RAMSEY COUNTY
# History
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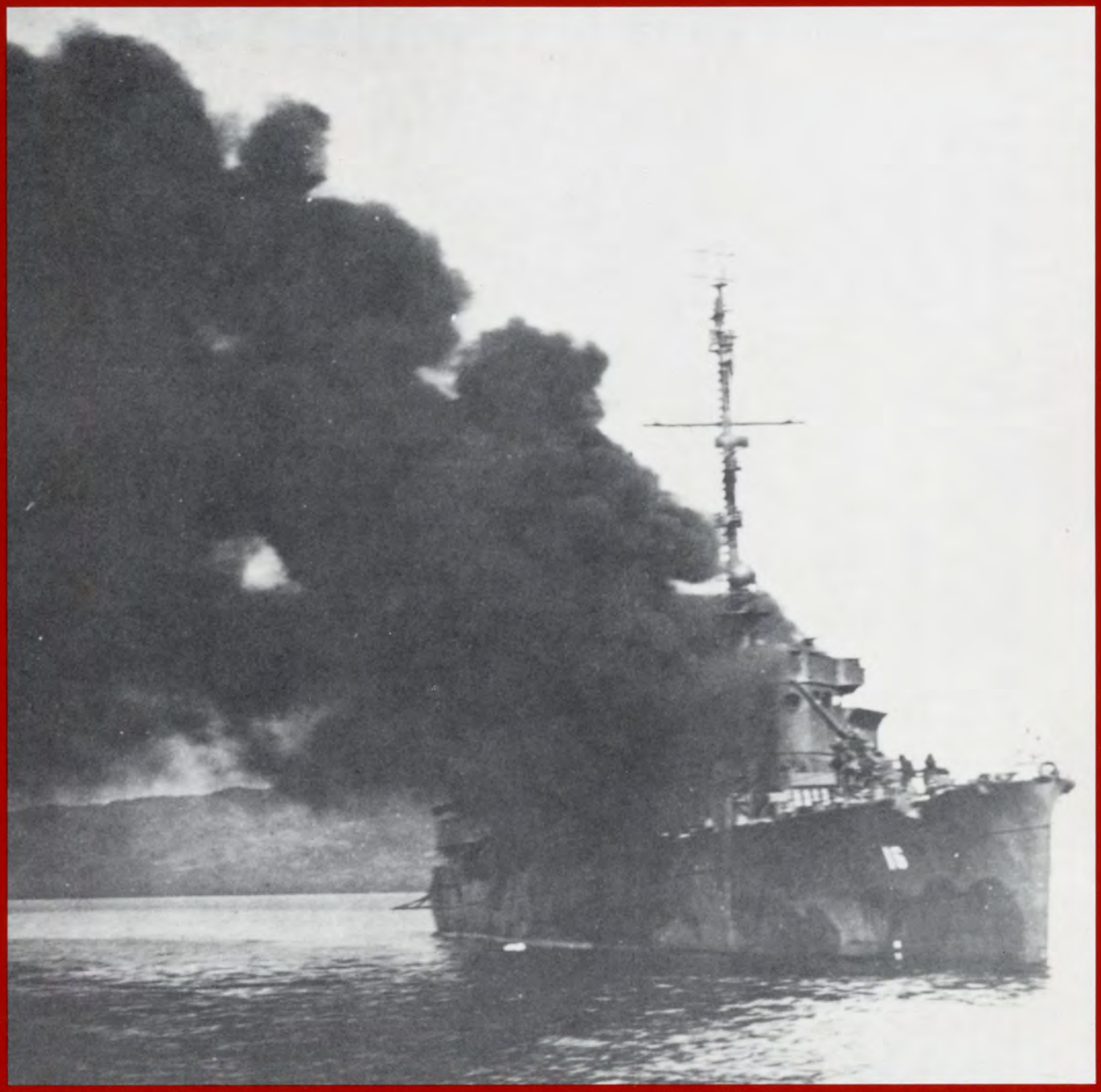

*The death of the U.S.S.* Ward. *The destroyer whose crew made up almost entirely of St. Paul men fired America's first shot of World War II, was sunk by gunfire three years to the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.* *See the article beginning on page 4 about the ship and her crew.*

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Fifty years ago this month the United States joined the global conflict known as World War II. This issue of *Ramsey County History* focuses on that momentous event with Jane McClure's article about the St. Paul men who served on the U.S.S. *Ward*, which fired the first shot at the Japanese. While men like the sailors of the *Ward* fought the enemy overseas, others, such as Hilda Rachuy, battled different adversaries–hunger, hardship, and poverty–as a single mother with two small children at home in St. Paul. Her article is a first-person account of that truly difficult side of the war. Lastly, Tom Kelley gives us new awareness and insight into Family Service of Greater Saint Paul, a 100-year-old social service organization developed to help those like Hilda Rachuy who need institutional support and comfort in their daily struggle to hold a family together.

–*John M. Lindley*, chairman, Editorial Board

# What's Historic About this Site?

## *St. Paul's Union Depot*

*Editor's Note: This is the eighth in a series of articles on Ramsey County's historic sites.*

Troop trains leaving St. Paul's Union Depot carried young men and women into service during World War II and the Korean War. This was the city's second Union Depot. The first was built in 1879 near the site of the St. Paul and Pacific railroad's little depot on Third between Jackson and Sibley streets at a time when at least twelve separate rail lines threaded in and out of St. Paul.

The first Union Depot was a massive Victorian structure that cost $125,000 and remained a city landmark for almost forty years. It opened in 1881, but it was damaged by fire in 1884. By 1889, after it was rebuilt, the depot was handling 8 million passengers a year and up to 268 trains daily.

