

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Architect to Kings:
Wigington and His Ice Palaces

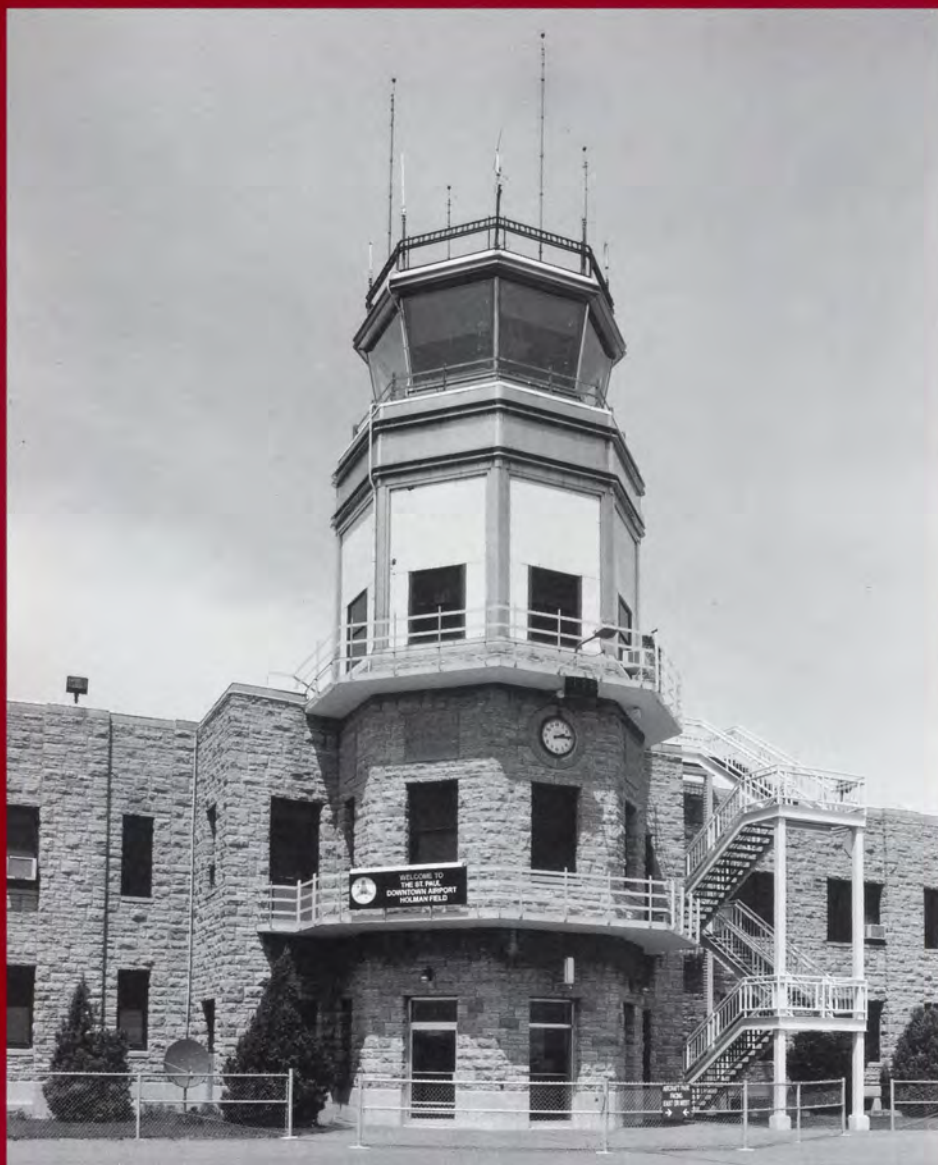
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Volume 34, Number 4

Three National Historic Sites
Clarence Wigington's Architectural Heritage

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The Holman Field Administration Building designed by Clarence W. Wigington in 1939 and built with resources provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This is one of the three Wigington buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Photograph by Don Wong, Don F. Wong Photography, Bloomington, Minnesota.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 34, Number 4

Winter, 2000

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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 the late Reuel D. Harmon

Message from Editorial Board

The Editorial Board of *Ramsey County History* is delighted to publish in this issue two fine articles on St. Paul's Clarence W. Wigington, who is believed to have been the first African-American municipal architect in the United States. Dr. David Taylor, dean of the General College at the University of Minnesota, is currently working on a biography of Wigington. His article gives us a sense of Wigington as an architect and as a pioneering civil servant at a time in this country when African-Americans faced many obstacles and handicaps to achieving professional careers. Wigington not only rose to a leadership position within the city's Office of Parks, Playgrounds, and Public Buildings, he also was a leader in the local African-American community throughout his working career.

