

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

*'Say It Ain't So, Charlie:'  
Comiskey's Labor Dispute and  
the Opening of Lexington Park*

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**Summer, 2004**

Volume 39, Number 2

*From Farm to Florence: The Gifted Keating  
Sisters and the Mystery of Their Lost Paintings*



*Madonna of the Rosebower (Stephan Lochner, c. 1435; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum). A beautiful example of the elegant International Courtly Style of the late Middle Ages, this 3' by 5' copy was painted by Sr. Anysia in 1939 as a gift for her niece, Margaret H. Marrinan. See article beginning on page 4.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 39, Number 2

Summer, 2004

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Judge Margaret H. Marrinan has long had more than just the casual interest of a family member in the artistry of her two aunts, Sr. Anysia and Sr. Sophia Keating, who belonged to the Congregation of St. Joseph of Carondelet in St. Paul and were sent by their Order to Italy from 1908 to 1910 to study art and copy Old Masters' paintings. The many reproductions of famous religious and secular paintings that the Sisters made during their three-year journey, as well as those they made after their return to the College of St. Catherine, have been a source of great pride to Judge Marrinan and her family, but have also raised many questions concerning what became of these paintings beginning in the 1950s.

Judge Marrinan unravels this tale as best she can, but a full account remains untold. So that our readers will better appreciate the artistry of Sr. Anysia and Sr. Sophia, the Society has reproduced eight of their paintings in full color on the front and back covers and in selected pages of this issue. The Society also salutes the College of St. Catherine, which on August 31 begins a nearly year-long celebration of its 100th birthday, by publishing these paintings and acknowledging the talent, hard work, and faithful dedication of two of the many women religious who have served so well to educate so many at the College over the past century.

*John Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*

## Byron R. Mortensen Remembers The Society in His Will



Byron R. Mortensen  
1949-2003

Byron R. Mortensen (1949-2003) was born in St. Paul and spent the early years of his life at 865 Sherwood Avenue, near Arcade Street. His father, Gordon Mortensen was an East Sider, but his mother, Loretta, was from the West Side. In 1961 the Mortensen family moved to White Bear Lake, where Byron, his brothers, Gordon Jr. and Neil, and his sister, Arvilla, all grew up.

Byron graduated from White Bear Lake High School. One of his favorite school activities was the Photography Club, a hobby that Byron continued as an adult. After high school, Byron attended Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn., studying history and business. He completed his business education at Lakewood Community College.

Using his business training well, Byron was employed by various Twin Cities businesses in the food service industry. He became very skilled at analyzing food preparation and handling equipment and arranging for its installation at commercial sites. His employer for about the last six years of his life was Commercial Kitchen Services in St. Paul.

Byron's father had been a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army and had served in

# Books

## *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party.*

Jennifer A. Delton.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

234 pages ISBN 0-8166-3922-1.

*Reviewed by Mary Lethert Wingerd*

Minnesotans might find it hard to imagine that our state, today known for its liberal Democratic tradition, was once so dominated by the Republican Party that it was considered a "one-party" state. When Republican ascendancy was eventually challenged in the 1920s, it came from the newly formed Farmer-Labor Party, not the Democrats. In fact, outside St. Paul, where Irish politicians held sway, the Democratic Party was a weak player in state politics until after World War II. Hubert Humphrey, elected in 1948, was the first Democrat ever sent to the Senate from Minnesota.

Humphrey broke ground in another way as well: When he delivered his historic speech at the 1948 Democratic Convention that urged the party to "get out of the shadow of states' rights to walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights," he signaled a new direction for the party—a turn away from complicity with the segregationist South and toward the pluralistic liberalism that characterizes it today. The speech also catapulted Humphrey, then mayor of Minneapolis (in a state notable for its lack of racial diversity), into national prominence as a champion of civil rights.

