

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Geological Forces
That Shaped
St. Paul

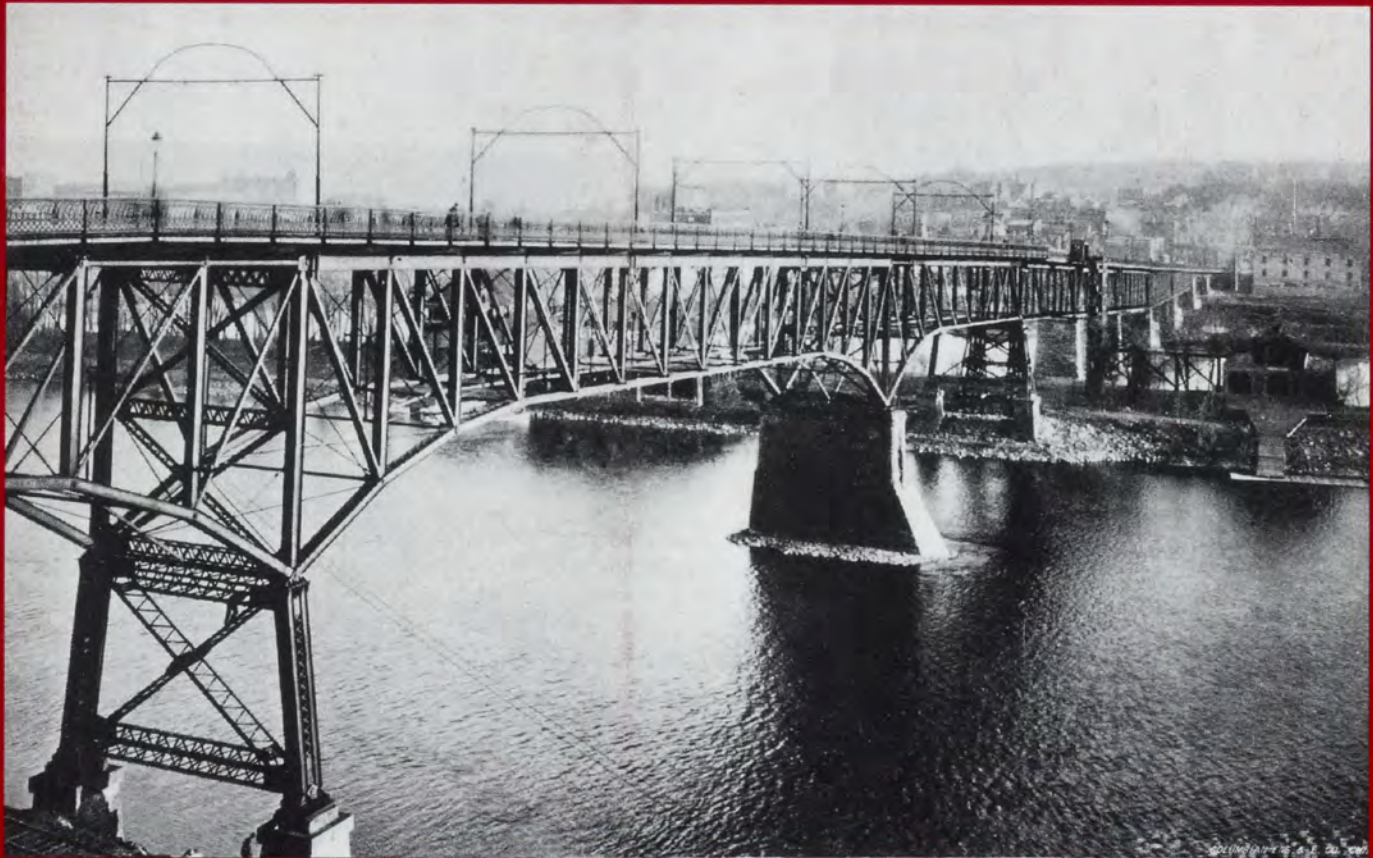
Page 13

Summer, 1997

Volume 32, Number 2

Last of Its Kind in Minnesota
The 1888–89 Wabasha Street Bridge

Page 4



The Wabasha Street Bridge, constructed between 1888 and 1889. Minnesota Historical Society photo. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Priscilla Farnham
Editor
Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John M. Lindley
Chair

