

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Helping the Sun Shine
Brighter for Farmers*

Robert Freeman
on Mount Ramsey

Harlan Stoehr — page 14

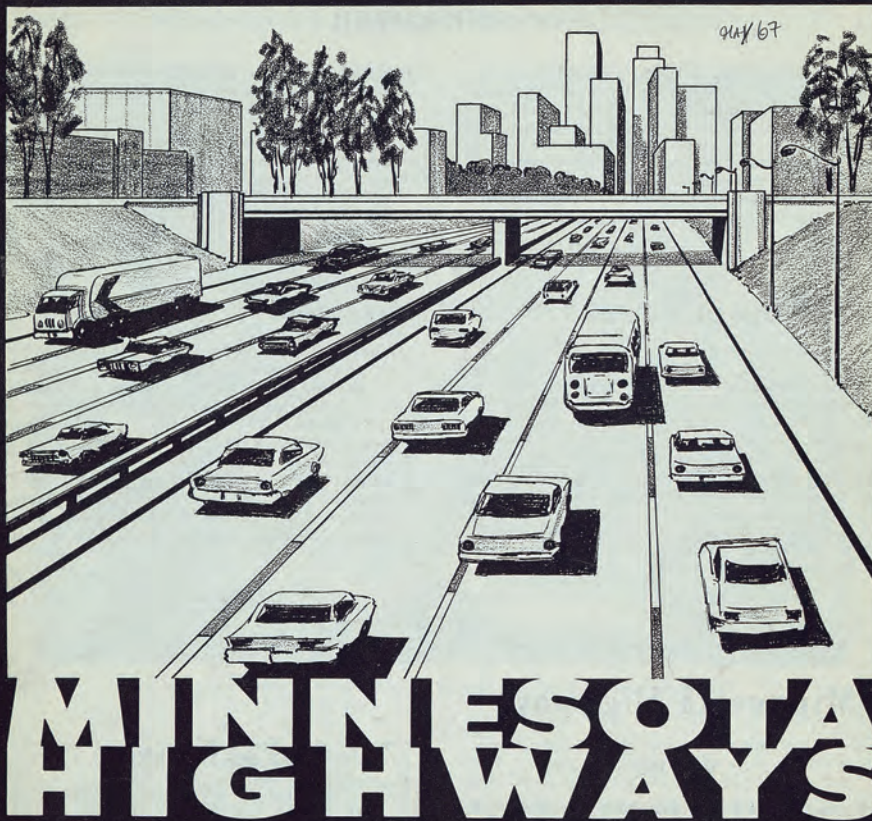
Winter 2013

Volume 47, Number 4

Preserving a “Fine Residential District”:

The Merriam Park Freeway Fight

Tom O’Connell and Tom Beer, page 3



DRIVE SAFELY

The front cover of the May 1967 issue of Minnesota Highways magazine, the official Minnesota Department of Highways employee newsletter between 1951 and 1976. At the time this cover illustration was drawn, the nation was in the midst of building the vast Interstate Highway system that was largely paid for with federal money. This illustration conveys an idealized view of how the new freeways would safely and efficiently transport automobiles and trucks into and out of a city. Plans that called for the construction of an interchange on I-94 in St. Paul at Prior Avenue produced plenty of controversy and called into question some of the underlying assumptions behind these new roadways. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Minnesota Digital Library.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 47, Number 4

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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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James Lindner

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Ramsey County is changing every day—witness the new light rail corridor on University Avenue—a transportation line that we could not have envisioned a few years ago. In this issue, we remember some earlier changes. Harlan Stoehr recounts the professional life of Robert Freeman, the longtime Ramsey County agricultural extension agent who began his job in the 1920s, when the county contained over 1,000 farms, and supervised that service through drought, grasshopper infestations, and finally, suburbanization. James Lindner reminds us that public works are frequently political in his story of the construction of White Bear Lake’s sewer system. And even freeways have stories: Tom O’Connell and Tom Beer recount the Merriam Park neighborhood’s passionate opposition to a Prior Avenue exit on Interstate 94. Hope you enjoy reading about how our values—then, as now—have shaped our built environment.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Helping the Sun Shine Brighter for Farmers

Robert Freeman on Mount Ramsey

Harlan Stoehr

This year marks the 100th anniversary of extension work in Ramsey County, which began with Harry G. Krum's appointment as county agricultural agent. Here Harlan Stoehr focuses on Robert Freeman who was the Ramsey County agricultural extension agent through the agricultural depression of the 1920s, the Great Depression, World War II, and rural Ramsey County's early transformation from agriculture to urbanization. Freeman's pithy annual reports, retrieved from forgotten cartons in the county barn on White Bear Avenue, are a first-hand account of an active participant and astute observer over three decades. What follows the Prologue comes mainly from annual reports of Freeman's work.

