

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Labor Found a Friend

W.W. Erwin for
the Defense

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Winter 2008

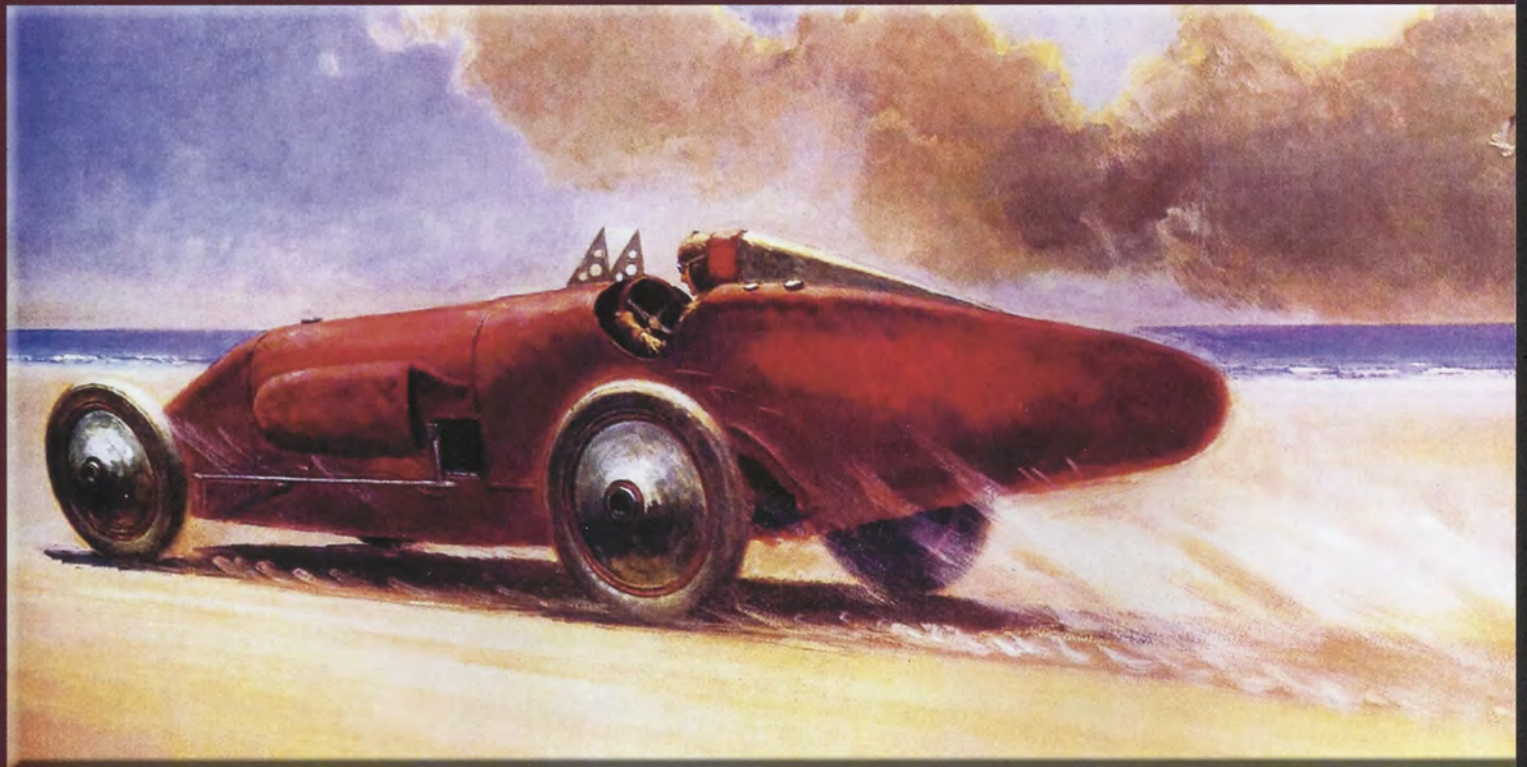
Volume 42, Number 4

Tommy Milton

The Story of “St. Paul’s Speed King”

Steven C. Trimble

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Tommy Milton and his Duesenberg racing across Daytona Beach on the way to a new world speed record in 1920. This portrayal is by Peter Helck, a very successful magazine and advertising artist. Helck's realistic and highly detailed works often captured the drama and speed of racing. Sometimes called the "Dean of American Motoring Artists," Helck (1893–1988) produced hundreds of sketches, drawings, and paintings during his career as well as writing two illustrated histories of racing. Painting courtesy of Automobile Quarterly.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 42, Number 4

Winter 2008

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ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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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

Every locale has its cultural heroes—and this issue showcases two men who filled that role for many in Ramsey County before they took to the national stage. Tommy Milton first wowed crowds driving his Duesenberg at the Twin Cities Speedway, and twice won the Indianapolis 500, in 1921 and 1923. His cool demeanor and consummate skill impressed fans, and his career reflected the excitement surrounding the new, automobile-focused culture. W.W. Erwin was a folk hero of another sort to labor sympathizers. A prominent St. Paul attorney and impassioned orator, he served as lead defense counsel in the trial of labor leader Eugene Debs for his role in the 1894 Pullman railroad strike. He also successfully defended participants in the strike against the Pittsburgh Carnegie steel works. We have been lucky to have two members of our editorial board, Steve Trimble and David Riehle, compile the stories of these fascinating characters. A grace note is the review of Georgia Ray's book on Grace Flandrau, a noted St. Paul author whose keen observations also extended her influence beyond local boundaries. As winter turns to spring, enjoy a good read with us.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

2007 Donor Recognition Roll

The Ramsey County Historical Society extends warmest and most sincere thanks to all supporters of the Society in 2007, 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 to countless members of his staff for their excellent professional assistance.

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receive support to publish the following book in 2007:

A Powerful Catalyst for United Action: The History of the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches, 1906-2006
Saint Paul Area Council of Churches

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Tommy Milton in the Frontenac he drove to victory in the 1921 Indianapolis 500. This is #27 in a series of trading cards showing great moments in racing history. It was produced as a marketing promotion in 1994 by the Valvoline division of Ashland, Inc. and is reprinted with their permission. The back of the card explains that Milton was a replacement driver that day, using the car in which Gaston Chevrolet had died. It also recounts how Tommy dealt with a main bearing leak by slipping the clutch on turns, using friction to burn off the dripping oil. See Steve Trimble's article on page 3.

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