

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

CELEBRATING  
**RAMSEY COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S**

**65th Anniversary**

**Fall 2014**

Volume 49, Number 3

*An Adventure in Historical Research:*

*In Search of Ethel Stewart*

*Steven C. Trimble, page 3*



*The Gibbs farmhouse about 1961 at the Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakota Life in Falcon Heights, Minn. The original portion of this building that was the home of Jane and Heman Gibbs for more than fifty years dates from 1854. Remarkably well preserved, the farmhouse is on the National Register of Historic Places and plays a central role in telling the story of pioneer life in Ramsey County and Jane's relationship with the Dakota Indians of the area. Photo courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 49, Number 3

Fall 2014

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

Nobody knows your own history the way you do. At RCHS, we are always advocating for families, businesses, and other groups to collect and write their own histories. This issue, we are taking our own advice! We have put pen to paper (well, digitally) and have brought together different perspectives from our history as an organization as part of celebrating the Society's 65th Anniversary. Steve Trimble writes about our founder, Ethel Stewart. John Lindley shares his views of Virginia Kunz, executive director and editor of this magazine for more than 40 years. Priscilla Farnham outlines the transformative change in interpretation at the Gibbs Museum that she initiated as executive director to include the 1995 archeological dig and the well-documented interaction between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people. Mollie Spillman, our curator/archivist, outlines her story of preserving and sharing our heritage of artifacts. And I'm in there too, writing about my first job at RCHS, one of the first tenants in Landmark Center. So get inspired, and write your own histories! Your family, friends, and maybe even readers of this magazine (should you submit an article), will thank you.

*Anne Cowie,*  
Chair, Editorial Board

# Expanding Our Understanding of the Past:

## The Sod House and Dakota Kin at the Gibbs Museum

Priscilla Farnham

Before I was hired as the Executive Director of the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) in the summer of 1992, I went through an intensive interview process. Part of that process included submitting a plan for what I would do during the first year of my employment with the Society. Among the items in my first-year plan was making the Gibbs Farm Museum a more active public attraction. I had heard the Museum's claim to an original sod house on its site, and I thought that bringing the sod house into existence could be a vehicle to attract more visitors to Gibbs.

As it happened, another item in my first-year plan received priority during those initial months of my employment: mounting an exhibit of Henry Bosse photographs of the Mississippi River in the late 1800s. Nothing of significance came of my ideas about Gibbs Farm until the January 1994 meeting of the RCHS Board of Directors, when I gave a brief summary of 1993 and a sketch of what the Society might consider in a planned Board retreat that was scheduled for later that year. I reminded the directors of my original thoughts about a sod house at Gibbs Museum with the recommendation that it should be on the agenda

Director Thomand (Thomy) R. O'Brien reacted immediately to the sod house idea and voiced his support for finding it. Within minutes, Board President Joanne Englund had appointed a Sod House Task Force consisting of Thomy and Bob Olsen, another director who enthusiastically endorsed doing something about the sod house.

### Rethinking Gibbs Museum

The Sod House Task Force acted quickly and by May, Robert Clouse archaeologist for Minnesota Historical Society, had visited Gibbs Farm Museum and probed the soil for cores to determine where the sod house might be located. Clouse indicated that the sod house was probably near the position of the museum's sod house sign,

which stood near the southeast corner of the farmhouse porch. The Sod House (now a) Committee then interviewed two different groups of archaeologists interested in doing the archaeological investigation to find the sod house. The committee chose the archaeologists from the University of Minnesota. Thanks to a grant from the Alice M. O'Brien Foundation, RCHS had the financing to pay for the dig.

As part of its preliminary work before starting the dig, the University group did research which included gathering information from the Gibbs family papers that

are in the RCHS archives. These researchers located a sketch book of drawings by Jane and Heman Gibbs's daughter, Lillie Belle Gibbs LeVesconte. Toward the end of Jane's life, Lillie had drawn a sketch of the sod house (or claim shanty) based on her mother's verbal description. Jane and Heman had lived in the sod house from 1849 to 1854, when they had built a small, one-room, log house nearby. Lillie had once lived in this log house. As the Gibbs family grew in numbers and prospered as farmers, they added on to the log house and by 1874 it had grown into the two-story, wood frame farmhouse we know today.

