

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.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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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



This is how St. Anthony looked in 1872. The first suspension bridge, linking St. Anthony with Nicollet Island, can be seen in the background.

Spring Wagons and No Roads

A Gibbs Daughter Remembers a Pioneer Family's Sunday as 'a serious undertaking'

Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte

In this reminiscence left to the Ramsey County Historical Society, Lillie Gibbs Le Vesconte recalls some of her earliest memories of life as the daughter of a pioneer Ramsey County farmer. Born in 1865, she was the youngest child of Jane and Heman Gibbs whose farm home now is the Society's Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakota Life.

Attending church services in the early 1870s was a serious undertaking, for our home was located three miles from southeast St. Anthony (now southeast Minneapolis) and no public road led from our farm into that part of town.

I recall the pleasant excitement of climbing into our two-seated spring wagon. Someone walked ahead to open and close our gate. A narrow winding road led through wild land following the valley which is now part of the

University of Minnesota Golf Course. Some landowners fenced their property but left bars to be opened for the convenience of the public. Three times we stopped while our hired man climbed out and let down bars and then carefully replaced them. On the way, we crossed marshy ground as well as some sandy soil.

I have a vivid recollection of our horses trotting down a slope and clattering across planks of a bridge over a



"Some of the pleasantest scenery in the state" became accessible to many pioneer families when a road, now Como Avenue, was laid out between Lake Como and St. Anthony.

pretty, sparkling creek that meandered through the University campus.*

We attended the Methodist Church, a low white building near Central Avenue. I fail to remember the choir or the organ (perhaps I was too small to see them), but I remember some of the songs: "I'll Away, I'll Away to the Promised Land," and "Where, Oh Where Are the Hebrew Children?"

A well-remembered occasion was the Sunday we went to hear a woman evangelist, Maggie VanCot. Possibly we arrived early, for we had a seat "up front." Later the church was filled to capacity. The ushers whispered to my parents. I was requested to give my space to a grown person. With another little girl, I was taken up near the pulpit

**Andreas Historical Atlas for 1874* shows a stream named Tuttle's Brook flowing through what is now southeast Minneapolis and onto the University campus.

and told to sit on the floor of the platform, behind the speaker. That brought us very close to Mrs. VanCot. We were well-behaved little girls and we did not whisper. My companion showed me how many warts she had on her hands and I tried to find some on mine, but failed.

I admired Mrs. VanCot; she seemed a queenly woman. I recall how she raised her arms gracefully as she walked back and forth the length of the platform while she preached. She wore a silver-gray silk dress with a long, sweeping train. I became interested in that train; it swept past me so many times.

I had a blue veil in my hand that had been tied around my neck. The thought came to me, "Why not give my veil a ride?" That proved an interesting pastime. Placing my veil on that portion of the lady's dress, I'd watch it ride to the farther end of the platform and to the nearer side, and I'd sometimes remove it while it passed—only to let it take another ride. Mrs. Maggie VanCot was

said to be an eloquent speaker and it is not likely the veil incident was noticed. I hope not.

I have reason to think the little white church was uncomfortable in winter. I recall hearing my mother say that "Mrs. R. took her chair to the stove to warm it before she sat down. Some boys giggled, and Mrs. R. scolded them right there."

Among the items in one issue of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* for the 1870s was the following:

"The people of St. Anthony are taking steps toward laying out a road from that city across the marsh to Lake Como. This will decrease the distance from that city to the lake to five miles. The road will run through some of the pleasantest scenery in the state."

The road, now Como Avenue, was soon a reality, and St. Anthony with its mills and stores and churches seemed much nearer to the people who lived out toward Lake Como and "the pleasantest scenery of the state."



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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