

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

Summer 2015

Volume 50, Number 2

Long-Ago Snapshots

*When Sitting Bull  
Was Photographed  
in St. Paul*

*Leo J. Harris*

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*When Ramsey County Politics Had an Edge*  
**Maas vs. Williams**

*Paul D. Nelson, page 3*



A 1934 campaign poster calling for voters to reelect Congressman Melvin Maas. Maas, a Republican, won this election, defeating four other candidates who split the votes in Minnesota's Fourth Congressional District, which included Ramsey County. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 50, Number 2

Summer 2015

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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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

## A Message from the Editorial Board

Enjoy fun summer reading with this issue. The political landscape in Ramsey County in the 1920s and '30s was not dull. Paul Nelson has written a lively account of the rivalry between Melvin Maas, a colorful Republican congressman, and his left-leaning and equally passionate challenger, Howard Williams. It's a great read. Leo J. Harris explores the world of professional photography in St. Paul in the 1880s. In particular, portraits of Sitting Bull illustrate an up-and-coming technology, used to record the poignancy of a defeated warrior. And Janice Quick reveals the brief but sparkling existence of a midway carnival on the island in Lake Phalen in the early 1900s. Until concerns about water pollution shut it down, it hosted many festive family outings. We have a few interesting book reviews, too, and updates from readers. We are always interested in what you think.

*Anne Cowie*  
Chair, Editorial Board

# Carnies and Calamities

## A Carnival Midway on the Island at Phalen Park, 1903–1908

Janice R. Quick

In June 1903, at the site of today's Phalen Park picnic island, city employees dredged the outer edges of a swamp to form a lagoon for passage of canoes and rowboats from Phalen Lake to Round Lake. They mounded the dredged material in the center of the swamp to create an island, where ambitious young Jacob Barnet created an amusement park that teemed with carnies and calamities.

The Saint Paul Board of Park Commissioners had awarded a Phalen Park contract to Barnet, the assistant manager of the Como Park pavilion and amusements.<sup>1</sup> Within the terms of the new contract, Barnet agreed to (1) install counters and fixtures in Phalen Park's first refreshment pavilion, which had been constructed earlier in 1903 at the site of today's Lakeside Activities Center; (2) manage the pavilion; (3) establish an amusement park on the new island, with a giant figure-8 rollercoaster and a carnival midway; and (4) manage Phalen Park's first public beach and bathhouse, which he was to construct on the east

shore of Round Lake. During the first five years of the contract, Barnet was to make twelve \$1,000 payments to the Park Board for the privilege of operating concession stands at the pavilion, amusement park, and bathhouse; he would retain proceeds from the concessions. At the end of five years, the Park Board would be given ownership of the pavilion counters and fixtures, giant rollercoaster, and bathhouse.<sup>2</sup>

Under Barnet's management, the classy two-and-one-half-story Phalen Park pavilion offered intimate gas-lighted dining spaces and shoreline balconies where evening patrons savored boiled ham-



This photo shows passengers aboard the 15-gauge railway, for a leisurely journey to the carnival midway. Photo from the *St. Paul Daily News*, August 3, 1905, p. 3.

and-vegetable dinners served with soups, breads, pastries, and ice cream. Casual ground-level refreshment counters in the pavilion supplied root beer, soft drinks, popcorn, and candy.

Barnet planned to open the amusement park in July 1904. He hired a crew of laborers who hastily nailed together a wooden bridge across the lagoon at the west side of the island, for what Barnet had hoped would be immediate delivery of tracks for a rollercoaster. Preparations for the midway were delayed, however, when settling and sinking of the mud and muck that had shaped the island repeatedly caused that island to revert to a swamp, despite periodic additions of fill over a period of two years. All construction was delayed through the spring of 1905, when the addition of 16,681 cubic yards of earthen fill finally stabilized the island.<sup>3</sup>

### The Midway Opens

Barnet opened the midway to the public on Sunday, July 9, 1905, and thousands of pleasure-seekers crowded the 3.6-acre island. Children paid five-cent fares and adults paid ten-cent fares for a first-day total of 8,000 rides on a rollicking figure-8 rollercoaster, 4,000 rides on a fanciful "flying horses" musical carousel,



Today's quiet Phalen Park picnic island hosted a raucous carnival midway in the first decade of the twentieth century. Photo by Janice R. Quick. Photo courtesy of Janice R. Quick.

and 1,800 teetering thrills atop a giant Ferris wheel. The midway was formally opened the following Wednesday with enthusiastic speeches delivered by Minnesota Governor John Johnson and Saint Paul Mayor Robert Smith.

