

RAMSEY COUNTY

# History

*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

Euphoria Dimmed:  
X-Rays' First Victim

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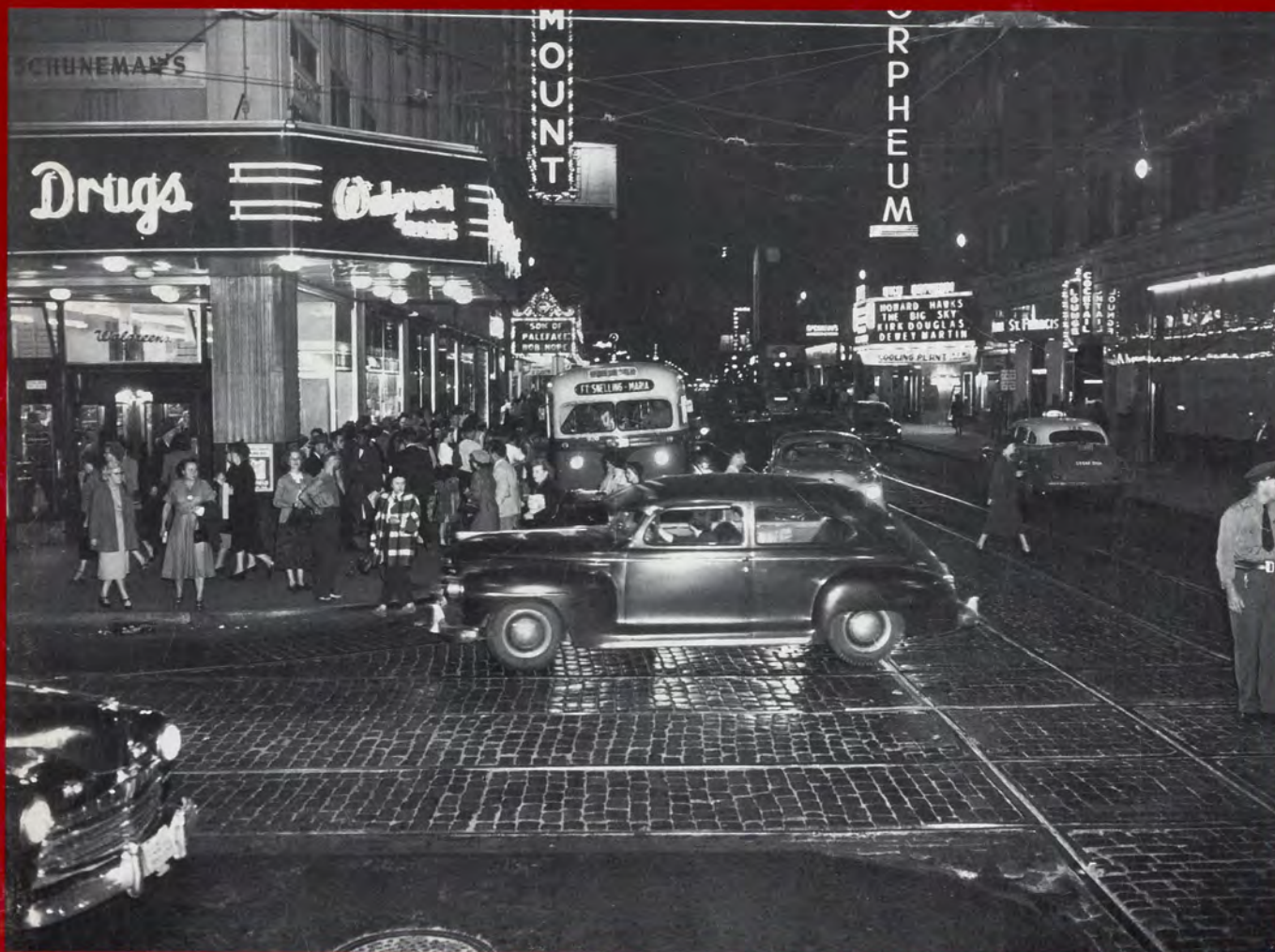
Winter, 1997

