

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Novelist Remembers:
Memoirs of Grace Flandrau

SEE BOOK REVIEWS

Page 38

Winter, 2004

Volume 38, Number 4

'He Loved a Tall Tale'

The Life and Times of I. A. O'Shaughnessy—
The Man Who Happily Gave His Money Away

—Page 4



Portrait of I. A. O'Shaughnessy painted by artist Frank Bensing. From the University of St. Thomas Special Collections.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

Priscilla Farnham

Editor

Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James A. Russell

Chair

Marlene Marschall

President

George A. Mairs

First Vice President

W. Andrew Boss

Second Vice President

Judith Frost Lewis

Secretary

J. Scott Hutton

Treasurer

Duke Addicks, Charles L. Bathke, W. Andrew Boss, Norlin Boyum, Joseph Campbell, Norbert Conzemius, Anne Cowie, Charlton Dietz, Charlotte H. Drake, Joanne A. Englund, Robert F. Garland, Howard Guthmann, Joan Higinbotham, Scott Hutton, Judith Frost Lewis, John M. Lindley, George A. Mairs, Marlene Marschall, Laurie Murphy, Richard Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Marvin J. Pertzik, Penny Harris Reynen, David Thune, Glenn Wiessner, Richard Wilhoit, Laurie Zenner, Ronald J. Zweber.

Richard T. Murphy, Sr.

Director Emeritus

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, *chair*, James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, Mark Eisenschenk, Tom Kelley, Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Paul D. Nelson, David Riehle, C. Richard Slade, Steve Trimble, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, William Fallon, Robert S. Hess, D. W. "Don" Larson, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Robert Mirick, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, chairman
Commissioner Susan Haigh
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Rafael Ortega
Commissioner Janice Rettman
Commissioner Jan Wiessner

David Twa, manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 2004, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. **All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.** The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address admin@rchs.com.; web site address www.rchs.com

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 38, Number 4

Winter, 2004

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 'He Loved a Tall Story'
The Life and Times of I. A. O'Shaughnessy—
The Man Who Happily Gave His Money Away
John M. Lindley
Virginia Brainard Kunz
- 36 A Century Ago: Hundreds of Thousands Greet
The Liberty Bell the Day It Came to Town
Susan C. Dowd
- 38 Books

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 the President of Ramsey County Historical Society

Anyone who has spent some time in St. Paul has probably come across the name O'Shaughnessy. It may have been on the facade of a building at the University of St. Thomas, or on the campus of the College of St. Catherine, or perhaps somewhere else in the local area. Many who have seen the O'Shaughnessy name in our capital city have a vague awareness that he was a generous benefactor, especially of educational institutions. Yet if you were to ask any number of individuals who O'Shaughnessy was, in all likelihood few would be able to tell you more about the man than his initials: I. A.

I. A. O'Shaughnessy was born in Stillwater, Minnesota, in 1885, but beginning in 1928, he and his wife, Lillian, made their home and raised their family in St. Paul. I. A., however, made his fortune in the oil refining business outside Minnesota. Consequently he was often away from their Summit Avenue residence tending to his many business activities in Oklahoma, Kansas, Illinois, or Washington, D.C. Thus I. A. O'Shaughnessy was less well known in his home community than he deserved.

In this issue, authors John M. Lindley and Virginia Brainard Kunz have combined their talents to provide the first wide-ranging biographical profile of I. A. O'Shaughnessy's life, business career, and personal and institutional philanthropy. They have used many documentary, business, family, and institutional records as well as extensive interviews with O'Shaughnessy family members and others who knew I. A. in writing this profile. The Ramsey County Historical Society hopes that the readers of our history quarterly will find that these authors have not only shed much light on the little-known career of the man who was once honored with the title of "Mr. St. Paul—A Great St. Paulite," but have also heightened local awareness of his great generosity to people and institutions in St. Paul and around the nation.

