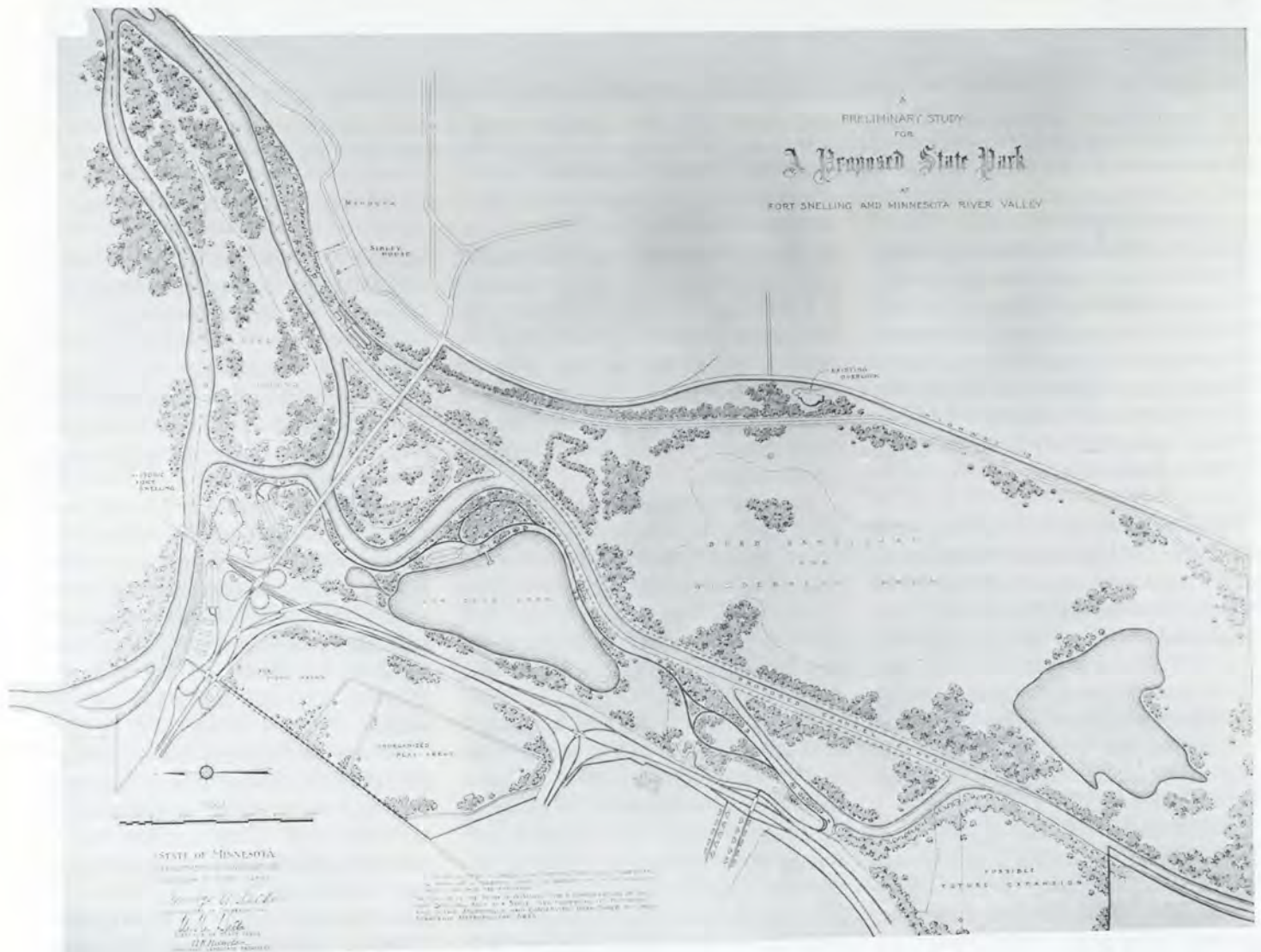
So finally there was victory. Late in the evening on the last day of the session, by arrangements worked out between Association members and legislative supporters, a motion was made in the Senate by Senator Val Imm of Mankato that the rules be suspended so that a vote could be taken on the Fort Snelling Park bill. That bill, already passed by the House, was then passed by the Senate with an appropriation of only \$65,000 and delivered to Governor Andersen just before the midnight deadline for the passage of bills. (The Governor

had declared that he would not accept the clock-covering scheme used by some previous legislatures to extend the last day of the session.) Thus, a new historical park was established through the collaboration of those concerned with the state's history, public spirited legislators, and a few dedicated citizens willing to spend countless hours seeking support for their dream and persuading key legislators that the Fort Snelling Park bill not be allowed to die.

