

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Geological Forces
That Shaped
St. Paul

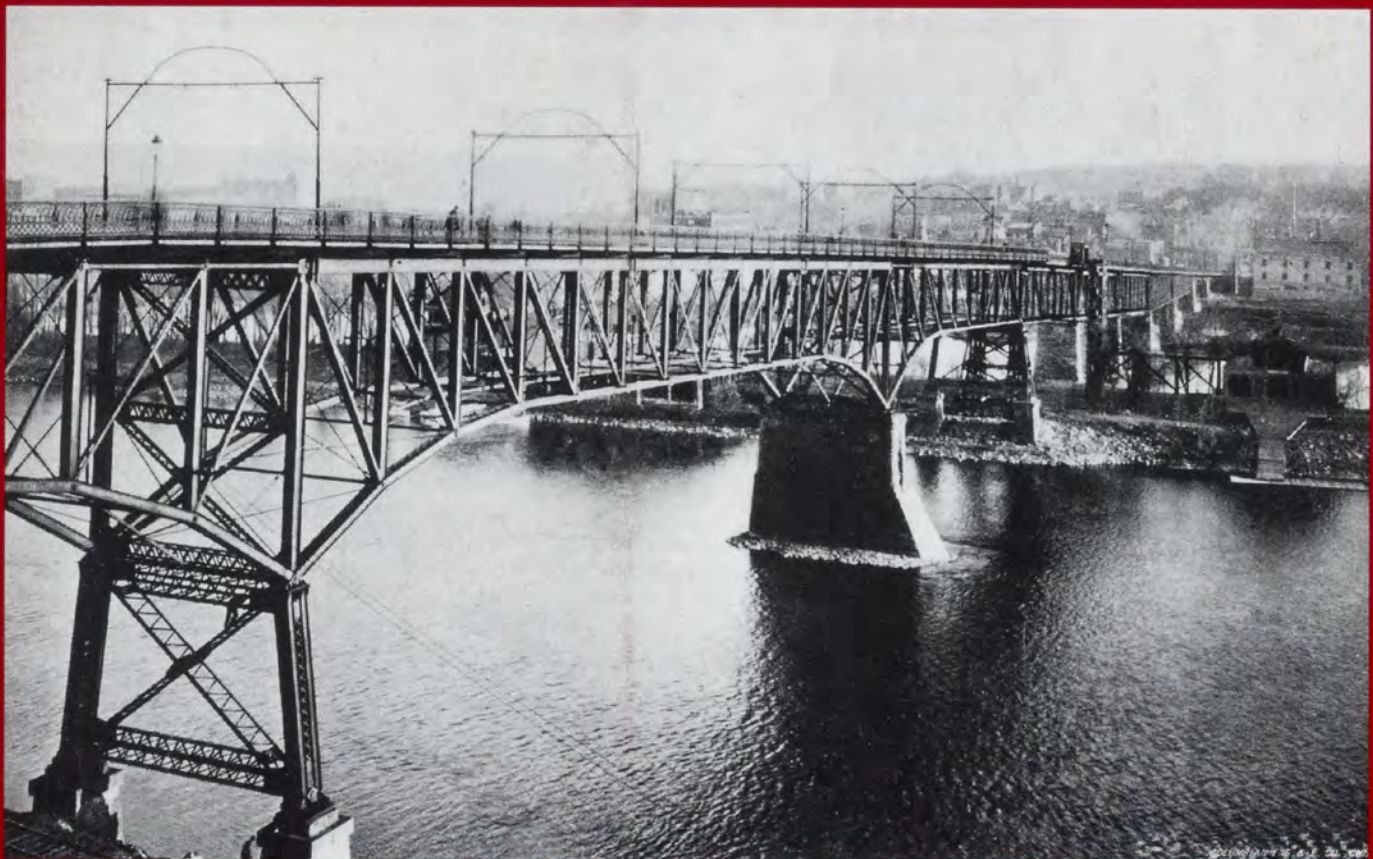
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Summer, 1997

Volume 32, Number 2

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

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

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 32, Number 2

Summer, 1997

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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

Growing Up in St. Paul

West Seventh Street: Czechs, Slovaks, Bohemians, And Kolache Dough Rising in the Warm Attic

Emily Panushka Erickson

My earliest memories of growing up in St. Paul center around the West Seventh Street neighborhood where I was born, as Emma Marie Panushka, on January 27, 1900.

While I was christened Emma, I've always preferred to be called Emily, so that name has clung to me throughout my life.