Expanding upon David Taylor's discussion of Clarence Wigington's accomplishments as an architect of many St. Paul buildings, Bob Olsen, the author of our second piece on Wigington, examines the architect's work as a designer of St. Paul Winter Carnival Ice Palaces between 1926 and 1942. Both articles feature photographs of buildings Wigington designed. Olsen's article includes photos drawn from the author's own collection of Ice Palace memorabilia.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Books

City on Seven Hills Columns of Oliver Towne

Gareth Hiebert
St. Paul: Pogo Press
204 pages, index, \$14.95 (paper)

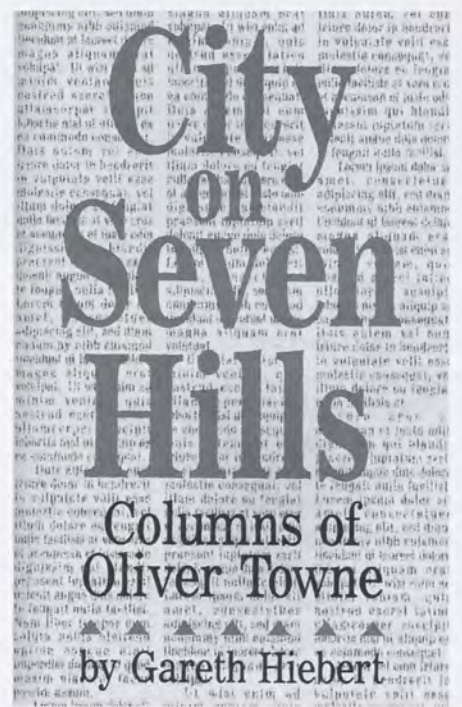
Reviewed by Virginia Brainard Kunz

It was entirely fitting that this collection of columns by Gareth Hiebert, for thirty-two years the popular Oliver Towne columnist for the *St. Paul Dispatch and Pioneer Press*, should be published as the city celebrated its 150th anniversary.

St. Paul's unofficial historian, Hiebert is a born story-teller and this delightful book presents some of his best. He reveals a warm and abiding interest in the people who have moved

through the city's history, from the 1850s to the near present. There was Commodore William P. Davidson, the steamboat captain, who built a "statuesque fortress" near Mounds Park overlooking the Mississippi and topped it off with a pilot house. There was William Pitt Murray, pioneer lawyer who in 1856 set up his practice at Tenth and Robert on property that remained in his family for almost a century.

There was Giesen's, the "wonderful magic" place at Sixth and Wabasha where sewing machines hummed as they turned out costumes for operas, plays, parties, carnivals. And there are the cemeteries and their little-known stories. A gravestone in Riverview cemetery at the end of Annapolis marks "the resting place of an Indian princess named Seneca and her husband, Chief White Cloud." Both Chippewas (now



Gareth Hiebert, early in his St. Paul newspaper career, circa 1940.

Ojibwa), they lived in the white world as Mr. and Mrs. Burton L. Baker.

St. Paul's historical fabric comes to life again in some of the city's well-loved but now vanished landmarks, such as the majestic Ryan Hotel, with its bay windows and iron grillwork, that once occupied the block at Sixth and Robert Street. Legend has it, Hiebert writes, that once, on a dare, John L. Sullivan cracked the "massive, mahogany-trimmed mirror" in the hotel's famous bar. And the author, who has a way with words, describes the "French school," the little domed Ecole St. Louis that once stood at Tenth and Cedar, as "hidden so shyly against the loftier pillars of concrete, the sterner buildings of the blocks around."

Although not a St. Paul native, Hiebert might just as well have been.

He has known virtually everyone. Mayors, bankers, and street people have been his friends over the years. Growing up in New Ulm, he came to St. Paul in 1939 at the age of eighteen to attend journalism school at the University of Minnesota and cover the University for the *Pioneer and Dispatch*.

He joined the army in 1943, served in the infantry, survived the Battle of the Bulge and the battle for Germany, then became public relations chief for the 84th Infantry Division. In 1946 he rejoined the Pioneer Press as feature writer and assistant city editor. In 1954 he became Oliver Towne, a name so identified with him that even now people sometimes call him Oliver, an enduring persona this fascinating book will reinforce.