With Fort Snelling State Park legally established, its transformation into the restored fort and the great and spacious state park we see today went forward on two parallel tracks, historical and recreational. Before anything could begin, the 320 acres of federal surplus land had to be acquired.

Here Park Director Hella and Minnesota Historical Society Director Fridley worked on the General Services Administration and the National Park Service, but nothing seemed to happen. Then Tom Savage turned to Congressman Walter Judd and Senators Eugene McCarthy and Hubert Humphrey for help. He wrote Humphrey:

The approval of the transfer of surplus federal property seems to be bogged down in the vast government bureaucracy and red tape. The application has been under consideration for ten months and has been shuttled back and forth between the Washington and Kansas City Offices of the General Services Administration several times. Just



A. R. Nichols' map of the proposed Fort Snelling State Park. The present park differs slightly from this map, which is dated 1961. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

three weeks ago a representative from the regional office of that agency came up to give the site a close scrutiny. Knowing that you have a unique ability for cutting through the red tape, and also knowing of your great interest in conservation, I am appealing to you to do what you can to expedite this matter for us. You would be doing a good deed for the entire mid-west for this and future generations!

These efforts finally paid off. On October 29, 1961, the federal government, acting under the 1944 Surplus Property Act, deeded the 320 acres to the state as a historic monument. This acreage included the chapel and the round tower, but not all of the rest of the old fort area. It also included substantial stretches of bluff land. The Fort Snelling State Park Association's first annual membership meeting, at which Judge Clarence Magney, the founder of the Minnesota Council of State Parks, spoke on parks as everyone's country estate, was held in November and the next spring, on June 3, 1962, a grand dedication was held.

From this point on, the story of the park is essentially two stories: one is the account of not just a restoration but of a careful and painstaking re-creation of the early nineteenth century fortress that guarded the strategic confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. The other story is one of fundraising, land buying, and fending off of one development threat after another.

The Restoration

The story of how the old fort rose again has already been told, at least in part elsewhere.* The first steps toward restoration began as early as 1957 when an initial partial investigation of foundations was undertaken with permission of the federal government. Helen M. White discovered engineering drawings of the old fort in the

* See *Progress at Old Fort Snelling as reported by Samuel H. Morgan in Hennepin County History, Winter 1967*; *Old Fort Snelling by Loren Johnson, director of restoration for the Minnesota Historical Society*; and *M.H.S. Collections, by Christina Jacobsen, both in Minnesota History, Fall 1970*.



An encampment on Pike Island in 1895. The confluence of the Minnesota (left) and Mississippi Rivers shows clearly. Minnesota Historical Society.

National Archives in Washington while on assignment there from the Minnesota Historical Society. The society's archaeologists continued to "read designs of the long-gone buildings from the remnants of their foundations." Consulting architect Brooks Cavin gave the contractor, McGough Construction Company, invaluable advice. The legislature, beginning in 1963, came forward with a series of appropriations sufficient to enable the restoration to go forward steadily step by step over a period of some fifteen years, from 1963 to 1979. Limestone to match that originally used was found on properties owned by the City of St. Paul and Webb Publishing Company, both of which let the stone be quarried free of royalty.

The restoration began on the round tower and proceeded with rebuilding the walls on the portion of the old fort area encompassed in the initial 320-acre federal gift. Loren Johnson and all of the others involved showed great confidence in the federal government. They went forward, spending many hundreds of thousands of dollars in re-creating the half of the old fort included in the 320-acre donation, even though the government still owned the other half, which included the much remodeled commandant's house and officers' quarters still occupied by Veterans' Administration personnel. Luckily, just in

time for the restoration to continue more or less on schedule the V.A. did vacate these buildings and the government did transfer the remaining old fort area and some additional land to the state for inclusion in Fort Snelling State Park.

