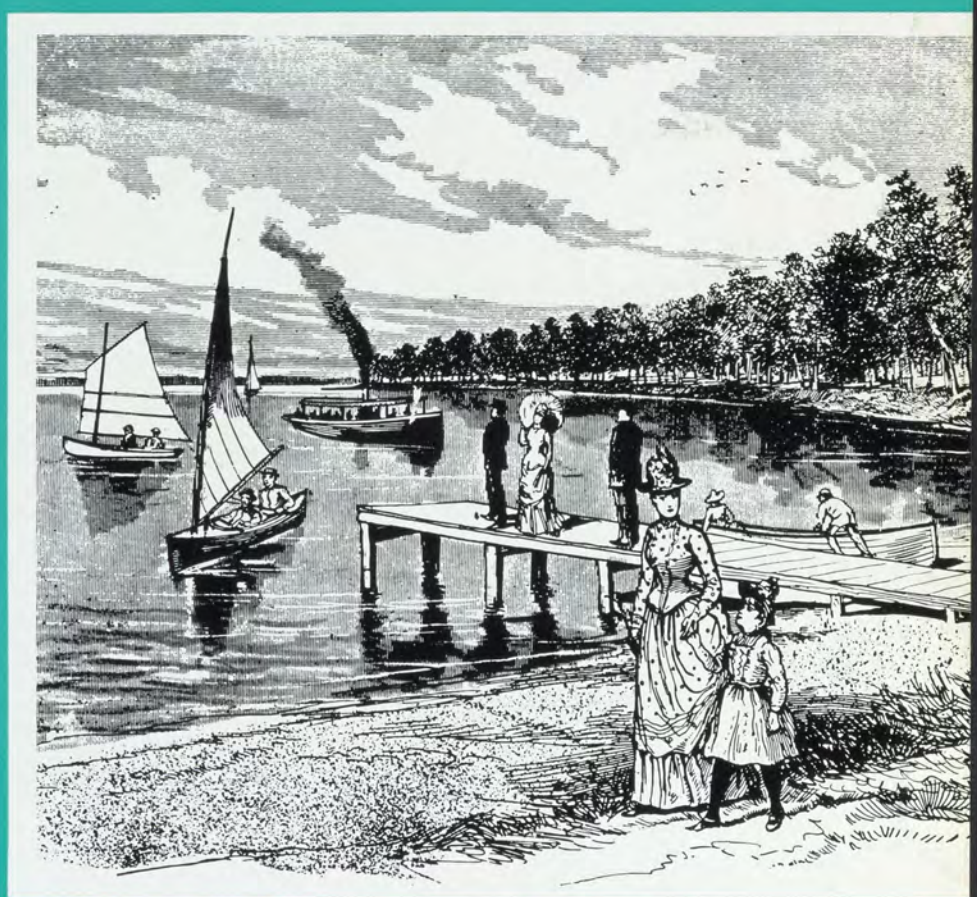
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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ON THE COVER: During the 1880's, a steamboat took Sunday visitors to North St. Paul on a trip around Silver Lake. Price was 25 cents a person. This tranquil scene of the lake appeared in the March, 1888, issue of The Northwest Magazine *and is reproduced here, courtesy of the Picture Department, Minnesota Historical Society.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Unless otherwise indicated, pictures in this issue are from the Picture Department of the Minnesota Historical Society. The editor is indebted to Eugene Becker, picture curator, and his assistant, Dorothy Gimmestad, for their help.

"A Teutonic Gentleman astonished at the growth of St Paul." So reads the caption under this sketch which appeared in an 1879 issue of *Independent Farmer and Fireside Companion*, reprinted here courtesy of the Picture Department of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Ramsey County's German Americans

Their Struggle With Pride and Prejudice

BY SISTER JOHN CHRISTINE WOLKERSTORFER, C.S.J.

THE history of Minnesota is inextricably interwoven with the movement of immigrants across prairies and woodlands and up rivers and across lakes into the heartland of the American continent.