Prologue: The County Agent

Events preceding the 1912 appointment of Minnesota's first county extension agent date from the Morrill Act of 1862 funding a "land-grant" college in each state (here the University of Minnesota). The Act's goal was to educate people in agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts, and other practical professions.¹

Farmers generally were interested in learning more about farming, but in Minnesota back then, not from the University. When it offered a 100-day short course in agriculture and a lecture course, no farmer enrolled.² In 1882 William D. Porter, the University's one-man agriculture department, began offering Farmers Institutes at locations throughout the state, which became well-attended.

Porter left for Missouri, and leadership of the institutes passed to Oren Gregg, a prominent Lyon County farmer. Gregg first used successful farmers and a few University faculty members as instructors, then dropped the University folk, turning entirely to "practical men," mainly farmers who had done what they described and demonstrated. Farmers found that these Institutes gave them common-sense information, attendance grew, and it became hard to find halls to hold the crowds.³

The University agricultural faculty

grew, wanted in on the action, and became increasingly critical of Gregg's conduct of the useful and successful Institutes. At the same time, farmers began to want more than once-a-year meetings.⁴ Gregg resigned in 1907 and was succeeded by Archie D. Wilson of the University's Agricultural Experiment Station faculty, a move designed to link the Institutes more closely to the University.⁵

In 1909 the Legislature passed a bill introduced by Ramsey County Senator Joseph Hackney, owner of Arden Dairy Farms, creating the University's Division of Agricultural Extension and Home Education, known as the Agricultural Extension Service.⁶ Wilson became its director and gradually shifted the Farmers Institutes into the Extension Service.⁷

An extension agent position was soon created. Commonly called county agents, their role was to connect the educational resources of the University with the people of the county: to inform and to teach improved methods and techniques of farming and homemaking—essentially, applying results of Experiment Station research to production agriculture. Agents organized and worked with committees of county residents to identify educational needs, and with volunteers to help meet them. They taught through lectures and demonstrations, co-

operating with other agencies, schools, businesses, and community groups.⁸

In Minnesota, a sponsoring organization to provide a portion of the agent's salary was required in each county.⁹ The Ramsey County Agricultural Society, founded in 1852, was reorganized in 1911 to serve as the county extension organization and to promote a county fair.¹⁰ In 1913 Ramsey became the eleventh Minnesota county to employ a county agent.¹¹ Harry G. Krum started work August 1, visited 192 farmers that year (only five at their request) and organized five farmers' organizations. Farmers had mixed views of county agents; some welcomed them, some were wait-and-see, some avoided them.

Rural Ramsey County had 1,067 farms in 1910, a few more than Traverse and Big Stone counties, a few less than Pipestone and Stevens, ranging from truck farms of a few acres to 200 acres and more.¹² The 160-acre Gibbs Family farm was then among the largest. Horses and mules powered farm implements and were the main



Ramsey County Agricultural Extension Agent Robert Freeman out in the fields about 1928. Photo courtesy of the Roseville Historical Society.

source of rural transportation. Twenty-nine mostly one-room rural schools educated rural children and, with rural churches, were social centers. Scientific farming was relatively new, and widely distrusted.

Boys and Girls (B&G) Clubs, forerunner of 4-H Clubs, were largely organized and supervised by the schools, with the county agent's support. Krum projected chapters in each school district (29) with 200 members in 1914, but his projection fell far short. His 1914 report noted only 4 B&G Clubs with 32 members, 12 silos constructed, 4 drainage systems planned, and 10 farmers growing alfalfa for the first time. He traveled 559 miles with horses, 5,519 by auto, and 2,450 by train, 1,300 of them on a study trip to Michigan. The Turtle Lake Farmers Club had 82 members, Rose Town 78.¹³

Krum left in 1917 to head the Twin Cities Milk Producers Association, which became Land O'Lakes. Frank Gerten, his successor, reported reorganizing farmers' clubs, "... as many of the local organizations were falling to pieces and were not accomplishing any worthy results." Most B&G clubs of the time folded with the school year, providing great opportunity to organize anew. "After 2 months of effort 16 of the 29 schools have organized B&G Clubs," Gerten reported.

"The spirit manifested in agricultural extension work and the program of the Ramsey Co. Agricultural Society partakes too much of an indifferent nature," Gerten wrote in 1919. "The spirit of the farmers, market gardeners and dairymen as individuals is excellent, but the difficulty of securing community interest has not been overcome." He left in 1920 to expand his truck farming operation, which later became Gerten's greenhouse and garden centers. Robert Freeman succeeded Gerten and stayed for thirty years.

