

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Summer 2012

Volume 47, Number 2

*Like the Wind . . .
Oakland Cemetery
Holds Many
Caught Up in the
U.S.-Dakota War*

Patrick M. Hill

—Page 14

From Cigars for Founders to a Festive 2012 Centennial

The (Men's) Garden Club of Ramsey County at 100

Barbara Parisien

Page 3



Jerry and Lee Shannon, right, take a rare moment to relax in their St. Paul garden—a park-like treasure in the heart of the city. The Shannons have been active members of the Garden Club of Ramsey County (GCRC) for over four decades and they often share their garden with the public. Like the Shannons, Zenas Thomas, top, one of the founders of the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County (the predecessor of the today's GCRC), found a moment in 1930 to survey his Bald Eagle Lake garden with his wife, Edith. Photo of the Shannon garden by Glen Stubbe. Photo courtesy of STARTRIBUNE/MINNEAPOLIS-ST.PAUL, 2011. Photo of Zenas and Edith Thomas courtesy of John and Carla Henry.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

John M. Lindley

Founding Editor (1964–2006)

Virginia Brainard Kunz

Editor

John M. Lindley

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Paul A. Verret

President

Cheryl Dickson

First Vice President

William Frels

Second Vice President

Julie Brady

Secretary

Carolyn J. Brusseau

Treasurer

Thomas H. Boyd

Immediate Past President

Anne Cowie, Nancy Randall Dana,

Joanne A. Englund, Howard Guthmann,

Richard B. Heydinger, Jr., John Holman,

Kenneth H. Johnson, Elizabeth M. Kiernat,

David Kristal, Carl Kuhmeyer,

Father Kevin M. McDonough,

Nancy W. McKillips, Susan McNeely,

Laurie M. Murphy, Robert Muschewske,

Richard H. Nicholson, Jay Pfaender,

Jeffrey Slack, Ralph Thrane.

Director Emeritus

W. Andrew Boss

EDITORIAL BOARD

Anne Cowie, *chair*; James B. Bell,

Thomas H. Boyd, John Diers, John Milton,

Debra Mitts-Smith, Laurie M. Murphy,

Paul D. Nelson, Richard H. Nicholson,

Jay Pfaender, David Riehle, Steve Trimble,

Paul A. Verret, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

William Fallon, William Finney, George

Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Marvin J. Pertzik,

James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Rafael Ortega, chair

Commissioner Tony Bennett

Commissioner Toni Carter

Commissioner Jim McDonough

Commissioner Jan Parker

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt

Commissioner Janice Rettman

Julie Kleinschmidt, manager,

Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2012, 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. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address: admin@rchs.com; web site address: www.rchs.com

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 47, Number 2

Summer 2012

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

CONTENTS

- 3 *From Cigars for Founders to a Festive 2012 Centennial*
The (Men's) Garden Club of Ramsey County at 100
Barbara Parisien
- 14 *Like the Wind . . .*
Oakland Cemetery Holds Many
Caught Up in the U.S.-Dakota War
Patrick M. Hill
- 22 *The Little Engine That Did*
The "Iron Walker" and Its Inaugural Run
Dave Riehle

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

Sometimes, the historical context of now-familiar institutions might surprise us. In this issue, Barbara Parisien shares the history of the Garden Club of Ramsey County and reminds us that the Club started in 1912 with a group of dedicated cigar-smoking men! We are pleased that the Garden Club is celebrating its centennial with us at the Gibbs Museum. Dave Riehle presents the history of the *William Crooks*, the first railroad locomotive in Minnesota, now in Duluth, which many of us remember from its display at St. Paul's Union Depot. But of course, the engine itself came up the Mississippi in 1861 by steamboat, along with the iron rails to build tracks for its initial ten-mile trip from St. Paul to St. Anthony. And at nearly the same time, the devastating U.S.-Dakota War between European-born and Native Americans occurred in southern Minnesota. Patrick Hill notes the Oakland Cemetery graves of white settlers involved and other military graves, showing that even those quiet places can evoke memories of vivid conflict.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

From Cigars for Founders to a Festive 2012 Centennial The (Men's) Garden Club of Ramsey County at 100

Barbara Parisien

Imagine a smoke-filled room with cigar-smoking gentlemen proclaiming a goal: to make the city of St. Paul a premier "Garden City." On April 3, 1912, a group of 118 leading citizens did just that. Called together by Attorney Zenas H. Thomas and District Court Judge Grier M. Orr, local businessmen gathered at the Commercial Club in St. Paul to weigh the merits of organizing a men's garden club. As toastmaster, Judge Orr introduced Mr. J. A. Vye of the *St. Paul Dispatch* who spelled out "What a Men's Garden Club Could Accomplish." Following this address, a vote was taken to organize such a club, and twenty-nine men became founding members with Dr. John Conrad Nelson, a Danish immigrant, elected as first president of the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County. New member W. L. Seeley passed out celebratory cigars to those who signed up. The minutes of that April meeting report, "A vote of thanks was then unanimously extended Judge Orr for acting as Toastmaster and a like vote was extended to Mr. W. L. Seeley for his kindness in supplying the members with cigars." Dues were \$1.00 a year payable in advance. By the end of that first year, the Club had 100 charter members.¹

