

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.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by gifts from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr.; by a contribution from Reuel D. Harmon, and by grants from The Saint Paul Foundation and the F. R. Bigelow Foundation.

Special contributions have been received from the following supporters who are hereby named honorary editors of the Winter and Spring, 1993, issues of *Ramsey County History*:

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The Ramsey County Historical Society and the members of *Ramsey County History's* Editorial Board wish to express their deep appreciation to these contributors for their support.

A Matter of Time

1853 140 YEARS AGO

►The *Minnesota Pioneer's* editor was positively rhapsodic as he greeted the new year on January 20, 1853. "We are never more sensibly impressed with the fact of the wonderful growth of our town," he wrote, "than while passing from the upper end of the town to the lower, in the evening, when the lights gleam from the dwellings, like fireflies in a meadow.

"Then along Third Street for an eighth of a mile the shops are so illuminated as to give the scene a city aspect. Three years ago last spring, there was scarcely a store on that street. Indeed, if we rightly remember, the bluff above the Post Office was not graded and made passable until the summer of '51. Previous to that, the only carriage way from the lower end of town to the upper was in front of the Central House. . . .

"Property on Robert Street, which crosses from Third to Fourth, has become very valuable. For example, we are informed that a certain lot, 60 feet front and 100 deep with an ordinary store on it, is held at \$3,000 and that \$2,800 has been refused. The work of grading Fourth Street should be presented vigorously and early. The best sites on Third Street are mostly occupied.

►The outside world was crowding in on St. Paul that winter as the *Minnesota Pioneer* brought news from abroad to a community isolated by the frozen Mississippi. Before the telegraph reached St. Paul in 1860, dwellers in the frontier community received mail just once a week, often by way of an express service. This was a uniquely entrepreneurial response to the problems of life off the beaten track. Mail, packages, valuables and shopping lists were entrusted to one person who would carry them in person by

steamboat up and down the Mississippi in good weather, through woodlands and prairie by coach or on foot in bad.

In 1851 James C. Burbank, who would build the mansion on Summit Avenue known now as the Burbank-Livingston-Griggs house, began the operation of a one-man express service. Burbank, who was born in Ludlow, Vermont, in 1822, was first reported in Minnesota Territory in 1849 when, as a lumberjack, he hewed the timbers for the Indian school built by the Reverend Frederick Ayer, missionary to the Ojibway, near the present site of Belle Prairie. The school was a few miles from Fort Ripley in central Minnesota. By 1851 Burbank was in St. Paul. Here, as general agent, he "made available to the frontier the blessings of the Graefenberg Line of Patent Medicines, advertised to cure all ills," Robert Orr Baker wrote in an article tracing Burbank's career that appeared in the Fall, 1972, issue of *Ramsey County History*.

That same year, and without capital, Burbank inaugurated his express service, carrying the material entrusted to him in his pocket and traveling on foot, by coach or packet to Hudson, Black River Falls and Prairie du Chien in Wisconsin and Galena in Illinois. Later he took on a sub-mail route, carrying one bag of mail.

Out of this humble beginning Burbank created a fortune based on transportation, banking and insurance. By 1857 his express service had grown into the Northwestern Express Company with a \$1,510,283 increase in money and goods transported during that year of the Panic of 1857. He established a wharf boat, which he docked at the now-vanished Upper Landing at the foot of Chestnut Street, and he converted it into a general wholesale, retail and commission store.

"He advertised that he would handle

everything from a harmonica to a steamboat engine—eventually, even McCormick's reaper," Baker wrote. While his coaches and express wagons distributed settlers and goods throughout Minnesota, Burbank also established the St. Paul Omnibus Lines—two buses making punctual half-hour trips throughout the downtown district.

In 1863 Burbank became a director of the First National Bank of St. Paul. In 1865 he became president of the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company and served until his death in 1876. In 1867 he became the first president of the reorganized St. Paul Chamber of Commerce and immediately involved himself in St. Paul's burgeoning railroad industry. In 1868 he was awarded a contract for all government transportation in Minnesota and the Department of the Dakotas. Revenues from this contract were around \$3 million. He organized and served as the first president of the St. Paul Street Railway Company, and he became a director of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad. Both were extensions of his omnibus and stagecoach routes.

It was very likely, back in the winter of 1852–1853, that it was through Burbank's early effort, his one-man express service, that dwellers in St. Paul learned that counterfeit bills from Chicago were appearing in Minnesota Territory. The \$5 bills were easily identified as fake, since Chicago didn't produce \$5 bills, a fact presumably unknown to the bunglers who printed them. Fiscal news that was more upbeat arrived from New York where the mint had received \$5,000 in Australian gold from a depositor in from California.