County Agent Robert Freeman

At 31, Robert Freeman knew agriculture and was confident of its future. He came from a pioneer White Bear Lake family, had farmed, bred Holstein cattle, managed milk marketing at the prominent E.C. Schroeder dairy farm at Moorhead, and held other roles in the dairy industry. County agents usually were college



Bertha and Erwin Ziebell owned a farm located on Hamline Avenue, a half block south of County Road B in Roseville, where they raised vegetables for consumers in Minneapolis and St. Paul. In this photo from late 1922, Bertha Ziebell is ready to deliver a load of squash to market. Photo courtesy of the Roseville Historical Society.

graduates; Freeman was not. He is remembered as taciturn in personal matters, dedicated to his work, a good public speaker. He was thoughtful, insightful, and highly literate, with a tendency like that of the Apostle Paul to write in long, complex sentences, as in the preface to his 1922 annual report:

Moses was taken up the side of a mountain and shown the Promised Land, which he was not to enter. Probably his vision more than recompensed him for the disappointment of not sojourning there. A County Agent is in much the same position. We are up on the high peak in our county and can see its wonderful possibilities. I see over hills covered with alfalfa, our level sand peat lands producing great crops of corn and spuds, our market gardeners becoming more and more efficient in raising the green vegetables that are so necessary to our diet, the dairyman, prosperous and with a clean heart, milking his clean cattle that are properly fed and housed, the mothers, ably assisted with labor-saving devices, having time to enjoy life, and a happy group of children attending school where they receive the education and training which will fit them for their life work, and all our people having a real desire to learn and improve. If this should come to pass, and we fail to reach the hearts and minds of our people and the spiritual and moral sides of their natures are developed, have we, as extension workers, done our duty in developing a balanced farm life?

Such is the outlook on our job. Our recommendation is to . . . so conduct our work

that in years to come the cumulative effect of teaching may cause men and women to so love one another that service to community will be their first consideration and these other results will follow naturally.

Casting his appointment parallel with that of Moses, God's right-hand man, was no great stretch for Freeman, but his optimism belied the situation. The period of farm prosperity begun in the 1890s was declining by 1920, prefacing the Great Depression to follow. While Ramsey County's eclectic mix of general farmers and market gardeners buffeted it for a time, Freeman's farmers, like Moses's charges, faced hard years ahead.

By 1920 Ramsey Co. Boys and Girls Clubs had become 4-H Clubs. Freeman shared responsibility for them with Extension home agents until 1928, when Clara Oberg became full-time 4-H agent, serving until 1953.

In 1921 Freeman had reported county agricultural association membership of 260, its largest ever; organization of a county Holstein Breeders Association, with 50 attending, 5 new purebred herds, and organization of a cow (milk production) testing association. Disappointed that "Many growers had never been to the University Farm and knew nothing of the advanced work in vegetable growing being carried out there," he organized Minnesota's first vegetable growers' field day.

When Freeman organized a 1922 mid-winter dairyman's picnic 400 dairymen and their families were entertained at a

downtown St. Paul theatre. When apple trees in orchards were sprayed, an abundant crop free from scab and insect injury followed the previous crop of a few apples of inferior quality. Soybeans, a new crop, were introduced on 26 farms; Freeman predicted that some farmers who had never seen soybeans would raise seed commercially.

Though the agricultural depression deepened, Freeman wrote in 1925 that, "Economic problems are not so pressing, as we are so close to the city and have easy access to a large consuming public. Roadside marketing will present a problem in the near future, but our wholesale produce market is very satisfactory to most growers. Our meat animals are hauled directly to South St. Paul and our milk goes thru [*sic*] the Twin Cities Milk Producers Association. Production problems will probably be the most pressing for many years to come. Social problems, due to the large numbers of suburban and acreage residents, are of very great importance." Freeman became manager of the Ramsey County fair in 1925, "and sure found it a handful."

"The ideal situation for our county would be to find the proper way to organize a farm of 40 acres in size," he observed. "Too much overhead and not enough of any one crop to make that a major operation. A few cows and poultry, some truck crops, some grain and hay, and a lot of grief seem the average organization. A cash crop that will fit the small dairy farm is needed. . . . Taking golf to the farmer

was a new start with us, and was probably the first time that golf lessons were ever given at a [county] fair." Freeman deemed the golf venture "very popular."