Although Minnesota usually has been thought of as "Swedeland, U.S.A.," the southeastern part of the state received more Germans than Swedes during the period from 1850 to 1900.[1] In 1850, when Minnetota was still a territory, the entire territory counted only 75 German heads of families and unmarried adults. Just ten years later, the United States census counted 18,400 Germans in the state. At that time they already outnumbered every other immigrant nationality. Three counties heavily endowed with this German immigrant population were Ramsey, Carver and Stearns.[2]

Considering Ramsey County, one can see patterns of settlement and influences that these German settlers had in the cultural and political development of the city. The effect of these influences on other settlers is the major concern of this article. Were the Germans blocking assimilation? Was a wave of American nativism already working against the German-Americans in the St. Paul area during the period when German immigration was heaviest?

The heavy tide of German immigration into Minnesota and Ramsey County coincided with the periods of heavy German immigration throughout the nation: The period of the "Forty-eighters" (refugees from the 1848 revolution in Germany), and that of the 1880's.

According to one study,[3] the Germans, like all immigrant groups in St. Paul, followed a stereotyped routine. The immi-

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Assumption Church with its landmark twin towers as it appeared in 1886.

grant first sought a colony of his own nationality, usually in the poorer districts of the city. He read a foreign newspaper, attended church services conducted in his native language, and identified himself as closely as possible with his own ethnic group. All the way up to 1920, the greatest concentration of German-born residents in St. Paul was in the Fifth Ward which centered around Assumption Catholic Church in downtown St. Paul, and the Eighth Ward, centered in what was known as Froschburg or Frogtown, around St. Agnes Catholic Church.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the facts concerning the German immigrant population in Ramsey County from 1850 through 1885.

1. According to the 1860 census, most St. Paul Germans had Prussian or Bavarian backgrounds, each group having its own provincial culture, yet bound by a common language.

2. Both groups had actively participated in the religious struggles of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. This established certain biases and religious antipathies.

3. In Germany's long struggle for unification, both provinces had assumed major roles. Hence, though not united in political points of view, they shared common political involvement. This would ready them for active interest in politics in their new land.

4. They shared the common problems of the foreign-born in the assimilation process, problems of economic competition, social acceptance, and political allegiance.

These points are important to keep in mind in evaluating other settlers' view of the Germans in Ramsey County. This view is twofold: immigrants symbolized the force of freedom pulling men through a golden door of opportunity; at the same time they looked poor, huddled, and unattractive in their different speech and customs.

Why did such large numbers of German immigrants settle in Minnesota when settlements farther east welcomed immigrants? A great wave of emigration from Germany followed the Revolution of 1848.[4] In the 1870's and 1880's military conscription was added to the woes of the impoverished peasant class.

Then, from the heart of America came Gottfried Duden's pamphlet, *Bericht von einer Reise nach den westlichen Staaten.* (Report of a Journey to the Western States.) Largely a product of his own imagination, Duden's travelogue contains wonderful descriptions of the fertile soil, abundant game, and the opportunities for personal independence. It also contained certain radical ideas for propagating the German race in America.

Eduard Pelz, born at Penig, Saxony, in 1800, was another revolutionary pamphleteer. He was a "Forty-eighter," well educated, widely traveled, fearless in his literary efforts, and thoroughly convinced that German immigrants should go to Minnesota and Minnesota only. He appears to be honest in his belief that Minnesota was destined to become the greatest state in the Union, the true center of North America.[5]

IN 1865 Senator George Becker, land commissioner of the first division of the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, and Colonel Hans Mattson, its Minnesota agent, encouraged

Pelz to promote immigration from Germany to Minnesota. In addition to much letter-writing lauding the opportunities of the area, Pelz went to Germany in 1866 and promoted immigration, particularly to the lands owned by the St. Paul and Pacific Road. This became part of the Northern Pacific in 1870. Pelz' writings after 1870 indicate he opposed the idea of a German state in the United States, although he favored group settlements where German cultural habits and customs could be continued. On the other hand, he favored the mixture of nationalities he observed in St. Paul.