While readers pondered events that lay beyond their ice-locked river, they also could read excerpts from the book, *The Life of Daniel Webster*, published



A coach labeled St. Paul Omnibus at the corner of Third and Sibley Streets in downtown St. Paul. Behind it is McQuillan's store. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

that winter in the *Minnesota Pioneer*. Presumably, they were huddled by their firesides as they read, since the weather outside was frightful at the turn of the year—sunny and still but very cold, with the thermometer “at first cock crowing” standing at 26 below zero. There was too much snow on the Mississippi for safety, the *Pioneer* reported.

► There were other things to worry about. Vegetarians were advised at a meeting in St. Paul that it was “not possible to be a Christian so long as man’s passions are stimulated by the eating of flesh.”

► A new Grocery and Provision store, located on St. Anthony Street in St. Paul and owned by Irvine and Brothers, was advertising groceries, ready-made clothing, books, shoes, nails and hardware. The Eagle Bakery at St. Anthony and Fort Street on Seven Corners advertised loaves, crumpets, crackers and cakes “of all sorts” as available “at all hours day and night.” For clocks, watches and jewelry, “the largest assortment of goods ever offered in the territory,” there was Robinson’s Jewelry Store.

1893 100 YEARS AGO

► In an era viewed a century later as peaceful, the United States nevertheless was on its guard and deeply suspicious of the expansionistic aims of the British. For this and other reasons, readers in St. Paul were interested in a *Pioneer Press* news story announcing that armament was still banned for ships plying the Great Lakes. Even so, according to the *Pioneer Press*, the British were alleging that their revenue cutters on the Great Lakes had the potential of destroying United States vessels, their armament was formidable at 6,000 yards and their shallow draft permitted them to run through the smallest canal in the Great Lakes system. They are considered a danger, the newspaper stated, and are being watched closely.

Despite this, newspaper readers were being assured that no ships had been armed and that locks on the St. Lawrence river would at least prevent “large warships” from entering the lakes. Minnesotans might have been somewhat relieved, since their state was one of the four in the Northwest that now shared the long bor-

der with Canada. North Dakota, Montana and Washington had been admitted to the Union in 1889 and Idaho in 1890.

The United States had entered its own imperialist mode, however. Benjamin Harrison occupied the White House and the Republican party of his time believed in increasing American influence and territory and protecting them. Harrison sent to Congress a treaty annexing Hawaii. (It was withdrawn by his successor, Grover Cleveland). The first Pan-American Conference was held in 1889. America’s first four battleships were built the same year, as the United States modernized its navy, and a string of coastal artillery forts were going up along coasts, such as the Olympic Peninsula, that the government felt were vulnerable to attack.

Furthermore, the United States and Great Britain had locked horns in the Bering Sea Controversy. The dispute centered around American authority to control seal hunting around the Pribilof Islands, acquired by the United States in 1867 and home of the most valuable seal herds in the world. Arbitration limiting the killing of seals in these waters settled the argument.

► There were other problems. A physician at Chicago’s Columbian Exposition, an event that had drawn many visitors from St. Paul, called for suspension of all immigration into the United States, the *Pioneer Press* reported. His reason: a rumored reappearance of cholera throughout the world. Exposition managers had other worries. They were debating whether or not to continue the exposition through 1894. It seems that they were running out of money.

► A strenuous effort to encourage hog raising was underway in Minnesota. St. Paul, according to the newspapers, had a home market for all hogs raised, an effort that was touted as better than raising wheat. One farmer took home \$300 for three loads of hogs.

► The ongoing argument of church-and-school was continuing in Minnesota, as Archbishop John Ireland stated that church and home training could be safely combined with a public secular education. However, the editor of *Church Progress* in St. Louis, Missouri, disagreed.

He believed, he said, that unsupervised secular education sapped the foundations of religion and paved the way to atheism.

► In St. Paul's twin across the Mississippi, the *Minneapolis Star* reflected the fact that the automobile era had not yet arrived. Advertisements sought a "boy to drive pony wagon at Cascade Steam Laundry" and added that he "must write and figure well." The Minneapolis Sale Stable announced a sale of thirty-two head of horses and mares, weight from 1,250 to 1,600 pounds, and advised readers to "come early if you want to buy and get first choice."

