

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

James J. Hill and  
His Oriental Rugs:  
A Practical Millionaire

Page 15

Winter, 2001

Volume 35, Number 4

*Attacked by a Starving Wolf*  
Four Sisters of St. Joseph and Their Mission to St. Paul  
—Page 4

U.S.P.R.R. EXP & SURVEYS - 47 & 49 PARALLELS.

GENERAL REPORT — PLATE I.



Stanley del.

J. Bien N.Y. lith.

SAINT PAUL M. T.

St. Paul as it looked in 1853, two years after four Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in St. Paul. This colored lithograph was produced as part of a United States government survey of Minnesota Territory. Ramsey County Historical Society collections.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 35, Number 4

Winter, 2001

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Our Winter issue presents three diverse articles ranging in time from Minnesota's Territorial period to the turn-of-the-century and on to the 1930s. In our lead article, Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson recounts the story of how four Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet came to St. Paul in 1851 and began their missionary work at this lonely outpost high on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi. Through her access to the details found in the records of the Order and other sources, Sister Ann provides a compelling portrait of these four female pioneers, their religious loyalty and faith, and their persistence in the face of great hardships. This is the story of the enduring influence of these devoted missionaries on St. Paul in its earliest years.

From the poverty and hardships of the four Sisters of St. Joseph, the issue moves on to the opulence and splendor of the mansion that James J. Hill built on Summit Avenue between 1887 and 1891. Writer and historian Lou Ann Matossian focuses on the Oriental rugs that Hill purchased to furnish his splendid home. By examining the available records, Matossian shows that Hill, who could easily have afforded Oriental rugs of any cost, bought many medium-quality rugs that impressed visitors but showed that Hill was what she calls "the practical millionaire." The James J. Hill that emerges from her research is a man who spent only what he needed to on his rugs and avoided any that might have qualified as works of art.

In our third article, John Larson's "Growing Up in St. Paul" tells how he and his family dealt with the serious eye ailment he had in the 1920s and '30s. He also recalls with detail and good humor his experiences as a member of the Vision Class at Webster School. Within the St. Paul Public Schools of that time, the Vision Class consisted of all the students at a particular school who were blind or had other serious vision problems. Although Larson tells his story matter-of-factly, his account is an understated tribute to the caring and well-qualified teachers who helped him (and by inference other students) succeed in their studies in spite of their medical problems.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*

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A special thank you goes to the Board of the Ramsey County Commissioners for their continuing and loyal support. Their patronage through the years gives the Society a solid foundation on which to build. Thank you Rafael Ortega, Chairman; Tony Bennett; Susan Haigh; Jim McDonough; Victoria Reinhardt; Janice Rettman; Jan Parker Wiessner. Special appreciation goes to County Manager Paul Kirkwold and his staff for their quality professional assistance.

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

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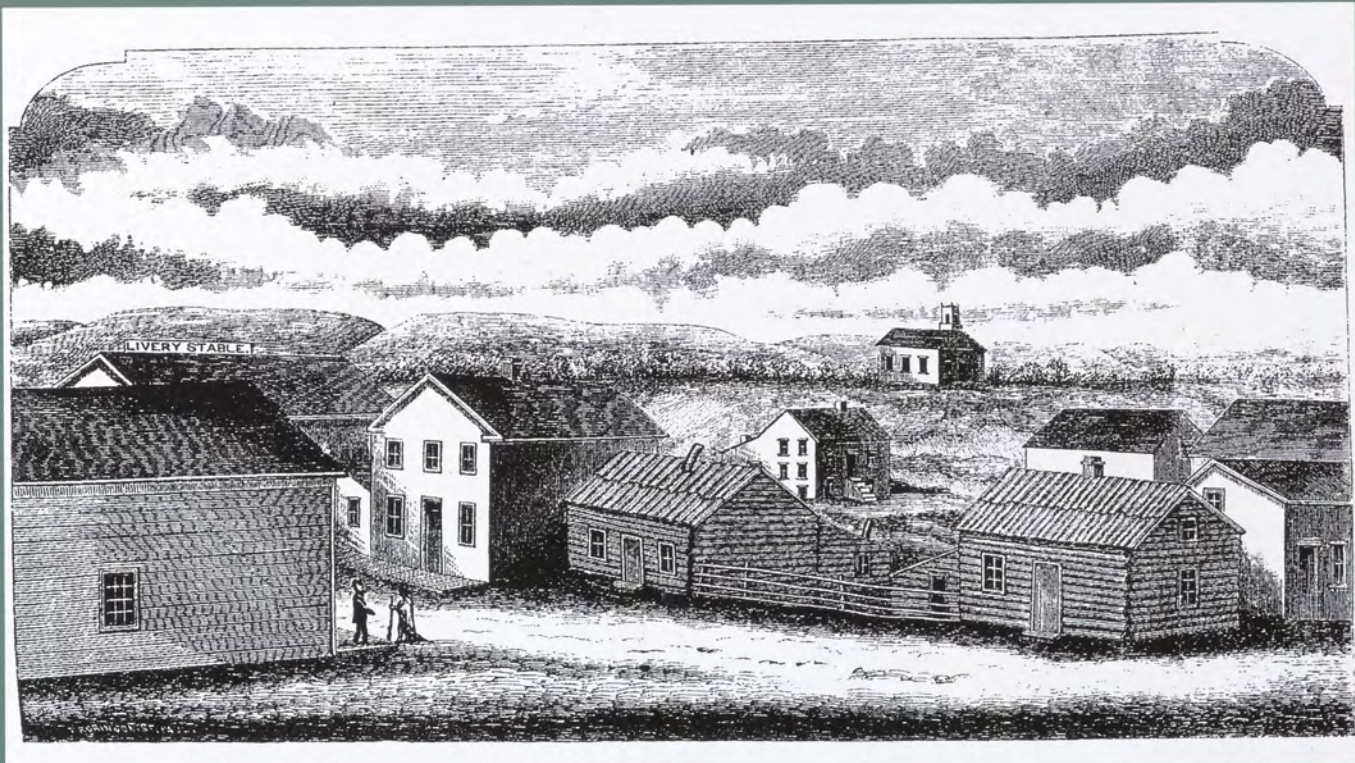
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The Society's board and staff are grateful to those who provide for the future of the society by remembering the Society in their wills.

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**A Special Thank You to Schroeder Milk Company**

For many years the Schroeder Milk Company and Mr. Ernest Schroeder, President, the Schroeder family and employees have supported an annual Dairy Day at the Gibbs Farm Museum. This special celebration drew more than 1,300 guests, many of them families visiting us for the first time. The Schroeder Milk Company celebrated the story of its 115 year old Ramsey County family business and shared a taste of its many products. Dairy demonstrations, music, magic and a petting farm added to the fun of the day. Ramsey County Historical Society salutes Schroeder Milk company for this generous support.



*A sketch based on one of the oldest photographs of pioneer St. Paul as it looked in 1851 when the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived there. The log house on the right stands at Third and Robert Streets. Minnesota Historical Society collections. See article beginning on page 4.*

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