

RAMSEY COUNTY
History

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The burning of St. Paul's International Hotel in 1869. See article on "the men who ran with the machine," St. Paul's volunteer firemen, beginning on page 4. "The Mystery of the Leaking Lake" begins on page 18.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Ramsey County History is your magazine. Without readers who have an interest in St. Paul, Ramsey County and the surrounding area, this magazine cannot be a forum for ideas and discovery about the history of Ramsey County.

Because the Editorial Board wants to encourage and support writing about urban and rural history relating to St. Paul and Ramsey County, we invite you to send us any suggestions or ideas for future articles or topics to be presented in this magazine. Perhaps there is a favorite landmark, person, group or institution that you would like to know more about. Whether your question concerns the origin of a street name in St. Paul or the origin of a neighborhood in Ramsey County, let us know of your interest and desire to learn more. Please call or write our editor, our executive director or the Society's general office in Landmark Center.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

A Matter of Time

1850 140 YEARS AGO

► Minnesota's winter weather physically isolated its sturdy pioneers, who were dependent on the river. During warm weather the Mississippi delivered settlers and supplies to St. Paul's steamboat landings but the community was locked away during the long, ice-bound winters. On December 4, 1850, the *Minnesota Pioneer* reported, the temperature was 14 degrees below zero but it could have been lower since "whether we have any accurate, reliable thermometers is doubtful."

Physical isolation, however, didn't sever the links with news from the outside world. Germany, even then, was discussing unification. As the *Pioneer* summarized it, "The conviction that it is impossible to go on in Germany with 37 or 38 governments is universal."

The *Pioneer's* report concerned one of the most famous of 19th century Europe's political upheavals. The revolution of 1848 pitted German intellectuals, who wanted a united Germany with political equality and a republican form of government, against the many small rulers of the German states who were determined to resist any local application of democratic ideas released by the French Revolution.

A national parliament, meeting in Frankfort, had drafted a constitution for a federal German empire headed by Prussia but the the Prussian king, hating the revolution and fearing Austrian opposition, refused to become emperor. With the collapse of the movement, thousands of German liberals fled to the United States. A number of these "Forty-eighters" reached St. Paul, the vanguard of the heavy tide of German immigrants that would flood Ramsey County during the latter half of the 19th century.

► Far to the west, the California Gold Rush, which had lured some of the



Swede Hollow between 1912 and 1915. For more on Edward Phelan, see page 18, and for more about Swede Hollow, read Saint Mudd, reviewed on page 30.

"Forty-eighters," appeared to be over, the *Pioneer* noted in December, 1850: "One of our citizens, who went there last spring, advises [those] who are here to stay where they are." "Men," the newspaper sniffed, "are beginning to learn that steady, persevering industry is not only the surest, but the shortest road to independence."

That advice likely would have been lost on Edward Phelan, had he been around to see it. Phelan, a discharged soldier from Fort Snelling, was the first settler in what is now downtown St. Paul. In 1839 he built a cabin on a claim that extended along the Mississippi from present-day Eagle to St. Peter Streets.

Some months later Phelan, who had a reputation for cruelty, was hauled off to Prairie du Chien, charged with murdering John Hays, who occupied a claim next to him. Released for lack of evidence, Phelan returned to St. Paul and

took up another claim in what became known as Swede Hollow, on the creek that bears his name (now spelled "Phalen").

The lure of California gold apparently plucked at Phelan, but he was propelled westward by another event in his tumultuous life. Indicted for perjury in the spring of 1850 by the first grand jury to sit in Ramsey County, Phelan fled and set out for California.

He never reached his El Dorado. Reports came back to St. Paul that Phelan had come to a violent end while crossing the plains, killed, apparently, by men in the same caravan who were defending themselves against his brutal manner. ► Halfway around the world, the Taiping rebellion was underway in China. The *Pioneer* reported that, "A pretender to the throne has collected an army of 50,000 men, plundered several of the towns and boldly aims at overthrowing

the government.”

► Back home, Minnesota's territorial government drew a blast from the *Pioneer*: “By some blundering stupidity in legislation, the law requires our Legislature to assemble and sit on New Years Day—a day in which most legislative bodies were apt to be in a condition to lie, rather than to sit.”