Volume 31, Number 4

*Rats, Politicians, Librarians*

Untold Stories of the Old St. Francis Hotel

Page 4



A brightly lighted downtown St. Paul was photographed on the night of September 4, 1952. This view looks west along Seventh Street from Wabasha to St. Peter. The St. Frances is on the right. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 31, Number 4

Winter, 1997

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**oward the end of 1996, Ronald M. Hubbs, a long-time supporter of history in Ramsey County, died. Ron not only had contributed a number of fine articles that were published over the years in *Ramsey County History*, but he also was unfailingly enthusiastic in his support for the Ramsey County Historical Society's publication program. The Society dedicates this issue to his memory and to the great value he placed on history. In it we feature a building—the St. Francis Hotel—and a location—Seventh Place—that many residents and visitors know but little understand in terms of their historical significance to St. Paul. A companion piece tells the story of the Saint Paul Building.

*John M. Lindley, chair, Editorial Board*

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## *Growing Up in St. Paul*

# Everyone Knew the Rules for the Rites of Passage And Transportation Was Mainly on Foot

*Brenda Raudenbush*

Samuel H. Morgan, my father's law partner, and the father of my oldest friend, Jonathan, described growing up in St. Paul in the Summer, 1995, issue of *Ramsey County History*. As I read, I detected no appreciable gap between our fathers' generation and our own when we began to prowl the streets of the Crocus Hill neighborhood in innocence forty years later.

The Victorian era extending into the first two decades of the twentieth century brought with it, if not behavior of moral exactitude, at least a uniformly delineated moral code. We were expected to be industrious and self-reliant individuals who also strictly adhered to the social conventions of the group. Everyone knew the rules and they continued to flavor the postwar 1940s and 1950s when Jon and I were growing up. Parents' sense of moral responsibility to home and children remained unchallenged until the explosion of choices and enticements brought into our living rooms by the television boom of the 1960s. It was still gauche to speak and write about any but the narrow path in polite society. Children were children and parents were parents. They lived in two discrete hierarchical and horizontal worlds, except when the two parents as a team made a vertical bee-line to the task of a "proper bringing up" of one of their momentarily wayward children. At home our parents made us toe the mark; yet, in our free time, we were left to our own devices during which we sought our own homemade fun unshadowed by adult supervision.

We followed the rites of passage of Sam Morgan's day. We played the same games, went to the same schools in almost the same school buildings, attended the same church, pursued romance in the same time-honored way: dancing school, sporting events, and skating parties. Our



*The Raudenbush house on Linwood Avenue, built by Grandfather Webb. His children and grandchildren grew up here. All photos are from the author.*

primary mode of transportation was on foot (shod in sneakers, stadium boots, Buster Browns, Mary Janes, hockey skates and figure skates or clamp-on roller skates) or we rode our bikes. City neighborhoods seem not to be put to the same use today as in the first half of the twentieth century. Where are all the kids and dogs running and riding to and fro, playing simple games in the streets without uniforms, teams, or expensive athletic equipment? Fun is organized into leagues and the streets are empty. So my own children would not relate to descriptions of the construction materials, bumps, roughnesses, and straightaways in exquisite detail. I do. I feel that I am having a visit with an old friend who really understands me because he respects the same hills and valleys I was up against in those distant days when I was seven and eight. When an expressway makes pie pieces out of Lower St. Clair

and buildings that were staples of our daily rounds are torn down, we share a sense of the disruption of the sacred, although no doubt these changes are being made in the name of progress.

To every child, in fact, the very bricks, dogs, and all growing things of the Crocus Hill neighborhood were intimate companions because we moved among them on foot. We knew the neighbors, who sat on their wide porches, walked their dogs, mowed their lawns. We did not spend hours indoors passively gazing into a TV-rama or watch the streets and houses whizz by in a blur while riding in endless carpools. I could count every cement slab in the wall down Avon between Osceola and Linwood to where I turned into the alley leading to our back door (I tagged them all as I walked—a daily ritual). My walking and biking route also took me east on Linwood to Grotto (the "Pill Alley" section that Sam

Morgan mentions where the doctors all lived). Sundays the Raudenbush and Morgan children walked as far north as Portland to Unity Church past Irving School (Grand at Grotto) with its big tower with the pointed roof. Irving is long gone. My brother went to school there before we moved to Florida during World War II and it had been torn down by the time we moved back to Crocus Hill in 1945.

