

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



Ramsey County History awarded  
AASLH Certificate of Commendation.

Winter, 1994

Volume 28, Number 4

*A Ninety-year Run*

Giesen's: Costumers to St. Paul—1872–1970

Page 4



A St. Paul Civic Opera Company production of "Martha" in 1934. Left to right are Mary Wigginton, Bill Lee and Antoinette (Tony) Bergquist. Giesen's was the official costumer for the Civic Opera. See the article about Minnesota's first commercial costume house beginning on page 4. Kenneth W. Wright photo from Walter Bergquist's collection.



## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

*Executive Director*  
Priscilla Farnham  
*Editor*  
Virginia Brainard Kunz

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William S. Fallon  
*Chairman of the Board*

Joanne Englund  
*President*

John M. Lindley  
*First Vice President*

James Russell  
*Treasurer*

Sidney P. Abramson, Arthur H. Baumeister, Jr., Thomas Boyd, Marshall Hatfield, John Harens, Liz Johnson, Judge Margaret M. Murrinan, Dr. Thomas B. Mega, Laurie Murphy, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Thomond O'Brien, Eileen Roberts, Darrell Rooney, Evangeline Schroeder, Jane Thiele, Richard A. Wilhoit and Laurie Zenner.

### EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Charlton Dietz, Thomas J. Kelley, Arthur McWatt, Laurie M. Murphy, Dr. Thomas B. Mega.

### HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Coleman Bloomfield, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, Clarence Frame, Otis Godfrey, Jr., Ronald Hachey, Reuel D. Harmon, Robert S. Hess, Ronald M. Hubbs, Fred T. Lanners, Jr., Don Larson, George Latimer, Lewis Lehr, David Marsden, Robert B. Mirick, Samuel H. Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome Plunkett, Peter S. Popovich, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

### RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hal Norgard, chairman  
Commissioner Diane Ahrens  
Commissioner John Finley  
Commissioner Ruby Hunt  
Commissioner Warren Schaber  
Commissioner Brenda Thomas  
Commissioner Richard Wedell

Terry Schutten, manager, Ramsey County.

*Ramsey County History* is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1994, 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.

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 28, Number 4

Winter, 1994

## CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** Giesen's: Costumers to St. Paul—1872–1970  
*Virginia L. Martin*
- 16** Growing Up in St. Paul  
A Grandchild's Journey into a Swedish Past  
*John W. Larson*
- 22** What's Historic About This Site?  
The House Peder Foss Built In New Brighton—1896
- 23** Books, Etc.  
*Too Hot, Went to Lake*, by Peg Meier  
*Reviewed by Liz Holum Johnson*  
*James J. Hill House*, by Craig Johnson  
*Reviewed by Thomas C. Buckley*  
*The Treasure Hunt* by Roger Barr  
*Reviewed by Richard T. Murphy, Sr.*

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 Reuel D. Harmon.

## Thirty Down and Many More to Go

**W**ith this issue, *Ramsey County History* has completed thirty years of continuous publication. Founded in 1964 as a semi-annual magazine published by the Ramsey County Historical Society, *Ramsey County History* moved to a quarterly publication schedule in 1990. Over the years, it has served as a substantial source of information about the history, people, businesses, important events, architecture and historic sites, economics and philanthropy of Ramsey County for both local and national researchers and readers. Twice, in 1967 and 1993, *Ramsey County History* has won a certificate of commendation from the American Association for State and Local History for its outstanding quality as a historical magazine. Much of the credit for its sustained excellence is due to the work of its founder and only editor since 1964, Virginia Brainard Kunz.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board



## A Ninety-year Run

# Giesen's: Costumers to St. Paul's Families and Festivals

Virginia L. Martin

St. Paul could not have seemed like a hospitable place to start a rental costume business in 1872. Streets were packed dirt; sidewalks, where they existed at all, rough planks; the landscape bleak and unsoftened by trees. But beneath the city's rather barren exterior, small shoots of Western European culture, carefully nurtured by immigrants from the old world, had begun to poke through the new world soil.

No group was more assiduous in tending its cultural gardens than the German-Americans. They formed about one-third of the residents of the city and were the largest single immigrant group in both Minnesota and St. Paul. They had scarcely unpacked when they began organizing singing societies, German language newspapers and Turnvereins. Friends gathered in each others' homes to play instruments, sing and to talk about music. Out of these informal gatherings emerged organizations such as the German Reading Society, the Schubert Club and the Mozart Club.

Giesen's Costumers, the first commercial costume business in Minnesota, paralleled this evolution. Marie Dreis Giesen started it, after years of unpaid costuming for many of the operatic productions of groups such as the German Society. In 1872, a year in which interest in German theater was especially marked, Marie Giesen launched her business with twenty-two costumes, apparently confident that the city had enough cultural and social activity to sustain it.

Marie Giesen probably never envisioned the eventual success of Giesen's in its heyday under the management of her son Martin, and his wife Olga. It grew into the largest costume house in the Midwest and one of the ten largest in the country. It probably had a larger opera wardrobe than any costume house outside the "Big 3" in the East—Eave's in New York City, Brooke's and Van Horne in Philadelphia.

No matter how large and well-known it was in its halcyon years, however, Gies-

en's Costumers remained a distinctly St. Paul institution. Generations of school children trudged up its well-worn stairs to be fitted for class play costumes. Local college theater directors obtained beautiful and sometimes prized garments for the city's annual Christmas Pageant. The Ordways and the Hills rented its costumes for balls and parties.

And for eighty-eight years, it was a distinctly family institution. Marie Giesen managed it until 1901, when she turned the business over to Martin, the youngest of her four sons, a frail child whom Marie had "kept close to her." No doubt the busi-

ness looked like a natural niche for Martin.

But if the niche belonged to anyone, it turned out to be Olga Hilbert Giesen, the tall, slender, determined woman Martin married in 1904. After their marriage, Martin and Olga managed the business together until his death in 1943. Giesen's continued to be a vital part of theater life in the Twin Cities under Olga's management, until the demands of the business and her own ill health forced her to sell in 1960. She died not long after. Its final owners kept it afloat until 1970, just two years short of its 100th anniversary.

Few records exist to tell us much about Marie Giesen and why she founded the business. (Just before it was dissolved in March, 1971, all the records were inexplicably burned.) The primary local histories of the day do not mention the Giesen costume business, giving only the usual obligatory nod to Marie as wife of Peter

ESTABLISHED IN 1872

THE LEADING WESTERN HOUSE



## MARTIN GIESEN COSTUMER

**Theatrical and Masquerade  
Costumes, Theatrical Wigs,  
Make-Ups, Etc., of All Kinds**

*Always in stock: Masks, Wigs and Beards,  
Gold and Silver Lace, Spangles,  
Grease, Paints and Make-up Boxes,  
Complete Costumes for Popular  
Operas, Cantatas and Oratorios.*

**418 N. Franklin Street**

**ST. PAUL, MINN.**

*Giesen ad in the 1905 St. Paul City Directory The little Dutch boy holding out his voluminous trousers became a familiar trademark. From the Ramsey County Historical Society collections.*



## ti vals – 1872–1970

and mother of their four sons.