He introduced northern-grown certified potato seed and purebred chickens, demonstrated use of ethylene gas for ripening tomatoes and blanching celery ("proved very successful"), and fostered organized recreation through the Ramsey County Kitten Ball League (kitten ball is a form of softball played without gloves). He wrote in 1929 that Rosetown and New Brighton were much interested in squash growing, and that 47 entries were secured for an evening squash show held at New Brighton.

Freeman wrote that garbage feeding of hogs was the principal livestock industry outside of dairy cattle, gladiolus grown by Conrad Seabloom under mulch paper were larger with more vivid colors than those grown without paper, and disposal of the Holstein herd at the County Home due to mismanagement and incompetence was a serious blow to the county as a Holstein breeding center.

The Great Depression

In the 1930s the depression deepened, accompanied by devastating drought. "Farm relief problems were analyzed by a group of 15 men, and dramatic presentations given at the Corn and Potato Show (300) and the Squash Show (350)," Freeman reported in 1931. Squash Show entries rose to 147. Extension fostered a Ramsey County Drama League; 22 members rep-

resented eight communities, and planned a one-act play contest.

With the drought came grasshoppers, further damaging drought-stricken crops. Town boards agreed to scatter poison bait on township roadsides and establish distribution points where farmers could get supplies of bait. "After hay and grain were cut the hoppers moved into truck crop fields; a 2-ton allotment of bait was only partly used," Freeman wrote. Meanwhile, ten groups competed in the one-act play contest with about 1,000 attending, and 500 people crowded the hall for the squash show.

Franklin Roosevelt succeeded Herbert Hoover as president in March 1933. His "New Deal" to combat the Great Depression had many ramifications for farmers and for county agents. Freeman prefaced his 1933 annual report with one long sentence of observation:

N.R.A. [National Recovery Act], Triple-A [Agricultural Adjustment Act], barnyard loans, seed loans, refinancing, blue eagles, wheat and tobacco contracts, leaders drafted, U.S. budgets, deer slayers, home demos, 4-H Club programs, county fairs, Farm Bureau memberships, vacation nix, rushes, drives, meetings, conventions, uproars, Farm Holiday, Taxpayers' Associations, general debility of the body politic, relief—financial and physical, goat project, drought, heat, floods, frost, scab, worms, rabies, reports, estimates, questionnaires, inspiration and uplift, New Deal—"We do our part"—codes, agreements, price-fixing, hog prices, blue sheets, emergency agents, nervous exhaustion, turnover, malnutrition, social adjustments—"Wise Use of Leisure," subsistence farming, socialized industry, bunkum and baloney, parity and parsimony, work sheets, schedules, ratios, static buzz and rattle are like a cloud of gad flies (*sic*) that pester, harass, strangle, benumb, befuddle, distract and dement the minds and hearts of even the hardest boiled and most disillusioned county agent.

Gone is the high idealism of the 10-year folks bred in the balmy days of easy finance and large appropriations. We are faced with the stern realities of nature in the raw, which is seldom mild.

We are relieved of the tremendous mental strain of creative effort and lonely leadership.



Threshing grain in the late 1920s, when this photo was taken on the John Jereczek farm, was hard work for men and horses. Neighboring farmers exchanged work in what was known as a "threshing ring," working together from farm to farm until all the threshing was done. Straw from the stack provided bedding for livestock over the winter. Photo courtesy of the Shoreview Historical Society.



Here two men butcher a hog on the Fabianski farm. Raising swine, cattle, and poultry was widespread on the farms in Ramsey County between 1920 and 1950. Photo courtesy of the Shoreview Historical Society.

Our pet projects languish for lack of our loving care and studious devotion.

The future of our work is shrouded in the fog of internationalism vs. nationalism, free trade vs. socialism, productive—profitable vs. peasantry farms, sound money vs. inflation, land utilization policy vs. contracted acres and the generous amount of dust kicked up by the wheels of progress and changes. . . .

New demands, new projects, new methods of approach and perhaps a rearrangement of our present setup are all in the picture.

During World War I, American farmers were urged to produce more to help feed war-torn Europe. A county agent's role then was to promote high production. After the armistice, as European farm production resumed, demand for U.S. farm products and prices paid for them dropped dramatically. The New Deal's "Triple-A" attempted to reduce supply and raise farm commodity prices by paying farmers to take some land out of production and to sell "surplus" livestock for slaughter. Now the county agent's role was to aid in lower production. Freeman painted scenes from this conflicted role in his 1934 report:

County Agent Freeman and A. E. Winqest, one of the township appraisers, brought the 90,000-mile Model-A Ford to a dusty stop. Second car contained Bureau of Animal