Founders

Considered Father of the Garden Club, Zenas Thomas lived in several St. Paul homes, but it was his summer home on Bald Eagle Lake where he created a lush pastoral garden, which he enjoyed with his wife, Edith. Zenas Thomas's grandson, John Henry, and wife Carla are current members of the Garden Club of Ramsey County. John has a clear memory of his grandfather "with rubber boots up to his knees, pushing a wheel barrow." John spent much time as a child at his grandfather's summer home on Bald Eagle Lake. (See cover photo of Zenas and Edith in their garden.) He remembers a large garden with three pools built by Thomas. "The lower pool had an island and was stocked with goldfish, about five or six inches long. The goldfish were kept over the winter in a tank in the basement. We were not allowed in the pool," Henry recalls. "We have pictures of Edith and Zenas digging potatoes and Zenas hand plowing

the garden. My grandfather was quite an individualist. I can picture him out in a thunderstorm with trees and wires falling all around him." This individualism characterized Thomas who volunteered in every capacity for the garden club, including its presidency in 1918. According to the Ramsey County Bar Associations, Thomas "was widely read, a student of affairs and deeply interested in community welfare."²

Co-founder Judge Grier M. Orr also had a "rural" home which was located on a pond known as Lake Iris (later drained) in what was known as Union Park. By 1919 Judge Orr had moved out of this "Paradise of Natural Beauty" into a more urban neighborhood at 1040 Laurel Avenue. Orr's passion for juvenile justice led him to support the founding of Highwood Ramsey County Boy's Farm, a youth correctional facility now known as Totem Town. In a public address to the 4-H, Judge Orr observed, "In thirty years as judge, I have had to dis-



About 1915, Zenas Thomas plows and prepares the family garden at his summer home on Bald Eagle Lake. Photo courtesy of John and Carla Henry.

solve many family ties through divorce, but this has never happened to parents who together grew flowers and a garden around their house."³ Judge Orr served as president of the Men's Garden Club in 1914 and also served on the board of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society (MSHS). Following in Judge Orr's footsteps, in the past twenty years, six GCRC presidents have served on the board of directors for the Minnesota State Horticultural Society (MSHS). The current Chair of the Board, Mary Maguire Lerman, was a Junior Member of the Garden Club of Ramsey County as a child.



Judge Grier M. Orr, along with Zenas Thomas, founded the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County. Photo courtesy of GCRC archives and the Minnesota Historical Society.

Monthly Meetings and Milady's Heels

From 1912 until the 1950s, monthly meetings were held almost exclusively in downtown locations convenient for the local businessmen and accessible by streetcar. At the first meeting held in the Commercial Club, Dr. John Conrad Nelson spoke on "The Gardening Germ, its Origin, Course of the Disease, and its Cure." In his 1923 talk to members, former supervisor of parks and founding member Earl L. Finney spoke about the absence of art in garden lawns, which he blamed on "milady's high heels." Women who wear high heels," he complained, "prefer plain cement walks. Walks, if they are artistic," Finney suggested, "should be consistent with the type of architecture used in the construction of the home." A 1932 depression-era meeting was held in the City Council chambers featuring a lecture on "Rock Gardens" which was open to the public. Monthly meetings right up to the present always feature a known speaker on a timely garden topic.⁴ (See sidebar for meeting locations through the century.)

During the growing season, formal exhibits of flowers were studied and judged "while the club enjoys dinner and

a brief program. The meeting is then adjourned to the show, where exhibits are studied and enjoyed by all the members. In this way the knowledge and practice of actual gardening are disseminated in the most vital way—by actual proof and demonstration."⁵

Annual Meetings Open to the Public

During its first fifteen years, the Club rented the St. Paul Auditorium in collaboration with the Ladies Home Garden Club for the annual spring meeting which was open to the public. The program often included a speech by the mayor, music provided by the St. Thomas College band, and a free packet of seeds for all attendees. In 1916 it was recorded that 28,000 packets of seeds were distributed. "The monthly dinner meeting stressed the importance of carrying the garden interest to the citizens in an effort to establish St. Paul as the Garden City."

In 1925 some 1,000 attendees received pointers on "How to Make Yards Beautiful." It was reported that up to 5,000 people attended the annual meetings.⁶

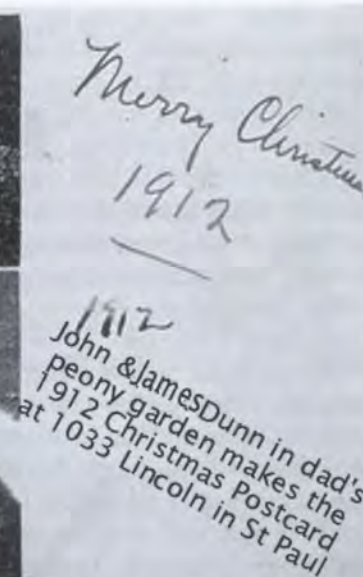
John W. G. Dunn Garden

John Warner Griggs Dunn, one of the Club's original members, tended a garden at 1033 Lincoln Avenue in St. Paul.



Attorney Zenas H. Thomas, one of the founders of the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County. Photo courtesy of the GCRC archives and John and Carla Henry.