Marie and her parents had come to the United States in 1850 when she was fourteen. Her father, Joseph Dreis, had been an artist in Cologne, decorating castle and church walls along the Moselle and the Rhine rivers with oil and watercolor paintings. The Dreis family settled in Chicago for four years before moving on to St. Paul. In 1860, Marie married Peter, a fellow German emigre.

Peter Giesen, a bookbinder who had won exclusive rights to bind West Publishing Company books, had started the movement resulting in the organization of the Mozart Club and the building of Mozart Hall, which he owned at the time of his death in 1915.

Mozart Hall was a multipurpose building. On its ground floor was a bar with a separate entrance, a kitchen, and a rathskeller that served light lunches. On this floor also was a formal dining room where guests could listen to classical musicians as they dined. The third floor of Mozart Hall was one large room that could be used either as a theater or a ballroom. It was here that some of the operatic productions, often featuring "Papa" Giesen's singing and Marie Giesen's costumes, were displayed.\*

Apparently costuming as a hobby and raising four sons were not occupations enough for the small, energetic Marie

*\*Emil Oberhoffer may have been the most illustrious of these musicians. Oberhoffer, German-born and trained violinist, was the first director of the Minneapolis (now Minnesota) Symphony Orchestra, in 1903. He had been stranded in St. Paul when the company he was touring with went broke. In straitened circumstances, he performed in restaurants and bars, apparently including the Mozart Hall dining room, and started a music school.*



*St. Paul around 1870, just before Marie and Peter Giesen started their rental costume business. This is a view of Seventh and Jackson Streets. Illingworth photo, Minnesota Historical Society.*

Giesen. Early exhibiting a good costumer's traits, Marie had begun saving the costumes from the German Reading Society and German Society productions to use from year to year. In 1872, she bought twenty-two masquerade and theatrical costumes and launched Giesen's Costumers as a commercial enterprise.

It is no surprise to learn that Marie Giesen was disciplined, no-nonsense and somewhat autocratic. Although she was tiny, she could strike fear into the hearts of her grown sons. "When she spoke, they ran," said her granddaughter, Louise Giesen Murphy, in an interview with the author. A devout Roman Catholic and a woman to whom family ties were important, Marie was, apart from her unorthodox occupation, a conservative woman. (When one of her sons married a maid, he

was ostracized from the family.)

Marie Giesen founded the business not out of a desire to succeed in the business world, said Louise Murphy – and the Giesens did not need money – but to provide a service to the cultural community. It is this sense of mission, almost of a calling, that underlies the Giesen story.

Historical accounts sometimes attribute the business to Peter Giesen, a logical assumption to make, since women, especially of the middle and upper classes, did not usually establish businesses. For its first few years, Giesen's was a modest enterprise. The first mention in the *St. Paul City Directory* for 1879–80, folds it into the bookbinding business in this spare ad:

Giesen, Peter J.,  
Blank Books and Costumes



In 1882, for the first time, the city directory acknowledged Marie Giesen as owner of the business, located then at 37 West Third Street. It moved briefly to 316 Wabasha and then to Mozart Hall, 410-418 Franklin, now the site of a union headquarters building on Main Street. It remained there until 1928.

Mrs. Giesen founded her business on facts as well as optimism. The quality and extensiveness of entertainment in St. Paul was higher than might be expected in a frontier town. As head of navigation on the Mississippi, St. Paul had a reputation as a health and pleasure resort in the early 1870s and attracted troupes from theatrical cities such as St. Louis during the summer months.\*

St. Paul also had a "genteel" and "aristocratic personality," thanks in part to early settlement by officials of the old fur trading companies and other emigrants from the Eastern seaboard and from Europe. "Moral" questions besieged theater in Minneapolis long after they were settled in St. Paul where Sunday theater performances had been the norm since 1871. Much early theater was provided by touring companies, although some stock companies existed. Giesens's drew other customers from schools and amateur theater and opera groups, and some business came from other events and celebrations that required costumes.

Among the upper classes in these leisurely years of the late nineteenth century, masquerade balls, costume parties, and even "costume lunches" were popular forms of diversion. Christmas brought demands for Giesen's beautiful Santa Claus and Kris Kringle suits and costumes for holiday pageants.

When the Northern Pacific Railroad completed its link between Minnesota and Montana in 1883 with the driving of the golden spike, St. Paul threw a spectacular party heralding the waves of prosperity the railroad link would bring. President Chester A. Arthur attended, as well as

---

\*In 1872, thirty-six legitimate theater performances were held in St. Paul and in the next season, it was increased to fifty-two, according to Frank Whiting's history.



*Peter and Marie Giesen. Peter, a bookbinder who won exclusive rights to bind West Publishing Company books, also helped organize Mozart Hall, which he owned at the time of his death in 1915. Minnesota Historical Society photo.*

Henry Villard, president of the Northern Pacific, a monosyllabic General Ulysses S. Grant, and two delegations of distinguished Germans and Englishmen. Bunting and flags hung from nearly every available building surface, light pole, door and window. Decorated arches with different themes sprang up all over downtown. Under the Grand Triumphal Arch the celebration reached its climax with speeches, parade and a tableau.

The tableau apparently was a triumph, if the sometimes overwrought prose of the newspaper accounts can be believed, thanks in part to the skills of Marie Giesen and her "sewing women," who had been working "day and night" to complete the costumes, according to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. "Flower-throwing maidens" tossed flowers at distinguished guests. Women were costumed to represent manufacturing and agriculture (and carry-

ing implements of their symbolic trades) and such geographic entities as "Columbia," "Germania," "Britannia," the cities of St. Paul and Portland, Oregon; and the railroad itself in the form of "the goddess of the Northern Pacific," were tableau highlights.

The Winter Carnival, established in 1886, was St. Paul's response to Eastern charges that Minnesota's winter was inclement. City leaders decided to celebrate the cold and snow in sports events, parades, and the construction of an ice palace. Mythic figures of winter and spring, light and dark, symbolically battled for superiority in this festival. Royalty, float riders and other carnival participants had to be costumed. One memorable year the horses drawing the sleigh of King Boreas were led by six white "polar bears" and two little polar bear cubs, one of whom was young Martin Giesen, later owner of



Giesen's.