To re-create the feel of the fort in its early years, the society endeavored to follow, at least in part, the advice of Richard Hagen who had been in charge of the restoration of Old Salem, Illinois. Speaking at the 1966 meeting of the Fort Snelling State Park Association, Hagen pointed out that the early soldier masons put to work by Colonel Snelling would not have done the neat tuckpointing of the stone that McGough's trained masons were undertaking to do. He further reminded the Association's members that visitors to the early fort would have been met with strong odors of horse manure and unwashed bodies when they entered through the old gatehouse.

Today, you can see how the society has re-created the rough trowel tuckpointing done by General Snelling's soldiers. However, no horses have been quartered in the old fort's confines, and the student soldiers and fort personnel who entertain visitors to the fort during the summer have not been asked to forego our modern American obsession with showers and cleanliness. They do speak to their visitors as they

would have spoken in the 1820s and '30s, and the food available in the sutler's store replicates some of what would have been sold there a century and a half ago.

While the larger part of the old fort, including the walls, the barracks, the school, the hospital, the powder magazine, the guardhouse, the shops and the commissary are "new buildings," they are replicas of long-gone parts of the early fort. Even those original structures still standing had undergone so many transformations over the years that a great deal of re-building was required.

For example, the round tower, after having a conical roof put on in 1862, was gutted by fire in 1869. Then in its 1870 remodeling, done at a time when romanticism flourished, the parapet was re-built to form the medieval appearing embrasures or crenels which those of us who knew the tower before its final restoration assumed was the way it had looked from its beginning. The most controversial act of the round tower restorers was the removal of the WPA murals painted in the tower's interior when it was converted from a residence to a museum in the 1930s.

Perhaps the most intriguing series of transformations of all had occurred with the commandant's house. First it was converted into a mansard type structure with the addition of a second floor. Then in 1904, along with the officers' quarters, it underwent a Spanish reincarnation, a style deemed appropriate for military installations following the Spanish-American War of 1898.

With the building of the gatehouse restoration of the old fort seemed complete. Alas, shortly afterward tragedy struck with a midnight fire that gutted the recently restored commandant's quarters. Calls for citizen help were answered, and soon the fire became an opportunity to restore the charming home of Josiah Snelling and his family to a more accurate representation than when the house was first reopened.

Every major historic site, such as those administered by the National Park Service, is expected to have a visitors' center where tourists can be introduced to what they are going to see. Those of us with a rather modest vision geared to the scale of the 1820s fort saw the long, low limestone

building lying northwest of the old fort as the perfect place for such a visitors' center. The Historical Society, however, whose members are no dreamers of little dreams, secured funds which enabled it to build, mostly underground and just northwesterly of this old limestone building, the elaborate Fort Snelling History Center with its offices, shops, and auditorium that we



Restoration and rebuilding of old Fort Snelling underway in October, 1966. Photograph by Alan Ominsky, Minnesota Historical Society.

have today. The Association does, however, envision the day when there will be just open land planted to prairie grass through which to approach the old fort from the visitors' center. The government has finally vacated the two large nineteenth century cavalry barracks standing between the restored fort and the visitors' center. But, as seems always to be required in this age of environmental impact statements, a study is being made on the question of whether these barracks should become part of a recreation of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century fort, or whether they should be leveled to re-establish the open land approach. It is the Association's hope that before long these two out-of-scale relatively modern barracks will be gone so visitors can once more approach the old fort across the prairie.

The Park and Its Growth

Restoration of the old fort went on under

the supervision of the Historical Society, which by agreement with the Department of Natural Resources took complete operational responsibility for it. The acquisition of land for the recreational part of the park and its development was carried forward by the Department of Natural Resources. This side of the Fort Snelling story is in large part the story of the Fort Snelling State Park Association.

Without ownership of the lands below the fort, there could be no park for the DNR to develop. The extensive privately owned lands there could not be acquired without money. The legislature had in effect said, "No appropriation of state funds without citizens first raising a substantial 'match'." So a fundraising committee was organized. Tom Savage, as the Association's first president, led the organization of the campaign. The directors contributed some \$12,000 to help with fundraising costs. An executive secretary and consultant, John Hedback, was retained with an office in the Minnesota Historical Society building. Reuel D. Harmon, president of Webb Publishing Company, was persuaded by Savage and Morgan to head up solicitation in the St. Paul area, with Goodrich Lowry having the same assignment in Minneapolis.