Virginia Brainard Kunz is editor of Ramsey County History.

Stopping the Presses— The Murder of Walter W. Liggett

Marda Liggett Woodbury
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press
220 pages, index, \$18.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Patricia Sweney Hart

Walter W. Liggett was a Minnesota farmer's son during a time when farmers often were radical, especially if they lived in the Midwest. His father William had an idea which was radical in its day: he was an advocate of diversified farming. He moved from Benson, Minnesota, to the Twin Cities, became a regent of the University of Minnesota and its first dean of agriculture.

His son Walter tried farming but decided on journalism instead as a way to deal with the wrongs he saw in society at the end of the nineteenth century. He possessed, as one friend observed, "indomitable courage and a burning desire to right wrongs regardless of personal

risk." It is scarcely surprising, then, that Liggett became a muckraker, a member of a hardy band that exposed what newspaper critic Marlen Pew labeled "the crass materialism of post-Civil War America . . . where machine politics joined hands with privileged business . . . The muckraker's science was to do a real investigating and reporting job, dramatize the situation in print, fearlessly call things and men by their true names and get action."

The times were ripe for these radical journalists. There was a great deal of muck to rake as business and politics teamed with crime, but from the turn-of-the-century through World War II the organizations, unions, leagues and political parties that formed to protect and strengthen community interests all were affected by the crime sprees of the Prohibition era and the desperation of the Great Depression.

Liggett was a supporter of the Non-partisan League, an organization that originated in North Dakota in 1915 and was made up of farmers from the northwestern states who rose up against what they saw as the evils of the grain trade. Minnesota's Farmer-Labor Party was the League's descendant. Liggett's "weapon" in his crusade was the *Mid-West American*, of which he was editor. He used his paper, widely viewed as a scandal-sheet, to take on the popular and charismatic Minnesota governor, Floyd B. Olson, the darling of the Farmer-Labor party. Liggett was convinced that Olson had connections with organized crime, and said so. This was a dangerous thing to do.

In 1935 Liggett was shot to death in front of his family. His daughter, Marda Liggett Woodbury, was ten years old at the time. Now a librarian and writer of reference books, she has told his story in an effort to clear his name. His murder remains unsolved, but readers will learn much about early political movements and the newspapers that covered them—another perspective on a different Minnesota.

* * *

Minnesota Rag by Fred Friendly, published in 1981 by Random House's Vintage Press, presents another look at journalism in Minnesota during the 1920s and 1930s. Friendly tells the story of how an annoying Duluth newspaper, the *Rip Saw*, stimulated a movement that resulted in the passage in 1925 of the state's Public Nuisance Bill, known as the gag law.

Minnesota legislators strayed far from their constitution's noble words: "The liberty of the press shall forever remain inviolate, and all persons may freely speak, write and publish their sentiments on all subjects," but apparently few noticed. Three who did were the unlikely trio of Thomas Latimer, a Minneapolis lawyer; the colorful Colonel Robert McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune*; and Robert Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Minneapolis publisher Jay M. Near, whose "muck-raking newspaper indulged his anti-Semitic, anti-black, anti-Catholic and anti-labor newspaper" was put out of business by the gag law. The law which, as Friendly noted, "allowed a single judge to bar publication of any newspaper found 'malicious, scandalous or defamatory'" set a dangerous precedent for prior restraint and curtailed freedom of the press.

Latimer, who was no friend of Near's *Saturday Press*, believed the law was unconstitutional and defended Near in court. He lost, but the newly organized ACLU came to Near's rescue with \$150 and a decision to carry the case to the United States Supreme Court. McCormick, who had his own prejudices and his own vested interest in protecting freedom of speech, paid for the appeal to the high court. In 1931, Friendly wrote, *Near v. Minnesota* was decided in Near's favor by a vote of 5-4. The author profiles the giants of the court at that time, notably Charles Evans Hughes, Louis D. Brandeis, and St. Paul's own Pierce Butler, who wrote the dissenting opinion.

Minnesota Rag offers another view of the famous muckrakers who often were thought to be functioning chiefly for the

good of the common man, but who instead hoped simply to arouse anger among the populace. Three of the Twin Cities' scandal-mongering publishers died violent deaths: Liggett; Howard Guilford, who was gun-downed in 1934 as he was driving in south Minneapolis; and Arthur Kasherman, whose murder in 1945 became an issue in Hubert H. Humphrey's campaign for mayor of Minneapolis.

Patricia Sweney Hart is a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Editorial Board which oversees publication of Ramsey County History.