Lillie would not have seen the sod house because she was not yet born when it existed. She relied, however, upon her mother's description of it, and her sketch provided some key details like the location of a window and the door, and a chimney. Thomy O'Brien later wrote an article about the archeological investigation in *Ramsey County History* in which



This is Lillie Belle Gibbs LeVesconte's sketch of the sod house where her parents lived between 1849 and 1854 on land in Rose Township that Jane and Heman acquired through purchase of a Mexican War veteran's federal land warrant. Lillie made this drawing from her mother's description many years after the sod house had been abandoned. Sketch courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society archives.

he summarized what the University's archeological team had learned from its dig.<sup>1</sup> The lengthy final report of the archeological investigation for the Gibbs sod house is now in the RCHS archives and can be reviewed by visiting the Society's Research Center in the lower level of Landmark Center.

The archeological investigation was an amazing process. Little by little, dirt was removed from the suspected site of the sod house, and when the defined rectangle was about four feet deep, a floor pattern began to emerge. The pattern in the dirt was four clearly defined parallel ridges of dirt of uniform height that ran north to south. The archaeologists thought the ridges had been formed by wooden floor joists that had long since decayed, across which the wooden floor boards for the sod house had been laid. The site of the archaeological dig at the southeast corner of the oldest part of the farmhouse lay open for the summer, and visitors received a printed explanation of the process the archeological team had undertaken to find exactly where the sod house was located.

At the same time that visitors were learning about the dig, members of the Sod House Committee consulted a number of archaeologists on what steps to take next. Because of a lack of funds, the University archeologists had not explored the area around the dig site. The consulting archaeologists told the committee that they thought the area around the sod house was probably rich in archaeological artifacts other than the approximately 5,000 that had been found in the recently completed study. The consultants highly recommended that no disturbance of the surrounding soil occur, unless it was done by an organized archaeological investigation. This advice effectively eliminated the area around and adjacent to the remains of the sod house as a location where RCHS might one day construct an interpretive sod-house replica.

If we wanted to build a replica sod house, we realized then that it should go elsewhere on the site and that before deciding where, we needed to review our entire interpretation of the museum. This would be a major interpretative review and it would involve two dominant compo-



*Jane DeBow Gibbs in middle age. The date of this photograph is unknown. Photo courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society.*

nents: (1) securing ownership of the land that RCHS was currently leasing from the University of Minnesota; and (2) developing an interpretive focus and theme that reflected what the archeological dig had told us about the early years that Jane and Heman had spent on this land.

### **Securing Ownership of the Land**

When I began my employment with RCHS, Gibbs Farm Museum was located on slightly more than one acre of RCHS-owned land, but the museum site was much larger than one acre. The University of Minnesota owned most of the land that RCHS interpreted at Gibbs, and the Society leased that land from the University. The boundary of the leased land immediately north of the White Barn nearly intersected the barn, which was an original Gibbs family structure. The lease that RCHS had with the University was due to expire at the end of 2003. That gave us some time to develop a plan but not that much.

Even without the possibility of a sod house or expanded interpretation, I knew that RCHS should try to purchase these leased land parcels (there were several). Members of the RCHS Board of Directors gathered a task force together that included former board member Robert Straughn, a Falcon Heights resident and well-known attorney, and strategized on the best way

to approach the University of Minnesota. This initiative was successful, and the University Board of Regents agreed to sell the land to RCHS on a contract for deed. RCHS was to get the processing papers from the University's Real Estate Department. It took a year, however, to get the papers, because the sale was stalled and complicated by the installation of the University's women's soccer stadium just to the north of Gibbs Farm Museum. With the kind intervention of a state legislator who was supportive of what RCHS wanted to do at Gibbs, the sale was finally executed in 1999.

Even before we developed an interpretive theme for Gibbs that incorporated what we had learned from the archeologists, I wanted to verify the facts of the early life of Jane Gibbs. With money from a grant, we hired Diane Zibell Weber, a skilled historian who had prior experience with archeology and preservation work, to research Jane's early life and to write an article about her that we could publish in our quarterly magazine, *Ramsey County History*.<sup>2</sup>

There were other untapped resources at RCHS as well. I had been searching relentlessly for several years for financial support for publishing a family version of the story of Jane's early life. Among the Gibbs papers in the RCHS archives was a pamphlet written by Jane and Heman Gibbs's daughter, Lillie, about Jane's early life and her life among the Dakota. It was written in period language and needed updating if it was to be the basis for a retelling Jane's early life in an easily readable style.

