

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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“A Great Experience”
Villaume Builds Gliders in
World War II
Page 22

“If It Can Be Manufactured from Wood, We Can Make It”
A History of the Villaume Family and the
Company They Built — Page 4



Eugene Villaume. Portrait by Nicholas Brewer (1857–1949), one of America’s finest portrait artists. Minnesota-born, Brewer trained in New York and later moved back to St. Paul. He painted presidents and official portraits of governors from Minnesota and ten other states. Brewer also painted portraits of a number of prominent Minnesotans, including Theodore Hamm, Ignatius Donnelly, George Dayton, and Archbishop John Ireland. Photo courtesy of Nick Linsmayer and Villaume Industries.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

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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 "If It Can Be Manufactured From Wood, We Can Make It"
A History of the Villaume Family
and the Company They Built
Steven C. Trimble
- 22 "A Great Experience"
Villaume Builds Gliders in World War II
John M. Lindley
- 28 *An Encounter at Kaposia*
The Bishop and the Chief
Leo J. Harris
- 33 Book Reviews

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A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue of Ramsey County History showcases the significant history of Villaume Industries, formerly the Villaume Box and Lumber Company, which is celebrating 125 years as a continuously operated family owned business. Steve Trimble tells the fascinating story of this company, which Eugene Villaume, a French immigrant, started in 1882. The firm initially specialized in making commercial boxes and installing fine interior woodwork, such as can still be seen in the art deco interior furnishing of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. During World War II, as John Lindley explores in a separate article, the Villaume Company helped defeat the Axis enemy by building glider floors and wings for the Army Air Forces. After the war, Villaume diversified into manufacturing roof trusses and custom wood packaging. The Winter issue concludes with a short article by Leo J. Harris about a little-known meeting in 1839 at Kaposia (now South St. Paul) between Bishop Mathias Loras and Dakota leader Big Thunder.

The Society is grateful to Villaume Industries and its president, Nick Linsmayer, for giving authors Steve Trimble and John Lindley access to the company archives, providing photos, and arranging for interviews with individuals who could tell the Villaume story based on their own experiences with the company. We hope that other local businesses will follow the example of Villaume and share their story with us.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Letters to the Editor

Remembering Charlie Luth

I am deeply honored at the beautiful work that Greg Proferl and Dave Reihle did in the [Fall 2006] issue of the Ramsey County Historical Society [on Charlie Luth and the 1894 Pullman Strike in St. Paul]. What a great treat for my birthday.

Mary Blomgren
St. Paul

More on Frogtown

What's it like to be in the skin of a 1930s seven-year-old in Frogtown? James R. Brown told his story unpretentiously straight [in the Fall 2006 issue]. From his "hot-to-trot" description of his brown suit with leather bow tie (to match his dad) . . . to tears that "dried up quicker than sweat on a hot stove," the author's story about his birthday with dad was delightful! I would love to read more stories by James R. Brown! Thank-you!

J.M. Lindstrom
Lake Elmo, Minn.

Cleveland School

I would like to know if Cleveland School on Jenks and Walsh streets in St. Paul was built on a cemetery?

Jessamine87@aol.com

Cleveland Elementary School was built in 1885. By 1894 it was a combined grade school and four-year high school known as Cleveland or East Side High School. Cleveland remained that way until 1911, when Johnson High School was built. In 1925 Cleveland became a junior high school. When the oldest section of the building was destroyed by fire in 1935, a new building was constructed which opened in 1937. In the

1880s C. Schurmeier Company owned the land on which Cleveland School was built. None of the Schurmeier land was ever used for a cemetery. Because Oakland Cemetery is about a mile west of Jenks and Walsh, Cleveland's proximity to this historic St. Paul cemetery may have suggested that the school was built on a cemetery.

Who Was Stryker?

Do you have any idea who Stryker Avenue was named for? My husband's family all come from St. Paul and their last name is Stryker.

Patricia Leake
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Thanks to Don Empson's new book, The Street Where You Live: A Guide to the Place Names of St. Paul (published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2006), all we need to do is quote from this source: "John L. Stryker of New York State was one of the developers of this West Side street in 1855. . . . [He] is not recorded as a resident of St. Paul, but his son, John E. Stryker (1862-1940), moved to St. Paul in 1887, as an attorney."

The Como Park "Dutch Oven"

What is the "sizable" man-made stone structure on Como Avenue, just east of Buelah Lane and across from McMurray Field? It has been fenced in and looks like the ruins of a chapel.

Sarahandbeans@aol.com

What you've described is the Joyce Kilmer Fireplace, also known as the Como Park "Dutch Oven." Alfred Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918) is best known for his poem "Trees," which was first pub-

lished in 1913. Kilmer was working as a writer and editor in New York City when the U.S. entered World War I. He enlisted in the New York National Guard in April 1917, sailed to France in October, and was killed in action in July 1918. In June 1936 the Joyce Kilmer Post, Fourth District of the American Legion, donated the Joyce Kilmer Fireplace to Como Park. The fireplace is located in a wooden area just west of the park's swimming pool in an area bounded by Como Avenue to the south, Horton Avenue to the north, and Beulah Lane on the west. Three stone arches that were originally parts of old drinking fountains that stood behind the park office were used to make the fireplace. This area was dedicated as an arboretum with a Joyce Kilmer Pool and a sign that hung from an oak tree with Kilmer's famous poem printed on it. Both the pool and the sign are now gone.

Cities Service Oil Company in the 1920s

[I'm tracking some family history in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area.] Can you tell me whether Cities Services Oil Company, a major oil company then that is better known as Citgo, had a district and/or regional office in St. Paul or Ramsey County in the early or middle 1920s?

Bud Meyers
Conservices1070@yahoo.com

The Cities Service Oil Company first appears in the St. Paul City Directory in 1922. The company had an office in the Hamm Building (on St. Peter Street between Sixth and Seventh streets, constructed 1920) with one gas station located on Eighth Street in downtown and another in South St. Paul.



This late-afternoon photograph taken in the 1960s shows a supply of building trusses with their "Gizmo Gussetts," or metal connector plates, ready for shipping on a Murphy Trucking Company flatbed trailer in the yard at Villaume Box & Lumber Company. In the background is the Villaume sign, complete with hundreds of light bulbs, mounted on the bluffs on the West Side. Various residences are just visible beyond the sign and above the bluffs. Photo courtesy of Nick Linsmayer and Villaume Industries. See Steve Trimble's article on page 4.

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

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