*Building Community, Keeping the Faith
German Catholic Vernacular
Architecture In a Rural
Minnesota Parish*

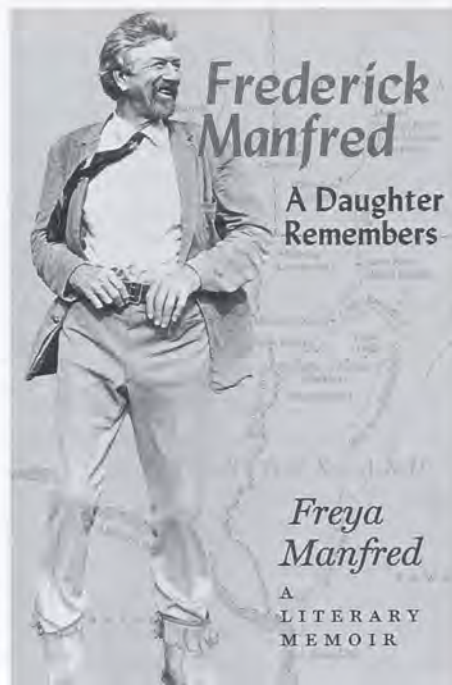
Fred W. Peterson
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society
Press, 1998
198 pages, index, \$39.95 (cloth), \$19.95
(paper)

The German Catholic immigrants who founded St. John the Baptist parish on the central Minnesota prairie made a remarkable transfer of tradition to their new environment. This study by Fred W. Peterson, a professor of art history at the University of Minnesota in Morris, documents, analyses, and interprets the community its pioneer settlers built between 1858 and 1915.

He reveals how their folk culture, aesthetic values, and religious beliefs were directly expressed in the houses, dairy farms, and churches they planned and built. He focuses on some thirty farmhouses built with locally made brick in and around Meire Grove, the village at the center of the parish. Using historical and contemporary photographs and his own architectural renderings, he demonstrates how settlers modeled the layouts of their new homes after those they had known in Germany, how they adapted those designs to the demands of prairie life, and how they intertwined the sacred

with the secular in their parish. Piety not only suffused their lives but affected every aspect of their built environment.

In its treatment of a single agricultural community, the book offers a perspective on similar ethnic enclaves in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest. This is important reading for students of architecture, religion, immigration, and ethnicity, and for anyone interested in the influence of European culture on America.



*Frederick Manfred:
A Daughter Remembers*

Freya Manfred
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society
Press, 1999
197 pages; \$24.95 (cloth), \$15.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Jane S. Angrist

This is a touching memoir by the Minnesota author's daughter, a writer herself of poetry, screenplays, children's stories, and novels. In this loving account of her father's life and death, she describes him as a regional writer whose "lack of prominence was also due to his almost total adherence to a singular vision of the Upper Midwest, a region he celebrated without apology or satire."

The book opens with her description

of her father's funeral and the memories shared there by other writers and family members. The author, who now lives near Lake Minnetonka, then describes her growing-up years with a father who was a huge man in size as well as in voice and personality, whose life was devoted to his writing, and whose family adapted to his daily routine. Mornings were a time when he went off to his cabin to write and his children learned to be quiet so as not to disturb him.

Almost half the book describes her father's slow descent into ill health and his family's efforts to help him die a dignified death. A series of small strokes and finally a brain tumor required treatment at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester and eventual hospitalization for care that could not be provided at home.

Freya Manfred's account of her father's life and her relationship with him is well told and includes many quotations from his writing and her own, and it should be read with interest, especially by those familiar with his work. Perhaps the many details of his illness and the indignities of growing old are more a private matter that need not have been shared with the public, despite Frederick Manfred's importance as a writer.

Jane S. Angrist is a researcher and a frequent book reviewer for Ramsey County History.

ALSO IN PRINT

Published first in 1977 by the Minnesota Historical Society Press, *Women of Minnesota—Selected Biographical Essays*, edited by Barbara Stuhler and Gretchen Kreuter, this revised version of a landmark study has been reissued by the Press. These biographical sketches, each of them contributed by a different writer, span the years from the early days of the territory to the opening days of the feminist movement.

The editors of the original book have added an essay on women's accomplishments over the past two decades, examining questions confronting women in the 1990 and highlighting such achievements as the number of judges, business lead-

ers, and sports figures who have risen to prominence. They also have updated the list of women legislators and added brief biographies of another 105 women.