Fortunately for RCHS, the Patrick and Aimee Butler Family Foundation liked what we proposed to do and gave the first grant in support of this project. Soon afterward, with the intercession of Pat Hart and Scheffer Lang, the Helen Lang Charitable Trust provided enough money for RCHS to publish a chapter-book written for children who were ages 8 to 14 that we titled *Jane Gibbs: 'Little Bird That Was Caught.'*

Written by Anne Neuberger and illustrated by Tessie Bundick, the book was carefully researched by both the author and the illustrator using not only the information gathered in the archeological

dig, Lillie's account of Jane's early years, and the information that Diane Weber had gathered in her article in our magazine, but also a wide range of other sources from the early nineteenth century, such as material on life at Fort Snelling in the 1830s and '40s and the watercolors of Seth Eastman. Virginia Brainard Kunz, who was then the editor of *Ramsey County History*, led a small committee that selected the writer and illustrator and then shepherded the book through production. Published in 1998, *Jane Gibbs* has been reprinted several times since then. It is widely used in the schools today, especially by elementary school teachers who want to prepare their students for what they will see and hear when they visit the Gibbs Museum on a field trip.<sup>3</sup>

### **Developing an Interpretive Theme**

Gibbs Museum, when I arrived at RCHS, was interpreted as a market garden farm around the late 1800s. This interpretation was developed by a previous site manager, Kendra Dillard, who did a great deal of research on market gardening in the Twin Cities area in this period of time for her Master's Degree at the University of Minnesota. She wrote a summary of her research in an excellent article that RCHS published in *Ramsey County History*.<sup>4</sup>

Although this was a valid and accurate interpretation of what had gone on at the Gibbs Farm, especially in the last third of the nineteenth century, I sensed that it did not have broad appeal to the public, especially when so little farmland remained in Ramsey County. Before we undertook the archeological dig, a sign near the farmhouse had located a sod house, but visitors did not hear the story of the sod house, nor of Jane Gibbs's childhood and her friendly association with the Dakota. The sod house was hardly mentioned in the market-garden interpretation of the site. It became clear to me that a key component in deciding where to put a replica sod house required us to develop an interpretive focus and theme that would include it.

Through an associate I had known when I worked at the Science Museum of Minnesota, I located a consultant who could lead us through the steps needed

to identify an interpretive theme. The consultant's name was Dr. Kevin Britz. Kevin was well qualified to lead us. He specialized in local Midwestern history and taught that subject at St. Cloud State University. He was employed as assistant director of the Stearns County Historical Society, where he had planned an exhibit that included, among other things, an interpretation of the local Native American history. He had also planned major interpretive exhibits for other small museums, such as the Bronko Nagurski Museum in International Falls. Three grants from local foundations (the Minnesota Humanities Commission, the Mardag Foundation, and the F.R. Bigelow Foundation) funded this planning process.

For a year, Kevin Britz led us through a process that involved gathering groups together who might have an interest or an opinion about the interpretation of Gibbs Farm Museum. These groups were varied and broad: RCHS board members, Gibbs volunteers, Gibbs family descendants, RCHS members, staff, other museum professionals, the general public, and Native Americans.

This last group, Native Americans, played a major role in defining the direction of the expanded interpretation of Gibbs Museum. Members of the group were primarily Dakota and included several descendants of Cloud Man. One of these descendants, Gary Cavender of Prior Lake, held Cloud Man's pipe. Several were not Dakota but were knowledgeable about Native American history and culture (Roger Buffalohead, a Ponca; and Michael Scullin, professor of anthropology at Minnesota State University–Mankato).<sup>5</sup>

These advisors were all familiar with the story of Jane Gibbs's childhood association with the Dakota and with Cloud Man's band. I remember the first meeting we had with the Native American group (who later became the Gibbs Museum Native American Advisory Board) when we met at the museum. Members of the group did not speak often, but they promised to consult their elders. The one message I remember hearing was that the public in general should know that when the Europeans arrived in Minnesota, the land was not without people—the Dakota were living in the area but they were not

often visible. The land was not empty, as many Europeans thought—it was inhabited by Dakota people.