Industry Inspector Kinneberg and Henry Baer, the other appraiser, who was lame. Grandma and daughter were pulling a few scattered weeds in a sandy patch of garden surrounded by chicken wire on rickety posts. A scrubby bunch of mongrel hens were listlessly scratching in a littered dooryard. The "back-to-the-land son-in-law" was driving a rickety corn planter reseeded a burnt-out and blown-out field for late fodder. The wheels of the planter sank deeply into the loose, dry sand. Inquiries and explanations, translated into Polish language for benefit of Grandma made it necessary for the cattle to be brought into the barn for appraisal and earmarking. Freeman and Winqest shagged the cows into the barn from the pasture, burned brown and bare. One enterprising heifer had jumped the fence into an adjacent field of winter rye, and was left behind to get her fill. Cattle were tied into stalls by Grandma and the three head were appraised at \$19, \$17, and \$16. These were Grandma's pets, and she must be allowed to shed some tears before giving her consent to the sale. Or weren't they tears of vexation at the low price offered?

Meetings were held at New Brighton and at White Bear to explain details of purchase plan, and the work went forward as fast as carloads could be assembled for shipment at convenient points. Seventy farmers sold a total of 209 head of ["surplus"] cattle.

Other activities as a result of drought

activities consist of signing certificates for freight rate reductions [and] certifying compliance or non-compliance of feed loan applicants with government cattle-reduction program. . . . Major projects in the livestock division were educational meetings and signup for corn-hog reduction contracts. After many, many weeks . . . the county allotment committee tackled a real job of reducing our hogs from 9,843 to 5,484.

A year later Freeman reflected on continued low farm prices and discouraging weather:

The 1935 County Extension activities in Ramsey Co. reflected a composite picture of light and shadows, rich colors and drab tints, some successes and many failures, high hopes and deep despair, abundant forage crops, frozen potatoes and mangy carrots, reaction from feverish feed relief problems to corn left standing in the field, sober realization that at least 5 years of good crops at fair prices [are needed] to heal the scars of drought, hail and frost, and through it all the dominant hope to cling to the land as the one hope for final emergence from individual want, [and] hope for a better understanding of economics, nature and social relationships.

Market gardeners were especially hard hit by unfavorable growing conditions and sought aid through emergency loans and grants. Farmers took out 98 drought feed loans and 150 seed loans. "Growers feel they should be given some opportunity to do some Works Progress Administration (WPA) work (at \$44/month) to liquidate these seed and drought feed loans. As yet, no setup is available. . . . Efficiency in production, the twin sister of marketing, is still the hardest nut to crack," Freeman noted.

Freeman estimated that the Extension Service had prompted changes on 800 of the County's then 1,078 farms. Coincidentally, 800 attended New Brighton's 1936 Squash Show, where the Minnesota Restaurant Growers Association now offered cash prizes and bought most of the prize-winning squash.

"The work of the county agent is not the work of a revivalist nor that of a missionary," Freeman mused in 1938, the twenty-fifth year of Extension work in

Ramsey County. "It is the work of a man among men whose one object must be to do the greatest good to the greatest number. The sun has long risen in the east and set in the west; why change that? But to help make it shine a little brighter in the hearts of American farmers is the county agricultural agent's mission. . . ." The grasshopper situation worsened; from June through August some 300 tons of poison grasshopper bait was spread.

Unfortunately, the sun did more that year to deepen the drought than to lighten the load of the county's farmers. Freeman outlined a one-act commentary on the state of Ramsey County agricultural economics by Farm Bureau members at their annual meeting:

Place: your town hall on a cold February day in 1939.

Occasion: Educational meeting of county and township committeemen to discuss 1939 agricultural conservation docket.

Characters: State field man and block man, county and township committeemen.

Action: Shovel snow away from Town Hall door, start fire, set up rickety table, hang up charts, put coffee on to cook.

Vice chairman: Tries to explain allotment procedure in absence of block man who is caught in snowstorm 20 miles away. Gets bogged down in intricacies of arriving at allotment procedure and group decides to put on impromptu March of Time program based on start of A.A.A. program, as follows:

Corn-hog signup meeting: Farmer brings in bushel of corn and two hogs in sack. Gets instructions to burn the corn and give hogs to relief organization.

Drought cattle: Cow is mortgaged to PCA, ordered shot and to be buried with town hall shovel.

Dairyman brings in four cans of frozen milk for pay. Three given to distributor to pay cost of delivering one he gets paid for.

1936 farm reporter arrives with protractor wheel, etc., all out of breath from escaping irate farmer whose field he measured by mistake.

County supervisor demonstrates, with use of aerial photo, periscope and perimeter

how fields of one of the committeemen are to be classified and measured.