This survey of the lives of Minnesota women and the diversity of their achievements and interests opens with the story of Harriet Bishop, who arrived in Minnesota in July, 1847, and became St. Paul's first schoolteacher. Another early influential woman was Jane Grey Swishelm, a tireless worker for abolitionist causes. An editor of newspapers, first in Pennsylvania and later in St. Cloud, Minnesota, she made it possible for married women, for the first time, to hold property. Eva McDonald Valesh, another early feminist, saw that the cause of women's rights was tied to economic justice and unions and became active in the labor movement.

Women who excelled in the field of higher education are represented by such outstanding examples as Maria Louise Sanford, a gifted teacher and lecturer at the University of Minnesota, and Mary Molloy who helped the Franciscan nuns establish Catholic women's colleges at a time when college studies for women were thought to "undermine women's health, physical and mental, and make them unfit for motherhood." Ada Comstock Notestein, the first dean of women at the University of Minnesota, worked to improve the life of women on campus.

Women in literature are represented by Maud Hart Lovelace, who immortalized Mankato, Minnesota, in her series of Betsy-Tacy books for children. Wanda Gag not only wrote children's books, too, but she also illustrated them.

Since 1922, when women first were able to vote, they have served in the Minnesota legislature. First elected in the 1920s, their numbers still are small: 2¼ percent of all legislators who have served in the House and Senate. In their chapter on women in the legislature, Arvonne S. Fraser and Sue E. Holbert list all thirty-two of the women who have served: twenty-nine in the House and three in the Senate. The authors' biographical sketches illustrate the diversity of the women legislators and the importance of the League of Women Voters as a training ground for women lawmakers.

The equally important field for women volunteers is represented by Fanny Brin, director of the Minneapolis Women's Committee for World Disarmament, and the Larson sisters, Agnes, Henrietta, and Nora, daughters of a southern Minnesota farmer-businessman. The Larsons have given a century-and-a-half of volunteer service to education and research and are listed in *Who's Who of American Women*.

Barbara Stuhler is a retired University of Minnesota professor and administrator and Gretchen Kreuter is an honorary fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. They have assembled an impressive collection of stories of women citizens and the contributions they have made to the lives of Minnesotans.

Reviewed by Jane Angrist

Views From the Publisher's Desk by Minnesota's thirtieth governor, Elmer L. Andersen, is a collection of editorials that represent almost twenty years in the remarkable career of the governor as businessman, politician, and newspaper editor. While he is thought of today as the quintessential Minnesotan, Governor Andersen actually was born in Michigan and began his newspaper career selling the *Muskegon Chronicle* for three cents a copy.

He launched an eminently successful business career in his adopted state in the early 1930s as advertising manager for a small manufacturer of paste, the H. B. Fuller Company. Later he bought the company and, as president and chairman of the board, built it into a company with world-wide distribution of adhesives and other products.

After his years as governor from 1961-1963, and his retirement from politics and from the company, Governor Andersen realized a lifelong ambition to become a newspaper publisher. Russell W. Fridley, former director of the Minnesota Historical Society, points out in his Editorial Notes for *Views From the Publisher's Desk* that most of the material in the book was drawn from Andersen's weekly column, "The Publisher's Notebook," which appeared in his newspapers, the *Princeton Union-Eagle* and

the *Mille Lacs County Times*. The columns contain personal recollections as well as reflections on his many interests: political parties, political candidates, and public policy issues facing Minnesota, the nation, and the world.