Marlene Marschall, President, Ramsey County Historical Society

A Century Ago: Hundreds of Thousands Greet The Liberty Bell the Day It Came to Town

Susan Dowd

Poets and Romantics took pens in hand on June 6, 1904, the day the people of St. Paul filled the streets in a “streaming, a living flood,” to see something they never thought they ever would see in person. That was the day that “the nation’s most cherished relic” spent a few hours in St. Paul. That was the day children viewed “the mass of silent yet speaking metal with almost superstitious awe.” That was the day the newspapers cried, “The old bell now is silent; hushed is its iron tongue, But the spirit it awakened still lives, forever young.” That was the day the Liberty Bell came to town.

Cast in 1752 at London’s Whitechapel Foundry, the Bell is inscribed with a verse from Leviticus, “Proclaim Liberty thro’ all the Land to all the Inhabitants thereof.” From the beginning, it was plagued with problems. Its E-flat strike note sounded harsh, and it exhibited an early proclivity toward cracking. Still, it was installed high over the State House in Philadelphia, and it rang for special events. In February 1846 the now-legendary crack occurred while the Liberty Bell pealed to mark Washington’s birthday. The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* lamented, “The old Independence Bell rang its last clear note on Monday last in honor of the birthday of Washington and now hangs in the great city steeple irreparably cracked and dumb. It gave out clear notes and loud, and appeared to be in excellent condition until noon, when it received a sort of compound fracture in a zig-zag direction through one of its sides which put it completely out of tune and left it a mere wreck of what it was.” Approximately twenty-four inches long and one-half inch wide, the crack seemed to enhance the symbolism of the Bell, endearing it all the more to those who saw it. In 1904 the Liberty Bell was arguably the most powerful icon of American freedom that the nation possessed.



Down one side and up the other, a century ago. This is part of the crowd that streamed down Broadway toward the old Union Depot on June 6, 1904, to see the famous Liberty Bell. St. Paul Dispatch photos from the newspaper microfilm collection, Minnesota Historical Society.

The Bell had left Philadelphia only five times before, and it never had traveled so far westward. This time it was on its way to St. Louis, Missouri, for the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition, marking the centennial of the nation’s greatest land acquisition. The story goes that the schoolchildren of St. Louis appealed for the Liberty Bell to be part of the celebration, and it was decided that the great Bell would make the journey by special train. And on a sunny Monday morning in early June, en route to St. Louis, it cast its cracked shadow over the jubilant city of St. Paul.

For days ahead of its arrival, the newspapers fed their readers details of the public viewing. It would rest “at the foot of Broadway in the rear of the Union Depot,” which was a change from the original plan. In the beginning, it had been determined that the Bell would be on view at Harriet Island. But the superintendents of both the street railway and the St. Paul

public schools decided that the traffic on the Wabasha Street bridge would become so congested “that there would be danger of accidents, particularly to children.” Instead, it would be placed on a side railway track along Broadway. Spectators could file past the Bell along the west side of Broadway, cross the tracks, and return on the east side of the street. All St. Paul schools, public and parochial, were decreed closed Monday morning in order to allow schoolchildren this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to gaze upon the famous Liberty Bell. The street railway offered a special fare to adults who wished to ride to the site and handed out 27,000 free tickets to the city’s youngsters. All that was left to do was to wait.

The train pulled out of Philadelphia on Friday, June 3. The flatcar that bore the Bell was carefully constructed to minimize bumps and jolts. Perhaps its ride was more luxurious than that of the humans



The Liberty Bell itself, guarded by police as the crowds marched past.

who accompanied it: “No passenger coach jolts its occupants less,” boasted the press. The passenger portion of the train consisted of four Pullman sleeping cars, a dining car, and a tourist car. It was due at the Union Depot in St. Paul on Sunday evening, June 6, at 9:45 pm. The train was late, but only by forty-five minutes. Traveling with the Liberty Bell was a party of no fewer than sixty-five Philadelphians, including Mayor John Weaver, most of the city council, and assorted dignitaries and their wives. Each was carefully noted and named in the St. Paul papers. Politicians and judges from St. Paul and Minneapolis welcomed the visitors while a large crowd of cheering onlookers watched the ladies receive flowers.