However, in this heyday of the railroad era and of the great rail networks that linked the nation coast-to-coast, the expanding railroad industry began to outgrow the first depot almost as soon as it opened. By the 1880s, plans for a new depot were being coordinated by Great Northern President James J. Hill.

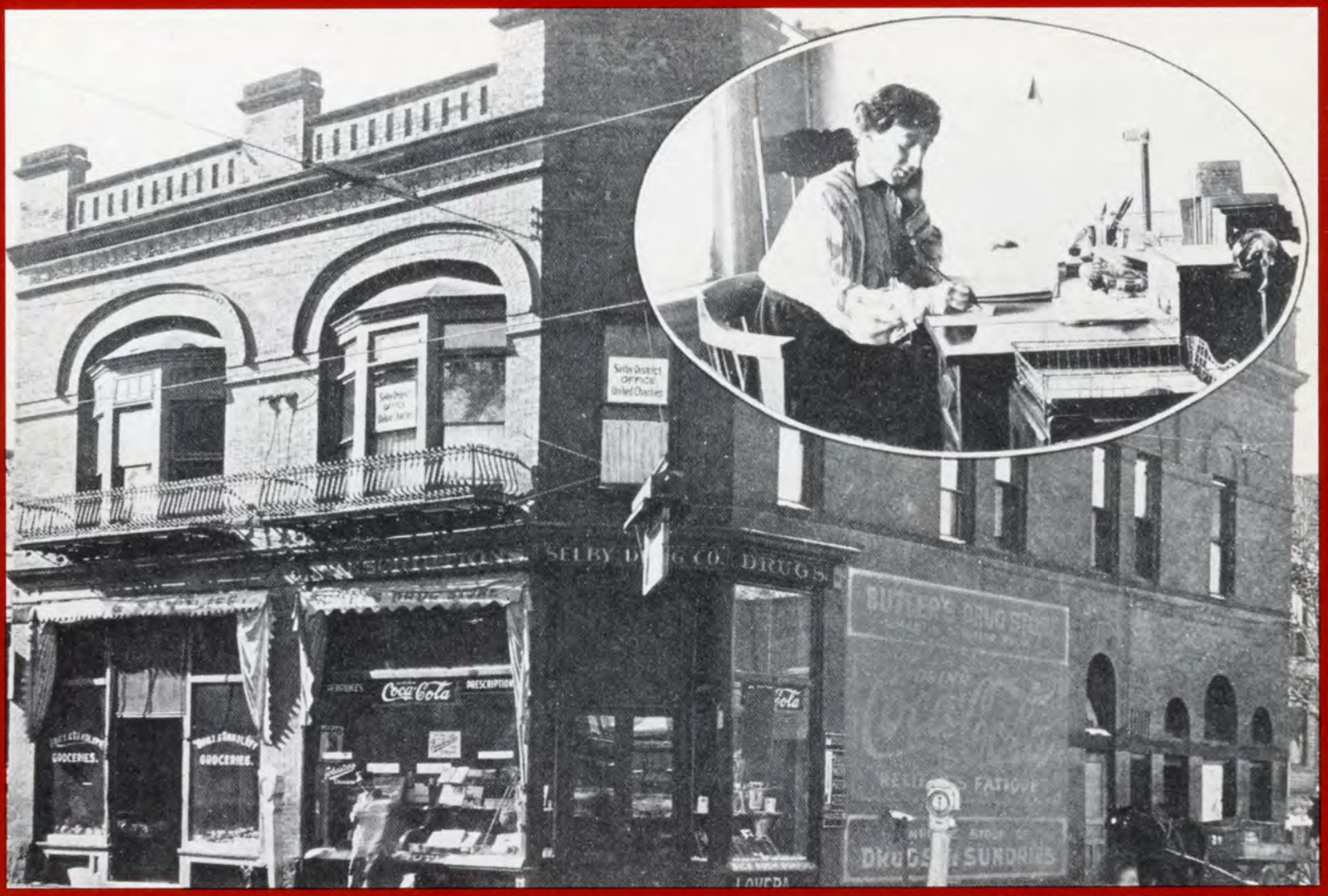
Hill died in 1916, the year before construction began on the new Union Depot at Fourth and Sibley streets. World War I, however, delayed construction and the 250,000 square foot terminal was not completed until 1923. In the meantime, the old passenger terminal was gutted by fire; passengers made-do with a shed-like remnant.

The new depot was designed by Chicago architect, Charles Frost. It was built by Toltz Engineering Company, with Colonel Fred Mears as supervisor, and George C. Grant Construction Company of St. Paul. The depot is a simple, rather severe example of the Neo-classical style of architecture often used in public buildings during the first half of the twentieth century.

*The Union Depot, St. Paul, as it looked in 1925.*

A colonnade of ten doric columns separates its identical left and right wings on the exterior. The interior, of Kasota dolostone, pink Tennessee marble, gray Missouri marble and reinforced concrete, was lavishly decorated with travertine murals and reliefs depicting the history of transportation in Minnesota. A long brick concourse extending south spanned seventeen tracks and Kellogg Boulevard.

It is perhaps an irony of history that the Union Depot opened in the waning years of the railroad age, when automobiles, trucks, buses and, eventually, aircraft would begin to compete for the passengers and freight that had been the lifeblood of the railroads. Use of the Union Depot for passenger traffic ended in the early 1970s and the depot remained closed for twelve years. Plans for its reuse came and went. A massive restoration project headed by St. Paul architect, Craig Rafferty, began in 1983. The depot is now open to the public as an office center.




*Family Service of Greater Saint Paul is marking a century of service to the community. It is an outgrowth of earlier charitable organizations, such as the United Charities, whose Selby District Office is shown here. It was located at 624 Selby Avenue from 1916 to 1919. An article tracing Family Service's history begins on page 18.*

R.C.H.S.
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