Vice chairman gets meeting under way again, presents economic information and puts over some good points amid much argument. Coffee is ready; lunch consisting of imported food products and canned milk is served. Wheaties for desert is a luxury considering 60-cent wheat. Group practices singing a song in preparation for a state conference of Agricultural Conservation Committeemen.

The 1940s and World War II

Ramsey County lost 17 percent of its farms from 1936 to 1940. Concerned by urbanization, Freeman applauded formation of a planning and zoning commission: "While the legislation is far from perfect, it does recognize the need for planning and zoning and already has crystallized sentiment in at least one governing board to stop, look and listen before approving a suburban development plot," he wrote. Building the Twin Cities Army Arsenal Plant on 2,400 acres in 1941 removed yet more farms, but Freeman did not mention that in his reports.

For obscure reasons, the Extension Service year began December 1 and ended November 30. Japan triggered U.S. entry in World War II on the seventh

day of Extension Year 1942. Freeman reported that:

Special committees were assembled to consider an expanded nutrition program due to impact of the War Effort: War Board activities, such as machinery and transportation rationing, clothing project, food preservation, Food for Freedom programs and Farm and Home Safety. These additional projects were almost too much for our understaffed office, but by neglecting all but the most essential routine work we got by. . . Extension Service set up Neighborhood Leader plan with 150 men and women pledged to carry the torch to their neighbors with timely information on the many wartime and economic problems now facing the nation's producers.

Tires and gasoline were rationed; farm equipment manufacture dwindled as factories turned to production of military equipment. Draft boards issued orders for young men to report for military duty. Food production was considered essential to the war effort; sons of some farmers with larger farms were exempted while others were called up.

"Due to smoldering resentment of farmers who find themselves short-handed and blame Selective Service officials, we organized a meeting of directors of the farm organizations in the county, also, township officials and members of the Legislature representing rural Ramsey



At the Schlosser Dairy in Roseville in the 1940s, bringing the cows home required crossing Dale Street where it intersected with County Road A2 (Roselawn). Photo courtesy of the Roseville Historical Society.



Youth was no exemption from farm chores. In this photo from the 1940s, Sharon DeHaven Rufford helps feed Grandpa August Otto's hogs. Photo courtesy of the Roseville Historical Society.

Co., to meet with Col. Nelson, Minnesota director of Selective Service, to discuss the problem," Freeman noted. "Col. Nelson kept his temper under control and personalities were barred by mutual consent. We all got a better picture of the War Effort and its probable effect on our lives and business relationships. . . . All of our Extension activities fitted into the War Program in one way or another."

Some 522 city youth were recruited for farm help; most took a 30-hour after-school class in agriculture. Grade school boys and girls were recruited for weeding and harvesting. At times the help problem became contentious; some farmers believed local draft boards should defer their sons from military service to help on the farm. "As a member of the county Agricultural War Board (AWB) I drew the job of investigating farm status of registrants (classified) by 12 local draft boards," Freeman wrote.

I recall one case where the mother violently disagreed with her husband and her father about John's future. Another son was already overseas and John was rarin' to go, but the menfolk were "selfish," as she put it, and wanted John's services at home; she felt that John was being deprived of a chance to show his stuff. Ancestors for many gen-

erations had been in every war the United States had fought.

Characterized as strongly identifying with the farm people he served, deeply reserved, and rarely revealing anything of himself, Freeman's feelings nonetheless were revealed in his writing, as in the introduction to his 1944 report:

When we remember that during this past year we have seen our young men leave their homes, their families and their friends in the home community and have to go to the far corners of the world to have their heads shot off in Europe and Asia, we feel very humble of our meager efforts in helping back them up with food and fiber. When we see aged dad, mother and younger members of the family harassed by worry and anxiety working beyond reason, we wonder at their endurance. When we contemplate the tremendous waste of material and manpower incidental to a world war we wonder at their patience. When we see our farm and community organizations carrying on their normal activities we appreciate their worth. A surge of pride in being able to help and take part is perhaps justifiable.

He wrote that year of finding a buyer in California for 2½ carloads of used lettuce crates and advising with the county

superintendent of schools on the milkweed floss drive. "Arranged for county highway trucks to pick up bags of pods at rural schools; 1,763 bags were collected and delivered to warehouse on State Fair grounds." Milkweed floss was used in life preservers.

Postwar Problems and Adjustments

"With VE and VJ Days historical facts," Freeman wrote in 1945, "we are somewhat more competent to properly evaluate the splendid (how trite) contribution of the farmer, the farmer's wife, the farmer's daughter, and the son whom the draft board overlooked, made in providing the necessary food, not only for the 10 million uniformed service men and women, but for the millions working at top speed in industrial plants, and the other hungry millions of just of just ordinary folks."