Why did civil rights become such a compelling issue in Minnesota where

less than one percent of the population was African-American? In this slim and elegantly argued volume, Jennifer Delton asserts that the politics of civil rights in Minnesota had little or nothing to do with the voting power of African-Americans. Rather, as a human rights issue, it acted as a point of agreement that could bring otherwise divided Democrats and Farmer-Laborites together. It facilitated the two parties' merger into the DFL. More importantly, led by Humphrey, civil rights played a key role in shifting the national Democratic Party, as well as the DFL, to an orientation on issues and away from reliance on ethnic, religious, and sectional loyalties.

According to Delton, this momentous political change was driven in large part by a group of political science graduates from the University of Minnesota (most notably Humphrey, Orville Freeman, and Arthur Naftalin). They advocated a politics driven by competition among various interest groups, believing the will of the people would be best represented by the relative influence of the groups. Since every voter had multiple interests (such as workers' rights, education, human rights), the role of the party was to find issues that avoided conflict among those whose interests overlapped. In other words, they sought not to unite voters in a common cause, but to create a viable political coalition through compromise and flexibility.

Civil rights in Minnesota were the point of convergence on which all factions could agree. In the wake of World War II, human rights was an issue on everyone's mind, deemed central to the American way of life. And human rights in this era were defined primarily as economic rights, the right to fair employment and equal wages. Few opposed such parity for it had pragmatic

as well as moral power: If African-Americans had access to good jobs, it would increase their purchasing power and add to the health of the economy; if they were paid on the same scale as white workers, it would eliminate an exploitable labor pool that created downward pressure on wages. And in Minnesota, the black population was too small to create significant job competition or raise other fears. As for African-Americans themselves, once attracted away from historical loyalty to the Republican party, activism as an interest group provided them a place at the political table. Thus, civil rights became the glue that held the Democratic Party together.

Delton writes that this "new" Democratic Party, freed from the taint of patronage, sectionalism, and machine domination, was less ideologically bound than the Farmer-Laborites, who were limited by the politics of class. Because it acted as a broker among multiple interests, the Democratic Party had the capacity to become a powerful national force in a way that was beyond the FLP or the old Democrats.

The author slants this transformation in a generally positive light; however, she acknowledges that Humphrey and his cohorts were quite ruthless in the tactics they used to obliterate what remained of the Farmer-Labor left, co-opting a moderate version of its issues while red-baiting its leaders out of the DFL. She also notes that the party that emerged from this struggle was a political coalition, not a movement. Interest group negotiations rather than citizen activism became the order of the day, a far cry from the heyday of the Farmer-Labor Party, which relied on the participation of rank-and-file citizens.

Farmer-Laborism, whatever its flaws,

was a model of participatory politics, a virtue that Delton ignores as she charts its demise. She also gives little attention to the important role women played in the FLP or to the fact that party leftists constituted the vanguard of civil rights activism. Instead, she focuses almost entirely on the undeniable factionalism that internally wracked the FLP. This is a disservice to what was perhaps Minnesota's quintessential democratic moment. By its very nature, democracy is messy, many voices, many points of view. When one considers the abysmal record of voter participation over the last thirty years, it suggests that the New Democrats reaped some unintended consequences from their overhaul of popular politics. But that perhaps is the topic for another book.

*Making Minnesota Liberal* is a fascinating exploration of the internal workings of state and national politics and situates Minnesota (surprisingly) as a key player in the civil rights movement. Anyone with an interest in politics will find it an illuminating and thought-provoking read.

*Mary Lethert Wingerd is a member of Ramsey County History's Editorial Board and author of Claiming the City—Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul, published in 2001 by Cornell University Press.*

### *Cahokia: The Great Native American Metropolis*

Biloine Whiting Young and Melvin L. Fowler  
University of Illinois Press, 366 pages  
*Reviewed by Michael G. Livingston*

If you stand in Mounds Park in St. Paul you can see the downtown skyline and below you, the broad curve of the Mississippi River. The mounds themselves are a few of the surviving mounds that once dotted Minnesota, which 100 years ago numbered in the thousands. Mounds like those at Mounds Park (and even bigger and more complex ones) are found throughout the Mississippi River valley and

beyond. Where did the mounds come from? Who built them and when? What were the builders like?