Were there no writers who painted a more realistic picture? Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816-1872) wrote some 150 volumes of travel and adventure in America. He knew what heartbreak the over-enthusiastic immigrant was faced with in a strange land, and he pictured conditions just as the newcomer found them. In *Nach Amerika* (1855) and its sequel, *In Amerika* (1872), he introduced the rascally land agent. In practically every novel, he issued a note of warning to the prospective emigrant who had too idealistic a concept of the land across the sea.[6]

JUST WHAT GROUPS of Germans did these writers influence to come to Minnesota? The great body consisted of peasants and members of the middle class, but along with these there was a large proportion of university men who, because of some political offense, had been compelled to flee the country. Some of these leaders opposed all forms of government and were themselves considered to be intriguers.[7]

* * *

Some of these German immigrants came up the river to St. Paul from New Orleans and St. Louis. The author's maternal grandmother, Emma Hanggi Hoeller, moved westward through New York and Quebec, by way of the Great Lakes and thence to Minnesota. Typical of this later group of immigrants was my grandfather, John Hoeller, who came to St. Paul in 1880 at the age of eighteen. A member of a Cologne family of fruitgrowers and fruit-processors, he sought work in the coal mines of the Ruhr Valley before emigrating from Germany. He had to seek his own livelihood since the business passed to the eldest in the family and he was second oldest.

Lured by the call of economic betterment, he landed in New York and got work on the railroad to pay his transportation to the farmlands near the twin-tower landmark of Assumption Church in St. Paul. His children often heard him tell the story of how he worked his way across country by shoveling snow off the tracks. He became so snow-blinded that he was incapacitated for some time after the journey. All of the group had skill in handiwork of various types and found work in St. Paul in shops operated by other German immigrants.

George L. Becker

Theodore Hamm

Hans Mattson

John Hoeller and his bride, the former Emma Hanggi, grandparents of the author, were typical of many Germans who came to Ramsey County in 1880 at the heighth of the German immigration to America. The picture is owned by the author.

Most of these Germans regarded skill in a trade as a ticket to future success. They also carried on a predominantly family migration, and many brought some capital with them.

WHEN THE FIRST German immigrants came to St. Paul, French-Canadian settlers already had settled there. The city village had been founded by the fur trader Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant and his partner, Abraham Perry. They had claimed the land occupied until this year by Ancker Hospital.[8] In the mid-1840's, the first German settler (born in Braintree, Vermont, in 1815) came to St. Paul. He was Jacob W. Bass who leased the building on the corner of Third and Jackson Streets, the Merchant's Hotel. His two-story "St. Paul House" was run as a hotel until the spring of 1852. Bass was appointed postmaster of St. Paul on July 5, 1849, and held that office until 1853.[9]

Bartlett Presley, who was born in Baden and as a child had come with his parents to St. Louis, landed in St. Paul in the early part of 1849. His sister, Marie, had married A. L. Larpenteur, a pioneer farmer, merchant, and land owner, and Bartlett came to St. Paul at the wish of his sister. He founded a small trading business and eventually became a prominent and wealthy citizen.[10]

A look at the early government of the Territory of Minnesota and Ramsey County, in particular, indicates German participation in political affairs. In 1854, the Democrats and Whigs were the main parties participating in the fifth session of the Minnesota Territorial Legislature. Among the Territorial acts affecting St. Paul was one to incorporate the German Reading Society. This was approved February 23.[11] More important was the approval on March 4 of the incorporation of the city of St. Paul whose territory was not more than 2,400 acres. Three wards were created.

In 1855, Alexander Ramsey was elected mayor; Daniel Rohrer, treasurer, and W. R. Miller, marshal. Aldermen included C. H. Schurmeier for the First Ward, A. L. Larpenteur for the Second Ward, and A. G. Fuller for the Third Ward.

IN THE SPRING of 1866, the election of the school board members was of great interest and the German vote took on special importance. Newspapers urged the Germans to "vote for those Americans, who had always been interested in the cause of the German language and also for several of the German nominees and for once to disregard party lines.[12] This resulted in the first success of the German-English School Society. Four members of the new board were Germans and the others were Americans who, with the exception of two, were interested in establishing a German-English school. The new board appropriated $1,000 from public school funds to introduce German into the public schools.