In 1900, we were living in a duplex at 686 Armstrong Street, a neighborhood where many other families of Czech, Slovak and Bohemian ancestry also lived. Our family was close-knit. My mother Kristina's parents, Peter and Mary Novak, lived upstairs. My father Charles Panushka was born in Kladrubce, Bohemia, in 1865. Both the Panushkas and the Novaks lived in Western Bohemia for many centuries, but in the 1880s they emigrated to America, settling first in New York. By 1893, my parents had moved to St. Paul (my father had heard about the wonderful hunting and fishing in Minnesota) and father found employment at his trade.

We lived in our community, we played there in our yards, we went to nearby schools and churches, our mothers shopped there, our fathers usually worked nearby. We were a large family of nine: Charles, Joseph, George, John, Elmer, Edward, Angela, Florence, and I. Charlie and Joe were born in New York City, the rest of us in St. Paul.

I remember many playmates during the years I was growing up on Armstrong and Jefferson Avenues. One of them was Leona Metzker, who lived next door on Armstrong. Her father Joseph worked as a driver for the Schmitz Brewery nearby. He had a huge belly and, being so young, I believed he had swallowed a watermelon seed and it had grown and grown. At least that's what my older brothers told me. Helen Wood, another good friend, also lived on Armstrong. Across



The house at 709 Jefferson, and the Panushka family: Left to right, top row: Charles, Joe, George and John; bottom row: Edward, their father Charles, Elmer, their mother Kristina, Angela, and Emily (Emma). Florence was not yet born. Photographs with this article are from the author's family.

from Helen lived Johnnie Wokika. Someone took a picture of the two of us and I still have it. Johnnie had on a short-panted tan plaid suit and I wore a dark red crocheted bonnet and a short jacket with two large collars over a print dress. My mother used to show this photo and chuckle because it showed holes in the knees of our clothes from hard play. Another playmate, Gertrude Cikanek, lived

across the street at 691 Armstrong. Her father was a machinist at the nearby Omaha Railway shops.

I remember the big summer kitchen in our house on Armstrong. It had a storage closet where, among other things, my favorite hat, a white beaver, once was stored for the summer, but one fall we found that a nest of mice had made their home in it. When I was about seven or

eight years old, I came down with a light case of small pox. I was bundled into a horse-and-buggy and taken to a small hospital on the west side of North Dale Street. While I was there, one of the patients called me to a window, pointed out to the yard, and said, "That's where they bury the dead ones." Not a pleasant thought for one so young. Some years later, I caught scarlet fever and was taken to Ancker Hospital on Jefferson Avenue. My sister Angela also had an encounter there when she somehow got a crochet hook caught in her cheek.

I often attended the Catholic church with my friends. One day, as we were leaving the church, one of the nuns took my gloved hand, placed it in the holy water, and made the sign of the cross on my chest. I never forgot that. My first school was the Adams school, a large, handsome red brick building, now gone, on View Street at Armstrong. I clearly remember two of the teachers on the staff—the Dougherty sisters. Theresa was the principal and Mary taught in the lower grades. It was about this time that I yearned for "sausage curls" because one of my pretty schoolmates had them.

When I was seven or eight years old, we moved to 709 Jefferson Street. It was a huge house—nine rooms in all, with five bedrooms upstairs and two staircases—front and back. There was just one bathroom for the entire family—a large-sized room with an oversize bathtub, since Charlie and father were both over six feet tall. Charlie and Joe shared the rear bedroom; George and John had one of the two middle rooms, and we three daughters had the other room. The two front bedrooms belonged to Eddie and Elmer, who were twins, and our parents were next to them. Downstairs were two living rooms, one for guests and the other for family—like a family room today. There was a large dining room with an adjoining clothes closet, a large kitchen with a pantry and a small porch where we kept our icebox. That kitchen, with its big table, was the focal point of family life; we used to spend our leisure time there. We would hang our coats on the chairs surrounding the dinner table, much to mother's annoyance since there was a clothes closet just a few feet away.

We often had gingerbread when we came home from school. It was so good that a friend of mine, Rose Demel, once asked me to trade an egg for a piece of mother's gingerbread. Mother's kolaches also were very good. She set up her dough in the attic on Friday nights because it was warm up there. On Saturday mornings she would take the dough down and make about four pans of wonderful



Emily, Johnnie Wokika, and the holes in their knees.

kolaches with prune, poppy seed, and fruit fillings. It was usually my job to pit the prunes. The kolaches were always gone after Sunday breakfast.