There is no way of knowing to what extent the costume business contributed to the Giesens' comfortable state, but they flourished. They were affluent enough that Peter Giesen commissioned St. Paul architect Albert Zschoke to design a home in the fashionable Dayton's Bluff section of St. Paul, already home to a large community of German-Americans. Completed in 1891, the three-story red stone Queen Anne house still stands, an imposing house on a hill overlooking the city. The Giesens, including three of the four sons, moved in. However, they lived in the house for a relatively short time for such an ambitious project. In 1907, the Giesens sold the house and the family moved to a more modest house, closer to the business, at 184 Summit.\*

Both business and family life were altering for the Giesens in the early 1900s. Marie was in her sixties. The sons were carving out their own careers as accountants, bookbinders, clerks. Martin, less robust than the other sons, began to learn the costume business in earnest in the early 1900s; in 1901, he was its manager. In 1903, when she was sixty-seven, Marie turned over the business to Martin. This decision might well have been precipitated by Martin's forthcoming marriage to Olga Hilbert in 1904.

Olga Hilbert was the daughter of Nicholas F. Hilbert, a civil engineer, and Louise K. Hilbert, and one of four children that included Otto, Emil and Emma (who renamed herself Marguerite and then Jane). The Hilbert and Giesen lives crossed in more than one way. Olga and Martin were both in the German Society

---

*\*There would have been plenty of room, even if they had all moved in with family and an entourage of servants. The house has an expansive, open, wrap-around porch with classical columns, a solarium, and a corner observation tower crowned by an octagonal spire above an open, belfrylike observation porch. The first floor alone is nearly 2,200 square feet. The house is large enough that, for a number of years before its present owners bought and began rehabilitating it, it was an apartment building with seventeen units.*

chorus of the 1895 production of "Czar and Zimmerman" ("The Czar and the Workmen"), in which Peter and his son Adolph had lead roles. The successful performance of this opera led Peter to form the Mozart Society.

Olga Hilbert and Martin Giesen complemented one another. Their marriage



*The house Peter and Marie Giesen built in the fashionable Dayton's Bluff neighborhood, home to a large community of St. Paul's German-Americans. The house still stands. Photo from the author.*

was a happy one, no less because it was the melding of two distinct personalities who brought entirely different gifts to their union and to the business that they operated together. Martin Giesen, a gentleman and a "gentle, good old soul," was handsome, dapper, and always perfectly dressed. In one hand, he always held a cigar, made especially for him. He got on famously with theater people and loved to get behind the counter and sell makeup and accessories. He concentrated on men's costumes and formalwear—Giesen's was the only place that rented men's tuxedos and morning coats at the time. He also handled all the financial aspects of the business and could often be found at his stockbroker brother Adolph's office.

Olga Giesen had no interest in what she herself wore, at least when she was working. She usually wore long, dark dresses over which she wore an apron that was al-

most like a carpenter's apron with pockets. Her clothes were always shot through with needles and pins, her graying hair pulled back into a bun from which, in the course of a busy day, strands would now and then escape.

Although the gilt-lettered name on the door read Martin Giesen's Costumers, it

was to Olga that knowledgeable theater people turned when they walked up the stairs to get costumes. Martin may have helped bring in customers, but it was probably Olga Giesen who brought them back. She was a tall woman with a commanding presence. You always knew when she was in the room, Max Metzger, a musician with the St. Paul Opera Company and founder of St. Paul's Opera Workshop, recalled. She looked so much like Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, that she could have played the part in a movie, said Clarence Jacobson ("Jake"), who worked for Giesen's on and off for about ten years beginning in the mid-1920s.

Marie Giesen and her daughter-in-law were alike in many ways. Although both had conservative facets to their personalities, they were unconventional enough to found and manage a business. They were



hardworking, organized, efficient and dedicated women who seemed to consider theater and opera costuming a calling. They both tended to work behind the scenes, letting their husbands occupy center stage.

Although neither Martin nor Olga had formal training in theater, music or art, both grew up in homes where such cultural activity was encouraged and appreciated. Olga and Martin may have met when they were both singing in the German Society Chorus. Martin grew up in a family in which everyone played a musical instrument and cultural events were part of ordinary family life. He graduated from Mechanic Arts High School in St. Paul. Olga did not go beyond eighth grade. Although perhaps not formally schooled in the arts, she was no novice to either the arts or the business world: she had been a buyer of notions and trimmings for the St. Paul department store Field Schlick and Company.

Martin and Olga learned about costuming on the job and from Marie Giesen, from books and magazines, and through research in the St. Paul Public Library. They subscribed to theater magazines and had them bound and indexed them so they could readily put their hands on information about almost any opera or play. They bought books—some of them valuable and expensive because of the engravings and illustrations—picturing dress from earlier eras. Their library represented a complete and detailed history of the American stage since the early 1900s. It was considered outstanding nationally, Louise Murphy remembered.

"[Olga] broke into [the business] pretty well cold," Jacobson said. "She made a quick study of everything. . . . I don't think [Giesen's] would have gone anywhere without her. . . . She was a perfectionist."

"She knew her costumes, she knew theater, and she knew people," said Mabel Meta Frey, for thirty-four years head of the speech and theater department at the College of St. Catherine. "I found her a great friend. She had a hearty laugh and she was good company. I was never bored."

Translating her ideas into costumes was



The Northern Pacific's Villard Arch in its 1883 celebration in St. Paul upon completion of its link between Minnesota and Montana. Marie Giesen and her "sewing women" worked day and night to complete the costumes. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

another matter. "Mother couldn't sew," said Louise Murphy. When she wanted to create something new, "she would visualize the costume she wanted, then draw a picture of it. Robbie [Minnie Robinson, her chief seamstress] would cut a pattern and make that costume. Sometimes she would costume a production much as a magazine or book in their library depicted

it, and sometimes she'd say, 'No, I don't like that as well as I like this.' She had her own way of doing things.

There is no question that Olga Giesen was the dominant force in the Giesen business. Martin was quiet, although gregarious and approachable, and content to let Olga "be the boss." Pleasant and likable, she could be stern, and was "quite positive



in what she was talking about," said Jacobson. Louise Murphy called her mother "Mrs. Take-Charge," and Jacobson added, "Mrs. Giesen wasn't one to let go of anything. . . . Nothing went on there without her knowledge," a trait he found exasperating until Olga learned to trust him to use his own judgment.

As with any family-owned business, the lines between business and home life sometimes blurred. Martin and Olga lived with the elder Giesens in the Summit Avenue house. Within walking distance, down the hill, was Mozart Hall and the Giesen business. Major events in the Giesen-Hilbert family were often eerily paired, and this was true in 1915. Peter Giesen died late that year, but not before he had a chance to meet his granddaughter, Louise Marie, Martin and Olga's only child, born in 1915 when Olga was thirty-five.

The younger Giesens lived with Marie Giesen until 1923 when they bought a home of their own at 1540 Lincoln. Even then their extended family continued to be an integral part of their life. "My Grandmother Hilbert lived with us as long as I can remember," said Louise Murphy. "When we moved from Grandma Giesen's, there was much sadness, but we needed a house."