His meticulous notes recording the progress of his garden from 1913 to 1917 are preserved in the Minnesota Historical Society archives. He tended two large beds filled with a variety of vegetables and flowers. In his notes Dunn recorded every step in his 1913 gardening process from planting parsley in pots on February 13, to the first killing frost on



John W. G. Dunn, an original member of the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County, sent this Christmas card in 1912, the year the Club was founded. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

September 21. That year he began his journal, "Planted three pots of parsley: on March 16, pansies, Shasta daisies, Iceland poppies and annual phlox. . . . On March 16, tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers." Continuing through the growing season, Dunn noted exactly when he cleaned up the yard, edged the beds, transplanted tomatoes, picked asparagus, cut grass for the last time, and picked 2½ bushes of apples. He recorded the first killing frost and finally, the first snow of the season. It's not clear if Dunn shared or sold any of his produce, but he reported canning tomatoes, beets, green beans and wax beans as well as making gooseberry and currant jam and plum butter. He must have had an outlet for his 210 celery plants, though one year he "set them out too late." In the early twentieth century, all gardening was organic. Dunn wrote that on September 12, 1914, he applied a load of manure on his peonies and phlox. His property must have included several apple trees as he speaks of grafting many varieties: Lowland, Raspberry, Stagman, Winesap, York, Delicious, King David, and Hybernal.

Gardeners today should be consoled by the fact that Dunn dealt with every usual garden nemesis: heat, drought, late frost, early frost, and many pests. Though today's gardeners complain of rabbits and deer, Dunn battled rats and sparrows. In 1913 he tallied the number of rats killed (8), sparrows (95). In 1914, the tally increased to 111 sparrows and 17 rats. Apparently, the pests moved on, as in 1915 only 23 sparrows and 4 rats met their demise in his garden. By 1917 they were not mentioned at all, though he comments, "Cut worms very bad." Apparently, Dunn took time to welcome harbingers of spring each year, as he noted the arrival of the first robin, blue bird, and martin.⁷

John Dunn's dedication to gardening was a sign of the times at the turn of the century and the decades following. About this same time, growers such as John Linders, the founder of Linder's Garden Center in 1910, transitioned from growing celery and other vegetables to growing flowers as the demand changed. Similarly, Gerten's (Garden Center) which began in 1906 as a small

truck farm selling produce to local residents, became known as a grower of annual and perennial flowers and nursery stock. Another Ramsey County business, Hermes Floral and Garden Center, originated in 1906.⁸

At this time of transition, gentlemen farmers-turned-businessmen such as John Dunn had new-found leisure time and energy which they channeled into a Club that was not merely social, but motivated by serious goals. They banded together to bring the countryside into St. Paul. As the first generation of city dwellers who were recently removed from the farm, they were serious about making St. Paul a "garden city."

Early Projects

Civic plantings were an early undertaking. The new Federal Courthouse, today's Landmark Center, was planted with hundreds of spring bulbs. In 1915 the Club successfully established a horticulture reading room whose purpose was to educate the populace of the city about gar-

dening in the newly constructed Central Library. Elaborate tiles which adorned the horticulture section can still be seen at the library despite its recent remodeling. Beautifying St. Paul public schools was another priority as was support for the new Como Park Conservatory.

One of the earliest projects supported by the Men's Garden Club was the sponsorship of a contest to solve "the bird house problem." In 1915, sixth grade boys in St. Paul designed and built over 2,200 bird houses which were exhibited and sold. The Club awarded prizes the first year and immediately made plans for the following year when the Auditorium housed 4,720 exhibits. A lighted sign declared St. Paul "The City of Song Birds and Flowers."⁹

Highs and Lows

During times of historic despair, the founders' generosity was greatly tested. In 1917 the Club, which at the time recorded its greatest number of members (493), sponsored a citywide garden campaign to

MEN'S GARDEN CLUB OF RAMSEY COUNTY



ITS PURPOSES

To make Saint Paul a garden city.

To encourage the cultivation of trees, fruits, flowers and vegetables in the city and country.

To aid in disseminating garden information.

To promote interest in nature in general



Meetings are held monthly during the winter months, and occasional trips are made during the summer to points of interest to gardeners.

This poster was displayed in St. Paul store windows in 1912 as part of the campaign to encourage membership in the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County. Photo courtesy of the GCRC archives.



In 1952, twenty years after women were admitted to the Garden Club of Ramsey County, Mrs. Edward (Anne) Koempel, right, was elected its first female president. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo. Photo courtesy of the GCRC archives.

promote Victory Gardens during World War I. An extra edition of the *St. Paul Dispatch* described 300 plots entered in a garden contest. The winner, Mrs. A.A. Kuehl "... won the capital prize of \$50 emphasizing that women as well as men were active gardeners in St. Paul." Then the great flu epidemic of 1918–1919 halted public meetings. In 1926, Club membership fell to 39 members. During those difficult times, however, members installed demonstration gardens near Como Park Conservatory featuring hundreds of peonies and iris. The Club's board included a director whose responsibility was to oversee these gardens. By 1929 there were 825 named iris and 174 peonies planted at Como Park.