After we moved to 709 Jefferson, I attended the old Cushman K. Davis school three blocks from our house. It was a small red brick building and it, too, has been demolished. Once when I was in second grade, my English teacher asked if any of us could tell her the past tense of "bring." I raised my hand with confidence and replied, "I know, I know . . . It's brang." No wonder I still remember that. On Saturdays we attended Czech school, walking a mile to Western Avenue near West Seventh Street. Our teacher, Mr. Matlach, was a middle-aged lawyer and a sour-puss. His office was in my father's tailor shop and occasionally he "snitched" on us when we became too

wild . . . the boys liked to chase us around the block at recess. I also attended Sunday school at a Czech Congregational Church on a street north of the present-day McDonald's restaurant. The building is still there but is now a private home. The Reverend Trcka was the minister. Two of his children, Benjamin and Mildred, also attended the Cushman K. Davis school and were friends of mine. Trcka later officiated at my wedding.

After we moved to 709 Jefferson my grandparents, Peter and Mary Novak, moved to a small apartment over Skarda's grocery store on West Seventh. My grandfather had asked my father for a "raise," since he worked for him in his tailoring business. For some reason, my father, who did not like Peter Novak, agreed to the raise, but said he would raise his rent. About this time, Grandfather Novak opened a repair shop in the middle of the same block, close to Skarda's. Every Sunday my brother John and I got a nickel to spend at the candy shop nearby on West Seventh. John and I always spent part of Sunday afternoon at our grandparents' listening to stories grandpa told us, mostly made up on the spot. In my mind, I can still see the little stool I sat on, and the candy store where they always gave us "six picks for a nickel."

Mr. Machovec, our regular grocer, would come every morning to take mother's order and return in the afternoon with the traditional folding wooden box filled with our groceries. I remember accompanying mother to the store when she paid her bill—\$28 but I don't remember if that was for a week or longer. One day when she walked to Machovec's store our dog, Dick, followed her and when she entered by the side door Dick sat outside waiting. In the meantime, Mother left by the front door to catch a streetcar downtown. Returning several hours later, she found Dick still waiting for her at the side door. Machovec's store is still open for business in that same building after all these years.

We bought milk from a neighbor, Mrs. Tucher, who had a cow in her barn on Arbor Street. She sold tickets for twelve quarts of milk for a dollar. Of course, the milk was not pasteurized in



The 1913 Studebaker: Emily, left, and George Panushka at the wheel.

those days. Her daughter later developed tuberculosis and died, as did my playmate, Margaret Brinkman. Margaret and her sister, Marie, were our next-door neighbors and their family lived with the John Bluels, who had a teenage son we called Booby. If I remember correctly, my brother George and Marie Brinkman were “sweet” on each other.

I remember the wash woman we employed. For a rather large family such as ours, she charged \$1.25 to do all the wash. Of course, that was good money in those days. Some of my friends tell me that they paid their wash women twenty-five cents an hour. Sometime later, my brother George got my father to buy a washing machine, and shortly after that we got our first car, a 1913 open Studebaker.

At the turn-of-the-century, when my father was working as head cutter for Schaub Brothers, then the leading tailoring establishment in St. Paul, he made a name for himself by fashioning an automobile coat. One day Phillip J. Schaub asked my father to fashion a coat that would be “the finest” and capable of taking first prize at the 1900 World’s Exposition in Paris. For a tailor in the “sticks” to enter into competition with the leading tailors of London, Paris, New York and Berlin seemed futile, but he did it and his coat was awarded first prize over garments entered by tailors all over the world. That it was an automobile coat

seemed funny because in those days automobiles were just coming into use and automobile coats were almost unheard of. Perhaps its novelty was one of the reasons it won. Father said it was made of greenish woolen gabardine and reached down almost to the ankles. Sometime around 1905, after having worked several years for Schaub, my father organized Panushka & Son at 370 Robert Street, and headed the company for twenty-five years.

In those long ago times, we had a neighborhood “mall” of sorts on West Seventh Street east of Randolph. Located there were Machovec’s groceries (at 997

Seventh Street), Ferber’s Dry Goods (at 995), Koch’s shoe store (at 989), the candy store, Rothmeyer’s saloon (at 949), and Jelinek’s pharmacy and ice cream parlor (961). Mr. Jelinek was one of my father’s best friends—an aristocratic-looking man with a deep voice to match his looks. He also represented the neighborhood in the state legislature. His pharmacy, established in 1898, continued until the 1950s. Across West Seventh Street was Graff & Cumming’s clothing store; next to it Rybak’s meat market (943); the Garden Theatre (927) and a barber shop. Shleck Brothers hardware store was located at 991.