Reviewed by Patricia Sweney Hart

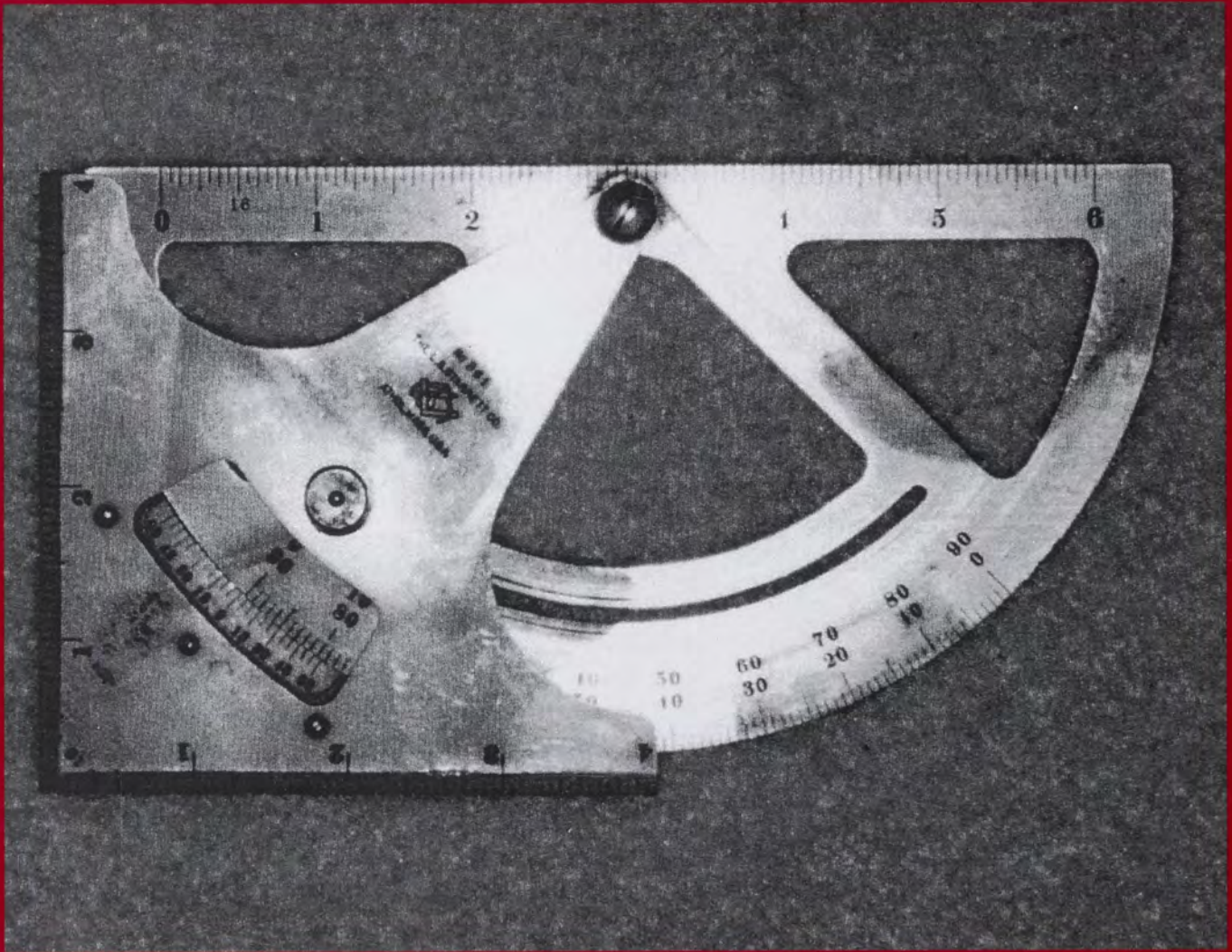
German-Bohemians—The Quiet Immigrants by La Vern J. Rippley/Robert J. Paulson was published in 1995 by the St. Olaf College Press and the German Bohemian Heritage Society, New Ulm. This is the story of German Bohemians who emigrated to the United States from the German-speaking western rim of Czechoslovakia and settled in and around New Ulm and Brown County, Minnesota. When they left their homeland, Bohemia was a crown colony in the Austro-Hungarian Empire but in the twentieth century it became part of the larger Czech nation known as the Sudetenland.

They came from small villages, farm communities where people lived and housed their stock, but worked scattered non-contiguous fields outside their small communities. They attended their village Catholic church and spoke a Bohemian dialect of German. Arriving in America, they were among the earliest farm settlers to come by ship up the Minnesota River to the New Ulm region. Beginning in 1856, they farmed in Cottonwood, then St. George, Sleepy Eye, and on west.

This is an in-depth study of their origins in Europe, their emigration, their settlement in their new home, and the German-Bohemian traditions they brought to Minnesota. It is well-illustrated with maps, photographs of the region's churches, farms, businesses, and the families themselves. Lists of the names of the German-Bohemian settlers in the New Ulm and surrounding townships are included.

The German-Bohemian Heritage Society also has published *One Hundred Tales from Sudetenland*, a collection of folk tales translated from the original German text and edited by Karen Hobbs. Reflective of a distinct culture and way of life, this is a book that should delight young readers, as well as older folks who remember their own childhoods.

Reviewed by Virginia Brainard Kunz



An architectural drafting instrument owned and used by Clarence W. Wigington, the first licensed African-American architect registered in the State of Minnesota. See the article beginning on page 4.

R.C.H.S.

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

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