

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

**Josias King —  
First of the First**

*Page 18*

**Winter, 1992-1993**

Volume 27, Number 4

**Henry Bosse and the Mississippi's  
Passage Into the Age of Industry**

*Page 4*



*St. Paul, photographed in 1885 by Henry Bosse. Photo from the St. Paul District, United States Corps of Engineers. See article beginning on Page 4.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 27, Number 4

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## CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** Henry Bosse's Priceless Photographs  
And the Mississippi's Passage into the Age of Industry  
*John Anfinson*
- 10** Draughtsman, Photographer, Artist—  
Who was the Mysterious Henry Bosse?  
*William Roba*
- 12** Growing Up in St. Paul—  
Looking Back at the Black Community  
*Eula T. Murphy (With David V. Taylor)*
- 16** Charlotte Quisconsin Van Cleve  
Daughter of the Regiment  
*Ronald M. Hubbs*
- 18** Josias King—First Volunteer for the Union  
*Robert J. Stumm*
- 20** A Matter of Time
- 23** Books, Etc.
- 27** What's Historic About This Site?  
*The George Luckert House*

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## Charlotte Ouisconsin Van Cleve

# Daughter of a Frontier Regiment – 1819

Ronald M. Hubbs

In Minnesota, in the depths of winter, life on the frontier, at an army post not yet built, seems considerably less than idyllic. But to a remarkable woman, it was just that as she looked back on her life more than half a century later.

Charlotte Ouisconsin Clark Van Cleve's account, "Life-long Memories of Fort Snelling," was published in 1888 as *Three Score Years and Ten*. She was almost seventy when she wrote her book and she expresses attitudes toward the Native American people she would encounter that were acceptable then, but not now. She also wrote with the sentimental Victorian flourishes typical of her time. But tucked into the flowery language are very real accounts of what it was like to grow up, and later to raise her own children on the very edge of civilization as she knew it. Although it is long out of print, her book reminds us that much fascinating and often personal history still awaits readers who will seek out these accounts in libraries or rare bookstores, or search for them at estate sales and in antique shops.

Charlotte Ouisconsin Clark Van Cleve began her story in 1819 in Hartford, Connecticut, where her father, Lieutenant Nathan Clark, was a recruiting officer for the United States army. There he was ordered to rejoin the Fifth United States Infantry regiment, at Detroit, Michigan. The regiment and its commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Leavenworth, were under orders to move to the Mississippi River and establish a military post at the junction of the Mississippi and the St. Peter's [Minnesota] Rivers. (Leavenworth's name has been preserved in posterity as the name of a city and of Fort Leavenworth, home of one of the nation's celebrated military educational institutions, the Command and General Staff College.)

Although Lieutenant Clark and his wife

had a son a year and a half old, and Mrs. Clark was pregnant with her second child, Charlotte herself, she insisted that she was prepared to "venture over so long and perilous" a journey and also to meet "the storm of opposition that broke upon them . . . from relatives and friends."

Travel obviously was not easy at that time: "A wearisome stage journey of many days brought them to Buffalo where, after a short time, they embarked in schooners for Detroit," then forward "with the regiment by water to Green Bay; thence in batteaux they ascended the Fox River to Lake Winnebago" in central Wisconsin.

Leavenworth had been instructed to "conciliate the Indians and avoid everything which might arouse opposition of these owners of the soil . . . to hold a council with them, and crave permission to proceed on their journey. This being announced to the chiefs of the tribe, they assembled to hear what the 'white brother' had to say. The day was beautiful; the troops all in uniform with bayonets glancing in the sun made an imposing occasion."

Charlotte Van Cleve described the scene as ". . . Colonel Leavenworth stepped forward and, through an interpreter, formally requested of the Chief permission to pass peaceably through their country. The Chief, a very handsome young brave, advanced, and with his right arm uncovered, said with most expressive gestures, 'My brother, do you see the calm, blue sky above us? Do you see the lake that lies so peacefully at our feet? So calm, so peaceful are our hearts towards you. Pass on!'"

The party then transported their boats "to a point least distant from the Ouisconsin [river] . . . by the aid of Indians. . . . This was a tedious process . . . and the boats were again on the stream, called by the Indians 'Nee-na-hoo-na-nink-a' (beautiful little river) and by the whites

Ouisconsin, the French orthography for what we now write 'Wisconsin'. . . . The tedious descent of the Wisconsin was at last successfully accomplished and at the mouth stood old Fort Crawford and a settlement of French and half-breeds called 'Prairie du Chien'."

The party had expected to reach this point in June and now it was July, Charlotte Van Cleve wrote. They were exhausted, afraid of Indian attack and in spite of "all possible care, the pork barrels leaked badly and the contents were rusting; the flour had been so exposed to dampness that for the depth of three inches or more, it was solid blue mold, and there was no choice between this wretched fare and starvation. . . ."

About an hour after the group's arrival at Prairie du Chien, the Clarks' new baby was born and named Charlotte for her mother, to which was added by the officers "Ouisconsin."

