

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

Zebulon Pike and Fur Trader  
James Aird: The Explorer and  
the 'Scottish Gentleman'

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Summer, 2005

Volume 40, Number 2

*Rendezvous at the Riverbend*

Pike's Seven Days in the Land of Little Crow—  
The Wilderness that Later Became St. Paul

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*A view of Pike Island with Fort Snelling in the distance as painted by Seth Eastman. The fort, of course, did not exist at the time of Pike's 1805 expedition, but Pike had recommended its site as the location for a military fort. Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 40, Number 2

Summer, 2005

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

September 23, 2005, marks the 200th anniversary of the signing of what is known as Pike's Treaty—an agreement between a number of Mdewatanton leaders and Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike in which the Native Americans granted an area that includes today's historic Fort Snelling to the United States in return for what eventually was about \$2,000. Historian Gary Brueggemann leads off this issue with a carefully drawn account of Pike's visit to Minnesota in 1805 and the consequences of this treaty.

Complementing Brueggemann's article is a short piece by Duke Addicks, who is a historical re-enactor. Addicks tells readers how he, as a modern-day storyteller, portrays the nineteenth-century Scottish fur trader James Aird, who met Pike just days before the Pike party arrived in Minnesota.

Readers may remember that in our Winter 2005 issue, we carried an essay reconstructing the history of the DeLoop Parking Ramp using building permits in the RCHS's St. Paul Building Permits Collection. In this issue, Steve Trimble gives us a photo essay in which he uses photographs to demonstrate the many ways in which parking garages helped shape the urban landscape of St. Paul.

This issue concludes with a "Growing Up" piece in which Alexandra (Sandy) Klas fondly remembers her aunt, Frances Boardman, the long-time journalist for the *St. Paul Dispatch*. Frances Boardman was a colorful and compelling St. Paul writer whose death in 1953 was mourned by many friends as well as others who had simply enjoyed reading her many theater, music, and other reviews in the newspaper over the years.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*



Michels Garage at 210 West Ninth Street. Henry Leif took out a building permit in 1922 for this one-story garage, thirty feet wide by one hundred fifty feet long. Photograph by Charles J. Hibbard. All photographs, unless otherwise noted, with this essay are from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. Ford Central Garage on West Exchange in 1927. Photo by K. L. Fenney.

## Lots of St. Paul: A Photo Essay on Downtown Parking And What Urban History Can Tell Us about a City

*Steve Trimble*

The parking evil is the least justifiable of any cause of congestion and is the crux of the traffic problem in St. Paul . . . There is but one solution for traffic congestion . . . and that is to forbid the parking of private vehicles on congested streets.

—George H. Herrold, 1927

Inexpensive off-street parking must be provided or greater use made of mass transportation facilities, otherwise many persons will divert the trade and activities to other districts where parking is not a problem.

—WPA report, 1939

Articles in Ramsey County History often can be prompted by letters from readers questioning or suggesting, sometimes deploring, the choices that appear in these pages and challenging historians to explain themselves. In the Spring issue of

Completion of new off-street parking facilities . . . would constitute a long step toward the ultimate solution of St. Paul's parking problems as well as contribute greatly to an increase in the level of downtown business activity.

—National Garages, Inc. Study 1950

The lack of convenient parking has begun to adversely affect commerce . . . the current parking situation may begin to affect the pace of downtown development unless we attack the root causes of the parking problems downtown.

—Downtown Parking Plan, 1986

\* \* \*

this magazine, one reader commented that: "the article about using building permits to locate nothing more than a parking ramp strikes me as a zero." Perhaps parking seemed so humble or so commonplace that it wasn't a proper topic for his-

torical analysis. Many urban historians, however, would feel that an explanation would be helpful. Here it is.

While the article cited was written to show how to use the Ramsey County Historical Society's building permits, the topic is one of wider importance. A recent book titled *Lots of Parking*\* even suggests that the need for off-street parking was one of the most fundamental forces that changed the face of our nation's cities and altered the lives of their dwellers. Its authors, a historian and a geographer, say the search for places to put cars was a principal motivation for downtown change and permanently altered the urban landscape.

As early as World War I city leaders worried about congestion caused by on-street parking feared that this problem

\*John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle *Lots of Parking: Land Use in A Car Culture* (Charlottesville: Univ of Virginia Press, 2004).

would cause a decline of downtown shopping. According to *Lots of Parking*, different cities dealt with the issue in a fairly standard pattern. This photo essay attempts to present a short perspective on St. Paul's response to a culture that became increasingly enamored with the automobile.

At first, older buildings such as liveries and warehouses were converted into parking garages. If automobiles were not enclosed, outdoor lots left them vulnerable to rain and their paint didn't hold up well in the elements. There was also a need for long-term storage since early cars were rarely operated during winter months. Auto dealerships provided some of the first garage spaces.

Soon new garages were springing up, some of them multi-level structures. Specialization developed and these businesses, sometimes called "auto laundries," added auxiliary services such as washing, waxing, tire repair and battery replacement. By the 1930s cars had changed, and there was no real need for dead storage; however enclosed garages still were built for large users, such as hotels, banks, and medical buildings.

The 1920s also saw the development of service stations whose initial purpose was selling gasoline. Small and independently owned, these stations profited by offering an area for parking; soon they began to include auxiliary services for

long- and short-term parkers. Within a decade, parking had become a specialized money-making enterprise.