Each day for four summers, throngs of excited children and eager adults poured from the doors of city streetcars at the Phalen Park station and raced three cross-country blocks to the amusement park on the island, or paid a five-cent fare to travel aboard a 15-gauge miniature railroad that moved at a leisurely pace from the streetcar station to the park pavilion and then to the island. Visitors delighted in the daily sights and sounds of free outdoor circus acts and vaudeville performances. Different artists and entertainers performed each week. “James Dougherty, the High Wire King,” walked a tightrope high above the island. “Diavoli” dove from a perilously high platform into a shallow tank of water. “Diavolo, the Fire Demon,” dove from a great height into a tank of twenty-foot flames. “Kataro, the Hindoo Juggler,” juggled knives and “slept” peacefully upon the points of eight bayonets.

Other acts included “The Two Lade Brothers,” who performed daring acrobatics on a circus trapeze, including “feats of strength displayed by the elder brother in balancing the younger in a trapeze held in his teeth.”<sup>4</sup> One of the Lade brothers, nicknamed “Professor Lade,” stunned audiences with “a slide for life on the slack wire [zip line]” attached to a flying hydrogen blimp. The Wrest family of five flying trapeze artists executed thrill-

ing aerial gymnastics. “Morille” also performed trapeze stunts. “DeVeo, the Head Balancer,” balanced heavy machinery on his head. “McGrath, the Upside Down Man,” completed feats of herculean strength while walking on his hands. Leo Wilder juggled and presented magic tricks. Zats Zaroni (also known as Sans Zarino) captivated spectators with magic tricks and “his Hindoo box mystery.”<sup>5</sup> “Professor Casselle” made hot-air balloon ascensions and performed aerial stunts from the edges of the basket. “The Female Minstrels,” in blackface, entertained with songs and comic skits. “Buck and Wing Artists, Kane & Bouges,” danced in wooden-soled shoes to fast-paced African rhythms.

In a sideshow pavilion dubbed the Temple of Mirth, silent motion pictures and film from the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) were accompanied by live music played on a steam calliope. Entrants to “A Scenic Trip of the World” boarded an 80-passenger railroad car where they gazed through the windows at moving film of distant lands. At the House of Trouble, skeletons and ghosts emerged from dark corners. In

the Fun Factory, a maze of curved mirrors produced distorted reflections and a winding tunnel lured visitors to pass a series of perplexing visual illusions as though they walked at a slant. At a shooting gallery, would-be sharpshooters fired toy guns at spinning targets and occasionally won inexpensive prizes.<sup>6</sup>



*The first Phalen Park pavilion was completed in 1903 at the site of today's Lakeside Activities Center. This photo was taken in 1902. Photo courtesy of Janice R. Quick.*

Pianists and singers presented “illustrated songs,” in which live performances were accompanied by descriptive colored photos projected onto a screen. Daily afternoon and evening band concerts on the island were played by a variety of bands, including the Harmony Band of twenty-two musicians; Weide’s military band; the *St. Paul Daily News*’ Newsboys Band of thirty-two young newspaper vendors; the Knights of Pythias benevolent society band of thirty-four musicians; the Ancient Order of Union Workers band; Bernadotte Band; and the First Regiment military band. Sing-alongs featured popular songs such as “A Bicycle Built for Two,” “My Wild Irish Rose,” “A Bird in a Gilded Cage,” “In the Good Old Summertime,” “Ida, Sweet as Apple Cider,” “In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree,” “In My Merry Oldsmobile.” On Wednesday and Friday evenings, sing-alongs in German embraced traditional folk tunes and popular German songs such as “Lorelei,” “Der Lindenbaum,” “Du, du liegst mir im Herzen,” and “Freut euch des Lebens.”

At weekly talent competitions, Jacob Barnet enthusiastically showcased the entertainment skills of local musicians, singers, magicians, tumblers, and comics. Winners were rewarded with free passes to amusement rides and with prizes such as loaves of Chidlow Bread, Duke of Parma cigars, and other merchandise donated by businessmen who shared with Barnet the cost of printing handbills that publicized activities on the island and advertised the merchants’ wares. The handbills were dis-



*A miniature railroad carried passengers from the Phalen Park pavilion, which is seen here in a postcard from 1907, to an amusement park on the island. The postcard is courtesy of the archives of the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.*



A wooden footbridge crossed the island lagoon. Photo from the *St. Paul Daily News*, August 8, 1905, p. 2.

tributed at the Como Park and Phalen Park pavilions and streetcar stations and at the advertisers' places of business.