At the height of the Great Depression, the president's year-end report for 1932 included "plans for a bigger and better garden club . . . we were all aglow with enthusiasm and forgot all about the depression." The proposal for changing the name and admitting women and children came about during this "low" time. In an attempt to reach its goal of 500 members in 1932, the Club offered 25 cents in plant material for each new member turned in, but it was reported that "By this time we discovered the Old Depression was still with us—the dollars were very hard to get."¹⁰

Finally, the Ladies

Although women had been allowed to attend GCRC meetings as guests since 1915, the Club voted in 1932 to allow women, as well as children, to become full members and the word "Men's" was dropped from the title of the Club which became the Garden Club of Ramsey County (GCRC). President John Dehmer reported, "Changing the name of our

club permitted enrollment of 23 Lady members, which is about one-seventh of our total membership." Nevertheless, many years passed before women were acknowledged as integral members of the Club. In the 1948 installation ceremony for new officers, N.M. Holmberg opened his speech with the proclamation: "Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! Gardening and horticulture was the first occupation



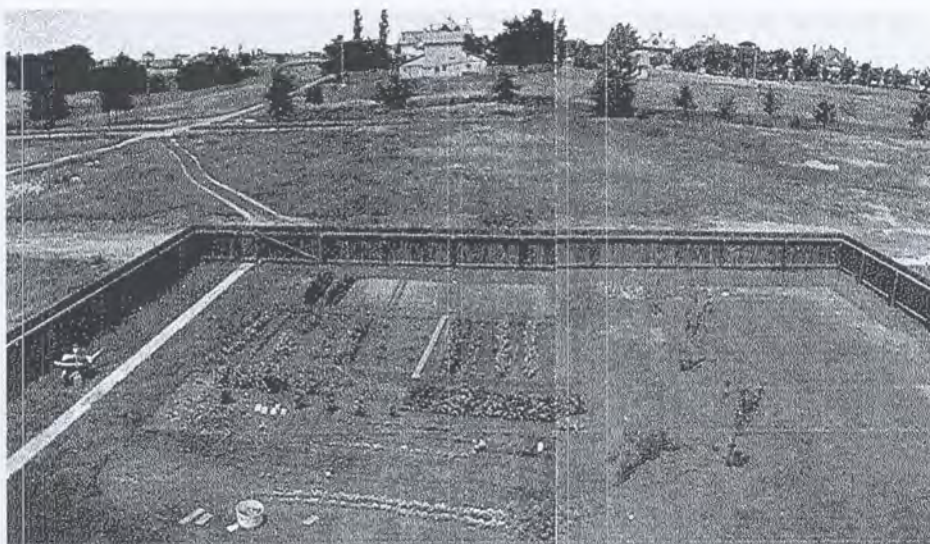
From the beginning, the GCRC published annual Garden Guides as part of the Spring meeting at the St. Paul Auditorium, such as this one from 1916. The Guides included detailed programs for planting flowers and vegetables as well as gardening hints. They are part of the Dunn Collection in the GCRC archives. Photo courtesy of the GCRC archives and the Minnesota Historical Society.

of man! Adam and Eve were placed in a garden. . . . From its inception, the Ramsey County Garden Club cradeled [sic] and conceived by God's noblemen have aoways [sic] fostered the art of gardening. . . . The record of all the former officers of this club is it is free from selfishness and misbehaviour . . . You are to be another link in the chain of leadership that makes for a finer citizenship, a beautiful city, and a greater universe . . . Arise ye Men of valor and do your stuff!!"¹¹

From the first year, however, one program a year had been geared to "Ladies Night." According to club historian, Ray Lindquist in his 75th anniversary speech, "Wives and sweethearts were invited . . . My guess is that the men found the meetings were more fun when women were there." He goes on to say, "I must report—there is no record of any unpleasantness or conflict between the sexes any place in the records of our club. Nor arguments or fights. No skeletons in the closet. The truth seems to be by the end of the 1920s many of our noble founders were no longer around. With hindsight you and I know all they needed was to admit women to membership. This would bring new members with luster and practical ability with enthusiasm for gardening of all kinds. All that was needed to create a Renaissance in the Garden Club was to amend the constitution and by-laws. . . . After these changes the Club made a wonderful comeback."¹²

Commemorating the admission of women, actor and "poet laureate" member of the Club, Walter N. Greaza, shared the following poem.

A lovely thing, the Garden Club, begun in 1912
 By business men, who after work did delve.
 And so the name, "Men's Garden Club" remained for several years,
 And Adam tilled his garden alone, or so one always hears.
 But like that other garden, eventually [sic] there came
 An Eve to help out Adam, and also change the name.
 The Garden Club it since has been, for which we all give thanks,
 To Mr. Dehmer, who allowed the Gals to join our ranks.¹³



John W. G. Dunn was a leader in the Garden Club from its inception. He began planting a garden at his home at 1033 Lincoln Street years before the GCRC was founded. The photo on the top shows his garden in 1903, looking north toward Grand Avenue (the street near the trees in the middle distance). An alley ran behind Dunn's garden fence and Oxford Street can be seen on the left side of the photo near the fence. The photo on the bottom from 1908 shows how much his garden grew in five years. Both photos are from the Dunn Collection in the GCRC archives and the Minnesota Historical Society.