Many a morning at the Twin City Markets I saw men who should have retired lugging heavy baskets of vegetables to the grocers' trucks. One man brought a lawn chair down so as to get a rest in between rushes. The farmer's wife not only did her own homework but helped out in the fields as much as possible. . . .

When the going got too tough for the farmer and his family, he asked the Extension Agents for help in locating machinery to produce, pressure cookers to preserve the fruits of their labors, better insecticides or any at all, latest information on nutrition for both humans and animals, disease control, get a furlough for son because dad stepped on a nail that put him in the hospital, how to get a school lunch program started, what is the ceiling price on cabbage, support price on spuds, how much is the milk subsidy, et cetera. . . .

Welcome as peacetime was to Freeman's farm families, it brought with it considerable concern for their future. As World War I before it, World War II brought demand for farm products, higher prices for them, and a period of prosperity for farmers. But memories of the farm depression that followed World War I only a quarter-century before were all too vivid.

Freeman addressed the situation thus:



In this scene on Arthur Otto's farm from the early 1940s, Art and August Otto stand ready with a horse-drawn potato digger to begin harvesting their crop. Photo courtesy of the Roseville Historical Society.

Dire prophecies of mass unemployment, over-production of dry milk solids, poultry and eggs—drought, inflation, labor shortages, social unrest; all seemed delayed and failed to materialize. Milk, vegetables and hogs, our three main farm products, were on constant demand at high prices.

City population spilling into rural areas is causing a realignment of school, highways, transportation, and protection facilities. Specifically, the City of St. Paul has issued an ultimatum that rural population must furnish their [sic] own high schools. No more extensions of water and fire protection or sewage outlets. Bus transportation is urgently needed in some areas. Housing codes to prevent appearance of slums and other hazards must be reviewed and enforced.

These matters affect the established farmer-producers, as taxes increase and production costs rise. If and when farm prices recede, these problems will be more acute.

Cow population is declining. Garbage, the mainstay of pork production in the county, may be buried if present disposal plans are matured. Vegetables are holding their own, and horticultural specialties are on the upswing. Small fruits are staging a comeback.

Personal services to many urban civic groups, individuals and organizations both rural and urban are increasing. We sometimes feel more like an information service than an Extension organization.

“In producing this annual report we are mindful of the lights and shadows that harass the days and nights of producers of food and fiber,” Freeman wrote in 1948.

Uncertain and often tragic weather hazards, attacks on crops and livestock by diseases and insects, uncertainty as to future economic trends, multiplicity of marketing procedures and restrictions all tend to cause undue strain on morale. . . . Subsistence general farming is on its way [to] being replaced by highly hazardous cash crops. Influx of suburbanites makes township and school problems more acute. A natural clash occurs at times between old-timers and their newly acquired neighbors with urban background.

Freeman reported that Louis W. Hill Jr., Ramsey County's 5,000-acre farmer, got a good stand of Ladino clover after the first seeding burned out by June heat. “Our contribution [to farm safety] this year was a radio interview over KSTP with Frank Tschida, who tried to ride a bucking tractor and woke up in a hospital, and Dalton Salesbury, who rassled [sic] a Guernsey bull all over the lot but survived after many months as an invalid. He's now a member of Friendly Valley Artificial Breeders Association.”

Of farming Freeman wrote in 1949, “While the county is small in size, its agricultural interests represent on a miniature scale all the varied types of agriculture in the state: Beef cattle, hogs, sheep, goat, poultry, rabbits, bees, commercial vegetable, canning crops, greenhouse specialties, fruit, golf course and bathing beaches. Financially, the farmers range from bare existence to \$2,900 federal income tax, and that ain't hay. Still 100,000 tons of sewage sludge cake being burned instead of used.”

Of the county fair, of which he remained secretary, he noted: “Bad hole in the cattle barn due to lack of interest on part of breeders of dairy cattle. We solicited their support but got exactly nowhere. State Board of Electricity had a display of hazardous equipment . . . we sold space to a man selling a water heater that was on the blacklist. Was he mad!”

Freeman Bids Farewell

From all accounts, Freeman and 4-H Agent Clara Oberg were strong and perhaps conflicting personalities who functioned as consummate professionals. In Ramsey, smallest of Minnesota counties with but four rural townships, Oberg built Minnesota's third-largest 4-H program, with more than 1,100 members in 1950. Help she had long sought for her program was about to come, but with it the county agent's role would be diminished. Freeman's take on this turn may show between the lines of his final report:

“Big noise in extension work in Ramsey Co. in 1950 was resignation of top brass Freeman and employment of Howard Grant, Extension agent in Crow Wing Co., as successor,” Freeman wrote. “This settles long-drawn-out efforts to secure additional assistance for county [4-H] club agent. As we understand the deal, the new county agent is to devote a major portion of his activities to 4-H Club work. No county fair or vegetable marketing program in his agenda. A \$1,200 raise in budget was necessary to accomplish this desired result. . . .”