On a recent visit to St. Paul I confirmed that it is still possible to see the sweep of Grotto Street all the way to the old Grotto Steps leading down to St. Clair Avenue by St. Clair Park. The sight of it instantly brought me back to the summer I struggled to stay up on my new bike, how many times I bit the dust and home seemed so far away—as far as Grotto Steps and more. I happened also on that visit to catch a view of the landmarks of Crocus Hill from the West St. Paul bluffs near the new High Bridge. I ran my eye from the familiar green neo-Gothic dome of the St. Paul Cathedral past the slate roof of the University Club on Summit Avenue toward the sandy-colored Highland Tower. The old red brick lantern tower of the Convent of the Visitation was suddenly and conspicuously absent, like the surprising loss of a tooth from the mouth of a seven-year-old. It's gone. I know that, but carried abruptly back a half a century as I scan the treeline in the summer of 1996, the shock is new once again. Someone took my landmark away. The convent remained a sacred sentinel at the heart of Crocus Hill until after I grew up and moved away from St. Paul in the 1960s.

My sister, Hilary, and I have said to one another that we were privileged to live in an era of structure and responsibility, although like all children, we griped about any work our parents made us do. We did chores for a pittance. "They" made us read good books and practice the piano. I took piano lessons from my grandmother, Florence Miller Raudenbush, who lived with my grandfather, Webb R. Raudenbush, in the center of Crocus Hill. "Nana" escorted me through the Thompson Series, beginning with *Teaching Little Fingers To Play* through *The Three B's*, especially Beethoven's

*Sonata Pathetique*. She and my dad (her son, David) inspired me in an enduring love of classical music.

Despite our care and application to worthy projects, we were sometimes bored or we got hurt. If we were bored, we handled it. We never expected a grown-up to entertain us. If we got hurt, we soon learned to rebound and to pick ourselves up. We were taught to solve our problems ourselves. "What would you do if I weren't here?" a grown-up would ask. Sometimes our parents disciplined us by sending us to our rooms, or making us eat in the kitchen. One balmy evening after supper, I went over to the house of one of the neighborhood children. Through an open window I accidentally overheard his father order him to leave the table and take his plate to the kitchen. I was so embarrassed for him, I just sneaked away.

There were, of course, hazards and challenges out-of-doors as well as within. Bigger children might pick on us. "Mean" boys from the neighborhood "below the hill" chased little girls and washed their faces with snowballs. But the rest of the time, we gathered joyfully together in the neighborhood streets for games, or lounged on our side porch where Dad read to us from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. The days stretched luxuriously before us. On Saturdays and Sundays, we could look forward to matinees at the UpTown Theater on Grand for twelve cents: Roy Rogers in "*Under California Skies* plus Ten Cartoons."

In those post-war days before the advent of the mall and the supermarket, goods and services were brought to our back door, just as they had been the generation before mine. "Citizen's Ice and Fuel Company," (I pronounced it, "Critics Ice and Folly Company") delivered the ice once a week. We kids stole ice chips off the back of the ice truck as it idled in the alley behind our house. Our parents warned us that the chips were filthy with sawdust and "god knows whatall" so we tried to wash them off under the tap without melting the whole thing away. The ice man strode through our kitchen door, carrying a great block of ice held by giant tongs. He swung it

off one rubber-covered shoulder into the upper portion of the ice box. Dad used an icepick to chip off little pieces for his old fashioned and high balls. Once when I undercooked hot, bubbling fudge which naturally refused to solidify, I tried to harden it by placing it on top of the ice cake. The hot pan melted a corner of the ice cake and thick chocolate streamed down into the lower portion of the ice box all over the milk and butter. Here ended my culinary efforts for the time being.

Our house had visits not only from the ice man, but also a delivery man from Ramaley's Bakery & Liquor Store, the Crocus Hill Grocery boy, the guy from the dry cleaners, not to mention the paper boy and mailman. We also had a milkman we called "Dear." One Saturday as Hilary, Peter, and I were finishing breakfast in the kitchen, the milkman made his delivery directly into our ice-box, then headed for the kitchen door saying, "good-bye." Mother was absorbed in her work at the stove and, thinking it was one of us, she responded absently, "Goodbye, dear." We loved to tease her about it.

