

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

Winter, 2006

Volume 40, Number 4

*Growing Up in St. Paul*  
The Andahazy School of  
Classical Ballet

Page 16

*“The Greatest Single Industry”*  
Crex: Created Out of Nothing

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This 1901 American Grass Twine publicity photo shows a room furnished and decorated almost entirely with wire grass products. The company processed all of the raw material and manufactured the floor coverings in St. Paul. It made the wicker items in New York. The wall matting and picture frames were probably made specially for this photograph. American Grass Twine later became Crex Carpet Company. Photo from *Creating New Industries in the Minnesota Historical Society collections*.



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 40, Number 4

Winter 2006

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.

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Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr.  
and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

## A Message from the Editorial Board

In this era when we seek to use natural products in new ways, we will enjoy reading Paul Nelson's lead article depicting a once-flourishing Ramsey County industry that manufactured twine, furniture, and carpet from a forgotten resource: wire grass! A modern-day visit to Crex Meadows in Wisconsin will evoke memories of workers harvesting this dense material, which was twisted and bent into wicker furniture that once graced the porches of St. Paul neighborhoods. A detailed portrait of the founders of the Andahazy dance studio, an account of an early rabies outbreak, and two book reviews round out this diverse issue.

We welcome as our new editor John Lindley, who takes the position following his tenure as editorial board chair. John brings to his new job years of professional publishing experience and a practiced, conscientious approach to the complex task of producing this magazine on a quarterly basis. Under his committed leadership we will maintain the high standards of content and production that have garnered *Ramsey County History* two national awards. As we greet John, we dearly miss our founding editor, Virginia Brainard Kunz, whom we profile in this issue. Her keen intelligence, lively curiosity, and abiding compassion have long guided our interest in local history, and she will always live on in our hearts.

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

## Virginia Brainard Kunz 1921-2006

### *A Remembrance*

Virginia Brainard Kunz, editor of *Ramsey County History* for more than forty years, died on January 7, 2006, in Minneapolis. Members and supporters of the Ramsey County Historical Society will miss Virginia's deft editorial hand, her nearly encyclopedic knowledge of St. Paul history, and her talent as a writer.



Born in 1921 in St. Cloud, Minnesota, Virginia graduated from Iowa State University in 1943 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter the *Minneapolis Tribune* hired Virginia. Her work with the newspaper involved cropping and sizing photos for news stories, writing short articles, and crafting headlines. These skills would serve her well when in 1962 she became the Ramsey County Historical Society's executive secretary. Two years later, Virginia founded *Ramsey County History*. At the time the Society's magazine came out twice a year. It expanded to quarterly publication in 1989. In 1973 the Society made Virginia its executive director, a position she held until her retirement sixteen years later.

During her tenure as executive director, Virginia oversaw the Society's move from offices at the Gibbs Farm Museum (now the Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakotah Life) in Falcon Heights to larger quarters in the Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul. In the 1970s she was one of a number of civic-minded leaders who were involved in persuading St. Paul and Ramsey County officials to restore the old Federal Courts Building and convert it to the Landmark Center. A skilled manager, Virginia also oversaw the growth of the Society from operating two afternoons a week on an annual budget of \$10,000 to more than 1,200 members and a budget that exceeded \$500,000 at the time of her retirement.

In addition to all the responsibilities she had as executive director of the Society, Virginia found time  
*(continued on the reverse)*



## **2005 Donor Recognition Roll**

The Ramsey County Historical Society extends warmest and most sincere thanks to all supporters of the Society in 2005, who allow us to offer high quality programs to the community.

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. Thanks to Tony Bennett, Chair; Victoria Reinhardt; Jim McDonough; Janice Rettman; Rafael Ortega; Toni Coleman; and Jan Parker. Special appreciation goes to County Manager David Twa and countless members of his staff for their excellent professional assistance.

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

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*'Bought 2 Horses & a Wagon' The Story of the Murphy Companies* — Murphy Warehouse

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*Anna and Lorand Andahazy as Zobeide and the Golden Slave in Scheherazade. Miss Dee Studio photo, 1964, courtesy of Marius Andahazy.*

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