Over thirty years Freeman had won

Ramsey County Population Data, 1920–1950

Year	City of St. Paul	Ramsey County	Difference
1920	234,698	244,554	9,856
1930	271,606	286,721	15,115
1940	287,736	309,935	22,199
1950	311,349	355,332	43,983

Source: U.S. Census Reports, 1920–1950

In the thirty years during which Robert Freeman served as Ramsey County Agricultural Extension Agent, the population of St. Paul increased by 133%, but the population difference between Ramsey County and the city of St. Paul increased by 446% in the same time period with most of the increase coming between 1940 and 1950.



By the 1950s when this photo was taken, most farmers, such as Art Larson who is seen in his farmyard, had replaced horse power with tractors for farm work. Photo courtesy of the Shoreview Historical Society.

the respect of both skeptical farmers and his peers. "I was only a boy then but I won't forget how respected Robert Freeman was," recalls Eugene Richter, whose family operated the feed mill at Co. Road C and Hamline Avenue.¹⁴ "Known as the dean of Minnesota county agents, Mr. Freeman acts as sort of a godfather to the growers," Amy Birdsall wrote in a 1947 *Sunday Pioneer Press*.¹⁵

Moses led his Israelites through forty years of difficulties, plagues of locusts among them. Freeman led his farm families thirty years, some with grasshopper infestations. Moses and his group reached their promised land, but in 1950 Freeman's farm families faced further

difficulties. The 1940s had brought them relative prosperity through rising demand and higher prices for farm products, but escalating urbanization fostered a foggy future.

Ramsey County still had 668 farms, only 19 of them with 220 acres or more. Of all farms, 90 were dairy, 81 vegetable, 33 poultry, 48 with other livestock, mostly hogs, 10 general, and 406 unclassified, essentially residential.¹⁶ "With expansion of city dwellings, problems for hog farmers, Anoka Co. will eventually get them all," Freeman predicted. Farmland became too costly to farm and over time, more and more of it was developed.

Epilogue

Following his retirement as county agent, Robert Freeman, served five years as executive secretary of the Minnesota Holstein Breeders Association. He suffered a stroke, became an invalid, and died at age 81 at Regina Nursing Home, Hastings, in 1970.¹⁷ By then nearly all Ramsey County farms had vanished.

Harlan Stoehr was assistant professor and agricultural bulletin editor at the University of Minnesota in the 1960s. A resident of Shoreview, this is the third article he has published in Ramsey County History.



Robert Freeman in 1929. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Endnotes

1. The Morrill Act of 1862, PL 37-108, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
2. Roland H. Abraham, *Helping People Help Themselves: Agricultural Extension Service in Minnesota, 1879-1979* (St. Paul: Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota, 1986), 9.
3. Roy Vernon Scott, "Pioneering in Agricultural Education, Oren C. Gregg and Farmers' Institutes," *Minnesota History*, 37, no. 1 (March 1960): 23.
4. *Ibid.*, 27.
5. Abraham, 37.
6. General Laws of Minnesota, 1909, Chapter 440, S.F. No. 494.
7. Abraham, 20, 36.
8. *Ibid.*, 45.
9. *Ibid.*, 48.
10. Frank Gerten, "Present Status of Farm Bureau Organization in Ramsey County," *Annual Report of the County Extension Agent*, 1919.
11. Abraham, 45, 46. The first Minnesota county agent appointment was that of Frank F. Marshall in Traverse County on September 1, 1912.
12. U.S. Census, Minnesota, County Data, 1910.
13. Information attributed to county agents Harry Krumm, Frank Gerten, and Robert Freeman is from the agent's unpublished annual report for the year noted.
14. Author telephone interview with Eugene Richter, March 8, 2012.
15. *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, June 22, 1947, Section W, p. 1.
16. U.S. Census of Agriculture, Minnesota, County Data, 1950.
17. "Robert Freeman Dies," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 30, 1970.

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In this photo from the 1940s, Herman and Jeanette Zuetzel pick beans on their farm in Rosetown (now Roseville). For more on market-garden farming and life in rural Ramsey County between 1920 and 1950, see page 14 for Harlan Stoehr's article on Robert Freeman and his work as the Ramsey County Agricultural Extension Agent in those years. Photo courtesy of the Roseville Historical Society.