

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Memoir:
Jimmy Griffin Remembers
His Years on the Force

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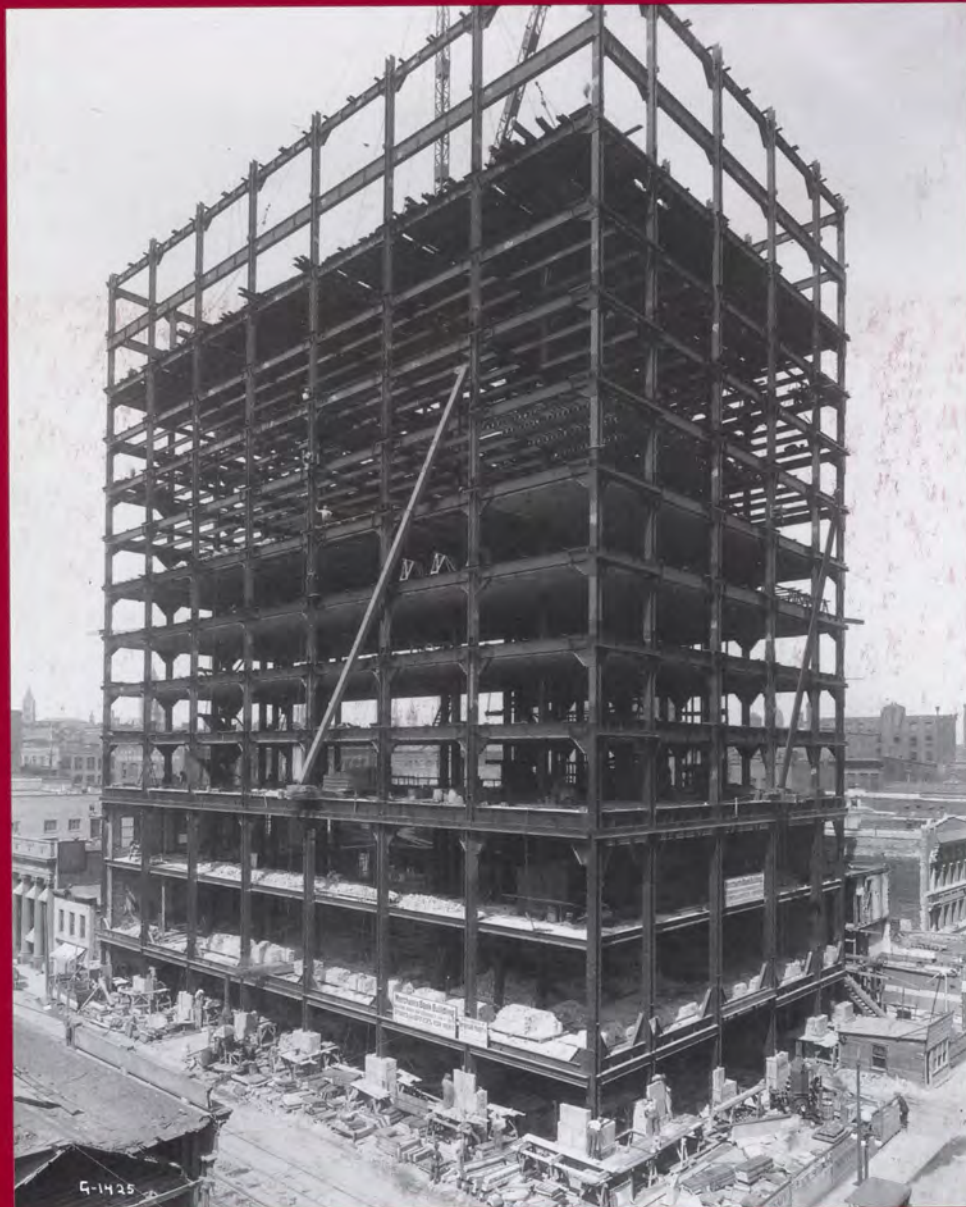
Winter, 2002

Volume 36, Number 4

Crises and Panics and Mergers and Failures

St. Paul's Banks and How They Survived 75 Years

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The Merchants Bank building under construction at 333 North Robert Street in 1914. Photo from the Minnesota Historical Society. See article beginning on page 4.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 36, Number 4

Winter, 2002

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A Message from the Editorial Board

In this issue Richard Slade, a former St. Paul bank executive who's also an historian of Twin Cities banking, examines the first seventy-five years of St. Paul's banks. Slade's primary focus is on the events and maneuvers during the 1920s that led to the formation in early 1929 of the "Minnesota Twins"—Northwest Bancorporation in Minneapolis and the First Bank Stock Group in St. Paul. During the decade of the 1920s, Minnesota banking experienced significant problems that led to numerous bank failures before the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in the fall of 1929. As Slade explains, Minnesota's banking problems of the 1920s produced a "combination of enlightened self-interest and fear" that gave rise to the idea of creating a bank holding company as an institutional bulwark against the growing economical and financial uncertainties of the times.