Biloine Whiting Young and Melvin Fowler help us understand the people who built the mounds by looking at the largest and most carefully studied mound site, Cahokia. The largest Native American city, Cahokia was built on the east side of the Mississippi River near present day St. Louis. At its peak, the city had a population of perhaps 25,000.

In their engrossing and fact-filled book, *Cahokia: The Great Native American Metropolis*, Young and Fowler trace the dual history of Cahokia: the history of efforts to protect and study the site, and the history of Cahokia as we have been able to reconstruct it. They richly illustrate the book with photos and maps (the maps are especially helpful).

Young is a St. Paul writer and Fowler is a professor of anthropology (emeritus) at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Fowler has been one of the leading researchers at Cahokia since 1951. His personal knowledge, along with Young's writing skills, makes *Cahokia* read like a novel, with the story of Cahokia's history unfolding along with the story of the archeological investigations. You finish the book with both a sense of archeology as a messy adventure in which real people (with quirky personalities and egos) try to figure out the past and a sense of what Cahokia was like over a several hundred year period.

Cahokia emerged as a major urban site around 800 AD; shortly after corn production began in the area, and was abandoned between 1275 and 1350 AD. The peak of the site occurred from about 1200 AD to 1275 AD. The area in which Cahokia is located is known as the American Bottom, an area that is fertile and well-suited for corn growing. Cahokia is part of the Mississippian Culture, which existed from about 750 AD to 1400 AD. The Mississippian Culture followed the Woodland Culture (from about 1000 BC to 1000 AD—overlapping in some places with the

Mississippian Culture). The Woodland Culture built many of the burial mounds and effigy mounds (mounds built to resemble animals, birds, geometric forms) scattered around the Midwest.

The book contains a number of chapters on the early investigations of Cahokia, how the picture of Cahokia slowly emerged in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, and chapters on the physical layout and culture of the Cahokia site. My favorite chapters were the ones on the physical layout of Cahokia, including downtown Cahokia with its grand central plaza and large earthen mounds resembling pyramids surrounded by a wooden palisade, the chapter on the woodhenges, and the chapter on the engineering and construction of the mounds which required a sophisticated knowledge of soil types, drainage, and so on.

Woodhenges are astronomical observatories and calendars, like the famous Stonehenge in England, used to predict the position of the sun on the equinoxes and summer and winter solstices. Cahokia had a number of henges.

The book ends with chapters on other Mississippian sites or "outposts of Cahokia" (the closest to St. Paul are near Red Wing and La Crosse), the abandonment of the site (due to environmental degradation and falling food production), and comparisons of Cahokia to other pre-Columbian sites.

After finishing *Cahokia: The Great Native American Metropolis*, I hopped in my car and drove to Mounds Park. Standing on the bluffs overlooking the river and downtown, I had a deeper respect for the peoples who lived here before Columbus arrived in 1492, and still live here today. I am now planning my trip to the Cahokia site and its museum.

*Michael G. Livingston is an associate professor of psychology at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict. He grew up near the Norton Mounds (on the banks of the Grand River in Grand Rapids, Michigan) and has been fascinated with the mound culture ever since he was a teenager.*



*The Pantheon (Rome). Original watercolor, 1908. The nuns' sojourn coincided with modern Italy's movement to distance itself from Vatican influence. An example of this evolution is found in the Pantheon itself. In the late nineteenth century, two bell towers added during its use as a Catholic church were demolished and the building reverted to the secular Pantheon we recognize today. Several of the people in this 1908 watercolor by Sr. Anysia wear the peasant dress still worn at that time by the lower classes. See article beginning on page 4.*

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

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