To begin with, a full-page ad was run in the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*. Most appropriately, on November 17, 1962, the campaign was opened at the Association's annual meeting at the Fort Snelling Officers' Club with delivery of a deed of gift from the Milwaukee Road of the land in front of the Sibley House in Mendota. The same railroad had bought the land exactly a century before, in 1862, from Henry Hastings Sibley for \$5,000. This 1962 gift was entered as the \$5,000 opening gift for the campaign.

Reuel Harmon was one who believed in a short campaign. He also insisted that every cent so raised had to be dedicated to land purchases. Within a couple of months, the Association's fundraising committee had come close enough to meeting its \$250,000 goal to convince the 1963 legislature to begin with an appropriation which led to a veritable outpouring of public money. By July of 1963 the Minneapolis paper could headline, "Snelling Park Rolling in Dough." The 1963 session had

appropriated \$400,000 in all for the park, nearly \$350,000 of which was for land acquisition.

The Federal Urban Renewal Administration gave a grant of close to \$75,000. The Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission (MORRC) authorized \$200,000 of its funds for Fort Snelling land acquisition. Soon the total exceeded \$600,000.

The Association's funds were placed in a land acquisition fund for use in special situations where private help was crucial. Its first major transfer to the state occurred on March 25, 1965, when the Association delivered a \$125,000 check to further augment the funds the state needed to continue with its land acquisition. On that occasion, Governor Karl Rolvaag described this gift as "the largest donation of funds ever received for state park purposes."

It was now possible for land purchases to go forward on a large scale. In 1965 Pike Island, the only part of the park in Ramsey County, was purchased from Robert Wilkus, the owner, for \$175,000, with the assistance of a \$48,000 federal grant that was added to funds available to the state. Wilkus had for years raised asparagus, bulbs, and pigs on the island, which had been completely flooded in 1965 (and again in 1993), except for the artificial mound on which stood his partially completed home. This structure, incidentally, has served as the park interpretive center after being remodeled by Park Superintendent Harold Raak. Before joining the Department of Natural Resources, Raak had served as architect for Wilkus' projected home.

A bit later a major acquisition occurred when the state purchased the 780-acre Gun Club property on the Minnesota bottomlands for \$350,000, a purchase made possible with \$31,000 from the Fort Snelling State Park Association. A *St. Paul Dispatch* editorial headed "Fort Snelling Rescue" said: "Thanks to another bit of rescue work by the Fort Snelling State Park Association" this purchase was accomplished. The reason even relatively modest additional funds, such as those from the Association, have often been so essential in closing important purchases has been that the state is limited by the sometimes quite conservative valuations of its ap-



The home of Colonel E. C. Mason, camp commandant in 1895, on Officers' Row. The young ladies are unidentified. It was Colonel Mason who first issued a plea for the restoration of the old fort. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

praisers. Except in rare cases, the state for many years has had no condemnation authority. As a result, when the lowest price the landowner will accept is greater than the highest amount the state can pay, the only way the land can be acquired for park use is with additional financial help from an outside source, such as the Fort Snelling State Park Association.

Acquisition has continued to go forward. The most recent acquisition occurred in 1991. With temporary financial help from the Minnesota Parks and Trails Council, the Association was able to purchase and then re-sell to the state the last tract needed to extend the park's land to its southwesterly boundary at Cedar Avenue where a "hanging" pedestrian-bicycle bridge crosses over the Minnesota River. This makes possible a direct connection from the trail through the Dakota County side of the park to the Minnesota River valley state trail along the north side of the river.

The successful staving off of threats to the integrity of the park and its environs has surely been among the most significant accomplishments of the Fort Snelling State Park Association. While there were almost dozens of suggestions for other uses for all or parts of Fort Snelling State Park, including a zoo, a transportation museum or a new school or college campus, the most

serious threats came from the federal government itself which had its eye on the beautiful and historic parade ground lying just across the highway from the old fort.

In 1965 the General Services Administration proposed to build its large new office building on the parade ground. In February of that year, Park Director Hella and Association officers and directors Raymond Black, Patrick Foley, and the author, flew to Washington to enlist the help of their representatives, Don Frazer, Joe Karth, and Clark MacGregor, in the battle to stop the General Services Administration from using this site. Later, Governor Rolvaag also used his influence to halt the project. Finally, an ingenious solution was worked out. The General Services Administration agreed to erect its new building to the north, where it now stands, if, but only if, the state would give it a piece of unused Highway Department land. But the Highway Department stated that it could not legally make such a gift. So the Association bought the land from the state for \$12,000, using part of its remaining land acquisition fund, and then gave it to the GSA. Thus, this threat was removed.