The next stage was the development of flat lots. Empty land was used, and as older buildings were torn down, they were replaced with parking. The larger ones were usually on the periphery of downtown on less expensive land, and were filled by downtown workers. This didn't serve the needs of merchants who wanted low-cost, convenient parking for store patrons, and some started to develop their own lots.

By the 1950s, the increase in the number of such lots had a negative impact on the old pedestrian city space. The increasingly vacant landscape also created visual problems, along with noise, gas fumes, heat and dust. The gaps that fragmented city space originally were presumed to be temporary, as a kind of land bank with the ultimate goal of redevelopment, but often remained there for decades.

Starting in the mid-1950s, large parking ramps began to spring up in St. Paul and other cities. Aided by steel frame, long-span building techniques, they were open-sided, saving money on construction and operating expenses such as ventilation and lighting. At first, the cars were parked by attendants. These parking structures also began to take on a distinct architectural form.

In the 1960s and 1970s, larger municipalities moved toward public ownership. There were zoning regulations and building standards that often required the creation of parking space. Many urban areas started building their own lots and ramps at this time. St. Paul did not get into public parking until later, but did adopt another new national trend—the end of attendants and the start of self-parking.

Today St. Paul, like most cities, sees parking as an important economic development tool. As a 1986 downtown plan noted: "If built and managed correctly, downtown parking will no longer be the focus for complaint and concern, but will benefit the economic vitality and physical environment." Recently, the city's involvement in building or subsidizing parking has even become a contentious political issue.

While the evolution of the parking problem may not capture the imagination of all readers, it was a crucial factor in the physical development of downtown St. Paul. As *Lots of Parking* put it, "the history of parking in the United States is . . . quite rich: personalities moving off on entrepreneurial tangents, designers bringing innovation to the fore, politicians bending to the realities of a new 'motor age.'" Perhaps it won't be long until preservationists start thinking about designating the Lowry Parking Garage or the Victory Ramp as historical landmarks.



In 1949, Harry Schloff wisely located across from the Emporium Department Store. It was primarily for short-term parking but, like other such businesses, gained additional income by adding complementary services.



Looking across Victory Square at the Lowry Hotel, with its parking garage on the right (with the white sign) in 1949. Five years later, the open area in the foreground, once the site of the old St. Paul City Hall/Ramsey County Courthouse would be filled by the Victory Parking Ramp. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo.



A self-parking lot at 184 East Eighth Street in 1957. While it may have been thought of at the time as a temporary "land bank" site slated for eventual development, cars still fill the site today. Norton & Peel photograph.



Large scale parking for downtown workers in the Capitol Approach in 1954. The location is between Cedar and Wabasha. The cross street in the center with the small white shed for an attendant is Tenth Street. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo.



DeLoop Service Station and Parking Ramp 384 Cedar c. 1931. A garage built in 1905 was torn down for a filling station in 1928. Three years later the 100 x 130-foot parking roof was added. Photograph by Peter Schawang.



Lot at Fourth and Jackson, 1953. A good example of the way in which tearing down buildings for parking altered the urban landscape, leaving unattractive empty spaces.

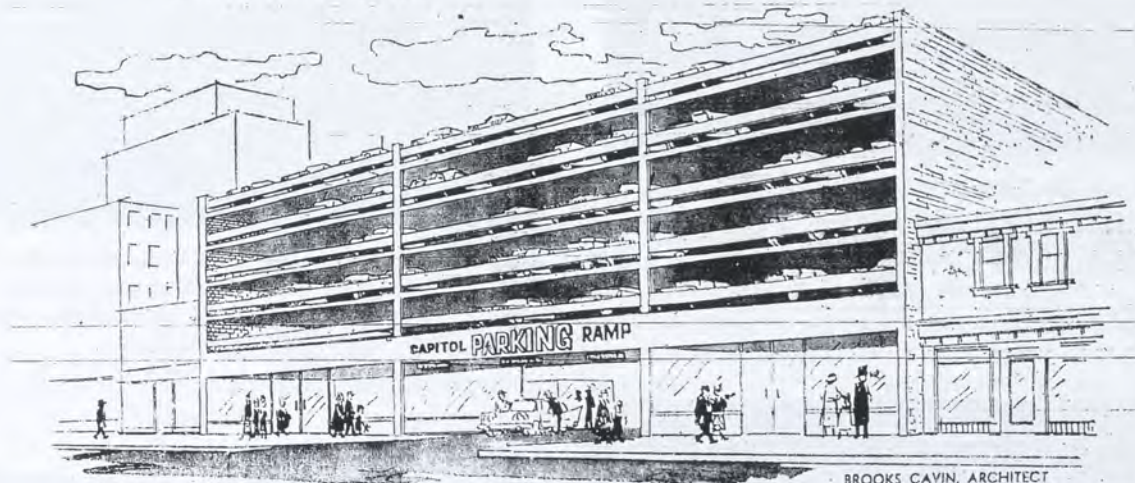
# GRAND OPENING

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A December, 1958, Pioneer Press advertisement for the new Capitol Parking Ramp at 380 Robert Street, where cars were "parked and delivered by courteous attendants." This is a good example of the new open span construction and an attractively designed ramp for downtown shoppers.



One of Seth Eastman's paintings which he labeled "Permanent Residence of the Sioux" and probably is the village of Ka-so-ja (Kaposia) as it looked in 1846 when Eastman was an officer at Fort Snelling. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

**R.C.H.S.**  
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