The Giesen-Hilbert family was still very much a part of the German-American cultural community that had helped spawn the costume business. When Max Metzger and his mother, Madie Metzger Ziegler, emigrated to St. Paul from Germany in 1932, they were quickly drawn into the community. The Metzgers were not only professional colleagues but frequent guests at Giesen parties.

For years, German was the predominant language spoken in the Giesen household. Everyone spoke German to Grandma Hilbert, and Louise Murphy (who spoke nothing but German until she was four or five) read the *Volkzeitung*, a German newspaper, to her grandmother. The Giesens had a maid, Lisa, who spoke only German, and later hired as maids young German twins who stayed with them for years.

They were a sociable family and the house was often full of friends and family, music and laughter. Like the bus driver

who takes a motoring holiday, the Giesens often threw costume parties at home. Although they were not "society" people, Mrs. Lucius Ordway and others who were, were occasional guests at the Giesen home. Business and pleasure mixed when guests included people like Leo Kopp and Phil Fein from the St. Paul Civic Opera. Once, the entire cast of "The Miracle" joined them for dinner, devil and all, Louise Murphy recalled. Bea Baxter, the "home ec lady" on KSTP radio, and radio announcer Brooks Henderson were frequent guests at the Giesens, as were Clarence Jacobson, their employee, and his friend, Herb Gahagan, who later became a successful professional set designer.

Despite the fact that Louise Murphy's childhood was spent in a well-populated household of extended family, nannies and maids, she grew up a lonely child. As a youngster, she took a dim view of the cos-

tume business.

"It was the place where my mother worked. I didn't like it," she said flatly. But she also found a few silver linings in the business, especially after she grew older.

"Robbie [the seamstress] would always give me the fabric that was left over from making costumes. . . . I always had the best-looking doll clothes. I got all the silk and satin and every once in a while there'd be a maribou boa. . . . After I got older and went to school, . . . my friends were fascinated by [the business]—going in and trying on wigs and things like that." It was a place to bring friends, to fantasize how one might look wearing a long green velvet gown and a blonde curly wig.

Almost immediately upon Martin and Olga's accession to the business, a new vigor appeared to take hold. A photograph of a Dutch boy in wooden clogs holding out his voluminous trousers became a familiar



Olga and Martin Giesen after their wedding in 1904.



trademark. The directory ads for several years bore this legend: "The Leading Western Costume House"—no idle boast—and "Established in 1872" appeared above the business's new name, Martin Giesen Costumers, followed by

Theatrical and Masquerade Costumes, Theatrical Wigs, Make-Ups, Etc., of All Kinds. Always in stock: Masks, Wigs and Beards, Gold and Silver Lace, Spangles, Grease, Paints and Make-up boxes, Complete Costumes for Popular Operas, Cantatas and Oratorios.

It was "a wonderful magic place," wrote Gareth Hiebert, in his "Oliver Towne" column for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, "a house of real make believe" despite its utilitarian "warehouse" look softened only by a few decorative welcoming touches: A grinning clown that became the Giesen logo, a small doll dressed as a medieval herald in tights and tunic, and a huge marble and gilt rococo mirror at the head of the well-worn stairs to the second floor where Giesen's sprawled over the entire floor. Here was the counter where Martin Giesen presided for nearly thirty-five years, joking with customers, selling them makeup and finding the correct tuxedo.

On racks near the counter hung the costumes that were going in and out that day. On the floor lay costumes, crates and trunks all marked "Martin Giesen Costumers, St. Paul." In a less romantic mood than in his earlier column, Hiebert later described the shop as looking "a little like a rummage sale all the time."

Two or three salespersons were always on the floor, helping customers select the right costume, selling makeup, taking and filling orders, checking costumes in and out. Beyond the counter was a large room where two or three seamstresses worked, chief among them, Minnie Robinson, a mainstay of the business along with Jacobson and Georgiana D. Glaser, a clerk and all-around assistant.

Giesen's provided costumes by mail all over the country. "There wasn't a day that went by that Olga didn't have three or four orders from outside St. Paul," Metzger recalled. Giesen's became the third largest mail order house in the United States, sending costumes from Montana to Texas and hundreds of places in between. For



*Olga Giesen in 1913.*



*Louise and Olga. Both photographs are from Louise Giesen Murphy.*

most mail orders, the local drama teacher or stage director would take measurements and send them to Giesen's, and the staff would measure and match and alter and modify costumes to characters, sizes and colors when possible. "That man's a blond," Olga Giesen would say. "He wants a blue coat, not a red coat."

The staff would pack up the costumes with accessories for each character, putting paper in between each full costume, labeling each with the character's name

and sometimes the scene and act, and send them off in big slatted wooden crates lined with newspaper (newsprint did not rub off in those days). Productions could be huge, and Giesen's would sometimes ship eight to ten crates for a single play.

"It's surprising how much stuff it takes to have a good costume house," said Jacobson, who should know. He discovered Giesen's as a theater-struck teenager. For ten years on and off after graduating from high school in 1925, he worked for Giesen's. He helped Giesen's move twice, from Mozart Hall to Fourth and Market in 1928, and then from Fourth and Market to 207 Midland Building at Sixth and Wabasha. And he helped Giesen's take its first inventory. He estimated that Giesen's had 25,000 to 30,000 costumes in stock in the mid-20s. Inventory was a long, hard tedious job because they had so many items.

Clown costumes, costumes for Turkish Charem dancers with see-through pantaloons (undergarments came with them), cowboy outfits, standard Halloween fare of gypsies, pirates and skeletons, red velvet and felt "Coca-Cola" Santa Claus and Kris Kringle suits trimmed with real rabbit fur, an Indian headdress made in Red Wing by a Native American (using real eagle feathers, legal then), King Arthur, Zulu tribesmen, Hebraic gowns, Cleopatra costumes, Cossack uniforms, Oriental, biblical, Victorian, and European Medieval costumes, animal costumes with cloth bodies and paper mache heads representing wolves, tigers, gophers, donkeys, cats, elephants.

F. Scott Fitzgerald once rented a camel costume from Giesen's for a party—he was the rear. ("Scott wrote a story about that party. It opened in our shop," said Olga Giesen.)

"They had an enormous collection of footwear—cowboy boots, Venetian shoes, Puritan shoes and they would costume from head to toe . . . and from inside out," said William ("Bill") Sowden, one of the last owners of Giesen's. Giesen's also had enormous collections of beautiful wigs for character parts, real hair wigs, wigs made of yak hair, imported wigs by famous [European] makers such as Heppner, wigs for Santa Claus outfits, and white "Marie Antoinette" wigs.