The next serious threat came just a few years later when the Post Office proposed to build a huge bulk mail facility on the parade ground. This threat was finally avert-

ed in large part through the efforts of the Association. Its then president, Ray Black, persuaded Representative MacGregor to step in and stop the Post Office plans.

Finally, it appeared that threats to the parade ground were at an end when, in 1971, Pat Nixon, on behalf of the President, delivered to Attorney General Warren Spannaus a deed for 140 acres which included the historic parade ground and polo field. This transfer, which Representative William Frenzel helped secure, was part of a program to transfer unused federal land. It had been conceived by President Nixon as he walked the empty beach at San Clemente and learned that the beach was part of the land of nearby Camp Pendelton that had been declared surplus. Now at last the Association had reason to believe it would no longer have to fight one battle after another to save this prime piece of Fort Snelling Park land from development.

Although the polo field and parade ground are now owned by the state and form part of the park they are used today primarily for organized softball and other like activities. So recently, despite expressed concerns of the Association that such use could lead to activities incompatible with its state park status, the State Executive Council last year authorized a five year lease of this area to the Minneapolis Park Board.

In regard to uses of the nineteenth century area that lies outside the old walled historic fort, note should be made of two structures or groups of structures which have involved both the state and the Association in countless hours of discussion and negotiation.

One of these has been the chapel which, as earlier noted, was part of the initial 320-acre gift of 1962. At first the chapel served as office and living quarters for Clinton Johnson, the park's first manager. Now its lower room serves as the only space of any size at the fort for state park personnel meetings. Many Association meetings have been held there, also. However, the chapel sanctuary has in the past been a source of much controversy. Shortly after the chapel was put in proper shape for use, following its transfer to the state, the Reverend Clifford Ansgar Nelson, formerly pastor of Highland Park's Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, took on the position of Fort



Officers' Row from the air in 1936. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

Snelling Chapel pastor. This resulted in protests by organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, that this was a violation of federal and state constitutional prohibitions against state support of religion. This author confesses that he was one of the directors of the Fort Snelling State Park Association who always declined membership on the Association's Chapel Committee, preferring to concentrate his efforts on those environmental activities for which the Association was primarily established. Today it can happily be said the chapel is available for nonsectarian Sunday services and is used for many weddings and funerals, all under a separate Fort Snelling Chapel Association, and pursuant to mutually agreeable arrangements with the state.

The other "building problem" has involved Officers Row and the remaining barracks along Taylor Avenue. Several years ago Curt Walker entered into a lease with the state DNR for operation of the golf course on Fort Snelling State Park property. Under this lease he was to rehabilitate Officers Row into what he hoped would become a small conference center located in a park setting, yet convenient for conference attendees due to its proximity to the airport. Unfortunately, this very closeness to the airport with the constant noise of its great jets appears to have made

any appropriate use of these charming late nineteenth century buildings impractical. Perhaps some reader has the solution to this apparently insoluble problem.

The Association has also been concerned not only with threats within the park's boundaries but to some beyond as well. Sometimes, as in the case where the Association finally secured removal of an obtrusive Univac sign directly across the Mississippi from the old fort, an existing eyesore was removed. The most memorable successful battle by the Association to avert a threat to views from the fort was that which stopped developers Clayton J. Rein and Jack Winter from erecting, on a piece of land they owned in St. Paul near Crosby Lake, a multi-story luxury apartment which would have completely blocked the view downriver from the fort. The Association's long-time president, S. Axel Von Bergen, led the Association's members and supporters in persuading St. Paul's mayor, Lawrence Cohen, and the members of the City Council to appropriate funds, initially a million, to buy out the developers. There can be few cases anywhere of more successful citizen action to protect a view.

The Association was fortunate indeed to have thirteen years of dedicated leader-

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rifled the boxes of the dead. Artillery men from the disabled pieces in our rear sprang forward, and seizing guns and cartridges of the wounded, fought by our side as infantrymen. Many of the men became deaf, and did not recover their hearing for a day or two. It was a grand and terrible scene." Seventy per cent of those actually engaged in the fighting—229 men—had fallen. In an engagement that resulted in the awarding of Medals of Honor to two of its members, the First Minnesota forced Pickett's division to fall back.