On the other side of Machovec’s store was Skarda’s groceries (1015), my grandfather’s shop (1021) and McAfee & Walter’s butcher shop (1035). The Masonic Hall was upstairs. On the corner was Bauer’s hardware store at 1097. Back of Jelinek’s was the St. Francis De Sales Catholic Church, since torn down. Across the street from Machovec’s and at the foot of Randolph Street was Hovorka’s drug store at 1026. The Bohemians dealt in a variety of trades but the most prevalent were shoe-making, cigar-making, tailoring, butchering, and selling groceries. Even today on West Seventh (now Fort Road) we find Pilney’s Food Market at number 1032 and opposite Pilney’s, at 997 West Seventh, Machovec’s Food Market. Frank Wosika opened a saloon at 974 in 1887; his descendants car-



The Northern Pacific Railroad office, with Emily Panushka, second from right, at her table.

ried on the trade more recently at 731 Randolph.

One day father took me to the Garden Theatre. Sometime later the theater began to hold "country store" nights on Friday evenings. Once I won a broom, but I was so embarrassed that I waited until I could be the last one to exit.

My parents were members of the Czecho Slovak Protective Society (C.S.P.S.) which met at the C.S.P.S. hall, 383 Michigan and West Seventh. Built in 1887, it still stands, an old and weather-stained, man-made pile of red bricks at the triangle of Western and West Seventh Streets. It was the foremost Bohemian social center in the state. There the voices of composer Anton Dvorak and Thomas Mazaryk, the father of Czech democracy, once were heard. On October 24, 1959, my father was honored there in his ninety-fourth year at a celebration for the senior members of the Czech community. What nostalgia he must have felt.

We also belonged to the Sokol Society, where they had gymnastics, folk dancing and ballroom dancing. Once as we were dancing, Joe Simecek dropped his gum in my hair and caused both of us some embarrassment until he extricated it. What good times we had there, and we could walk to the hall from home. I still have a photo of Charlie and Joe with a group of gymnasts all lined up with their chests bare and wearing navy tights. They really looked dashing. On weekends, we sometimes traveled to New Prague, Montgomery, or Hopkins where we put on gymnastics and folk dancing shows.

My best friends at that time were Elsie Runge, Gertrude Simecek, and Stephanie Olexa. Stephanie's family had come from what is now the Czech Republic. She had two brothers, Jaroslav and Ladislav. We called them Jerry and Laddy. I remember that their mother often would take a cookie or doughnut home for "papa" after a party. Other good friends were Joe Simecek, Joe Schiller and Charlie Jelinek. The Simeceks once gave a birthday party for my mother where everyone had tags that said "50." Mother didn't like that at all. She said she was only forty-nine. Perhaps I got my sensitivity about age from her.



Alvin and Emily Panushka Erickson on their wedding day in 1921. Erickson's grandfather was one of the last toll-keepers on the first Wabasha Street Bridge.

Mother had a group of close friends who lived nearby: Mrs. Runge, Mrs. Wanshura, Mrs. Kosik, Mrs. Cummings (of Graff & Cummings Dry Goods), Mrs. Felger and Mrs. Hampl. Most of them were of Czech descent. Mrs. Hampl's granddaughter is Patricia Hampl, a well-known author who has written about her Czech ancestry and mentions her grandmother in her books. My father was well-known and respected in the local community and also had many friends, such as the druggist J.P. Jelinek and Dr. McCord, who lived close by. Many of his friends shared his passion for hunting and fishing. In some ways our family was old-fashioned in that it was quite Old World European. Father was the boss, never helped around the home, and left mother with the responsibility of running the household. She ruled the kitchen, but not much else.

Around 1917-1918, my brother

George was attending the University of Minnesota—the only one in our family to do so—and majoring in chemistry. When America entered World War I, he and a friend, Paul Moe, decided to join up for the great adventure. Wrong decision! A member of "B" Company, 30th Engineers (Chemical Corps), he was killed by German shell fire near Chateau Thierry on July 30, 1918. Another friend, Charles Zalesky, a baker on Bay Street, enlisted the same week as George in November, 1917, and was killed the same week in France during a gas attack. George was an outstanding person who could do so many things. He liked to perform tricks or magic for us. My brother Charlie also served in World War I. He was sent to France, but the war ended and he came home safely, along with my brother John, who also had joined up.