Out of these meetings with many diverse groups, Kevin Britz developed the theme for Gibbs Museum's expanded interpretation. It shifted the interpretive focus from the market-garden days of the late 1800s and early 1900s back to the 1830s when Jane De Bow (Gibbs) first arrived at Fort Snelling. Basically the theme Dr. Britz proposed was a dual interpretation of two cultures, pioneer and Dakota, in the 1850s living in this area of what would become Minnesota.

Britz also recommended that we emphasize four areas of comparison between these two cultures: (1) how each culture used the land to provide food; for example, gardens of hilled corn for the Dakota in contrast to plowed, straight rows of corn for the pioneers; (2) how each provided shelter for themselves; such as the Dakota using seasonal tipi and bark lodges compared to the Gibbs's sod house; (3) how each structured its family; as in the extended matriarchal kinships of the Dakota compared to patriarchal hierarchy in the pioneer society; and (4) how each viewed concepts of land ownership; as with the pioneers' absentee ownership (a person owned the land even if the owner was not using it) in contrast to the Dakota concept of user-occupied ownership (if the Dakota were using the land, it was theirs). Dr. Britz delivered this new interpretive approach in a printed report in 1997. In addition, he suggested details of how to present the interpretation and a timeline of key steps in implementing his proposal.

In the expanded interpretation developed by Kevin Britz, he used the Gibbs story, which was grounded in historically verifiable events, to engage visitors in a deeper appreciation of local history. He thought this approach would allow the Society to go back in time and tell the story of the family that first established the farm and built the sod house, while incorporating the earlier story of Jane Gibbs's childhood association with Cloud Man's band of Dakota.

It was a "people story" with which visitors could identify. It was also a true

story about friendship, survival, and the interaction between two cultures. The expanded interpretation also made local history relevant to current times. The story offered a positive glimpse into an unfamiliar culture at a time when the region was also interacting with several other very different cultures.

The contemporary view of Native Americans has generally been stereotyped—if there was any knowledge at all—with very little knowledge or appreciation of the value of this part of our Minnesota heritage. Jane Gibbs’s friendly association with the Dakota offered a model for today’s association with new cultures, especially the ones from Southeast Asia and Africa, in our area. I thought the expanded interpretation had great potential at Gibbs because our staff there could use a compelling story to engage visitors in our local history and to broaden their appreciation of history by making the story relevant to contemporary times.

### **A Physical Plan**

Once we had secured ownership of the land and had an expanded interpretation that incorporated a replica sod house, we needed a physical plan of the site that could implement the themes. I called the University of Minnesota’s Landscape Department and talked with Dr. John Koepke. Fortuitously, he lived within the area of Gibbs Farm Museum and rode his bicycle past it frequently, and he agreed to help us. He suggested a brilliant plan for the division of the museum’s land that used the entire northern part of the property for a Dakota interpretation and the southern area, which already contained the original Gibbs farmhouse and the White Barn, for a pioneer interpretation. He recommended that we locate a replica sod house between the two areas, making the sod house the connection or the pivot between north (Dakota) and south (Pioneer) land areas, as well as between the two cultures.

Historically, the sod house had had a connection with both cultures. With this basic land concept plan, we visited Elmer L. Andersen, former governor of Minnesota, and well known environmentalist. He suggested that we

consider applying for an implementation grant from the State of Minnesota through the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR). With the efforts and support of several members of the RCHS Board (Laurie Zenner, then the RCHS president, and Art Baumeister, a RCHS board member), we attended the hearing of the deciding legislative committee, and advocated for our plan. Not long afterward we received word that the legislature had awarded a generous grant to RCHS to alter the landscape of Gibbs Farm Museum. The Minnesota Historical Society was tasked with administering the grant. Although the LCMR grant did not include money to construct a replica sod house, we subsequently received several generous private and foundation grants that funded it.

Expanding the Gibbs Farm Museum’s interpretation began with changes to the landscape. These included establishing an acre of prairie, creating a replica Indian trail, building a replica Dakota bark lodge, installing Dakota tipi, planting a Dakota vegetable garden and a comparable pioneer garden, identifying and planting historically correct trees and vegetation on the perimeter of the site,

and installing appropriate paths between these new interpretative stations.<sup>6</sup>

We also built a replica sod house. At the dedication of the sod house, several guests of honor included descendants of Jane and Heman Gibbs. One of the guests was a grandson, Gordon (Gibbs) Nelson. He had spent much time in his childhood with his aunt, Abbie Gibbs Fischer, and had sharp memories of life in the Gibbs farmhouse. He vividly remembered an apple orchard, and asked me if we couldn’t include an apple orchard on the site.