". . . It is difficult to realize how my mother endured her hardships," Charlotte wrote. "and when I add that almost immediately both she and my brother were seized with fever and ague, which soon exhausted their strength and made them very helpless, it would seem almost beyond belief that she should survive. . . . My dear father could never speak of that experience without a shudder. . . ." Soon the troops moved on, however, and the feeble mother, her small son and her "Little Daughter of the Regiment" went with them.

They traveled up the Mississippi on batteaux and keel boats, the keel boats having been fitted up as comfortably as possible for the women and children. They "were propelled by poles all that three hundred miles [up the Mississippi] in the following manner: Several men stood on each side of the boat on what was called the running board, with their faces to the stern, and

placing their long poles on the river bottom, braced them against their shoulders and pushed hard, walking toward the stern. Then, detaching the poles, they walked back to the bow, and repeated this operation hour after hour, being relieved at intervals for rest."

She described the end of the journey: "Sometime in September the pioneer regiment arrived in pretty good condition—where? No fort, no settlement, no regular landing even, simply at the mouth of the St. Peter's River where we had been ordered to halt and our long march ended."

"In trying times," she wrote, "the courage of the ladies of the party did not fail . . . their cheerful way of taking things as they came and making the best of them was a constant blessing and source of strength to that little community." For many weeks, the boats were their only shelter but finally a stockade was built that enclosed log houses erected for the garrison.

The winters of 1819 and 1820 were "very cold with heavy snows and fierce winds" and their quarters "were not calculated to resist the severe storms which at times raged with great violence." On one occasion, the roof of their quarters was blown off and the walls seemed about to fall in. Her father, Charlotte wrote, "held up the chimney to prevent a total downfall; while the baby [Charlotte herself], who had been pushed under the bed in her cradle, lay there . . . 'smiling unbeknownst' . . . when, upon being drawn out . . . she evinced great pleasure at the commotion . . . as something designed especially for her amusement. Scurvy broke out among the soldiers and forty of them died of this dreadful disease."

That spring of 1820, more permanent and comfortable quarters were built at "the beautiful spring on the fort side of the [Mississippi], and named by the officers Camp Coldwater. Before the garrison could move into their new quarters, Colonel Leavenworth was relieved from the command by Colonel Josiah Snelling, who wasted no time in commencing to build a fort. Two years later, Mrs. Snelling gave birth to the first white child born in what became Minnesota.

In 1821 the Fifth Infantry moved into the fort that was named for the new com-



Charlotte Ouisconsin Van Cleve

manding officer. "Then the only white people within three hundred miles were shut within that hollow square, a community dependent largely on each other for all the little everyday kindnesses and amenities which made life enjoyable, having no regular intercourse with the civilized world, except by mail, which at first was received semi-annually, after awhile quarterly, and for many years not more frequently than bi-monthly. We really shared each other's pleasures and wept each other's tears."

As soon as Fort Snelling was occupied, the first school was organized and Charlotte added a familiar comment: ". . . with all the improvements in the way of text books and methods, I do not think the results, as far as fundamental education goes, are more satisfactory now than then." The first Sunday School was established at the same time by Mrs. Snelling and Charlotte's mother.

"There was no Chaplain allowed us then, no Sabbath service and these Christian women felt they could not live or bring up their children in that way," Charlotte wrote. "They therefore gathered the children together on Sabbath afternoons in the basement room of the commanding officer's quarters and held a service, with the aid of the Episcopal prayer book, both of them being devout members of that branch of the church, and taught the little

ones from the Bible."

"It was difficult," she wrote, "to find amusements and recreation [during] the winters in that fort, so completely shut away from the world and so environed by snow and ice" but various activities were planned "to keep up the general cheerfulness and to ward off gloomy feelings and homesickness. I can dimly remember the acting of plays in which the gentlemen impersonated all the characters . . . men and women!" The monotony of life at the fort during the warm months was relieved by expeditions to the "little falls," now Minnehaha, and to Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet, named for Mrs. Leavenworth, in what is now south Minneapolis. The arrival of the steamboats also was the cause of great excitement. The first steamboat to arrive in 1823 set off a great celebration.

Whiskey rations for the troops were a part of army life at that time, and Charlotte Van Cleve commented on the practice: "In those days there seemed nothing wrong in this; but with the added light and wisdom of sixty years, all right-minded people would now regard it as [an] evil."

Joe Rolette, famous for preventing passage of the bill that would have transferred the state capital from St. Paul to St. Peter, makes an early appearance in Minnesota history through Charlotte's account. At the time, she wrote, he was furnishing beef to the garrison at Fort Snelling.

A wolf hunt the children of the garrison organized themselves after the loss of chickens and pets stood out in her memory. The children found that traps set for the wolves were gone, but blood indicated that a wolf had been there. They induced a young Indian to search for the wolf, which he did successfully. His reward was a loaf

In 1825 Lieutenant Clark was granted a furlough and took his family East for a visit. To reach their New York destination, they traveled by keel boat the 300 miles to Prairie du Chien. From there they took a steamer to New Orleans and from New Orleans they journeyed by sailing ship "out of sight of land, encountering a fearful storm off Cape Hateras."

