

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

The African-American  
Community and the Cuba  
Pageant of 1898

Page 15

Winter, 1999

Volume 33, Number 4

*Timber, Steel, Law, Politics*

*St. Paul's Pioneering Lawyers—Page 4*



*The signing of the Briand-Kellogg Pact in Paris on August 27, 1928. Frank B. Kellogg is seated at the table. This copy of a painting of the historic event is from the Minnesota Historical Society. See article beginning on page 4.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 33, Number 4

Winter, 1999

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

The winter issue of *Ramsey County History* opens with a fascinating account of how some pioneering lawyers who were involved in cases relating to the timber and steel industries helped shape and change the practice of law and politics in Minnesota. Written by Samuel H. Morgan, a retired St. Paul attorney, this article ranges from President Theodore Roosevelt persuading Frank B. Kellogg and Cordenio A. Severance to represent the government in key anti-trust cases in the first decade of this century to the great 1962 election recount involving incumbent governor Elmer L. Anderson and his challenger, lieutenant governor Karl F. Rolvaag.

David Riehle's article examining the reaction of the African-American community in St. Paul to the fighting in Cuba in 1898 reminds us that the struggle of African-Americans in Minnesota to obtain full civil rights didn't begin in the 1960s. By using information culled from the pages of St. Paul's articulate and influential African-American newspaper, *The Appeal*, Riehle demonstrates that the decision to go to war with Spain in 1898 brought out complex reactions from the local African-American community. What Riehle finds in the coverage of the pageant in *The Appeal* is clear-cut ambivalence as to the meaning of the war for the civil rights of African-Americans in St. Paul.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*

# Books

## *Reluctant Dissenter— An Autobiography*

James Patrick Shannon  
New York: The Crossroad  
Publishing Company  
228 pages, index (\$19.95 cloth)

Reviewed by Virginia Brainard Kunz

Once—and still—a Roman Catholic bishop, lawyer, historian, and president for twelve years of St. Thomas College (now the University of St. Thomas), Jim Shannon, as he is so widely and affectionately known, occupies a special place among the people of Minnesota. Now he has written the story of his extraordinary journey, a moving first-person account by the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States to resign from his office over a matter of conscience.

While his book sheds light on an important aspect of the unsettling years, for Catholics, that followed Vatican II, it will be much more than that for many readers. Shannon describes a seemingly idyllic childhood in South St. Paul with a strong mother and a father who placed a high premium on education—clearly the contributors, along with the church, to a strong moral compass that guided him through a troubled period in his life.

He takes his readers through his years at the Christian Brothers' Cretin High School and St. Thomas Military Academy, which he entered on scholarship when he decided to study to be a priest. St. Paul Seminary followed, as did a steady progression through ordination, assignment to the St. Paul Cathedral parish; the St. Thomas College presidency (the youngest college president in America); a doctorate in

American history at Yale; and his appointment, in 1965, as an auxiliary bishop in the archdiocese of St. Paul.

The mid-1960s, however, were an intensely difficult time for Americans, as well as for the Catholics among them, and Shannon writes vividly of that era. He marched shoulder-to-shoulder with Martin Luther King in Selma, protested the Vietnam War before it was acceptable to do so, and served as the spokesman for the National Conference of Bishops. For the Roman Catholic church, those were the years also of Vatican II, a profoundly threatening event for many of the church's traditionalists but for Shannon the sessions were "the most exciting and sustained spiritual and intellectual experience of my adult life."

He writes that, "In the category of other providential events during the twentieth century, I would, without hesitation, cite the Second Vatican Council convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962, as the single most graphic illustration of divine intervention in human affairs in this century. It is, by a wide margin, the most remarkable religious event in my lifetime."

The changes Vatican II created for American Catholic parishes, however, set off an anguishing series of events that changed Shannon's life. His participation in an NBC documentary, "The New American Catholic," televised nationally in 1968, aroused the wrath of the powerful and vindictive Cardinal Francis McIntyre of Los Angeles. The most reactionary of the American church prelates, McIntyre attacked Shannon directly. As Shannon saw his support among his peers crumble under McIntyre's "iron fist," "My great pride in being an American Catholic bishop suffered a blow that day from which it

has never recovered." The doors of the church began to close for him. Finally, finding himself unable as a priest to support *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life), the encyclical issued in 1968 by Pope Paul VI which prohibited birth control among Catholics, Shannon knew he had to resign from his office.

He found a new life as a college administrator, as a lawyer after earning a law degree and, finally back home in Minnesota, as an executive of philanthropic foundations, work he saw as a continuation of his lifelong ministry. The loneliness he experienced without the supportive congeniality of the priesthood was eased by a happy marriage to Ruth Wilkinson, whom he had met in 1964 in Washington, D. C.

This is a gently written book. Shannon describes a fellow bishop as "the kind of bishop Jesus Christ had in mind when he put together the original team." More than that, it's a riveting book in his accounts of the sometimes Byzantine politics of the Catholic church as he experienced them in the 1960s a time when American Catholics were striving to follow Rome at the same time as they struggled to serve their own people. The hurt, bewilderment, and anger over his own treatment is clear, but so is his love for his faith and his commitment to it.

Shannon notes that he completed the manuscript for this book in 1979 but, after two publishers had rejected it, set it aside, uncertain about "going public" at that time. It is gratifying that he has done so now. This is an important autobiography. It should be widely read.

*Virginia Brainard Kunz is editor of Ramsey County History.*

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*The four-act pageant presented as  
a benefit for the American League of Min-  
nesota in November, 1898. See Dave  
Riehle's article about St. Paul's African-  
American community and the Spanish-  
American War beginning on page 15.*

## R.C.H.S.

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