One of our interpreters, Jim Erickson, recommended I consult with Ralph Thrane, a master gardener whose skills included owning a commercial apple orchard. I approached Ralph about the project, and he was very interested. Ralph researched the history of apples, defined heritage apples that the Gibbs family might have raised, searched the country for these identified varieties, and then paid for them and planted them himself. He wrote a fascinating article about apples and their origin in *Ramsey County History*. We learned after this monumental task, that the Gibbs Museum heritage apple orchard was probably the only heritage orchard in the entire upper Midwest. It was an astonishing accomplishment.<sup>7</sup>



*In 1995 archeologists from the University of Minnesota undertook a dig to find the sod house at the Gibbs Museum. This photo shows two archeology students working on the site. Although the remnants of the sod house occupied a relatively small area (roughly 10 feet by 12 feet), the researchers carefully removed the soil in the research plot section by section and layer by layer looking for information relating to the construction of the house and artifacts that had belonged to its former inhabitants. Photo courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society.*

## Two Types of Tours

These landscape and interpretive changes took several years to accomplish. The result was that now Gibbs Museum could offer two types of tours simultaneously: a Pioneer tour and a Dakota tour. Thanks to the museum site manager at the time, Ted Lau, Gibbs had a robust attendance of elementary school groups. Most elementary school groups took the Pioneer tour and they comprised the bulk of our visitors. With the addition of the Dakota tours, we had the possibility of doubling our attendance. However, we had few visitors requesting the Dakota tour. Schools were not requesting Dakota tours in spite of our efforts to contact them by telephone. Many of the teachers of third through fifth grades in the metro area were open to the idea, but they lacked the funds needed to schedule these tours.

Finally, I came up with the idea of offering free Dakota tours to schools within the Saint Paul District that met the eligibility standards for free school lunches. These tours were then grant-funded by many local foundations. Subsidized visits to Gibbs Farm Museum by these schools included a copy of our children's book about Jane Gibbs, (*Jane Gibbs, Little Bird that Was Caught*), free bus transportation, free admission and tours, and free demonstrations for a "take home" Dakota object.

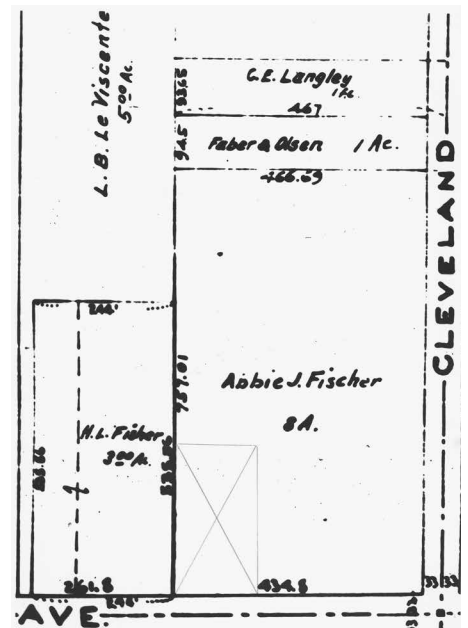
We then met with curriculum specialists of the Saint Paul School District who agreed to identify eligible schools. With the grants removing the problem of how the eligible schools would pay for these tours, the program proved to be a great success and eventually expanded to the Minneapolis School District. Throughout the expansion of the Dakota tours, we continued to consult with our Native American Advisory Board. New members of the group were added, and some moved away, but we met frequently with them. They reviewed the early scripts that interpreters were to use and most of the publications that contained information on the Dakota. We owe them a great debt. At various times, we employed Native Americans for Dakota programs at the site. We did not pretend, however, to speak as Dakota people. Our interpretation was Dakota culture and history as seen through the eyes of Jane Gibbs.

These subsidized tours eventually attracted the attention of schools which could afford to pay for the Dakota tour and our audience continued to grow.

In the meantime, Gibbs Farm Museum continued to receive requests for "farm visits." Because of the word "farm" in our name, the general public thought of the site as a farm. The interpretive expansion added to the historic content of the museum and the Gibbs Committee realized our museum's name did not reflect accurately the expanded content and visitor experience. Consequently in 2001 RCHS officially changed the name to Gibbs Museum of Pioneer and Dakota Life.