During these years, Captain Clark was assigned to recruiting duty in several other

*Daughter of the Regiment to page 19*

er climate, King resigned from his position and moved back to St. Paul.

His resourcefulness made it fairly easy to reenter the job market. Once again he worked as a surveyor, then at a desk job at an insurance company. King had one last fling with the military when he was appointed inspector general of the Minnesota National Guard. During his brief tenure, he put into effect a number of improvements, and afterward he came to be known as the "Father of the Minnesota Guard."

Josias King gained a measure of immortality when he posed for a statue that was the central element in St. Paul's first and only major Civil War monument. The monument stands near the intersection of Kellogg Boulevard and Summit Avenue, on a hill overlooking downtown St. Paul. It was dedicated on November 21, 1903, before a crowd of 4,000 people. Three times larger than life, the statue is perched atop a fifty-foot-high granite shaft and depicts King in the full-dress uniform of a Union soldier. While the body is that of a "standard" Civil War soldier, the head of the figure is a likeness of King modeled from life by sculptor John K. Daniels.

King's last years were lived in hardship. Civil War pensions amounted to little more than a stipend, and in order to support himself and his wife, King had to continue working even though he was past eighty. The Kings became even more impoverished after a streetcar accident on March 8, 1915, which left Josias incapacitated. Friends of the King family persuaded the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* to publicize their plight in a September edition in the hope of soliciting contributions. Thanks to the generosity of some of St. Paul's wealthiest residents, including James J. Hill, the Kings were presented with a gift of \$2,500 on Christmas Day, 1915.

After being confined to his bed for nearly a year, Josias King succumbed to a heart attack on February 10, 1916. Thousands mourned his passing at a service at the St. Paul Cathedral. Archbishop John Ireland officiated at the funeral, tying King's bravery and patriotism to the war America was about to enter in Europe. Josias King would have approved, for there is little doubt that, if alive and of draft age, he would have been among the first to volunteer for service in World War I.



*Josias King, top photograph. Below, King stands beside the bronze statue before it was placed on the monument. The head is his likeness, the body a "standard" Civil War soldier. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.*

*Robert J. Stumm is a freelance writer and author of two earlier articles on St. Paul history published in Ramsey County History.*

#### *Daughter of the Regiment from page 17*

states. He was ordered to Fort Howard at Green Bay, Wisconsin, and, in 1833 to Fort Winnebago on the Fox River in Wisconsin. Here he died in 1835. The two children had left for the East—Charlotte to attend "Mrs. Upthorpe's School for Young Ladies" in New Haven, Connecticut, and her brother to enter West Point.

In 1836, when she was sixteen, Charlotte Ouisconsin Clark married another army officer, Lieutenant Horatio P. Van Cleve, during a ceremony held in deep winter. Because of the snow and severe

weather, their minister became snow blind on his way to the ceremony but "he was so perfectly familiar with the marriage service that there was no delay in consequence."

Lieutenant—later Major—Van Cleve resigned his commission in the army, a step that was taken "after much thought and deliberation. . . . But the Army had always been my home; I loved it as such. I love it still, and it is a comfort to me in my old age to know that I am not far away from a fort, that I can almost see the beautiful flag as it sways in the breeze, can almost hear the drum and fife, the music of my childhood, and can feel that they are near me, in dear old Fort Snelling, my earliest home."

In 1856 the Van Cleves moved to Long Prairie, Todd County, Minnesota Territory, where they would live for the next five years. She wrote that it was a winter of great snow and cold, there was a serious lack of food and she faced the possibility that they would all starve to death. But a sled arrived "at the last desperate moment" with supplies. "It had taken the drivers seven days to travel twenty-nine miles.

With the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and the outbreak of the Civil War, Horatio Van Cleve was summoned to St. Paul by Governor Alexander Ramsey and asked to assume command of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The regiment distinguished itself in the battle of Mill Springs, and took part in the long siege of Corinth and the battles of Lockout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. The regiment's charge up Missionary Ridge was one of the great feats of courage of the war. Van Cleve was promoted to brigadier general early in the war and assigned the command of a brigade.

After the war, the Van Cleves settled first in St. Paul, then moved to Minneapolis. In their home at 603 Southeast Fifth Street, the Van Cleves celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on March 22, 1886. Van Cleve Park is named for the general.

*Ronald M. Hubbs, retired chairman of the board of the St. Paul Companies, is a frequent contributor to Ramsey County History.*



*Henry Bosse's photograph of St. Paul's old High Bridge after it opened to horse-and-buggy traffic in 1889. Because the bridge offered easy access to the Cherokee Heights neighborhood, settlement of this section of the West Side began in earnest. A modern bridge replaced the old bridge in 1985. See article beginning on page 4. Photograph from the St. Paul District, United States Corps of Engineers.*

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