At concession stands on the island, visitors purchased fresh lemonade, peanuts, popcorn, Fairy Floss cotton candy, Barnet's handmade chocolates, Barnet's home-bottled root beer, cigars, and firecrackers.

Festivities at the amusement park concluded each evening with an elaborate display of aerial fireworks, launched from the eastern shore of Phalen Lake. Synchronized bursts of color produced sky-high images of an eagle and shield, a Japanese emperor's fan "shown on a field of red flame with the royal emblems of the state woven in the fan,"<sup>7</sup> the dove of peace, a giant pinwheel, and "the reproduction from a photograph of the handsomest lady in St. Paul."<sup>8</sup>

Gleeful giddy days and evenings on the island were especially relished by the 600 teenage "newsies" of the *St. Paul Daily News*. On one or two days each summer, they were temporarily released from their duties as newspaper vendors on city street corners, and they boarded free chartered streetcars that whisked them directly to Phalen Park. At the park, Jacob Barnet allowed them free admission to all of the amusements on the island, and he treated them to free refreshments at the pavilion. At other locations in the park, they played baseball, competed for prizes in a tug-of-war, and chased a greased pig. On each occasion, the boys enjoyed a full day of outdoor fun, and the next issue of the newspaper included an article in praise of the newspaper's generosity and in praise of the wonderful entertainment on the island.

## Problems at the Park

Unfortunately, not all park visitors welcomed the clamor and commotion of amusements on the island. Some objected to the screeching of the rides and the squealing of the riders in what was otherwise a tranquil setting for fishing, canoeing and other quiet activities. Others criticized the litter of the carnival crowds, especially the wastepaper that floated in the island lagoon and in the lake. Many others complained of offensive odors near the island. City health officials vehemently objected to the overflowing outhouses, which were the source of the odors.

The contract of 1903 between Barnet and the Board of Park Commissioners had not addressed the need for restrooms for thousands of daily visitors to the island amusements. Both parties had resolutely refused responsibility for construction of restrooms until six days before the midway had been opened to the public. Then the Park Board had summarily instructed the Superintendent of Parks "to make temporary provisions for additional toilet rooms at Phalen Park."<sup>9</sup> As a result, park employees had quickly constructed two makeshift wooden privies on a hillside southwest of the island.

Wooden vaults below the privies frequently leaked or overflowed, and the Saint Paul Board of Water Commissioners feared that sewage from the privies would

seep into Phalen Lake and pollute the city's drinking water, which had been pumped to homes and businesses from Phalen Lake since 1869. The temporary privies had not yet been removed from service in July 1906 when the Board of Water Commissioners ordered an inspection of the conditions on the island and adjacent grounds. A report of the conditions declared:

The island is strewn with waste paper from peanut, popcorn and candy bags and destroyed firecrackers. The Ladies' and Gentlemen's Toilet(s) . . . are frame structures and the vaults underneath are built from 2" lumber, 9 X 12 wide and about 12 feet deep. Those vaults are about 110 feet from the made waterway [island lagoon], and set on a slight hill 25 feet above the waterway . . . It is only a matter of time when the drainage from them will slip through the sand and contaminate the made waterway, which in its course will find its way to the main Lake.<sup>10</sup>

Almost three months later, the privies had still not been removed from service, and Dr. Justus Ohage, Commissioner of Health, delivered to the Board of Water Commissioners a terse message:

A close inspection of the toilet rooms at Lake Phalen . . . proves them to be a menace and . . . source of danger to the people of our City. These vaults are made of wood and constructed so that nothing will prevent the sewage . . . entering into the water of Lake Phalen. They must be moved fur-

## Cost of a Family Picnic at Phalen Park

The *St. Paul Daily News* reported in 1906 that a family of six could enjoy a picnic at Phalen Park for a cost of \$3.95 including lunch and transportation, as well as amusements in the park and on the island:

The luncheon: two loaves of bread . . . 10¢; two pounds pressed corned beef or ham . . . 25¢; one can mustard sardines . . . 10¢; half a dozen cinnamon rolls . . . 5¢; cake . . . 15¢; fruit . . . 25¢; dill pickles and olives . . . 20¢. A bottle of iced tea or bottled lemonade may be brought from home, or a pitcher of lemonade secured at the park.

Cost of a Park Trip: carfare [streetcar fare] to Phalen and return for a family of six . . . 60¢; boat [rental of a row boat for one hour] . . . 25¢; other amusements, merry-go-round, Ferris wheel, etc., 5¢ and 10¢ each . . . \$1.00; lemonade and incidentals . . . \$1.00.