The Dakota tours have evolved gradually and improved with time, using abundant primary resources. Cloud Man's band of Dakota is well documented. Major Lawrence Taliaferro of Fort Snelling wrote about them and drew a map of their location at Lake Harriet and Lake Calhoun. Captain Seth Eastman at Fort Snelling, whose Dakota wife was Cloud Man's daughter, painted lovely watercolors of his wife's family and the everyday living and ceremonies of the Dakota. Samuel Pond described the life and culture of the Dakota in his book, *The Dakota or Sioux as They Were in Minnesota Before 1834*. We used Pond's verbal description and one of Eastman's paintings, for example, in designing the replica Dakota bark lodge.<sup>8</sup> Another visual guide is George Catlin's painting of Cloud Man's Village at Lake Harriet in 1836 that is in the Smithsonian American Art Museum.<sup>9</sup>

Using these rich primary resources, Terry Swanson, the current site manager at Gibbs, has continued to improve and refine the Dakota tours. With a grant from the Grotto Foundation, we introduced some Dakota language words and phrases to our tour explanations and signage because Jane Gibbs was able to speak fluent Dakota. One of our Gibbs Museum Native American Advisory Board members, Gabrielle Strong, along with another Dakota language specialist, Terri Peterson, spent several days training the Society's museum staff and interpreters in appropriate Dakota language phrases. These advisors also connected the Gibbs staff with University of Minnesota Dakota language specialists and a Dakota



This is the northwestern portion of the land plat where today Cleveland and Larpenteur Avenues intersect. The faint box that has been added in pencil in the lower left of Abbie J. Fischer's property shows the land that the Ramsey County Historical Society acquired in 1949. This parcel included the Gibbs family's farmhouse. In 2006 RCHS purchased an additional 1.5 acres of land immediately to the west (left of Abbie's property) that Jane and Heman Gibbs had once owned. Plat map courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society archives.

language website for continuing language education. Now a Dakota tour visits seven stations of Dakota life and activity. Visitors are greeted in Dakota at each station, and they learn at least one Dakota phrase about the content of each station (wild rice, maple syrup, horse, and so on).

## Acquiring Additional Gibbs Land

With one exception, Gibbs Museum is surrounded by property owned by the University of Minnesota: the soccer fields to the north, a golf course to the west, and experimental farm fields across Larpenteur and Cleveland Avenues. To the immediate west of the Gibbs farmhouse, there is a large brick residence, sitting on what had once been original Gibbs land that was a part of the 160 acres Jane and Heman had purchased in 1849.

Over the course of time, members of the Gibbs family had sold parcels of their

original acres and at the time, the property nextdoor to the west was owned by a professor who taught at the University. In 2004, he and his wife decided to sell the property, and they notified me of their intention and of their interest in selling it to RCHS. I took the proposal to the president of RCHS, and he said that we could not consider this purchase because we did not have the finances to do it.

When this proposal was later brought before the RCHS Board of Directors, however, this reluctance changed. Several members of the board of directors thought that the original Gibbs land should be returned to the Gibbs Museum for future use. A capital campaign resulted and most of the purchase price for the land was raised. RCHS purchased the house in 2006 mainly for the 1.5 acres of land upon which it stood. The society was interested in the purchase in order to own the original Gibbs land, and ownership of the house was secondary. After the Society purchased the property, we considered many options for use of the house until we were ready to use the land as part of the museum interpretation. In the end, the Board decided to use the house for museum administration.

The addition of the original Gibbs land was a catalyst for the RCHS board of directors to decide we needed a new strategic plan. Headed by former RCHS board president Laurie Zenner, and facilitated by Anne Bitter (formerly with the Science Museum of Minnesota and the Walker Art Center), a group of RCHS board and staff members convened regularly for a year to create a new Strategic Plan in 2007. The plan included a new mission statement, identified three program areas of concentration, and set goals for the future. It recommended strengthening, enhancing, and expanding RCHS's three programmatic services of preservation, presentation, and publication.