Uniforms? Just name the war, said Jacobson. "We had loads of authentic Civil War uniforms," and he told a story about one of them. One Memorial Day, the Civil War veterans were gathering for a parade in front of the Capitol. One old man walked into Giesen's and said, "I'd like to march with the boys, but I haven't a cap. I thought you might have one you could lend me."

Olga Giesen had just recently gone to New York where she had purchased a consignment of twenty genuine Civil War caps. She showed the man to the case in which they were kept, picked one up and handed it to him to try on. He looked inside, was startled, and looked again. He knew the name stenciled inside the crown. Tears sprang to his eyes. "This is the cap of my old buddy in the war," he said. Olga Giesen told him to keep it.

Going to Giesen's was "almost like going to a museum," said Don Stolz, owner, director, producer and manager of the Old Log Theatre in Minnetonka. Olga Giesen had some costumes that were not really costumes, but authentic garments. "She had things that were old, old, old. . . . I always felt she had things hidden away that she would dig out if she thought there was a special reason for doing so."

"Giesen's always had more 'prizes' than we did," said Wayne E. Murphey, retired vice-president of NORCOSTCO (Northwestern Costume Company). Like many other American costume businesses, Giesen's had emerged from the traditions of the state-subsidized European, especially German, theater and opera houses. One costume NORCOSTCO bought before Giesen's folded still had the label indicating it had once belonged to the German State Opera. Giesen's also had enormous collections of European-made helmets and crowns.

"Many Giesen costumes came out of the opera houses of Europe, because there were materials and braid and detail that I just don't think Olga's people had the expertise, the skills, or the time to create," said Bill Sowden. Costumes in the early twentieth century were "built," padded, somewhat preshaped so that they almost stood on their own. The singer or actor stepped into the garment and little fitting was necessary. Not only were they heavily



*Olga Giesen and her sister, Jane Hilbert. Photo from Louise Murphy.*

padded, but many of them had real gold belting and other decorative work. "They wore like iron. We still had a few pieces nearly 100 years later," said Murphey.

There were a number of authentic garments in the Giesen collection: a fourteenth-century Ming costume, authentic Mandarin gowns, said Sowden—"beautiful pure silk, all gold embroidered, all silk embroidered, vivid, vivid greens and reds and yellows and blues—blue upon blue". There were Russian uniforms of Persian lamb fur, and "breathtaking" Colonial and French Empire collections.

"When I say *collection*, I'm not talking about one or two or half a dozen [costumes], but I'm talking in terms of thirty to sixty, or even more," Sowden continued. There was a set of real brass armor that Giesen's never rented out, military uniforms and a costume the magician Blackstone had worn. Several costumes

had belonged to Geraldine Farrar, the Metropolitan Opera diva, "including a long cape lavish with cut jewels that weighed a ton," said Sowden.

"Farrar was just a little thing," Jacobson recalled. "She was so small I don't know how she could walk on the stage with it. Mrs. Giesen prized that and seldom rented it out." Another memorable Farrar costume was a sea green silk chiffon Empire style dress with a long green velvet train that Louise Giesen Murphy once modeled at a National Costumers Convention.

The Farrar costumes came into the Giesen collection through another member of the Giesen-Hilbert family, Jane Hilbert, Olga's sister. She had made her career on the other side of the theatrical curtain on Broadway and knew Farrar. A tall, beautiful, elegant woman, Jane was cut from the same cloth as Olga. At a time when most women were expected to marry, stay home and raise their families, both



Olga and Jane cultivated demanding careers. They were determined women, who seldom let the boundaries set by society get in their way.

Jane was seventeen and attending Woman's College near Baltimore, near the turn of the century, when she scandalized her family by going off alone to New York City to break into theater. She wrote of that event:

That 17th summer I went to New York and got a job in the cast of "Runaway Girl." It opened and closed the same night in New Haven. But it led to a role with the darlings of the [Flora Dora] Sextette that became a by-word on the American stage. And still sends gray heads of today into happy meditations upon the joys of their youth.

No doubt Hilbert determination as well as talent and beauty played an important part when Jane beat the odds and became one of the original members of the Flora Dora Sextette on Broadway. She also performed on London, Berlin, and Paris stages.

Jane led a glamorous life in New York, attending parties hosted by "Diamond Jim" Brady, very nearly marrying Jerome Kern, driving to Harvard football games in a horse and carriage. She knew Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan and Ethel Barrymore, and sent her niece autographed pictures of people like Sophie Tucker, inscribed to Louise Marie. Jane had a longterm relationship with a New York stockbroker, who, it turned out, was married. Here is Jane's account of meeting him, as she recalled it for Gareth Hiebert:

One night at the famed Racquet Club in New York I met a young man who persuaded me to invest my life savings in the stock market. . . . Well, actually, I never turned a cent of my \$1,200 over to him . . . I got cold feet the next day, but he called to tell me he'd bought that much stock in my name on margin and I'd already made more than \$3,000 profit. . . . To make a long story short, that \$1,200 parlayed into \$50,000 and then I sold . . . And with \$25,000 took my mother from St. Paul to Europe and kept the rest.

Hiebert added that she had at least one other souvenir from that financial coup: a ring with an eight-carat diamond and an



Marie Giesen about the time she and Peter started their costume rental business. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

eight-carat amethyst.

Jane never married, and after her return home in 1925, she helped care for her ill mother Louise Hilbert. She moved in with Olga and Martin, and had a room built upstairs for herself. Always known within the family as "Tante," the German word for *aunt*, Jane gave Martin \$1,000 (a tidy sum then) so she always would have a place to live. She performed with the Wright-Huntington Players at the old Schubert Theatre (now the World Theater in downtown St. Paul) for one season. Although she came back to St. Paul well off, thanks in part to her investments, she later lost some of her money and decided to find

a job. She lied about her age and got a job as a china buyer with the J. B. Hudson Company in Minneapolis, undoubtedly impressing the people there with her elegance and bearing.

Olga and Jane shared other traits besides determination and unconventionality. Neither was a particularly nurturing woman, said Louise Murphy and Louise's daughters Mary Jane Murphy Dix and Patricia Murphy. Tante had a wonderful imagination and would spend hours playing "Mrs. Pumpernickel" and other fantasy characters with Louise under Grandma Giesen's grand piano.

"Tante was the showman and Mother was the behind-the-scenes person," said Louise. Patricia Murphy remembered Olga Giesen as being a "very orderly person. She wasn't cold and she was always glad to see us, but you always knew there was much business going on in her head. Tante was . . . the flighty one who would take you to Como Park in her red Buick convertible with the white interior."

Another family member even more closely allied with costuming was Emil Hilbert, Olga's brother. Martin and Olga had established Emil in Minneapolis Costume in the Radio City Music Hall on LaSalle and Eighth Streets in the 1920s. The Hilberts and Giesens might have dominated the costume trade in the Twin Cities for years, but Hilbert was not a successful businessman. He went bankrupt in 1943 and Giesen's absorbed what was left of his stock—and Emil. He worked at Giesen's until Olga sold it in 1960.