The Club continued to elect men as officers until 1952 when Club members elected Mrs. Edward (Anne) Koempel, daughter of a charter member of the original Club, to her first term as president. In the 1952 history of the Club, Mrs. K.W. Fisher asserts, "This by no means establishes the club as a women's group, as the officers, directors and committees are almost equally divided between men and women." Koempel was elected again for a second term in 1963 and she was still active many years later when she was growing 100 African violets under fluorescent lights and 30 other house plants. "One is a Christmas amarilla [sic] which is about to bloom now for the fourth time since Thanksgiving," she notes in a May 15, 1977, article in the *St. Paul Dispatch*. Koempel's

garden included the 'Early Scout' peony which was chosen by the members of the 2012 Garden Club as a symbol of its link with the past. Several members purchased the 'Early Scout' and planted it in their gardens to celebrate the Centennial. In 2012 the membership of the GCRC includes 26 men, 149 women, and one child.¹⁴

Building on Original Goals

Goals of the early club are still being met today. A 1912 poster for the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County stated as its purpose:

- To make Saint Paul a garden city
- To encourage the cultivation of trees, fruits, flowers and vegetables in the city and country

- To aid in disseminating garden information
- To promote interest in nature in general.¹⁵

These four goals continue to drive the Club's efforts in 2012 as its members maintain public gardens, educate citizens at monthly meetings, and cultivate a garden culture throughout the city and county.

Public Gardens

The Club maintains four separate garden areas at the Highland Branch of the St. Paul Public Library and the adjoining Hillcrest Recreation Center. These gardens, developed through an \$11,000 grant, consist of perennial flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees native to Minnesota. The native gardens were designed by nationally known landscape architect, Cole Burrell, and planted by volunteers from the GCRC. One garden area is maintained as a small prairie; another features woodland plants in a natural setting; and the other areas showcase a number of species of plants in attractively designed small plots so that individual types can be readily identified and studied. The gardens occasionally serve as a teaching resource for classes and workshops on native plants. Twenty members of the Great River Chapter of the American Society of Botanical Artists created pen and ink drawings of the plants featured in the native garden. Library visitors can check out illustrated plant guides and tour the gardens.¹⁶

The Club also maintains two gardens on the northeast corner of Montreal Avenue and Edgumbe Road in St. Paul. These gardens consist of a mix of common perennials and small ornamental trees. Garden Club volunteers clean up the gardens each spring and fall, divide and transplant as necessary, weed and water throughout the growing season. On February 4, 2000, Governor Jesse Ventura awarded a Certificate of Commendation to the Garden Club of Ramsey County for its Highland Park Perennial Project: "In recognition of your significant contributions to furthering the community greening efforts."¹⁷

The Garden Club of Ramsey Co. PICNIC!

FOR MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

REMEMBER THE DATE, SATURDAY, JULY 14th, 1934

WILL BE HELD AT

Mr. and Mrs. Albert E. Greaza's Garden, Highwood

Members with and without autos will meet at 2:30 p. m., Washington and Fifth Street, Post Office. Leave Promptly 3 p. m.

Those coming later take the Point Douglas Road to Lindwood Ave. to top of hill Oscar Sandell, Marshal in charge of Caravan.

Bring Basket Lunch.

Entertainment by Dept. Parks and Playgrounds.

Attach Garden Emblem to auto.

R. Steinman, Sec., Ga. 4549., Da. 6087

Yearly picnics have been held since the beginning of the Club. Albert Greaza, the host for this 1934 picnic, was a well-known actor and poet. This year, on July 16, the GCRC's annual picnic was held at Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakotah Life in Falcon Heights. "Members with and without autos" gathered late in the afternoon to tour the Museum's gardens, prairie restoration, and heritage apple orchard and to share a potluck picnic. Photo courtesy of the GCRC archives.

All Around the Town . . .

Meeting Places through the Century*

1912—First meeting at the St. Paul Commercial Club.

1919—Joint meeting with the Minnesota State Horticultural Society at the Emporium Tea Room.

1924—Meetings held in the Women's City Club; women allowed, but only as guests.

1930s—Carlings Café, at 5th & St. Peter streets.

1932—January meeting at the Frederick Hotel, first meeting with women members; March meeting at Mechanic Arts High School; summer meeting at Como Park demonstration gardens.

1933—December meeting at the Masonic Temple with past president John Dehmer arriving as Santa through the skylight; August meeting at the St. Francis Hotel.

1938—Masonic Temple with entertainment provided by mezzo-soprano Madie Metzger-Ziegler and her trio.

1958—Schuneman's River Room

1960—Dayton's River Room.

1972—First National Bank.

1974—Jimmy's Restaurant, 1965 Ford Parkway.

Late 1970s and 1980s—Messiah Episcopal Church, 1631 Ford Parkway.

1980s—Lee's Village Inn, 800 S. Cleveland Ave.

1990s to the present—Hillcrest Recreation Center, 1975 Ford Parkway (3rd Monday of the month September through May).

*Compiled from GCRC minutes and news clippings by MaryDon Beeson.



In 1916 the Men's GCRC began demonstration gardens at St. Paul's Como Park. By 1929 there were 825 named iris and 174 peonies planted near the Como Park Conservatory. Photo courtesy of the GCRC archives and the Minnesota Historical Society.