Future use of the newly purchased Gibbs land required long-term planning. In 2010, we developed a concept Master Plan for enhancing and enlarging our dual Dakota and Pioneer interpretation. Once again, RCHS turned to Dr. Kevin Britz, who was then at the Fort Collins College and Museum, Durango, Colorado, and asked him to consult with us and pre-

pare a plan that would encompass both the older Gibbs site and the new acreage next door. This plan was developed under the leadership of and included intensive planning sessions with Dakota representatives, Gibbs family representatives, and RCHS staff.

Kevin Britz helped us draw up an excellent way to use the landscape to enlarge the Dakota interpretation, with a Dakota village (more than one bark lodge), a winter camp, summer and spring camps, a section of land that would be devoted to market-garden farming as practiced by Heman Gibbs, and a year-round interpretive center. We then submitted this plan to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in an effort to receive funding that would pay for the working out the details of how this latest proposal would be implemented. The evaluators at the NEH ranked our request very high, but it missed qualifying for NEH funding by a few points—much to our disappointment.

New hope of implementing the Britz plan arrived in 2011 with the news that a Gibbs Museum volunteer, Crystal Cliff, had left a generous bequest for Gibbs Museum in her will. Crystal had volunteered frequently in the Dakota bark lodge in the middle of the prairie, and she loved the Dakota interpretation. Her ashes have been buried in the Gibbs Museum prairie. Crystal's gift was one of many gifts that supported this long journey of expanding the interpretation at Gibbs. Many, many people, foundations, and charitable funds contributed generously with both talent and money to the progress of bringing to life this extraordinary story of both survival and cross-cultural friendship.

The plan for expanded use of the land that RCHS now owns at Gibbs that was developed under Kevin Britz and the NEH planning grant request that came later are still in the RCHS archives, waiting to be implemented. It is my earnest hope that this true story of a pioneer family and the little-appreciated Dakota contribution to our local history will be brought to life through implementation of this plan when the time is right.

*Priscilla Farnham retired in 2012 as the executive director of the Ramsey County Historical Society after twenty years of*

*service in that position. She holds a B.A. in economics from Vassar College, which included numerous courses in American History, and a Certificate from La Sorbonne in Paris. Prior to joining RCHS, she was a senior manager at the Science Museum of Minnesota.*