Although costume houses sometimes look "like rummage sales," an underlying organization prevails. No doubt Martin and Olga Giesen valued Clarence Jacobson in part because of his ability to help bring order into the complex costuming world. In helping with their inventory and two of their moves, Jacobson created miniature cardboard floor plans that showed each fixture and indicated where every type of costume and accessory was to go. He also helped Giesen's organize the stock so that every item had a label with a number.

Giesen's huge stock came to it from a variety of sources. A few garments, probably only for display in later years, survived



from the earliest days of the business. Others may have been brought to America by affluent German immigrants. Peter and Marie had brought back costumes from European trips, and Jane Hilbert, on her tours of the European stages, frequently bought costume items for the Giesens. Although Olga and Martin never went abroad, when they did travel they were always on the lookout for costumes and accessories, said Louise Murphy. Olga bought authentic garments and accessories in Los Angeles' Chinatown when she and Martin went to Alaska and then traveled down the West Coast. She bought Indian garments and "gorgeous" feather head-dresses during a trip.

Olga Giesen prided herself on having just about anything anyone wanted, and she bought things on the chance she might someday need them. When the Strauss and Warner hat people of St. Paul went out of business, Olga bought plumes and feathers, birds' wings and birds' heads that were used to adorn modish women's hats.

Years later, Sowden recalled finding this cache: "There were [milliners'] dove wings and heads, walls lined with them that Olga had bought. That's the kind of multiples you'd find everywhere."

Despite their enormous stock, Giesen's had to create new costumes from time to time. Like most costume businesses, Giesen's would make a masquerade costume only if they could profitably add it to their stock. Jacobson remembered an "Indian" costume specially made for a well-known St. Paul sausage manufacturer who hosted a huge annual Halloween party. Made of white flannel decorated with fringes and beadwork, accompanied by a "great, big, beautiful Indian headdress," it became a party favorite.

The same criterion was not applied to creating new opera and theater costumes, where a full production usually meant making new costumes. That was invariably true when the St. Paul Civic Opera Company, active between 1933 and 1957, mounted its productions. For Giesen's, it was full circle back to its operatic roots. Giesen's supplied all the costumes, occasionally—as with many costume shops—sub-renting an item from another Twin Cities business or, more rarely, from a New York City house. When the St. Paul

Civic Opera staged "Carmen," Giesen's provided 214 costumes, including some worn originally by Geraldine Farrar when she sang the title role, and some newly created. When the company did "Madame Butterfly," Olga had a friend living in Tokyo send her authentic and expensive scarlet kimonos and a pair of delicately embossed lady's sandals.

Giesen's was the official costumer for the St. Paul Civic Opera, and Phil Fein was one of the Opera's stage directors who gave Olga a free hand, Max Metzger recalled. Olga and Martin, and Olga alone after Martin's death, attended all the company's dress rehearsals. If Olga saw anything awry that she could not fix on the scene, she would either send Martin back to the shop to get replacements, or she made notes and brought them over herself the next day.

Metzger remembered Olga in a heated discussion with a director over costume details at a dress rehearsal. The director thought the costumes were fine exactly as they were. Olga did not. The stage director said, "I like them this way." Olga said, "Well, I don't, and they're *my* costumes." Metzger added: "I remember one time she walked right down the aisle . . . and stopped a dress rehearsal," not intimidated in the slightest by the entire board of directors attending the rehearsal.

Although Martin did most of the men's costumes, it was Olga who saw to it "that the jabot was the right lace and that the pin that went with the jabot was there—the detail was always hers," said Louise Murphy. "Daddy would lay out the men's stuff, and then she would say, 'Now you need such and such a shoe, such and such a pair of stockings, and buckles for the knee pants.'"

"She spent a great deal of time selecting . . . the right thing, the right accessories, everything," said Stolz. "She always wondered what they were going to put on their feet."

"You didn't wear your own black shoes," said Metzger. "Sometimes I'd come up and tell her we were doing an opera workshop but we didn't have much money, and I'd say, 'I'm going to have the fellows wear their own dark pants, their own shoes, their own shirt, and maybe I'll just rent uniform coats.' And she'd say, 'Oh

no, you're not.' I'd bring [the singers] up there and they'd give them full britches, boots, the whole ball of wax."

Olga and Martin Giese were generous. "When Shipstads and Johnson were starting out with their Ice Follies," said Louise Murphy, "they came to Daddy and said, 'We're going to need costumes and we have no money. Will you trust us?' and Daddy said 'Sure.' " Martin and Olga lent them the costumes and Shipstads and Johnson paid back every cent—"and of course you know what success they went on to."

Max Metzger remembered that whenever he consulted her about an opera workshop, Olga would ask what he had in his budget for costumes. "And I'd say, 'Under \$25 at the moment.' 'Don't worry about it,' she would say. 'What do you need?' And afterwards we'd get a bill and maybe it would be \$10. Sometimes she'd make barely enough to pay for the drayage."

No one was a bigger beneficiary of Olga and Martin's generosity than the St. Paul Roman Catholic schools, high schools and colleges, especially St. Joseph's Academy and the College of St. Catherine, Louise Murphy's alma mater. Giesen's always gave them substantial reductions in their costume rental fees.

Olga Giesen applied that missionary zeal to the annual Christmas Chorale Pageant, held from about 1939 to 1979 on the first or second Sunday in Advent to herald the Christmas season in St. Paul. Olga Giesen brought out prized costumes for this event that she seldom lent to anyone else.

For many St. Paulites, the pageant was a major holiday event. People often had to be turned away because the St. Paul Auditorium was filled to its 12,000 capacity. Its cast and choirs were drawn from Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, public and parochial schools, businesses, colleges, civic, fraternal, religious and secular institutions in the area.\*

*\*One reason for the pageant's success was that the St. Paul Pioneer Press cosponsored and subsidized it, in cooperation with the Women's Institute. Bernard H. Ridder, the newspaper publisher, and his wife, Agnes Ridder, took personal interest in it.*





Geraldine Farrar, costumed for "Carmen," around 1910. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

Giesen costumes literally shone in the tableau depicting the story of the birth of Christ. Students from all four area colleges—Macalester, Hamline, the College of St. Catherine and the College (now the University) of St. Thomas—played the parts of Mary, Joseph and the angels; pastors from local churches played the Wise Men. The finale was so dazzling it brought tears to people's eyes, Bill Sowden recalled.