Education

Education has been central to the mission of the Garden Club since its inception. Today, monthly meetings held at Hillcrest Recreation Center, which are free and open to the public, feature speakers on a variety of garden topics from flower arranging to native plantings, to shoreline restoration, to climate change. Mentorship is offered to new gardeners in the Club and each year scholarships are awarded to students of horticulture through giving to local colleges. Members open their gardens each summer to share tips and beauty. "Garden Sages," Joe Baltrukonis and Jennifer Porwit, write a monthly column in the Club's newsletter educating members on the intricacies of gardening. A 2011 column, "Battling the Japanese Beetle" was timely and popular. These columns, as well as speaker topics and a calendar of events are available to the public through the Garden Club's website, <http://www.ramseygardeners.org>.

Sharing the Bounty

Charitable giving has always been another central mission of the Club. In November 1933 at the height of the Great Depression, Louis W. Hill began the tradition of distributing food baskets to the

less fortunate with each harvest. Club secretary R. Steinman wrote, "In keeping with the spirit of Thanksgiving—and in accordance with the actions taken at the October meeting—our members are requested to bring for distributions to the unfortunate, articles such as apples and other fruits; potatoes, rutabagas, onion, squash, flour, coffee, cocoa, tea, break-

fast food, canned milk, tomatoes, corn, peas, beans, etc. (It's giving that makes Thanksgiving.) . . . We are planning for the equivalent of 100 baskets."¹⁸

Today, the Club holds a bake sale each November and a silent auction in December with proceeds going to the food shelves. The key fundraiser each year is the annual plant sale in May. Members divide perennials from their own gardens and sell them to gardeners who come from all over the Twin Cities. In May 2012, over 3,200 plants were donated by members for this sale. This event has become one of the most anticipated garden events in Ramsey County. Since 2005, the Club's Charitable Giving Committee has donated to St. Paul food shelves nearly \$11,000 in cash and hundreds of pounds of food.

The Garden Club of Ramsey County's culture of giving has fostered annual horticulture scholarships, served the county Master Gardener projects, enriched programs such as Blooming Saint Paul, Trees St. Paul, Great River Greening, Friends of the Saint Paul Parks and Trails, the Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakotah Life, and Como Park gardens. Over the past decade alone, the Club has donated more than \$40,000.¹⁹



The Garden Club of Ramsey County hosted the Minnesota State Horticultural Society when the MSHS held its annual meeting in St. Paul on November 15, 1934. These meetings attracted up to 5,000 people. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society.

Pedro Park

by MaryDon Beeson

Last year an iconic 1960s downtown building met its doom. Early in that decade, Carl Pedro Sr. built a store at the corner of Tenth and Robert Streets to bring his family's luggage business to a new home in the heart of St. Paul. He had started selling luggage and other types of leather goods in 1914. About the same time as this move to Robert Street, Pedro joined a new, albeit historic, family of gardeners who were soon to celebrate their 50th Anniversary, the Garden Club of Ramsey County.

His daughter, Marilyn Pitera, recounts this story about her father: "It seems as though Daddy had a garden mishap falling and breaking his elbow, which resulted in one arm in a sling. Early in the growing season, about 1:00 A.M., in the middle of the night the following week, their neighbor Mr. Thatcher telephoned their home, alarmed. Something strange was going on in their backyard because he kept seeing a flashlight going on and off. Mother, who took the call and was a bold woman, marched out into the backyard alone to find out what was going on. Daddy had taped a flashlight to his shovel and was busy planting. Anything living outdoors was his love and his passion even to this extreme." No doubt, timing the blooms for showing at a specific time demanded planting on a specific date.

Like other St. Paul business leaders who had preceded him in the Club, Carl needed only to stroll down the streets of the city to Dayton's Department Store and into Schuneman's River Room to attend the Club's monthly meetings and listen to its informative speakers while enjoying a tasty dinner. In 1961, Club members and the public were treated to three of the Club's four flower shows at downtown locations, including the Twin City Federal Savings & Loan, the Emporium and the Golden Rule, all businesses that would perish years before the family owned, Pedro Luggage and Briefcases closed its doors.

Carl Pedro Sr. exhibited and com-



This photo from 2011 shows the start to the demolition of the Pedro Luggage store. Eventually this site will become Pedro Park in downtown St. Paul. Photo courtesy of Minnesota Public Radio.

peted in these flower shows with cut flowers from his own garden, racking up points to finish in the top 20 and earning a meager 50 cents in prize money, but gaining immeasurable bragging rights. He also shared his passion for growing that same summer as host of the Club's annual picnic in his home garden at 770 Viking Drive. The committee chair for the event, Betty Van Buskirk of McCarrons Lake, reported to the president on the lovely weather for the picnic at Pedro's on June 20, 1961, but noted the need for a more complete picnic report to the board.

Although the Club successfully bought and served steaks, salad, beans, and coffee to 65 people at this festive gathering, they apparently forgot to bring along the charcoal for the grill and subsequently depleted Carl Pedro's coal coffers. In her follow up to the president, Betty reported, "I purchased another 20 pounds of charcoal and returned it to Pedro's spending an additional \$1.29." Again pressing for more precise reports, she added "so when next year comes around someone won't have to start scratching out their dandruff." The board got the message. Over fifty years later, records of every check expensed for the

Pedro picnic, the shopping lists for the salads, and the full amount of coffee served still exist and are scanned into the Club's archives.