Early the next morning, a thirteen-gun salute was fired by Battery A, commanded by Capt. William Louis Kelly Jr. The Capital City Band played rousing music to the delight of the crowd. Every street railway car was pressed into service. Swarms of men, women, and children “seven and eight deep” already had gathered by 7 a.m. In the next five and one-half hours, a crowd estimated at 100,000 filed past the flat-bed railway car on which the Liberty Bell was suspended. It rested in a wood frame made of heavy oak. The “tongue,” or clapper, was firmly secured to be certain it would not strike the Bell. Oak flagpoles stood at

the corners of the car, each proudly bearing American flags. An iron railing surrounded all. The first lucky viewers were allowed to board the car and walk within arm’s length of the Bell, but in a short while it became clear that this system was too slow for the size of the throng. People were instructed instead to march by on the street, along both sides of the car. Those who might have dreamed of reaching out and touching the hallowed Bell had their hopes quickly dashed. Two large Philadelphia policemen guarded the relic carefully. They were selected because of their size and height (6 feet, 5 inches) to be an imposing presence. “Philadelphians cannot touch the bell,” explained one Officer William Crooks, so presumably St. Paulites couldn’t either. Indeed, while in Philadelphia the Bell resided inside a case made of heavy plate glass on all sides.

An unnamed *St. Paul Dispatch* writer was particularly moved by the event. He wrote, “There is a big crack in the side of the bell, and its clapper is tied with a piece of rope to the supporting wooden horse, but it is still ringing through the world and around it—ringing in five strokes and then a pause, and these five strokes are—Pro-Claim-Lib-Er-Ty. When absolute monarchs hear its abhorred tones they stop their ears with their fingers, and when its echoes reach the waiting ears of

patriots in many distant lands, men who maintain a fearful silence, hope is awakened and the dim dawning of a better day of constitutional government is to be seen in the East.” Such was the power of the Liberty Bell one hundred years ago.

On the other hand, as is often the case when a larger-than-life object or individual is seen in person, some people were disappointed at the size of the Bell. Many expected it to be larger and grander, while in reality the distance from the lip to the crown is a mere three feet. “An inherent American characteristic,” suggested one writer, “to judge perhaps too much the importance of things by their size.” One German immigrant was heard to remark, “Churches in little villages in Germany have bigger bells than that.” She was quickly reminded that none possessed the meaning of this one. One of the guards reportedly told her, “We wouldn’t trade this bell for all the bells in Germany.”

While masses clambered for viewing space and places in line, the dozens of Philadelphia dignitaries enjoyed a drive to Como Park, after which they were feted at the Commercial Club. The proceedings there, it was reported, “took the nature of an informal reception. The committee had planned some speech-making, but it was omitted at the request of Mayor Weaver and other members of the Philadelphia party.” Presumably, four days of train travel, together with the crowds and brass bands that had greeted the train and Bell at every station, were beginning to take its toll; and they still had two more days of travel left before finally reaching St. Louis. Thus, the group returned to the Union Depot, and the train, the Liberty Bell, and the entourage departed the station at 12:35 p.m.

The city of St. Paul caught its collective breath and returned to work, school, and home. By the next day, everything was the same as usual. But was it? In an era when a journey to Philadelphia to see such a sight was beyond the reach of most people, the Liberty Bell had come to them.

(Sources: *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 2-7, 1904; *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 6, 1904; general information about the Liberty Bell from www.ushistory.org)

Susan C. Dowd wrote about “Death in the Railroad Yards” in the Fall, 2003, issue of Ramsey County History.



A crane installs the Globe Oil & Refining Company sign at the company's McPherson, Kansas, refinery in 1933. Photo reproduced by permission from the private collections of the Lario Oil & Gas Company. See article beginning on page 4.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY · COUNTY · HISTORICAL · SOCIETY

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

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul, MN
Permit #3989