Two plans were proposed: engage a German teacher for each of the public schools of the city or establish a German-English school under the supervision of the Board of Education. The latter was thought to be of better service to the children. The school could only hope to quell prejudice against the German language and stimulate interest in the school if it had good teachers.

It is safe to say that nearly all German immigrants believed firmly that the Germans had a mission to fulfill in the United States. Most German-Americans thought they could accomplish the most by being formally naturalized and joining one of the American political parties. Some of the more radical, mostly among the "Forty-eighters," wanted to transplant a German

state into the United States.[13] Some of these ideas spread to Minnesota but there is no evidence that any German-state group secured a foothold in St. Paul.

There *was* evidence of the interest of St. Paul Germans in the revolutions within the Fatherland. Fairs were held to raise money to support revolutionaries and German societies in St. Paul also raised funds for their support.[14]

BECAUSE OF THIS activity many native Americans feared that these German immigrants were still interested in allegiance to the Fatherland. Americans regarded with apprehension the Germans' idea that sooner or later the United States would be Germanized. The Germans believed this would be accomplished in two ways: the intellectual superiority of the Germans would make Americans unable to resist them, and German states founded in different parts of the United States would influence the surrounding territory and gradually bring it under the German sway.[15]

Although the radical "German-state" plan was doomed to defeat, as late as 1897 a group known as *Der deutsche Kriegerbund* was in existence. The *Preussische Jahrbücher* (Prussian Yearbook) for January, 1895, contained an article, "Die Deutschen in Amerika," by Wilhelm Weber, pastor in Belleville, Illinois. He argued that to preserve the German national feeling among the German-Americans it was necessary to continue the use of the German language as an educational and conversational medium. Plans proposed for German schools and adult education were radical and quite impossible but they showed the tenacity of the radical element among the German immigrants.[16]

One of St. Paul's important German immigrants was Theodore Hamm, the millionaire brewer. Born in Baden in 1825, Hamm came to St. Paul with his wife, Louisa Buchholz, in 1856. He ran a prosperous boarding house, "Sailor's Rest," near the levee. Despite his exposure to the Western gold rush fever and his admiration for Karl Schurz, which almost induced him to join the Union Army during the Civil War, he remained in St. Paul. After the war he took over Keller's Brewery which had become a $3,000,000 business by 1896.[17] Hamm entered freely into social activities and had a sense of civic responsibility, despite the fact that he never sought or held public office. He was a Democrat and his son, William, followed his political ideas. The latter was elected to the city council in 1885 and served three years.

MORE FAR-REACHING in impact than the political contributions were the cultural contributions of the German immigrants to the Ramsey County area. From the very beginning the churches offered leadership. Although Catholic and Lutheran endeavors were more numerous, Jewish and Methodist groups also made substantial contributions. The oldest German Catholic church, Assumption, was a twin-tower landmark for many German immigrants.

The German churches were much concerned with the education of youth. Assumption School listed twenty-five pupils in 1856. In 1869 there were 248 boys and 307 girls.[18] The problem of civic funds for parochial education reared its head as early as 1853. Monsignor (later Bishop) Cretin wrote out a bill presented by his St. Paul followers to the Minnesota Territorial Legislature which provided for a division of the school fund, part of which was to be used for support of Assumption School, the only parochial school then in existence. The bill was rejected. A concerted effort was made in 1867 by Catholic citizens whose plea described their double taxation. The State Legislature refused their request. The St. Paul School Board was thus unable to give help to teachers of a school in which a certain religion was professed.

IN 1869, the matter again came before the School Board. This time pressure was exerted by citing examples of aid given parish schools in other cities. On September 14, 1869, *Der Wanderer*, the German newspaper which was the spokesman for the rightists, said that Roman-Catholics could legally demand part of the school fund and questioned the fairness of subjecting a Roman-Catholic child to the distinctly Protestant atmosphere of the public school.[19]

Again the refusal, but this time there was an added note that parochial schools of Protestant churches would likewise have to be considered, and there were three of them in St. Paul at this time. Obviously there

was more to this refusal than remnants of anti-Catholic Know-Nothingism.