Carl Pedro was active in the Garden Club into the 1970s. Today his legacy lives on, and is true to the Club's founding mission to make "St Paul a City Beautiful." In 2009 the Pedro family donated the site where their luggage store once stood on Robert Street to the city with the stipulation that it be used for a park and that it bears their father's name. According to Anne Gardener, Landscape Architect for the City of St. Paul, "A community process is now underway to develop a new design for Pedro Park." Pedro himself would have savored the fact that it coincides with the centennial of the Garden Club of Ramsey County.

Perhaps in the future, the Club will gather for a picnic in Carl Pedro's garden, in a new century of gardening and in a new city park. Rest assured, Pedro family, that although the club paid its charcoal debt and has precise records on how to feed a crowd, it will make this future picnic a potluck.

If you want to follow and support the progress of Pedro Park, see www.st.gov/pedropark.

Parallels in Leadership: Then and Now

The dedication of early members such as Judge Orr who served on the board of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society is paralleled by 46-year member Jerry Shannon. The Shannon garden covers two-thirds of an acre or the equivalent of four city lots right in the middle of urban St. Paul. Like Judge Orr, Jerry has served as educator in his long career as teacher and administrator in the St. Paul Public Schools. Shannon oversees juveniles in the Sentence to Serve program each year. These youth help clean up and maintain the Highland Public Gardens.

Just as 1912 toastmaster John Vye graded his own street in St. Anthony Park (approved by the city council and paid for by the city) another St. Anthony Park resident has made her mark over the years. Judy Wehrwein, member since 1985, an immigrant from England, and GCRC president in 1998, has been known for her traditional English garden in St. Anthony Park. The March 1989 issue of the *Park Bugle* credits Wehrwein with national fame when her garden was featured in *Better Homes and Gardens* as one of five outstanding American gardens. At that time she confided, "My goal was never to have to pay for a brick." Building sites, city demolition crews, and a roadside dump in Wisconsin provide most of her raw material. She confessed, "I did finally have to break down and buy some [bricks.]"²⁰

Just as John Dunn led by example in his plantings at the turn of the century, our twenty-first-century Garden Club members, Sherry and Rick Sanders, have been an inspiration as they continue to restore their property on McCarrons Lake in Roseville with a massive lakeshore restorations project. The Sanders agree, "It is paramount for us to help restore ecosystems. By sharing the beauty and wonder of our environment, we encourage others to join this mission."²¹ (See photo on back cover.)

Founder of the *Men's Garden Club*, attorney Zenas Thomas, might be surprised that in 2012 the Club boasts a young, female lawyer, Jodie Carlson. Another dedicated gardener, Mary



This undated photo reflects the pleasure that Edith and Zenas Thomas received during one Fall day from harvesting the potatoes that they grew in their garden. Photo courtesy of John and Carla Henry.

Maguire Lehrman, legislator and current chairman of the board of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society, was a child member of the Garden Club of Ramsey County. Emma Ebeling is a current child member of the Club.

Former *St Paul Pioneer Press* garden writer and master gardener, Marge Hols, continues to showcase her garden as well as hosting yearly luncheons in her floral conservatory as an auction item to benefit the food shelves every year.

Centennial Celebrations

The Garden Club of Ramsey County held its official 100th birthday party on April 16, 2012. President Liz Morrison led a champagne toast to the Club which has for one hundred years worked toward making St. Paul a premier garden city. At the meeting, History and Archives Chair MaryDon Beeson announced that the Club was the recipient of the Cultural Heritage Award from the Saint Paul Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

On May 15, 2012, the award was presented to five former Club presidents, one from each decade from the 1960s to the present: Jerald Shannon (and wife Leona) for the 1960s; Barbara Meyer 1970s; Ruth Luh (for husband Edwin) 1980s; Judy Wehrwein 1990s; Maureen Adelman 2000s; and current president Liz Morrison. The award text reads “for encouraging the cultivation of trees,



In November 1933, at the heart of the Depression, members of the Club filled 100 baskets with food harvested from their gardens that was distributed to the needy. GCRC member Louis W. Hill is credited with starting this tradition. This photo from 1954 shows that the Club's practice of filling food baskets for the needy at Thanksgiving has been ongoing, even after the local economy improved. Minneapolis StarTribune photo. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



In the 1960s and '70s, Carl Pedro competed in flower shows sponsored by the Garden Club and earned a meager 50¢ in prize money, but he also gained immeasurable bragging rights. Photo courtesy of Marilyn Pitera.

flowers, fruits and vegetables in Saint Paul, educating its citizens and civic plantings for 100 years.”²²

On May 21, 2012, the Club held another centennial celebration beginning with a wine reception in the garden of Jerry and Lee Shannon followed by a presentation at Highland Recreation Center. Nationally known garden writer and designer Cole Burrell was the featured speaker. Burrell, who had designed the native gardens surrounding the Highland Library and Recreation Center, spoke on “Literature into Art: Books that Changed the Way We Garden.”