Dad, who grew up in the same house, used to tell about the time he came home from school with a three-cornered rent in his knickers. My grandmother wrapped him in a blanket while she mended the tear. Hearing someone bumping around in the basement, she hurried to the basement stairs and hollered down: "Are you running around down there without any pants on?" A deep voice replied, "No, ma'am; I'm just reading the meter!"

My first friend was Katherine "Tukie" Griggs (best known as the late Katherine Chrissman, author of *Dreaming in the Dust*, and other works), who lived across the street. Wearing a plaid pinafore with ruffles at the shoulders, she stood behind her doll carriage and stared at me with great curiosity, but without malice, while we were unpacking and moving into 791 Linwood. She was five and a half, between my age and that of my younger sister, Hilary, and she already knew how to ride a two-wheeler. Mother had a lot of respect for Tukie, who could read way above her age-level. She had the best dolls (Stevie, Nancy, and the twins.) Saturday mornings, we little girls pounded

up to the third floor room where Tukie lived shouting, "I dibs Stevie! . . . I dibs Nancy." The Griggses were the center of much fascination. Later in the 1950s, they had the first TV on the block. Our creative games about the neighborhood receded in direct proportion to the time we spent gathered around "Kukla, Fran, & Ollie" or the "Colgate Comedy Hour" with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. The Griggses' beloved housekeeper, Rowena, baked the best chocolate chip cookies we ever ate, and they never ran out. Most fascinating and mysterious of all, Tukie's grandmother had known F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald during the Roaring Twenties. "She never talked about those days," Tukie said. I once got to see a lot of flapper outfits in her big closet, but I guessed they were hers, not Zelda's.

That first summer after the war ended, our family spent five weeks on a dairy farm at Deer Lake in northern Minnesota. Farmer Nelson showed us how to milk and took us haying. Horses pulled a great wagon through the fields and men and boys slung the hay high up on the hayrack with pitchforks. No haying machine rolled stacks that my daughter used to call "sleeping bag hay." My brother, Peter, would bring the cows in from pasture by himself. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson operated a hand-cranked cream separator in their kitchen, which always smelled like sour milk. They gave us thick rich cream to put on top of our oatmeal. We tried venison and bear meat, too. Mom and Dad sat on the screen porch of our lakeside cabin, editing a draft of Dad's book, *Democratic Capitalism*. We discovered that Grand Avenue was littered with ticker-tape from the V-J Day celebration as we rode back into town in August of 1945.

After Deer Lake, I was bundled off to begin Mrs. Wendland's second grade at Linwood Park School. Peter, who was in Mrs. Berg's fifth grade, escorted me down Osceola. I was afraid I'd never find my way alone. We had lunch together in the fifth grade classroom the first day, but we quickly established our own social circles after that.

Students at Linwood had colorful names: Keith Orenstein, Anetta Divett, Janet Jelnick, Burt Danarski (who

washed my face with ice balls) Louis Suddheimer (a romantic interest), Leonard Mastbaum, and Bruce Goethe. I met my lifelong friend, Julie Seabury, in Mrs. Wendland's class. Julie lived at 631 Goodrich near Dale Street in the heart of Crocus Hill. After Linwood, Julie and I went on to Summit School together, graduating from high school in 1956.

Caroline Ingersoll, my best friend in third grade, lived one short block from school. Sometimes I would drop in after



Hilary and Brenda Raudenbush on Brenda's eighth birthday.

school and we would end the day on her bed, along with her mother who was always knitting a sweater, and we listened to "The Challenge of the Yukon" on the radio. It reminded me of my own mother, also a gifted knitter, who would spend the hour before bedtime with Hilary and me, and later, my baby sister, Lucy, on the big bed she shared with Dad. But rather than listening to the radio, (which both my parents considered "tripe," for the most part) we would spend many cozy times together reading aloud from *The Odyssey* or the Greek myths. Having been an English teacher, Mother liked to quiz us on the reading just to see if we were paying attention. "What were Penelope's suiters doing during the ten years Odysseus wandered the seas?" "Wasting my substance!" we cried in unison.