Accompanied by Bizet's "March of the Three Kings," the Wise Men, bearing gifts and followed by train-bearing pages, would proceed slowly down the center aisle of the Auditorium. Their gowns were velvet, lined with silver, royal purple, and scarlet satin, trimmed with ermine, silver and gold. Sometimes one of the kings wore the cape that Geraldine Farrar had worn for her role in "Tosca." Made of pure silver lame threads interspersed with gold thread sewn in scrolls and adorned with hand-sewn Bavarian diamond and sapphire crystals, this was one of the prized garments Olga seldom rented out. The powerful klieg lights would shine down, and the

train would be ablaze with light. "I tell you, it would be astounding," said Sowden.

For Olga Giesen, the event, like the St. Paul Civic Opera productions, was a personal one. One year Mabel Meta Frey, who always coordinated the tableau, told Olga she was considering giving up her work on the pageant. Olga admonished her: "Do you realize that's the only Christmas some people get?" Ms. Frey continued.

Long before the holiday season winds down in the Twin Cities, St. Paul Winter Carnival preparations have begun in earnest. For years, Giesen's made the king's robe and the queen's dress and robe and many of the costumes for lesser royalty and common folk. Costuming parade participants for Minnesota's January weather was not easy, especially before lighter weight "miracle fabrics" were invented. Heavy wool and sheer bulk kept out the cold. Gowns for queens and princesses, as well as every other kind of costume, had to be made to go over big snowsuits and somehow still suggest sexiness and glamour.

After the springtime demand for costumes for school plays and formal wear for proms, a slack time followed, interrupted for a few weeks by the Minneapolis Aquatennial in July. In slow times, Jacobson and Georgiana Glaser would open up drawers and shake out, brush and neatly replace stock.

While the costume business has its glamorous moments, costumers and their families also know about the sixteen-hour days, the nights spent crating up costumes until 1 or 2 a.m. so they can be shipped at daybreak, the frenzied days and weeks around Halloween when costume shop employees seldom touch home base, the exhaustion of packing up all the costumes on the last night of a play's run and getting them back to the shop—sometimes unpacking them that same night.

Louise Giesen Murphy knew about it. She helped out during summer school breaks, when her parents were ill, or business was heavy. She followed family tradition by majoring in drama at the College of St. Catherine, but tradition stopped at the costume house door. "When we retire," Olga said in a newspaper interview, "we

hope to turn it over to our daughter Louise."

However, Louise had other ideas. She had intended to be a drama teacher, but gave that up when she learned that she would have to teach literature as well as direct plays. At St. Catherine's, she learned about makeup, skills she put to use now and then for Giesen's. On one memorable occasion, she was hired to apply makeup to the legs of costumed ice skaters for an ice show. The skaters stood on a table, rotating as required, as she stood on the floor. "All I saw for two hours was legs, legs, legs," she said.

Instead, Louise went into radio. Bea Baxter, of KSTP Radio, hired her for her morning program. It was here that Louise met Bob Murphy, a well-known radio personality, whom she married in 1941. Two years later, in 1943, the National Broadcasting Company lured Murphy to Chicago, where he became nationally known.\*

Major events seemed to happen in pairs in the Giesen-Hilbert family, and it was true in 1943. In the same year that the Murphys moved to Chicago, Martin Giesen died after a two-year illness. He was sixty-nine.

Olga ran the business alone now. William ("Bill") Giesen, her nephew, the son of Adolph Giesen, kept the company books. Emil Hilbert still worked for her, but was frequently ill. At home, Jane Hilbert was a mainstay for Olga, who continued to manage the business with her usual flair, dedication, and meticulousness, but the business had begun to change and she was getting older and somewhat frail. Then she became ill. Martin Giesen Costumers was still elegant, but a little frayed and tired.

Although the St. Paul Civic Opera company was neither frayed nor tired, it finally succumbed in 1957 to the perpetual lack of funds. Virginia Hardin Olson, a singer with the opera company, remembered that Olga was no longer replacing costumes in

\*Bob Murphy's NBC shows included the "Bob and Kay Show," a noontime talk and interview show, and the "Morris B. Sachs Amateur Hour." He was the announcer for Alex Dreier on the morning news and for Don McNeil's popular "Breakfast Club."



the company's last years. She turned away business because she could not handle it, said Wayne Murphey, and NORCOSTCO was the reluctant beneficiary. "Towards the end," said Max Metzger, "we would tell [Olga] what we'd need, and she'd say, 'You know where they are. Pick out what you need.' The costumes were already in shambles."

Giesen's had performed an important service in the cultural life of the community. Olga wanted to see it continued, and she tried hard to get someone to take it over. She talked to Bob Murphy, but that would never have worked, according to Louise. "He didn't have the patience." She urged Jacobson to buy it, but by then he had a degree in chemistry and had moved on to new challenges. Olga asked the youthful owners/managers of NORCOSTCO, J. Thomas Scott, Sally Ross Dinsmore and Wayne Murphey, to buy her out, but the two groups couldn't agree on inventory lists, price, and conditions.

In 1960, Bob Murphy died unexpectedly, leaving Louise with nine children, the youngest of whom was a year-old toddler. Olga Giesen was already so ill that she couldn't go to Chicago for the funeral. By that time, however, Olga had buyers for her business: Bill Sowden, Glyde Snyder, and Charles ("Chuck") Meehan. Sowden was a mitten manufacturer, as well as a singer, dancer, comedian and comic pantomimist in the Twin Cities. Snyder was a theatrical promoter and founder of the famous Schiek's Quartette. Meehan was director of the Edyth Bush Theatre in St. Paul.

Sowden, Snyder and Meehan completed the purchase of Martin Giesen Costumers in September, 1960. Olga Giesen sold reluctantly, said Sowden. "She loved [the business]—it was her life." On November 1, 1960, she died at the age of eighty-two.

Probably no one could have sustained the business as it had been. It and the economy had changed. No one could have continued to make only enough money to "pay for the drayage." No one could have continued to "build" elaborate costumes, one by one, often hand-decorated with lace and jewels, and stay in business. Giesen's had emerged out of an earlier, lusher tradi-



Edward C. Hampe, King Boreas XI of the 1948 St. Paul Winter Carnival, in his royal robes. For years, Giesen's costumed Winter Carnival royalty. Kenneth Wright photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

tion of German theatrical costume houses. The old methods had given way to faster and more efficient, almost mass production techniques. Basic garments were created that could be easily altered not only for size but for style and period.

The new owners hoped to sustain the museum part of it and fund a renaissance of the company, but it was impossible. In 1969, Homer H. Johnson, a former investment manager, bought out Giesen's, by then located at 389 St. Peter Street. Meehan stayed on. Sowden salvaged some of the Geraldine Farrar costumes and he and Snyder left. In 1970, just two years short

of its 100th birthday, Johnson conceded failure. He held a three-day auction, August 19-21, 1970, in Stem Hall in the Civic Center in St. Paul, and sold off 50,000 costumes, along with furniture, equipment, and antiques. Tom Scott and Wayne Murphey of NORCOSTCO bought some beautiful old "Coca-Cola" Santa Claus suits, but they found surprisingly little left that was in good shape, at a reasonable price.