The final celebration will be a Centennial Potluck Picnic at Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakotah Life on July 16, 2012. Garden Club of Ramsey County members, families, and friends are invited to visit gardens and exhibits at 5:30 p.m. and share a potluck picnic at

6:30. This is a fitting final centennial celebration. Heman Gibbs, original owner of the land on which the Gibbs farmhouse still stands, was active in the Minnesota State Horticultural Society. In 1849, Jane and Heman Gibbs built a small, one-room, dug-out sod house where they lived for five years while farming the land. The remains of this “soddy” have been excavated. Prior to the picnic at Gibbs Museum, members can see this excavation site and a replica sod house as well as the farmhouse, which was built later to accommodate a growing family. Heman’s son, Frank Gibbs, who became a cut flower grower on Gibbs land near the original family homestead, was often featured as a speaker in the early years of the Men’s Garden Club of Ramsey County. Current GCRC members and life members of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society, Ralph and Loanne Thrane, are Gibbs Museum volunteers.²³

The Garden Club of Ramsey County, the oldest continuously operated gardening club in Minnesota, proudly celebrates its one hundredth year.

Barbara Parisien has a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Hamline University. Since her retirement from teaching high school English, she devotes much of her time to writing, watercolor painting, and

gardening. She credits MaryDon Beeson, Garden Club of Ramsey County archivist, treasurer, and former president, for providing archived material, historical data, fact checking, and her passion for history as part of the preparation of this article. For more information about the Garden Club of Ramsey County or to become a member, visit the Club's website at www.ramseygardeners.org.



In June 2012 all of the living past presidents of the club were honored at a centennial dinner in the Shannon's Highland Park garden. Pictured top row, left to right: Jerald Shannon 1996; Karl Reiter 2008; Conrad Leighton 1990; (blocked) Judy Wehrwein 1998; Ruth Luh 1999; Kirsti Groess 2006; John W. Mercer 2000-01; Maureen Adelman 2003; Karen Milton 2004; Barbara Meyer 1983-84; Laurie Krivitz 2010; and Judy MacManus 2007. Bottom row: Liz Morrison 2012; Cyn Bloom 2002; Virginia Melin 1979-80; MaryDon Beeson, 2005; Fran Duffee 2011; and Virginia Nitardy 1994-95. Those who were unable to attend: Stanley Strommer 1979; Patricia Schue 1981; Jim Beardsley 1986-87; Eric Nitardy 1994-95; and Karen Sutherland 2009.



On May 19, 2012, members of the Garden Club of Ramsey County donated over 3,200 plants to be sold to gardeners in the community. This project is a fundraiser whose proceeds benefit GCRC annual giving programs. Photo courtesy of Joan Floren.

Endnotes

- Minutes of April 3, 1912, meeting from the archives of the Men's Garden Club of Ramsey County, now known at the Garden Club of Ramsey County (GCRC). The archives are held by the Ramsey County Historical Society. Most of the information in the text of this article is based on this archived material.
- Information about Zenas Thomas is from the author's interview with John Henry Thomas on April 12, 2012, and from a booklet, "Memorial Services for Deceased Members of the Ramsey County Bar Association."
- Theodore A. Erickson with the assistance of Anna North Coit, *My Sixty Years with Rural Youth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 150.
- Archives, GCRC, "Garden Club Hits Cox Ouster Move," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, December 14, 1923 and speech, given at the 40th anniversary meeting.
- Archives, GCRC, 40th Anniversary history (1962) signed by Mrs. K.W. (Marge) Fisher.
- Archives, GCRC, 1952 history and *The Market Grower's Journal* (1920).
- "Garden Guide" (St. Paul: Men's Garden Club Ramsey County, [n.d.]), 2 volumes, Garden Book, 1033 Lincoln Avenue, in James Taylor Dunn and Family Papers, 1903-1927, Minnesota History Center, Location 142.F.18.7B, Box 37.
- Websites of garden centers: www.linders.com; www.gertens.com; and www.hermesfloral.com.
- Archives, GCRC, 1912-1932.
- Archives, GCRC, President's Report (1932) and a history written in 1987 by GCRC historian, Ray Lindquist.
- Archives, GCRC, President's Report (1932) and installation ceremony, 1948.
- Archives, GCRC, 1987 speech by historian Ray Lindquist.
- Archives, GCRC, 40th Anniversary history signed by Mrs. K.W. (Marge) Fisher.
- "Ramsey Garden Club Past 65," *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 15, 1977.
- Poster in the archives of GCRC.
- A framed poster hangs in the St. Paul Public Library at Hillcrest. Laminated plant guides can be checked out by patrons so that they can identify the native plants around the library grounds.
- The certificate is in the archives of the GCRC.
- Notes from GCRC Secretary R. Steinman, November 16, 1933.
- GCRC Treasurer's records.
- "How Does Her Garden Grow?" *Park Bugle*, March 1989.
- Author's interview with Sherry and Rick Sanders, May 22, 2012.
- Cultural Heritage Award presented at St. Paul City Hall, May 15, 2012.
- Gibbs Museum website <http://www.rchs.com/gbbsfm2.htm>.

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage
PAID
Twin Cities, MN
Permit #3989



Sherry and Rick Sanders, members of the Garden Club of Ramsey County, have taken on a massive lakeshore restoration project at their home on McCarrons Lake outside St. Paul. They believe, "It is paramount for us to help restore ecosystems. By sharing the beauty and wonder of our environment, we encourage others to join this mission." For more on the Garden Club of Ramsey County, see page 3. Photo courtesy of Sherry and Rick Sanders.