1918 75 YEARS AGO

► John D. Rockefeller donated another \$1 million to the University of Chicago, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported, bringing his total to \$2 million in contributions to the university. It might have been a mixed blessing, however, since strings seem to have been attached. Rockefeller, the newspaper said, "suggested certain plans on how the funds are to be used."

► A soldier from Minnesota was killed in France. General John J. Pershing announced the death of Charles W. Cowden of the Engineer Corps.

► Back in the United States a patriotic and anti-German hysteria had been sweeping the country since its entry into World War I. The *Minneapolis Journal* reported that George Smith, a waiter at the Gateway restaurant, was the first person in Minneapolis to be charged under the Sedition Law that prohibited any language that might discourage enlistment in the country's armed forces. Smith was reported to have said that, "Uncle Sam is no good" and he hoped that "the Germans might kill all the Italians."

► Daylight bandits robbed the People's State Bank at Seven Corners in Minneapolis of \$5,500. The robbery was so well planned, the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported, that policemen across the street were unaware of what was happening until the robbers, who had locked the bank's employees in the safe, drove off.

1943 50 YEARS AGO

► The first Minnesotan to be declared

missing-in-action turned up in a German prison camp that winter. He was Private Edwin Furru and he was imprisoned in Stalag 8B, the American government revealed. A Minneapolis pilot made a name for himself as a gunner. Captain Carl Husted, twenty-six years old, held off Japanese Zeros from his bomber high above Rabaul, New Britain, in the Pacific. No Zeros were shot down and they escaped into the clouds.

► The Toughy gang resurfaced in Chicago, the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported. Gang members, who had escaped from prison ten weeks earlier, seized an armored truck, fired at a war plant and sped off in the vehicle, which contained \$10,000—money that was to be used to cash checks for employees at the plant.

► Twin Cities residents were adjusting to gas rationing, although the streetcar company reported no increase in riders and downtown parking lots were full. Many people, however, were leaving their cars in their garages, the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported.

With World War II in its first desperate weeks, Minnesotans took part in a blackout to prepare for a possible air attack. More than 100 planes monitored the exercise by air. Military officials declared the effort "second to none."

Twin Cities men and women working in essential industries would no longer be permitted to resign or to change jobs, the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported. According to the Twin City Industrial Area Committee of the War Manpower Commission, the directive would affect 175,000 workers.

The United States Employment Service was seeking boys over thirteen years of age for food service in a Twin Cities defense plant. Experience wasn't necessary, but they were asked to "bring proof of citizenship."

► The Coca Cola Company was urging people "to get their coke now," because supplies would be limited due to the war. Coke was selling for 5 cents a bottle. In Minneapolis, Maurice L. Rothschild clothing store advertised men's corduroy slacks for \$3.95; tailored slacks for \$4.95; wool tweed for \$7.95; and "precision cut" for \$10.95. Rbt. Burns Panatela

cigars, priced at 11 cents each, were out-selling all other major deluxe cigars combined. Fair Oaks apartments at 2415 Third Avenue South in Minneapolis was advertising "the best apartment homes. Furnished and unfurnished." An elevator operator and houseman was needed at 238 Oak Grove Street, near downtown Minneapolis. The job paid \$75 a month.

1968 25 YEARS AGO

► In New York, 4,000 policemen foiled protestors' attempts to disrupt activities at an armed forces induction center. Other "Stop the Draft" protests went on in Philadelphia, Buffalo, Berkeley and Iowa.

► Minnesota's Senator Eugene McCarthy announced plans to enter the Massachusetts primary on April 30. He told supporters that the Vietnam War was indefensible on any grounds and that the United States finds itself without the support of "the decent opinion of all mankind."

► In downtown Minneapolis, a man walked into the Federal Reserve Bank and asked to cash in thousands of dollars in gold pieces. He said he felt that it was his duty to turn in the gold. The bank's vice president, Clarence Groth, told the *Minneapolis Star* that this type of transaction hadn't been seen since the depression.

► In downtown St. Paul, a skyway was opened, the beginning of a system that would link all downtown buildings. The \$54,000 cost was paid for by the St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

► The 3M Company was awarded a million-dollar contract by the Atomic Energy Commission to develop and produce a thermoelectric generator for use in space missions. Work on the generator, slated to be completed in fourteen months, will be conducted at 3M's Roseville Isotope Products facility.

Adapted from research compiled by Dwight John Erickson, Jr., Dorothy Parker and Tom Steman, history students of Professor Thomas C. Buckley at the University of Minnesota.



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.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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