

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Who Are These Young Men?
The Shell Service Station
at Arcade and Jenks*

Linda McShannock

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Winter 2014

Volume 48, Number 4

Citizens versus the Freeway:

RIP-35E and the Pleasant Avenue Route through St. Paul

John Watson Milton

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When the Minnesota Department of Highways published its official state highway map in 1972, it included an insert map that showed how the interstate highway system would eventually crisscross the city of St. Paul. The dashed lines to the left of center indicate that the section of I-35E running north-south along the Pleasant Avenue corridor was incomplete. Map courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

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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

History is not always harmonious. When President Dwight Eisenhower envisioned a vast system of interstate highways, designers did not plan for parkways as part of that system. But over many years and several court battles, tenacious St. Paul citizens and legislators managed to carve out an exception: 35E as it runs through downtown St. Paul. John Milton has carefully researched this chapter of Ramsey County history and uncovers its complex and relevant story in this issue. Gerald Scalze shares the story of Ralph Scalze, a strong labor leader who negotiated increased benefits on behalf of workers at the Seeger Refrigerator Company during the 1950s. On a less serious note, Linda McShannock shows us some photographs of young men outside an East Side gas station in 1941, capturing a lighthearted moment just before the United States entered World War II. We don't know the names of all the men in these pictures; contribute to history and help our editor identify them!

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Who Are These Young Men?

The Shell Service Station at Arcade and Jenks

Linda McShannock

Five young men gather in front of the Shell Petroleum Service Station at the corner of Jenks and Arcade streets on St. Paul's East Side; two of them are in the process of shoveling a light snow. From the left, the man leaning into the photo, dressed in a top coat, is unidentified; next to him, Wally Grochowski appears to have a shovel in his hand; at the center, George Drevnick poses next to Dan Rygwalski, who looks as if he is dressed for traveling, carrying a bag. Finally, the man on the right might be Vernon Williamson, the operator of the station leaning on his snow shovel.¹

In the second photo Grochowski and Drevnick are part of another group of young men, apparently hanging out in front of Lyle Anderson's Bar and Bowling Alley, across the street from the Shell Station. Four of the men are unidentified, but Grochowski and Drevnick are on the right and Chester (Chet) Jablonski is at the lower left.² These photos were taken at the corner of Jenks and Arcade, capturing the images of young men from the neighborhood, apparently just hanging out with their buddies, possibly on a Saturday afternoon in early March of 1941.³

The U.S. Congress established a civilian draft in 1940 and war was declared after Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941. These young men, ages 19 to 21, are photographed just before World War II impacted their lives. Each of them lived with their families and worked as laborers at neighborhood businesses before going off to war. Grochowski worked at a neighborhood bakery; Jablonski was a helper at the Minnesota Box Company. Drevnick and Rygwalski worked at the nearby 3M Company.⁴ Williamson was the only one married by this date, and he did not serve in the military. He operated this Shell station from 1932–1942.⁵ The rest of the young men identified in these photos and their buddies served in the Army, Navy, or Marines for the duration of World War II.⁶

After the war, they returned to the

neighborhood and to their jobs at growing businesses during the postwar boom. Drevnick and Rygwalski returned to jobs waiting for them at 3M. Jablonski joined them at the tape plant on the East Side. Williamson changed jobs to work as a guard at Seeger Refrigerator Company, which later became Whirlpool.⁷ Grochowski bought the Dorothy Ann Bakery on east Seventh Street.⁸ They married and raised families gradually moving out of the immediate neighborhood.