Laurie Zenner
President

Howard M. Guthmann
First Vice President

Evangeline Schroeder
Second Vice President

Charles H. Williams, Jr.
Secretary

Robert F. Garland
Treasurer

Arthur H. Baumeister, Jr., Alexandra Bjorklund, W. Andrew Boss, Mark Eisenschenk, Joanne A. Englund, John M. Harens, Marshall R. Hatfield, Judith Frost Lewis, George A. Mairs, Margaret M. Marrinan, J. S. Micallef, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Thomond O'Brien, Bob Olsen, Marvin J. Pertzik, Fred Perez, James A. Russell, Vicenta D. Scarlett, Richard A. Wilhoit, Anne Cowie Wilson.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Pat Hart, Laurie M. Murphy, Vicenta Scarlett.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, Otis Godfrey, Jr., Ronald Hachey, Robert S. Hess, Fred T. Lanners, Jr., D. W. "Don" Larson, George Latimer, Frank Marzitelli, Joseph S. Micallef, Robert Mirick, Samuel Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome Plunkett, James Reagan, Solly Robins, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Susan Haigh, chairman
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Dino Guerin
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt
Commissioner Janice Rettman
Commissioner Jan Wiessner

Terry Schutten, manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102 (612-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1997, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 32, Number 2

Summer, 1997

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 Last of Its Kind in Minnesota
The Old Wabasha Street Bridge and How It
Linked East to West
Demian J. Hess
- 13 Millions of Years in the Making
The Geological Forces That Shaped St. Paul.
Edmund C. Bray
- 16 No Grass Beneath Her Feet:
Harriet Bishop and Her Life in Minnesota
Norma Sommerdorf
- 22 Growing Up in St. Paul
West Seventh Street: Czechs, Slovaks, Bohemians
And Kolache Dough Rising in the Warm Attic
Emily Panushka Erickson
- 27 Books

Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

Ramsey County History returns to the area's beginnings in this summer issue. In his article on the Wabasha Street Bridge, author Demian J. Hess not only provides a detailed history of this well-known, now-vanished landmark, but also establishes its centrality to the growth of the city of St. Paul in the second half of the nineteenth century. A companion article by Edmund C. Bray tells the geological story of the mighty natural forces that created the Mississippi river, which the Wabasha Street Bridge eventually would span.

Returning to the era before the bridge was built, Norma Sommerdorf chronicles the arrival of Harriet Bishop in St. Paul a century-and-a-half ago and describes Bishop's many contributions to the educational, moral and religious development of St. Paul's young people over a thirty-six year period. Finally, Emily Panushka Erickson recalls her years of growing up in St. Paul's West Seventh Street neighborhood. Although this issue of our magazine spans in time the Ice Ages to the present-day replacement of the Wabasha Street Bridge, its focus is squarely on how St. Paul and Ramsey County have grown and changed over time, whether measured in geological ages or human years.

John M. Lindley, chair, Editorial Board

Janet Erickson Remembers The Society in Her Will



Janet L. Erickson

Janet L. Erickson was born in St. Paul, went to school there and retired there, but a love of travel, an abiding interest in history and genealogy, and a fascination with exotic places and people, led her to live many of her years in Africa, East Asia, and India.

Born in 1920 into a family with Swedish and Norwegian ancestry, she graduated from the University of Minnesota's School of Nursing in 1941 on the brink of the United States' entry into World War II. For the next four years, she served with the army's 26th General Hospital through the North African campaigns, the landing at Anzio, and the fighting in Italy. She ended the war as a first lieutenant, then returned to the University of Minnesota to earn a master's degree in nursing in 1947. During the next few years, she taught at Syracuse University and the University of California at San Francisco, but far places beckoned.