The Ramsey County Historical Society is also pleased to reprint in this issue an excerpt from *Jimmy Griffin: A Son of Rondo, A Memoir*. In the selection reproduced here, Griffin recounts some of his experiences as an African American rejoining the St. Paul police force in 1946, following his wartime service in the U.S. Navy. This firsthand account tells without editorializing of the racism of that era, Griffin's effectiveness as an officer and his unflinching determination to make his way on the force on the merits of his performance on the job.

This issue concludes with another piece of family history from Leo Harris, a local lawyer and historian. In a carefully researched account of his family's iron business, the Harris Forge and Rolling Mill Company, in New Brighton in the 1880s and '90s, Harris gives us a glimpse of the efforts of a small manufacturing firm to prosper in a rural community on the fringe of St. Paul. Despite careful management and a ready market for its iron bar, fire twice destroyed the firm's plant and in 1893 doomed the business, bringing hard times to the Harris family and the community of New Brighton.

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 Jim McDonough, Chairman; Tony Bennett; Susan Haigh; Rafael Ortega; Victoria Reinhardt; Janice Rettman; Jan Parker Wiessner. Special appreciation goes to County Manager Paul Kirkwold and his staff for their quality professional assistance.

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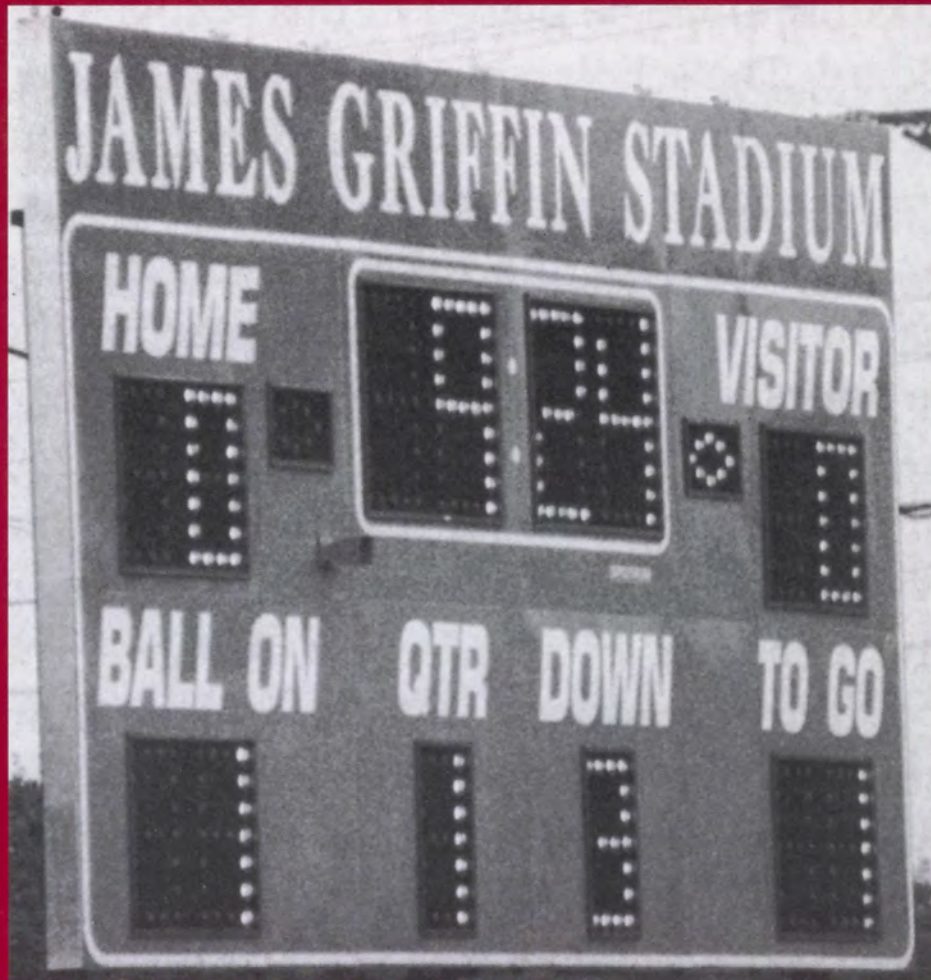
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Griffin Stadium Scoreboard and Signage. See excerpts from Jimmy Griffin's memoir beginning on page 13.

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