► St. Paul certainly was in a holiday mood. The first of a series of parties, the *Pioneer* observed, was held December 3 at Mazurka Hall in Upper Town. Seventy-five people were present for the music of the Sixth Regimental Band.

► Travelers to Galena, Illinois, could purchase *The Scarlet Letter* and works by Edgar A. Poe in J. Brookes' bookshop there.

1890 100 YEARS AGO

► Of considerable interest to the Irish of Ramsey County were *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reports that the Irish Nationalist Party of Charles Stewart Parnell had split, with Parnell retaining leadership of twenty-three of the faithful; forty-five others deserted Parnell to form a new party under Justin McCarthy.

It was the twilight of his career for the brilliant, charismatic leader whose small but powerful party in Parliament had come so close to achieving Home Rule for Ireland. A scandal arising out of his relationship with Kitty O'Shea, wife of a Parnell supporter, so shattered Parnell's reputation and influence that he lost the leadership of his party and died in 1891. In St. Paul the young Irish-American Club welcomed in 1891 with a New Year's reception in the Windsor Hotel.

► Out in South Dakota tragedy was awaiting Sitting Bull, the famous tribal leader and holy man of the Hunkpapa Sioux Indians and a former star of Buffalo Bill's circus. Hundreds of Sioux had gathered for the Ghost Dance, a religious rite designed to offer hope to the Sioux that, through the magic of dance, the buffalo would be brought back to the plains and the whites banished.

United States troops, however, thought the Sioux meant to revolt and attacked, killing men, women and children

and piling their bodies in trenches. With the incredible insensitivity and prejudice that characterized that era and did so much to poison relations between the races, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* commented that “the speediest method of the government to select in getting at the seat of the Indian troubles is to have Sitting Bull's hair lifted a la Sioux.”

On December 15 Sitting Bull was killed by Indian troops as he resisted their attempts to arrest him.

► Politics were of interest as the 1891 legislative session neared. Representative W. F. Cross proposed the reorganization of the House of Representatives on a non-partisan basis and the *Pioneer Press* noted that Minnesota picked up two more congressional seats in the 1890 reapportionment.

► At least 5,000 St. Paul residents were working for the railroads in 1890. Friedrich Emmert, superintendent of the Flint and Marquette, was arrested for keeping a dead employee on the payroll and pocketing his salary.

► Citizens interested in holding another Winter Carnival met to request \$10,000 from the city of St. Paul. The carnival had fallen on hard times. Launched with great fanfare in 1886, it was held again in 1887 and 1888. Then enthusiasm waned. When January of 1889 turned out to be unusually warm, the carnival was canceled and not held again until 1896. Apparently, the effort to tap the city for an 1891 carnival was unsuccessful.

1915 75 YEARS AGO

► General Francisco (Pancho) Villa gave up his struggle against the Carranza government in Mexico, telling his followers to “take care of themselves,” the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* told its readers in December, 1915. Scarcely a year later Villa and his small army of revolutionaries attacked Columbus, New Mexico, looting the town and killing some of its inhabitants. The National Guard was called into federal service, an act which involved Minnesota's three infantry regiments, the First, Second and Third, as well as the First Minnesota Field Artillery.

An expeditionary force under Brigadier General John J. Pershing was formed to pursue Villa who continued to cross the border into the United States to kill and loot. Minnesota's regiments were sent to Llano Grande, Texas, where they helped patrol the troubled border throughout seven months of intensive training in Texas heat and dust.

► The war raging across the Atlantic increasingly concerned a still-neutral United States. The Sixty-fourth Congress debated a bill that would allow the country to defend its integrity against any threat. In the meantime, the Serbians were being pushed back by the Bulgars, the Allies began to use airplanes as a defense against the German U-boats and the Armenians issued a call for aid.

► Fort Snelling figured in a growing concern over preparedness. Creation of a “second West Point” at the Fort was proposed that December, in order to increase the number of trained officers.

► Automobiles were becoming an economic necessity, the industry was trying to persuade Americans. Overland advertised “benefits beyond calculation” for \$725 in the *Pioneer Press*.

► In a forecast of things to come, Dr. John Atkinson claimed that cigaret smoking created an irregular pulse and elevated blood pressure.