The Shell Service Station changed hands, but it operated under various names until 1956. In 1958 the business at this site was the Falcon 1 Pilgrim Cleaners and Launderers.⁹ The building still stands; the most recent business at this location is the 52 Market & Trading, an Asian and American convenience store reflecting changes in the neighborhood from its Swedish and Polish roots. Lee Koua has operated this business for the last eight years.¹⁰

The images and artifacts that remain in the possession of the families of these young men reveal a close knit community of young men who are confident, comfortable, and personal with their buddies in the photos. They not only hung out together on a Saturday afternoon, but also participated in the various sports available to them including neighborhood, church, and work-



An unidentified man, Wally Grochowski, George Drevnick, Dan Rygwalski, and Vernon Williamson, left to right, pose for a picture in front of the Shell Service Station at the corner of Jenks and Arcade, interrupting their snow removal efforts, March 1941. Photo courtesy of Linda McShannock.

place leagues as they bowled, golfed, and played baseball. Fishing, hunting, and speed skating were also popular sports.¹¹ Roy Johnson, not pictured in these photos, but one of the young men from the neighborhood, sums it up in these words in a letter to Rygwalski, still in the Army in 1944. “[M]y folks back home are figuring on moving. . . .

Hell, I’d be lost if we moved away from there.”¹² These photos and his words capture the vibrancy of this East Side community and its families.

Linda McShannock is a Curator at the Minnesota Historical Society. She and the editor thank Ken Drevnick for initiating the search for the names of the men in the Shell Service Station photo



A fun-loving group of young men gather on the opposite corner of Jenks and Arcade in front of Lyle Anderson’s Bar and Bowling Alley, March 1941. Identified in the picture in the front row are Chet Jablonski at the left and Wally Grochowski on the right. In the back row, on the right, George Drevnick displays a boyish grin. The others are unidentified. Photo courtesy of Linda McShannock.



Koua Lee removes snow from this same corner in January 2014. Photo courtesy of Linda McShannock.

from early 1941. Ken and Linda appreciated the opportunity to meet and experience their fathers’ shared experiences growing up in the Arcade neighborhood. If you, or someone you know, can identify any of the others in these old photos, please contact the Ramsey County Historical Society at (651) 222-0701 or john@rchs.com.

Endnotes

1. This photo was first published in *Ramsey County History* in 2010 (Fall issue) without identifying the young men in the photo. When Ken Drevnick saw the photo, he immediately recognized his dad. Ken’s aunt recognized Wally Grochowski. Dan Rygwalski, my dad, is also in the photo. My dad’s photos were stored in his gun cabinet. This was his personal space and off limits to the rest of the family; so these two photos were not discovered until after his death in 2010.
2. Personal communication from Ken Drevnick, December 16, 2013.
3. The 1941 St. Paul Winter Carnival plaque/button is visible in the window behind the men in front of Anderson’s bar and bowling alley. Thomas St. Martin, *Minneapolis, MN, Climatological Record, December 1890 through December 1999: Temperature, Precipitation, and Snowfall Records Kept by the U.S. Weather Bureau and the U.S. Weather Service in Downtown Minneapolis and at the Twin Cities International Airport* (Woodbury, Minn., T. St. Martin, 2000), records that there was heavy snowfall in November and December 1940, no snow more than 0.5 inch in January and February 1941, and three snowfalls in early March 1941 ranging between 1.5–2.5 inches.
4. *U.S. Census*, 1940.
5. *St. Paul City Directories*, 1932–1942.
6. Rygwalski was drafted into the army in October 1941. Drevnick enlisted in the Marines in June of 1942. Jablonski and Grochowski enlisted or were drafted at an unknown date.
7. *St. Paul City Directories*, 1942–1950.
8. <http://www.dorothyannbakery.com/about-us/> accessed on 1/17/2014. The Dorothy Ann bakery moved to Sun Ray and is now in Woodbury.
9. *St. Paul City Directories*, 1950–1958.
10. Personal communication with Lee Koua, January 14, 2014.
11. Personal communication with Harry Linroth, January 12, 2014.
12. Roy Johnson letter to Dan Rygwalski, August 17, 1944, Rygwalski family papers.

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On January 7, 1949, members of Local No. 20459 of the Refrigerators Workers Union elected Ralph M. Scalze, front row, center, their president and secretary-treasurer (business agent). For more on Ralph Scalze and his leadership of the Refrigerator Workers at the Seeger Company plant in St. Paul, see page 18. Photo courtesy of Gerald E. Scalze.