By the time I headed home from Caroline's, the sooty October snow was shrouded by darkness and each street light had oily rings around it. I slipped and slid on invisible ice patches, longing to be out of the lonesome gloom and already seated at the dinner table. I spied Mother's smiling face watching for me through the cozy light of the back storm door as I came down the alley so glad to be at home at last.

The houses on our side of Linwood still stand on the same little plateaus above the sidewalk level and the grass strip where elm trees used to grow before Dutch Elm disease killed them all. Everyone called these hills "banks." Dad tried in vain to grow grass on the banks in those early days when gangs of neighborhood children ran up and down the banks absorbed in play. I spent countless hours pushing off from one of these banks to get my balance on the two-wheeler I got for my eighth birthday. Then came that magic day when knowledge moved beyond thought and my whole being suddenly caught the secret. Still to come was the precarious business of rounding the corner at Grotto, wavering back and forth, and trying not to steer into a tree.

Soon I could ride "no hands," or sitting on the fender behind the bicycle seat. I tied jump ropes to the handle bars and went riding with Sandra "Sansi" Ramsey, who lived on Fairmount, a block north of Osceola. We pretended to be Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Why did I ever think riding a bike was tough? Later in January, my craving for a chocolate fudgesicle drove me out to crunch over snow drifts, my bare hands sticking to the metal handle bars. I learned well how tough that could be, and turned back, crying from cold and my own stupidity for not wearing mittens. Down every snowy block, I longed for the warmth of home and a chance to curl up with *Caddie Woodlawn* instead. You put your bike away in the garage and come in the back door, and your mother says, "Hi, dear." You say, "Hi." It never occurs to you to tell her about your adventure. You are just safely home, and grateful that she's there to love you with a simple greeting. The whole encounter takes less than one minute, but total security is condensed

into that minute . You go up the back stairs to your room and crawl under a quilt with your book until supper. Life is good again.

Now that the bike was user-friendly, I ventured as far north as Grand Avenue. I knew every dog and every variety of Prairie Victorian architecture in those five blocks. Turning left past the Firestone Tyre Shop at Grand and Grotto (the yellow brick is still visible), I stopped and made solemn transactions at the Rexall Drug Store (fudgsicles, probably.) If you buy a fudgsicle in winter and try to eat it in sub-freezing weather, your tongue and lower lip stick to the ice cream and you can't get them off. Scriptos were twenty-five cents at Peiper's Variety Store, a little farther down the street. I bought cards of barrettes and little pads for the aspiring writer with the other half of my weekly allowance for washing the dishes at night and making my bed and half of Peter's bed with my sister (woman's work.) Once, I bought a pack of Wrigley's Spearmint Gum from a "cute little shop" next to Peiper's. In the rather murky atmosphere, I saw some men seated at what I supposed was a soda fountain. They laughed at the skinny little girl in blond braids and thick wireframe glasses. The proprietor accepted my nickel with a straight face and handed me the pack of gum with deep respect. Only years later did I realize I had shopped at a beer joint.

In the cold, blustery early spring Saturday afternoons, when the sun is watery thin and struggling to warm up the earth, I mastered roller skates. These were not rollerblades, but the kind of skates which clamp onto brown Oxfords and you tighten them with a special skate key. I still have a photograph of me in a corduroy jacket, one elbow akimbo, at the head of a line of four fellow skaters: my sister, Hilary, Tukie and Katherine Kerwin, who lived down the block. The little girls are relaxed: all smiles and innocence, whereas I stare almost defiantly into the camera, confident in knowing I am a cut above. The skate key dangles from my neck. Keeper of the key means leader of the pack. You need to tighten up? You better come to me!

The streetcar and later the bus became

the way we children got to the dentist. I had learned to negotiate a bus route at the age of five in Florida. In those days, mothers stayed at home. Dads took the streetcar to work, leaving the car for mother's errands. Mothers, however, did not carpool. Children made their own way, walking with other children. In fact, mothers did not turn up at school every five minutes to check on their kids as some do today. I remember my mother being up at Linwood School only twice when, in the spring of 1947 before my baby sister, Lucy, was born, she taught a class on how to write for our school newspaper, *Linwood Speaks*. Once I had a fight with the principal who accused me of opening the giant library dictionary to a page with a dirty word on it. I was capable of it, but I wasn't the one who did it. But I don't believe the principal ever called Mother.

