

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

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Winter 2012

Volume 46, Number 4

*At Home and Abroad,
St. Paul's Impresario
Cut a Swath*

How Nettie Snyder
Put the City
on the Musical Map

Roger Bergerson

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From Boom Times to the Great Depression

Two Stolpestad Men in St. Paul Real Estate, 1886–1936

James A. Stolpestad

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A roadside directional sign points the way to Stolpestad, a farming community located near Ringsaker in north central Norway. There the homestead of Stolpestad East Farm, center, marks the place from which Andrew Hansen Stolpestad emigrated to St. Paul in 1884. In the photo on the right, a fourth-generation descendant of Andrew, James A. Stolpestad, right, did family research on his Norwegian roots with his cousin, Signe Lund, in 1999. All three photos courtesy of James A. Stolpestad.



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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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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A Message from the Editorial Board

Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin has observed that a person remains alive as long as others continue to remember him or her with stories. In this issue we have some of those stories. Jim Stolpestad recounts the family history of Andrew Stolpestad, a Norwegian immigrant who built a successful real estate career in St. Paul during its boom years of the 1880s, and his son, Annar, who worked as a real estate officer with the Hill family at Northwestern Trust, forerunner of First Trust. Roger Bergerson presents the tale of Nettie Snyder, an energetic and colorful personality who brought opera to St. Paul in the early 1900s. And Brian McMahon reminds us that artifacts have stories, too. Who knew that the *William Crooks*, the first locomotive used in Minnesota, almost left the state to join Henry Ford's collection in Michigan? We're lucky these stories have been preserved; we hope they will strike a chord as you revisit some of your own memories.

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

Louis Hill to Henry Ford: “No Deal!”

Henry Ford and the William Crooks

Brian McMahon

Henry Ford was born and raised on a farm and always preached the value of the rural life and character. Ironically, his Model T automobile (first produced in 1908), more than anything, was responsible for the migration of farmers to the city and the transformation of an entire culture. This conflict between Ford’s stated goal of preserving the agricultural world he had known and the results on the ground must have added to Ford’s unresolved inner turmoil. Consciously, or subconsciously, Ford’s response was to go on a buying binge to preserve the many historic technological and transportation artifacts that were rapidly disappearing in small villages around the country. He became a voracious collector of “Americana,” which he displayed in a huge museum (the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, opened 1929) he set up in Dearborn near his River Rouge plant.

Cost and size were of no concern as Ford proceeded to buy up and move entire buildings that had a historical significance or a personal connection, including his home, and his old one-room school house. This collection of buildings was displayed in a village setting and was likely the first instance in this country of a recreated museum village intended for interpretive purposes.

The search for transportation artifacts extended to Minnesota. Ford was interested in acquiring the famed *William Crooks*, the first locomotive used in the state beginning in 1862. It was considered “a pet of the late James J. Hill during the last years of his life,” who took great pride in being photographed alongside it. Hill’s son, Louis, considered giving the *William Crooks* to Ford if he was willing to display it in Minnesota and even suggested sites at St. Paul’s Union Depot, or perhaps at the new Ford assembly plant in the Highland Park neighborhood.

The manager of the Minneapolis Ford assembly plant, S.A. Stellwagen, actively pursued the sale and assured Ford’s General Secretary E.G. Liebold that “. . . we will bring influences to bear from several other men who are personal

friends of Louis W. Hill, and if it is at all possible to secure this locomotive for Mr. Ford, you may be sure that nothing will be left undone toward that end.” But Liebold declined Louis Hill’s request that the locomotive remain in Minnesota, and no sale was made. Ford was only interested in displaying it at his museum in Dearborn alongside his huge collection.

The *William Crooks* was later exhibited at the New York World’s Fair in

1939, and at the St. Paul Union Depot from 1954 until it was donated to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1962. It is currently exhibited at the Lake Superior Railroad Museum in Duluth. This year is the sesquicentennial of the first run that the *William Crooks* made on June 28, 1862, between St. Paul and St. Anthony, some ten miles away.

Although the *William Crooks* remained in Minnesota, Ford’s legacy as a collector of Americana and creator of the first museum village would have earned him an important place in the annals of our country, even apart from his automotive accomplishments.

Brian McMahon is the executive director of University United, a nonprofit serving the community along University Avenue in St. Paul. This is his fourth article to be published in Ramsey County History. This article is excerpted from his forthcoming book, Full Circle: The Ford Motor Company in Minnesota, which is scheduled to be published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2013.



The steam locomotive known as the William Crooks was engine #1 of the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, a predecessor of the Great Northern Railway. It made its inaugural run to St. Anthony on June 28, 1862. Photographer John Runk took this shot of the restored locomotive in about 1920, a number of years before Henry Ford tried to acquire it for his museum. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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Between 1954 and 1962, the William Crooks, the first steam locomotive to operate in Minnesota, was on display at the St. Paul Union Depot. This postcard from that time period shows the well-preserved engine close up. For more on the William Crooks, see page 27. Postcard from the collection of Brian McMahon.