## Notes

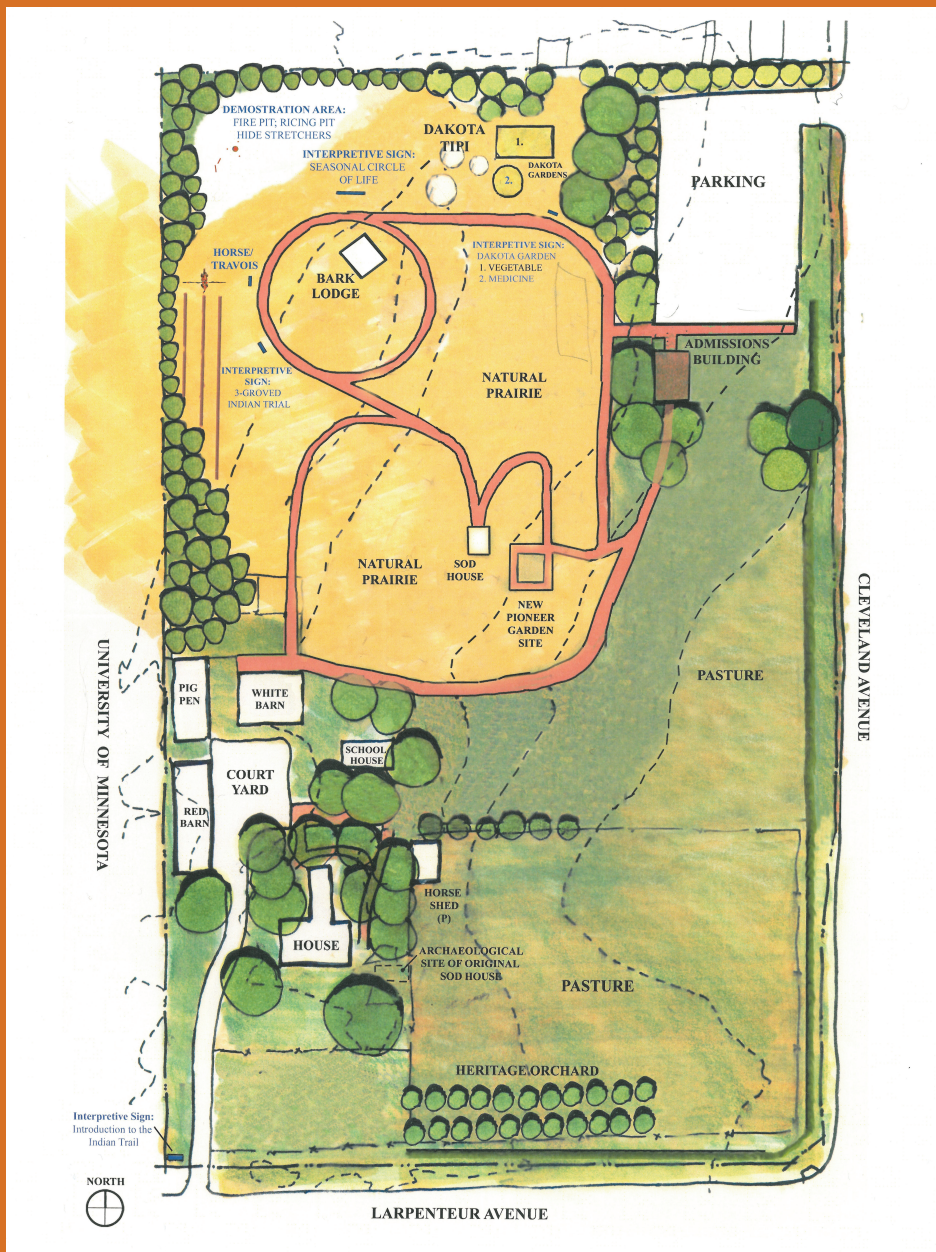
1. Thomond R. O'Brien, "Digging into the Past: The Excavating of the Claim Shanty of Heman and Jane Gibbs," *Ramsey County History*, 31, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 17–20, 25.
2. Diane Zibell Weber, "Jane Gibbs, the 'Little Bird That Was Caught' and Her Dakota Friends," *Ramsey County History*, 31, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 4–16, 27.
3. Lillie Belle Gibbs LeVesconte, *Little Bird That Was Caught* (St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society, reprinted 1968). This pamphlet was initially published by RCHS in 1954 and has the subtitle "A Story of The Early Years of Jane DeBow Gibbs by her daughter Lillie Belle Gibbs LeVesconte" and has a preface that was written by her son, Lester LeVesconte. Anne E. Neuberger, *Jane Gibbs: "Little Bird That Was Caught"* with illustrations by Tessie Bundick (St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society, 1998).
4. Kendra Dillard, "Farming in the Shadow of the Cities: The Not-So-Rural History of Rose Township Farmers, 1850–1900," *Ramsey County History*, 20, no. 3 (1985): 3–19.
5. Julie Humann, "The Two Worlds of Jane Gibbs: The Gibbs Farm and the Santee Dakota," *Ramsey County History*, 35, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 4–13; Mark Dietrich, "A 'Good Man' in a Changing World: Cloud Man, the Dakota Leader, and His Life and Times," *Ramsey County History*, 36, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 4–24.
6. See for example, Janet Cass, "Gummy, Yellow, White Flint Corn: The Dakota Garden at the Gibbs Farm Museum," *Ramsey County History*, 35, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 14–16.
7. Ralph Thrane, "The Gibbs Museum Heritage Orchard and the Comeback of the Ancient Apple," *Ramsey County History*, 38, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 19–21.
8. Samuel W. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, reprinted 1986; first published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1908); Sarah E. Boehme, Christian F. Feest, and Patricia Condon Johnston, *Seth Eastman: A Portfolio of North American Indians* (Afton, Minn.: Afton Historical Society Press, 1995).
9. This painting, which is titled "Sioux Village, Lake Calhoun, near Fort Snelling," was done while Catlin was exploring the West. It is reproduced on the cover of the Spring 2001 issue of *Ramsey County History*.



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*In the late 1990s, landscape architect John Koepke prepared this conceptual drawing of the Gibbs Museum. The drawing shows how a replica sod house could be positioned at the center of the prairie to function as the key element in the movement in both space and time from a Dakota interpretation in the northern portion of the museum to a pioneer interpretation in the southern part where the Gibbs farmhouse and barn already stood. Drawing courtesy of the Ramsey County Historical Society archives. For more on the Gibbs Museum, see page 22.*