We walked, rode bikes, or took buses everywhere. People say that the "olden" days were safer. We never heard about bad things, like abductions or drive-by shootings. I took the St. Clair-Payne-Phalen or the Grand-Mississippi bus to the Lowery Medical Arts Building for the dentist and eye doctor. Carfare was ten cents. I preferred the St. Clair, because there was a Bridgeman's Ice Cream place at the downtown stop. Once I was looking out the streetcar window when a woman came out of Bridgeman's with a

double-decker cone. Oh, man, did it look good! As she hurried toward the streetcar, she dropped her cone and, in frustration, gave it a mighty kick in the gutter. I remember feeling amazed and embarrassed at such a public display of temper. It seemed so unnatural; so violent. Later on, buses replaced streetcars, and the disk jockey, Merle Edwards, ran a campaign on his late-night show on WTCN: LET'S TEAR UP THOSE OLD UNUSED CAR TRACKS! he would holler. Somebody finally heard him.

The Holmans, Griggses, Sally Bingham, Jon Morgan, Robin and Sissy Moles, Raudenbushes, and sometimes Julianne Perl and Teddy Koch and others from the Morgan end of Linwood played baseball-in-the-street at dusk.

Growing up in Crocus Hill had its hazards. One summer night, Peter went to the Morgan's yard to play kick-the-can. He ran into a clothesline in the dusk and still bears a faint scar on one side of his mouth. I dislocated my knee playing Blind Man's Bluff in Robin Moles' living room in my stocking feet. Hilary gashed her thigh a quarter inch above the femoral artery while swimming over a submerged mooring pipe in the spring-swollen St. Croix River. My sister, Lucy, ran a sled runner through her nose an hour before she was due to appear as a cherub in the Unity Church Christmas pageant. The Holman boys wiped their



Neighborhood roller skaters: Katherine Kerwin (left), Hilary Raudenbush with "George," Katherine "Tukie" Griggs, and Brenda Raudenbush.

dirty hands on Mother's best guest towels and were banned from our house. I sneaked into the Holmans' house with Karen and was banned from their house because they were banned from our house. Timmy Griggs was spanked and sent to his room for sawing three quarters of the way through one of the stair treads on the cellar stairs. It's still that way when I checked, some forty years later.

In winter, we skated. Julianne Perl's father shoveled the back yard and flooded it with a hose. The girls gathered there on Saturday afternoons and sometimes week-day evenings. Ice and snow covered the alleyway between the Raudenbush back yard and the Perls' two houses away. We put on our skates at the back steps of our own house and skated our way to Julianne's rink. It was there that we learned to figure skate, doing such poses as "the swan," the "waltz jump," and "shoot the duck." We worked on our twirls, going round and round like Sonje Henie, the only famous skater we knew. Louis Suddheimer once asked me to go skating with him at the Olympic Skating Rink. The only drawback was that, instead of having clean, white boot skates (with pompons on the laces) my skates were jet black, but I tried not to care as I rounded the curves at the Olympic holding onto Louis' hand and feeling just fine. It was good to have been chosen. The first time always seems to be the best. I thought we had a really good time, but he never asked me to skate with him again. I wonder about such things. But, after all, we were only nine.

Sound carried clearly through the pure frosty air as we crisscrossed Julianne's rink with our skates. From behind someone's window we could hear the organ theme music for "Lux Presents Hollywood" swirling around us with the snow flakes and winter breezes. Hearing far-off radio sounds from behind lighted windows always made me feel safe and cozy and connected to the world around me. I was outside in the cold and dark, but somewhere, nearby, and available to me, were mothers and fathers, lights, and familiar radio sounds going out to families all across the United States at the same time.

My grandmother, Nana, who taught

me piano from age eight to age sixteen, lived in an apartment atop Crocus Hill around the corner on Lincoln. I loved going there (unless I hadn't practiced, because she became very sad if I didn't practice.) She always fed me hot chocolate and Lorna Doones on cold wintry afternoons. On bleak winter evenings, when I had forgotten to put on leggings, she made me wear her enormous "snuggies" home. It was embarrassing, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings. I only hoped with all my heart that the telltale pink stuff, wrapped around me twice wouldn't slip out from under my short skirt!