An ignoble end for a noble house, perhaps. But perhaps not. Perhaps no indigni-

*Giesen's to page 22*



# What's Historic About this Site?

## *The House Peder Foss Built— New Brighton, 1896*

*This is the fourteenth in a series of articles on Ramsey County's historic sites.*

**W**hen the Foss House, the home of its longtime resident, Peder Foss, was built in 1896, New Brighton was a village of about 350 linked by rail to both St. Paul and Minneapolis.

The land on which the house stands, although now within New Brighton's city limits, was originally farmland, owned in 1874 and for the next twenty years by the Bowers family. In 1895 Josephine Bowers sold the land to Ingebor Foss (later Ingebor Oleson), who may have been Peder Foss's sister. The house was built approximately a year later and by 1898, an atlas of Ramsey County had labeled the property as belonging to Peder Foss.

Foss was born in 1858, the son of Ole Foss, a Norwegian immigrant to Ramsey County. The Foss family owned the house until 1944, when it was sold to Esther Swanson.

The house is historically and architecturally significant as the largest and most intact Victorian house now standing within New Brighton and as the home for many years of a family who were early settlers in the area. Important architectural details include the three-story round corner turret with conical cap and finial and the three bullseye windows on the turret's third story. There is an open porch with a pediment at the entrance, supported by square columns, and an open side porch. Decorative shingles cover the gable ends.

New Brighton, in the 1890s, had grown from a community of farmers who raised crops and cattle into a busy commercial center as the home of the Minneapolis Stockyards and Packing Company. In 1887 a group of Minneapolis



businessmen established the packing plant to compete with the recently founded stockyards at South St. Paul. However, the competition of the South St. Paul stockyards, as well as increasing complaints by townspeople about air and water pollution caused the New Brighton stockyards to retrench around 1900 and eventually to close.

World War II brought a surge of growth and business activity to the community. In 1941 a large munitions plant was built immediately north of New

Brighton in rural Moundsview Township. This attracted many new residents to the area. Gas and sewer connections were installed, bus service was established and roads were improved.

But it was during the two decades after World War II—from 1950 to 1970—that New Brighton experienced the growth that boosted its population from 2,200 to more than 19,000. Today, the city remains largely a suburban community linked to the greater Twin Cities area by two Interstates—35E and 694.

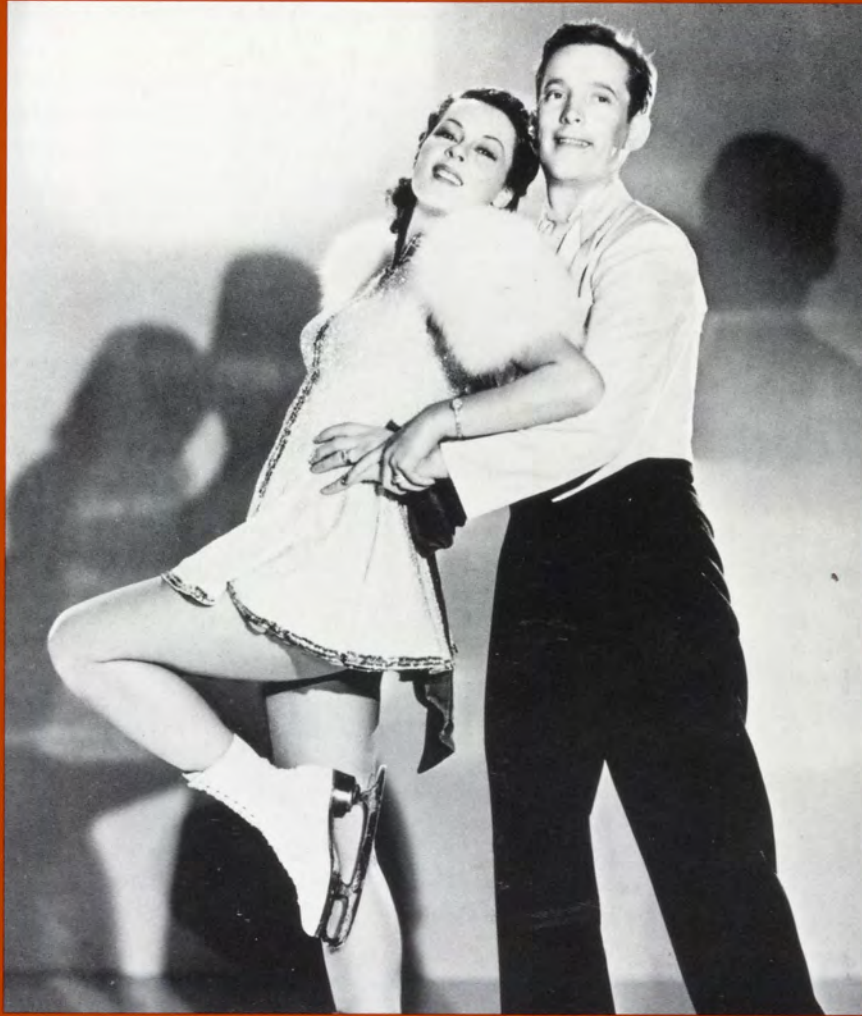
### *Giesen's from page 15*

ty could tarnish the legacy left by Marie, Martin, and Olga Giesen, Jacobson, Georgiana Glaser, Minnie Robinson, and those who tried to carry on the business in the Giesen tradition. It was, for hundreds of thousands of people for nearly 100 years, "a house of real make-believe," in which ordinary men and women were transformed into Santa Claus, a Polar bear, an Oriental King, Madame Butterfly, Norma, Earnest or Aida. And millions more, who may not even have known the name Giesen's, were charmed, enlightened and entertained by the parades and plays, operas and oratorios, pageants and parties that

Giesen's Costumers had illuminated with their beautiful and impeccable costumes.

*Before becoming a technical writer nearly fifteen years ago, Virginia L. Martin worked for the Minnesota Historical Society for eight years. In the years since, she has continued writing and editing historical articles and books. She wrote a history of Abdallah's Candy Company and edited books on Andrew Peterson, a Scandia pioneer and horticulturist and on NORCOSTCO (Northwestern Costume Co.) of Minneapolis. Two of her family-based histories have been published in Hennepin County History. Her article about the fifty-year-old culturally diverse Rainbow Club is to be published in Mpls/St Paul in 1964.*





*Ice Follies pair skaters Bess Ehrhardt and Roy Shipstad in 1938. They played later in the MGM movie, "Ice Follies of 1939." When Shipstads and Johnson were just starting out, Martin and Olga Giesen loaned them their costumes. See article beginning on page 4. Minnesota Historical Society photo.*

**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

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage  
PAID  
St. Paul MN  
Permit #3989