In 1861 the Christian Day School, a German-English school, had been organized under the auspices of the Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church. In 1864, the first lay teacher was called into service.[20] Trinity Lutheran Church erected a new school on Wabasha near Tilton Street in June, 1880.[21] Zion Evangelical Lutheran Congregation erected a school in 1865.[22]

Quite a number of American children attended and received instruction in German at a flourishing elementary school connected with the German Methodist Congregation at Rosabel and Sixth Streets. Its programs of German and English readings and dialogues, musical selections, and exhibitions were always well attended and received favorable comment from friends of education. In 1867 the school engaged two teachers for its growing classes.

THE SAME YEAR, the Germans worked out a plan for the introduction of German into the public schools as a regular subject. On March 9, 1867, a bill passed the State Legislature for the teaching of German in public schools.[23] The annual report of the St. Paul Public Schools for 1871 stated that "In the Baldwin School the German language is taught in connection with the English language and is attended mostly by children of German parentage."[24]

This was a period of rising feuds between public and private education. Many segments of the population were reluctant to accept the opinion that public funds should sustain education beyond grammar school. Not until 1882 was the battle for public-supported high schools won.[25] Besides this, the anti-religious attitude of the public school system and parents' misconception of the purposes of the denominational schools were pitted against the conviction of the religious groups that one of the important phases of their work lay in the education of their youth. All this fanned the fires of mutual distrust and competition, each system struggling for survival.

IN ALL OF the activities of the German immigrants, their love for the German language, traditions and ideals, their glorification of the Fatherland were the motivating forces. Germans formed societies, such as the *Leseverein*, *Turnverein*, and *Deutsche Verein*, out of a sense of duty to new home and old.

They saw no reason why they should discard their language and customs, and they believed that certain German characteristics complemented American traits.[26] This idea of *Deutschtum* seemed to wane with the rise of the younger German immigrants whose love for things German was tempered by their love for American ideals and principles of life.

Most German societies were committed to furthering the arts. In the 1850's, St. Paul had three or four small music halls. In 1858, an informal string quartet was formed and from this group, five years later come the St. Paul Musical Society, a small orchestra which was to be one of the leading instrumental ensembles of the state. It is probable that its performance of a Haydn symphony in 1863 provided the first hearing of any Eighteenth-century composer in Minnesota.[27]

During the 1870's, a number of music-minded St. Paulites, many Germans among them, held meetings and concerts in their homes. This was the beginning of the Ladies' Musicale which became the Schubert Club in 1891.

SINGING CLUBS, German Reading Clubs, Theater Groups, and Turners made their appearance. By 1890 there were some hundred *Vereine* in St. Paul and agitation for creating a single hall to house all German group meetings began. The Order of the Sons of Hermann, a benefit lodge, led this movement. The German House was not begun until 1910, and only finished in 1920. As a result of the war, it became known as the "American House" and in the 1950's was demolished in the capitol-approach program.[28]

The 1870's witnessed economic advancement for the Ramsey County area and German immigrants were active participants in the business ventures of that time. The National German-American Bank grew as the city grew. This business venture started in 1856 as a private banking house organized by Gustav Willius and Henry Meyer as partners. They had been friends in Bremen, Germany, and had migrated to America in 1853. Their firm was incorporated in 1873 as the German-American Bank.[29]

The Beethoven String Quartet, founded in 1890-91, typified the interest in culture which the Germans brought with them. Members were, from left, Emil Straka, Sr., Louis Milch, Emil Oberhoffer (later conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra) and Louis Von Guetzen.

ONE OF THE MOST important tools in cementing the communities of German immigrants together and of offering mixed blessings in achieving their ideal of *Deutschtum* was the German press. The first German-language newspaper, the *Minnesota Deutsche Zeitung*, later the *Daily Volks Zeitung*, appeared in 1855.[30] The *Volks Zeitung* was established by Frederick Orthwein who was born in Ludwigsburg in 1824 and came to St. Paul in 1855. The *Zeitung*, a four-page weekly, was printed in his shop above the Winslow House, a popular hotel on Fourth Street. It became a daily in 1856.[31]

Orthwein started it as a semi-independent Republican paper, then made it a Democratic paper in 1856. The only defense he ever offered for his switch was his belief that German settlers had more to gain by supporting Democratic candidates and platforms. His paper would accept only such principles as would aid the German immigrant.