Joe was the first of us to marry—in June 1916. He was a talented singer, a tenor who sang with the Municipal Chorus. On at least one occasion he sang with a baritone, Rudolph Ogren, on a program broadcast from the Commonwealth Electric radio station. A newspaper reported that, after listening to the concert, some boaters on a nearby lake, spontaneously stood up and applauded. I accompanied Joe many times after my father bought a piano. I had begun lessons before I started high school.

I remember some of my brothers' pranks. There still were outhouses in St. Paul and one Halloween Eddie and some other neighborhood kids, swiped an outhouse and placed it on the railroad tracks to see what would happen. The engineer of the next passing train had to stop the train, and this story was still being retold fifty years later at family get-togethers.

Sometimes it was hard growing up in a large family, especially when I wanted some solitude. When I was in high school, Emmy Garrett, captain of our football team, asked me for a date. He had broken his leg playing football so he had to take the West Seventh Street streetcar, then hobble to our door. Naturally we decided to stay home for the evening. As we sat in the parlor, Eddie and some of the other younger children began to peek into the room, making faces and generally acting like little

fools. I locked the doors and pulled down the shades in an attempt to gain some privacy, but soon my father came along and demanded, "Young lady, open those doors and shades immediately."

I'll never forget a date on an excursion boat from the Jackson Street landing to Hastings. When we returned at the end of the evening another boy, Glen Fadden, who always made a pest of himself, followed our streetcar in his family's car just to annoy me. About the same time, I had a small party at my house for some friends and my mother baked a cake especially for the party. When we went to fetch the cake, which had been left on the porch to cool, we were mystified to see that it was gone. A search could not locate it and it was only much later that I found out that Glen Fadden had stolen it.

I attended Central High School on Lexington Avenue, walking about two miles to school every day. Before graduating, I took a job as a clerk with the Northern Pacific Railway. My brother Charlie, the assistant car accountant, got me the job in his department, and when I got a substantial raise I bought a fur coat for the huge sum of \$125. As I recall, it was a marmot skin coat. I worked in a large room with several departments,

some of us working at big tables, three to a table. Our job was to locate and trace all of the company's freight cars among the many files in the room. Eventually, when Charlie's boss, Bernie Ryan, retired, Charlie became the head of the department and remained there for several decades. I never graduated from high school, having left a few months early to take that job. That was common in those days. However, I always have been a reader and have had a strong interest in music, art, and travel.

Not long after this, I met Alvin Martin Erickson at a picnic at Spring Park near Minneapolis. It was sponsored by the Northern Pacific and Great Northern Railways and we got there by train. We became engaged in February, 1920. Al worked in the office of the Omaha Railroad shops near West Seventh and Randolph. Later he worked as a bookkeeper for Bruber, Rude, and Johnson in the livestock business in South St. Paul; for the Northern Pacific Railway as a stenographer and office worker; and by 1926, for Noyes Brothers & Cutler, wholesalers of "everything for the physician, pharmacist and soda fountain," with offices on Sibley and Sixth Street in Lowertown. In July, 1920, I developed typhoid fever and was

in bed for three months. Al had my father hire a full-time nurse and I still have her hourly record of my temperature, pulse, food intake, and medicine during that critical struggle for life. This was a typhoid fever epidemic and many died.

Al and I were married on March 12, 1921, in a service held at home with Reverend Trcka officiating. I wore a gown of white taffeta with lace over-drapes and carried a bouquet of bride's roses and lilies-of-the-valley. Our wedding dinner included wiener schnitzel, my father's favorite. After a honeymoon in Chicago via Northern Pacific Railway we lived with Al's parents for three months at 405 Fuller Street, then bought a duplex with his parents at 1477 Iglehart, where we settled in on the upper floor.

As you can see, my thoughts have been "reverting to gone-by ages" and to my marriage, which lasted until Al's death in 1976. But I can never forget my wonderful childhood, growing up in St. Paul.

At the age of ninety-seven, Emily Erickson still lives in St. Paul. This reminiscence was adapted by her son, Warren C. Erickson, from a longer memoir she wrote for her children.



The Panushka family home at 686 Armstrong. Grandmother Mary Novak and Grandfather Peter Novak are on the left, with the Panuska boys on the porch.



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

R.C.H.S.
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