Nana was president of the Schubert Club of St. Paul for twenty-five years. My grandfather made pianos with his father and brother. Pianos by Raudenbush & Son were well-known for keeping their pitch and can be seen today in the museum of musical instruments in Landmark Center opposite the St. Paul Public Library in Rice Park. My grandparents lived in the house my grandfather built on Linwood, where my dad and my Uncle Roddy and Aunt Emily grew up and where the second-generation Raudenbushes lived. My grandmother patiently demonstrated the proper finger-action and wrist posture with an up and in lifting motion of the hand to get the most music out of the piano. When visiting at our house, she would allow Dad to give her a small glass of sherry. She laughed at his witticisms, and remonstrated, "how provoking!" when someone told a story of trial or frustration. My cousin, Charles Kimbrough, son of my Aunt Emily Raudenbush Kimbrough, herself a gifted pianist, stood beside Nana at the piano and sang arias. He exclaimed, "Oh, blunder!" when he made an error. I thought it odd that an eleven-year-old would use that quaint expression (I was nine by then). He also designed exquisite facsimiles of Metropolitan Opera sets from shoe boxes. This, too, seemed unusual for a boy his age. His love of art and music found expression from his earlier boyhood. The rest is history. He is today a noteworthy stage and television actor, most recently on *Murphy Brown*, in the role of Jim Dial.

Karen Holman, two grades ahead of

me in school, was note-worthy for other reasons. First, she was the only fourth grader I knew who could play *Hungarian Rhapsody Number Two* by Franz Liszt. Second, she revealed to me in graphic, if not completely accurate, detail how a man and a woman make babies. No! It was hard enough to imagine my parents doing such a thing, and when my eye roved from house to house, imagining the unthinkable between each of the neighboring couples, it was more than I could bear. I burst into tears on the slushy sidewalk outside my house, calling Karen "a liar." Later on, the nurse at Linwood School gave a course on conception and birth to the fifth grade girls. Various cautious conversations on this most interesting topic, of course, arose among the younger set. But we were all quite unsophisticated about such matters and felt cheated of nothing. It was not like it is today with the media running mad on the subject and kids growing up before their time. Teddy Koch was disgusted with the whole topic. He was far more interested in becoming a jazz musician. "I am saving my lips for my clarinet," he vowed.

The Convent of the Visitation, on Grotto and Fairmont, was a big draw for some of us girls, because it was forbidden and therefore a great mystery. The "Viz" was a block and a half from my house. Rowena walked there wearing a kerchief every Sunday for mass with her friend, "Muggie," who worked at the Bud Kleins' a couple of blocks north. Sally Bingham, Georgiana "Sissy" Moles, and I scaled the wall a couple of times to "peek" at the forbidden cloister, curious to catch a glimpse of virtue, perhaps. We would jump down and run if a sister in black-and-white habit appeared in the cloister garden. One winter at sunset, I scaled the wall by myself and lo and behold! I caught sight of two or three nuns skating noiselessly on the cloister skating rink. What a graceful pantomime in the soft light of the newly risen moon: black bare-branched trees etched against a moon-white sky; ghostly figures in black habits gliding silently against white snow with a moving echo of white wimple at the throat. Everything black and white, except for one vermilion streak in the western sky. I remember this as a sight of

magical beauty . . . an unexpected gift, the memory of which rests peacefully in my heart. I miss the old convent and even today experience a pang of surprise and disappointment every time I round the corner at Linwood and Grotto and look north. Invaded by an asphalt driveway leading to squatty, modern buildings, the old brick wall which once enclosed a holy secret is breached.

Many who have married and moved away from Crocus Hill eventually return. St. Paul is that kind of town. Despite new infrastructure, a freeway, and general

emersion in the troubles of the modern world, there is a trace of Victoriana about the Crocus Hill neighborhood, which lends an air of dependability, rather than decay. I understand at my age now why people get interested in historic preservation. In *Our Town*, Emily bids "goodbye" to Grover's Corners, and to life as she has known it, knowing she did not really know it, that although she was a good person, she possessed the flaw we all possess: the almost inescapable flaw of careless unconsciousness. She cries out, "Oh, Earth! You are too wonderful for anyone

to realize you!" We, too, yearn to realize and to remember and to know where we belong.