Orthwein urged newcomers among the Germans to enter fully into political life. He proposed that Germans form a core of strength within the Democratic Party which might influence the party to look with favor upon German candidates and result in other benefits for immigrants.

He was particularly incensed by the victimization of German settlers by land speculators. He advocated free land distribution, and such sentiments won him the admiration and affection of Minnesota Germans. He opposed the Order of Know-Nothings, the temperance crusade, and the extension of slavery.

HE URGED that Germans exert leadership in industrial, agricultural, and cultural developments in Minnesota. He also was convinced they could avoid becoming second-rate citizens only if they gave up their "old-fashioned ways" and their provincial attitudes. He encouraged his countrymen to support German cultural organizations, and was one of the founders of the German Agricultural Society of Ramsey County and a member of the German Reading Society.[32]

After 1890, there was a steady decrease in foreign-language newspapers due to immigration restrictions and the consolidation of existing papers as the immigrants' second generation demanded stronger orientation to American interests.

Many of the German newspapers were started by "Forty-eighters" who seem to have been the most radical of all German immigrants who came to Minnesota and Ramsey county in the Nineteenth century. One wonders, then, if this radical element did not contribute to suspicion of the German immigrants and to anti-German sentiment which later reached nativistic proportions and erupted so forcefully during World War I.

One such paper that prompts this question is *The Wanderer*, which even today prides itself on being one of the best-loved and best-hated publications in the United States. It was founded in 1867 by two Benedictine monks at Assumption Church in St. Paul. They called the publication *Der Wanderer*, which to them meant "The Immigrant." In 1878 a layman, Hugo Klaproth, became editor. He came from northern Germany, had a background of fervent Lutheran traditions, and was a convert to Catholicism.

HE USED *Der Wanderer* to wage a lifelong battle against naturalism, rationalism, and modernism. His son-in-law, Joseph Matt, became editor in 1897 and the paper has remained in the Matt family ever since.

Was there evidence of an anti-German nativism in St. Paul during the period from 1850 to 1880? At first Americans in the area were friendly toward the German immigrants. Colonization programs for Germans were advocated. Know-Nothingism, to be sure, had made its appearance as a result of

the violent talk of the foreigners, especially the "Forty-eighters." There must have been remnants of this attitude in the county as German immigration picked up after the Civil War and reached its peak during the 1880's.

INTER-FAITH conflicts cannot be ignored. Suspicion had carried over from the petty Germanic wars and it seems that the very pattern of settlement in Ramsey County tended to keep that suspicion alive.

Sometimes these suspicions manifested themselves at election. The stand of German newspapers in supporting German candidates certainly paved the way for the vituperation meted out to Charles Lindburgh after the turn of the century.

The Germans' insistence on their right to amusements that shocked the censorious—card-playing, beer gardens, and Sunday frolics, even during the Temperance Movement of the 1870's—also rested uneasily on some Americans in Ramsey County. The German quarters, full of saloons, signboards and German-language schools, seemed disturbingly self-contained.

On the other hand, the Germans had a reputation for honest, thrifty, and orderly living. Some Americans found the Germans easy to accept, since the German notion that it is a good thing to have a good time was readily acceptable by many Americans.[33]

Thus at this time, there does not seem to have been any pressing sense of the Germans as a distinctly national menace. Despite this, it is obvious that many seeds of unrest were present in the St. Paul area that future nativist reaction would capitalize on and interpret as a real threat to American nationalism.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *The above article consists of excerpts from a longer paper the author wrote in connection with work on her master's degree. Because of space limitations, annotations were cut to a minimum by the editor. A copy of the entire paper, with complete annotation is on file at the Ramsey County Historical Society.*

THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue W., St. Paul, Minn.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958 the Society erected a barn, behind the house, which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.