1940 50 YEARS AGO

► War news again filled the front pages of the St. Paul newspapers. The Bessarabians revolted, that December, rather than be ceded by Romania to the Soviet Union. The Greeks were holding out against Mussolini's Italian forces. Britain asked the United States for more aid and President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced plans to create a 200-ship Navy.

► After almost a decade of unemployment during the Depression, a shortage of labor was a problem as the country geared for battle. William Knudsen was named to head a council to streamline war production, the American Youth Commission reported that high schools would include vocational training to meet local needs for labor and the National Youth Administration hired



Schuneman and Evans, one of St. Paul's leading department stores, circa 1890, when the store advertised a "real diamond ring" for \$1.98.

20,000 more young people in Minnesota.

► Otherwise, just a year away from the attack on Pearl Harbor, all seemed normal on the home front. The Young Motor Company was selling a 1940 Ford Deluxe sedan for \$650, a 1939 Ford Sport Convertible for \$550 and a 1928 Ford Model A for \$45. Quilted robes were on sale for \$10.95 and *Mrs. Miniver and Information Please: 1941 Edition* were the best-sellers at the Golden Rule.

► At the movies, "Philadelphia Story," starring Katharine Hepburn, arrived in St. Paul to compete with "Go West," featuring the Marx Brothers.

1965 25 YEARS AGO

► Although Lieutenant General Lewis Hershey, director of the Selective Service, was claiming the right to reclassify and draft Vietnam War protestors, peace talks seemed to be in the air. Guns still outweighed butter, however, as "informed sources" placed the 1966 budget at more than \$60 billion. The Federal Reserve planned to increase the discount rate, provoking the ire of President Lyn-

Johnson.

► Foreign ministers of thirty-four African nations adopted secret measures to bring down Rhodesia's white-ruled government, as Great Britain's economic sanctions began to bite. And in France, Charles de Gaulle was forced into a run-off election to remain president.

► The St. Paul Junior Chamber of Commerce held its 36th annual Bosses Night dinner at the Prom Center. Ronald M. Hubbs, president of the St. Paul Companies, received the Boss-of-the-Year award. Elsewhere, corporate wife and mother Mrs. J. Robert Flour, declared that a good corporate wife should not be too beautiful or smart.

► Out in Los Angeles, conditions after the Watts riots continued to be disastrous. An eight-person commission reported that the causes of the riots included poor schools, hatred of the police, a burgeoning population, inadequate public transportation and insufficient federal programs. In Selma, Alabama, an all-white jury acquitted three men of the slaying of Unitarian minister James Reeb.

Letters from page 3

tutions and commercial centers of both cities. That cooperative spirit was perhaps best personified by the joint efforts of both Mayor Latimer and Mayor Fraser in modernizing the downtown business districts of both cities in the early 1980s.

—A. C. McWatt, St. Paul.

West is South, North is..?

When did St. Paul annex the West Side and why on earth is it called the "West" side when it so obviously lies to the south of St. Paul?

—Paul Conrad, South St. Paul.

The Mississippi mostly runs south and divides the nation more or less neatly in two—hence the historic references to "east" or "west" of the Mississippi. However, at the point where the Minnesota river joins the Mississippi, the Mississippi enters a great bend and flows north and east, so that the West Side really does lie south of St. Paul. St. Paul annexed the West Side in 1874.

Comiskey's White Sox

When we visited the Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, New York, we noted that Charles Comiskey was manager in St. Paul of the New Western League which in 1900 moved its franchise to Chicago and became the White Sox. Later, on a tour of Frogtown in St. Paul, our guide pointed out a site where Comiskey's team had played. However, he told us, the city would not allow games on Sunday so Comiskey moved the games outside of the city limits to Lexington Park, now the site of the University-Lexington mall. Shortly afterwards, as I recall the story, the city annexed the site. Since the Sunday law still applied, Comiskey took his team to Chicago as the White Sox and built Comiskey Park, where the last game in this park was played this past September. I believe this story to be true, but it could be authenticated through the newspapers, and it might be the basis for an interesting article in *Ramsey County History*.

—Martha C. Bray, St. Paul.



Before the days of boom boxes, canoeists at Phalen Park in the 1920s brought along their victrolas to listen to music. For a history of the park and of Lake Phalen, see the article beginning on page 18.

R.C.H.S.
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