*BRENDA RAUDENBUSH moved to Atlanta in 1964 where she and her husband raised four children. She now lives near Conyers, Rockdale County, Georgia, where she teaches remedial reading to adults through the county literacy program and is a member of the Rockdale Writers' Group and the Honey Creek Poets' Society.*

## 'Empty Nests' and Tea at the Ramsey House

*Editor's Note: Brenda Raudenbush's mother, Patsy Raudenbush, has added her own reminiscences of an earlier generation.*

### Patsy Raudenbush

It really started as a joke. We were anticipating losing our first-born sons as they went off the college in the East. Silly it was. We were grown women, but we also were friends and neighbors, so we got together every so often, supposedly to grieve—today's "empty nest" syndrome. We told our sons, jubilant to depart into an adult world, that we would share their letters with one another. Of course we wouldn't, particularly after we found out how short those letters would be.

We all were wives of professional men and all of us were serious volunteers in museums, hospitals, and industrial places. Occasionally we organized outings to someone's cabin on a lake or in a forest. We hiked, played bridge, read, or knitted. We tried to create gourmet meals, and we learned that it was true, that life did go on.

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Like most young mothers, I used to take the children for afternoon walks. There weren't many uniformed nursemaids in our neighborhood. One glorious September day, I assembled my three daughters and off we went to stroll the streets and stop at the house of Arthur Foote, our minister at Unity Church. He

was in Maine for the summer but was expected back because school was about to begin. I had with me a pair of pants his daughter, Franny, had left at our house after a sleepover with Brenda, who was then nine.

Pants in hand, washed and wrapped in tissue paper, I rang the doorbell. No response. We went to the back of the house and leaned on that bell. No answer, but someone must have been living there because a man's shorts hung on the clothesline. Foote no doubt had invited a new parishioner to use the house. I took out Franny's pants and was just hanging them on the clothesline when the back door was flung open by a small, gray-haired man who shouted "*Was Machen sie mit meine pants?*"

I was stunned, but I tried to explain with "*machen*" and "*pants*" what I was doing so logically. No fractured German calmed the old fellow so I waved and scuttled my family away.

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Some years earlier, as a bride, I took tea, as we said, at the Alexander Ramsey house. I was returning a call made on me by the Ramsey granddaughters, Anita and Laura Furness, during the first year of my marriage. They and my family had Philadelphia connections. I wore a hat and white gloves and I carried a folding pink leather, gold-tooled case which held my calling cards.

Passing through the iron gate, I stepped up to the porch and pulled the

bell at the enormous door. The Furness sisters greeted me warmly. They were expecting me. Ahead of me was a very long staircase; at the left was the long parlor with two marble fireplaces and two crystal chandeliers.

We moved into the library where three upholstered chairs had been placed before a cheerful fire in the fireplace. As the older sister, Anita presided over tea. A maid in black with a crisp white cap and apron entered carrying a large silver tray. There was a silver urn for hot water on its stand above an alcohol flame. Tea was steeping in a china pot. Sugar and cream and thin lemon slices with clover stars, were there, too. There were cucumber sandwiches, little cakes, and dreamy cookies, all of them made from recipes of Anna Ramsey, the governor's wife.

"Patsy, this is Lapsang Souchong smoky tea," Anita Ramsey said. "How would you like it?" I knew the tea, but thought I would ask for sugar and milk, the English way. I thought the Furness sisters quite English. The tea was excellent, the conversation (books and art) stimulating, but the autumn dark was approaching and it was time to take my leave.

Near the door, Anita, who always was forthright, I later learned, said to me: "You know, one never should take milk with a smoky tea." Slightly abashed, I thanked her and Laura. Then I thought, she's trying to help me learn a subtlety of social manners.





*St. Paul's first public Market House at Seventh and Wabasha, about 1870. It was built by Vetel Guerin, a French-Canadian who was the first settler on this tract of land. Minnesota Historical Society photo. See article beginning on page 4.*

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