General Winfield Scott Hancock, who had ordered the charge and was one of the few who had seen the First Minnesota carry out its orders, later told Senator Morton Wilkinson of Minnesota that "[t]he superb gallantry of those men saved our line from being broken. No soldiers, on any field, in this or any other country, ever displayed grander heroism."

Moe's strength as the author of this book is his willingness to let the primary source material speak for itself. He has done a marvelous job in culling out fascinating, moving, and highly descriptive passages from the diaries and letters of the members of the First Minnesota. Moe's narrative is original yet unobtrusive, and provides the perfect balance between placing these excerpts in context and allowing the soldiers' words to speak for themselves. These comments are particularly applicable with regard to the book's chapter on the Battle of Gettysburg. I would recommend this book to anyone who seeks to know more about Minnesotans who fought in the Civil War and whose portraits may have ended up on our courthouse walls.

Thomas H. Boyd is a St. Paul attorney and author of the article on Judge Walter B. Sanborn which appeared in a recent issue of Ramsey County History.

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ship from this charming Axel Von Bergen of aristocratic Swedish background. Today he can be remembered by all who descend the Von Bergen trail made possible



Headquarters building, Fort Snelling, 1900. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

at the fort by a generous donation in his memory.

During all these years of Association efforts in the areas of acquisition and protection, the Minnesota Division of Parks, under the leadership of Judge Hella and the direct supervision of a succession of park managers, beginning with Clinton Johnson and continuing with Harold Raak and others, has succeeded in creating a beautiful and enjoyable park out of what was literally and in substantial part a dump back in 1962.

Finally, it can fairly be said that neither the unique early nineteenth century fortress we see today, nor the continuum of parks along the Mississippi between the downtowns of our two cities and extending for miles up the Minnesota River and all coming together in Fort Snelling State Park, would have come to pass without the strong, continuing, and cooperative dedication and effort of *individuals* in both the public and private sectors. The dreams of those with vision, such as Wirth, Nichols, Hella and Fridley, were transformed into reality by the support of a series of governors, including Orville Freeman, Elmer L. Andersen, and Karl Rolvaag, by congressmen such as Humphrey, MacGregor, and Frenzel, and above all by citizens such as Savage, Harmon, Black and Von Bergen who carried on the work of preaching, lobbying, fundraising, and prodding, and who "stayed the course."

While an article on history as this is must deal primarily with the past rather than the present or the future, it may not be amiss to report that the Fort Snelling State

Park Association, after a period of years when its members felt they could say "mission accomplished," is undergoing rejuvenation as it finds new challenges for its members to meet. One of these is to secure the late Tom Savage's dream of a new park visitors' center to be located below the fort and not far from the old steamboat landing. It would replace the relatively inaccessible and wholly inadequate temporary interpretive center created out of the uncompleted Wilkus house on Pike Island. The Association's members are today bending their efforts to secure legislative funding for this very necessary feature for the park, which is to be named in honor of the Association's founding president.

Another dream of at least some members of the Association is for it to be not just a Fort Snelling Park Association but to become a Fort Snelling Historic District Association, which would include the old village of Mendota. Such a project could make the historic Sibley House, along with its adjoining Faribault House, Dupuis House and St. Peter's Church, all an integral part of the Fort Snelling Park and Historic District, with perhaps a restored ferry to connect the fort and Mendota directly, as was the case back in the days before the Mendota bridge was built.

Samuel H. Morgan, a retired St. Paul attorney, was one of the prime movers in the establishment of Fort Snelling State Park. He is a past president of the Fort Snelling State Park Association and of the Minnesota Parks Foundation.

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Church news must reach us not later than Saturday; letters to
the editor, social news and classified ads by 5 o'clock Monday.

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As new owners of "The Highland Villager," we wish to take this opportunity to thank the advertisers for their patience and the cooperation accorded us during the transition of ownership. It is our sincere desire, with your cooperation, to make "The Highland Villager" outstanding among papers of its kind.

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The masthead from the second issue of the Highland Villager, dated March 12, 1953. For the history of St. Paul's colorful neighborhood newspapers, see the article beginning on page 13.

R.C.H.S.
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