In the mid-1960s, she joined the Agency for International Development and served in Sierra Leone for three years before joining the World Health Organization and a post first in Ahmedabad, India, and next in Bangkok, Thailand. In 1974, she was ordered to Delhi to fill a vacant Regional Nursing Advisor position, an assignment that took her back to Thailand, but also to Burma, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. In her many letters to family and friends, she vividly described some of her experiences:

"...I saw the mountains which ring

Books, Etc.

The Far Islands and Other Cold Places—Travel Essays of A Victorian Lady

Elizabeth Taylor
Introduction by James Taylor Dunn
St. Paul: Pogo Press, 1997

Reviewed by Virginia Brainard Kunz

Elizabeth Taylor (1856–1932) was one of a group of well-known women known as “Victorian Lady Travellers” and she wrote widely of the earth’s rugged cold places—Alaska, Canada, Iceland, Scotland, Switzerland, Norway, and especially the Faroe Islands of Denmark where she lived for nearly ten years. Now thirty-nine of her articles, published originally in such periodicals as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Leslie’s Popular Monthly*, and *Popular Science Monthly*, have been edited by her great grandnephew, St. Paul writer and historian James Taylor Dunn, and gathered here into anthology form.

In this magical book, Elizabeth Taylor describes travels by birchbark canoe, steamboat, Red River ox cart, horseback, and cabriolet. She writes of her 1892 trip to the mouth of Canada’s Mackenzie river on the Hudson Bay Company’s early supply boats; of her journey through northern Norway’s wild Hardanger Vidda; and of course of her decade-long stay in Denmark’s Faroe Islands. These last accounts are particularly important since they are among the earliest written descriptions of that region in the English language. Her essays cover such diverse subjects as whale hunting, folklore, cooking, marriage, hunting, fishing, and she presents vivid descriptions of the beautifully bleak scenery of the northern Atlantic region.



Elizabeth Taylor and her older sister Harriet (circa 1860). Photograph by Whitney’s Gallery. Minnesota Historical Society, from the Dunn Family Papers in the Society’s collections.

Elizabeth Taylor was a maverick, her great grandnephew writes in his introduction to the book. Known as Lizzie, she was born in Columbus, Ohio, but moved that same year with her family to St. Paul where her father, James Wickes Taylor opened a law office and was a lobbyist for various railroad interests. In 1870 he was appointed American consul to Winnipeg and served there until his death in 1893.

His daughter, Dunn writes, “enjoyed interests few other young ladies of her background would then have even considered. She also had the advantage of an articulate and fascinating father who, finding himself blessed with a very unusual daughter, doubtless encouraged home reading and continuing self education—what she later called “good home influences.”

Her love for the challenges of the

northland brought a widespread recognition that endures today. She was listed by the United States government in 1908 as among the recognized explorers of the American arctic region. She wrote extensively about fishing and was an accomplished fisherwoman. A self-taught botanist and zoologist, she described the flora, fauna, and wildlife of the places she visited. Two plants which she discovered carry her name. She collected plant and fish specimens for the American Museum of Natural History, Cornell University, Catholic University of Washington, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Pitt River Museum at Oxford University.

However, her greatest interest was in writing about the culture, family life, and folklore of the places she visited. Minnesota readers, and specifically those of Norwegian ancestry, should be particularly interested in her account of her journey through the Hardanger Vidda, a high, barren plateau. “It was interesting to see how independent these isolated farms are of the outside world,” she wrote. “The furniture, dishes, spoons, churns and other articles of domestic use are made on the farm which provides also wool for the home-spun garments, fuel, and fodder for the live stock. The lakes which abound in the valley furnish fish, and the sale of cattle, butter, or timber enables them to procure the few necessary articles of foreign production, such as coffee, sugar, cotton cloth, and iron ware.

This is a book for those who are interested in women’s history, in explorers, in adventurers, and in out-of-the-way places—how those places once appeared and how their people lived before their earlier way of life was obliterated.



Another view of the 1888-89 Wabasha street bridge. Minnesota Historical Society photo. See article starting on page 4.

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

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989