Using an inflation calculator, the \$3.95 cost for transportation, food, and entertainment in 1906 would cost about \$90.00 today.

Source: *St. Paul Daily News*, July 3, 1906, p. 6.

ther from the Lake and not higher than the level of the Lake and built over water tight cesspools made of stone and cement.<sup>11</sup>

### Toilets a Menace

The following summer, neither Barnet nor the Park Board had yet accepted responsibility for replacement of the temporary privies, and visitors to the island continued to use the malodorous and overflowing toilets. Carnies and conces-

sionaires avoided the privies by relieving themselves at their work sites. An inspection by employees of the Saint Paul Department of Health revealed:

On the island we found several places that were used for toilets and there is garbage and rubbish all over the grounds, there is also a stagnant pool of waste water coming from the refreshment stand at the Figure 8 Roller Coaster and this will wash in to the lake when there is a heavy rainfall.

We respectfully recommend these conditions be remedied at once, and if it is not kept in a proper sanitary condition in the future that steps be taken by this Department to prohibit the use of this place as a public park. . . .<sup>12</sup>

At the close of the 1907 season, Barnet continued to “respectfully deny any obligation as per my lease at Phalen Park to construct any toilet rooms on the Island,”<sup>13</sup> despite persistent coercion from the Board of Park Commissioners. The debate ended in March 1908, with a decision by the corporation attorney for the City of Saint Paul that “There is nothing in the . . . agreement requiring Mr. Barnet to construct toilet rooms.”<sup>14</sup>

During the late spring of 1908, the Park Board grudgingly funded construction of enlarged toilet rooms at the park pavilion, as the previous rooms had been overcrowded with peeved adults and fidgeting children who used those rest-



“Meet Me on the Island” was the slogan for newspaper ads that promoted activities on the island at Phalen Park. This advertisement is from the *St. Paul Daily News*, June 23, 1906, p. 7.



The *John Barnet Amusement Company* advertised attractions on the island in this 1905 handbill. Handbill courtesy of *Janice R. Quick*.

### Prevention of Water Contamination, ca. 1906

From 1903 through at least 1908, the Saint Paul Board of Water Commissioners bristled at activities and events that threatened the purity of the city’s drinking water, which was pumped from Phalen Lake. The causes of their concerns were varied. Workhorses were used in the construction of the first Phalen Park pavilion and were stabled near the lakeshore. Neighborhood dairy farmers rented acres of park land where they pastured cows. Employees of the Parks Department herded sheep through the park to keep grass cropped. Outhouses overflowed near the island lagoon. In response to these and other potential contaminants, the Board of Water Commissioners presented the Board of Park Commissioners with a statement of “Rules for the Prevention of Contamination to the Lake Phalen Water Supply”:

No stables shall be placed within 200 feet of the lake and then only at such points that the drainage therefrom cannot empty into the lake. All the manure shall be placed in a tight covered box and shall be removed as often as cleanliness may require.

No hitching or standing place for horses shall be constructed or located that the manure from it may wash into the lake or into any stream, spring or dry water course, running into the lake.

No dead animal, bird or fish nor any filthy or impure water, nor any decayed fruit, vegetables, substances, remains of lunches, shall be thrown into the lake nor thrown into any spring, stream or water course, running into the lake.

No horses, cows, sheep or other animals shall be washed in the lake or in any influent stream.

No bathing [swimming] will be permitted in the lake or in any influent stream.

No privy shall be located within 200 feet of the lake or any stream, spring or dry water course, the water from which, when running, empties eventually into the lake.

All privies constructed shall either have a water tight brick or cemented vault or have under the seats, half barrels, tubs, pails or water tight boxes or troughs arranged to be easily and frequently removed, cleaned and returned to their places under the privy seats and must be absolutely water tight and not allowed to overflow. Ashes and dry earth must be used in these privies as a deodorizer and absorbent.

Source: Rules for the Prevention of Contamination to the Lake Phalen Water Supply [prepared by the St. Paul Board of Water Commissioners and presented to the St. Paul Board of Park Commissioners], ca 1906, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.

rooms before and after an excursion to the island. Park employees removed the overflowing temporary outhouses near the island, but they did not replace them. Neither Barnet nor the park commissioners wanted to spend more money on what would be a lost cause if the Board of Water Commissioners prevailed in closing the amusement park and prohibiting a beach and bathhouse.



One of the many attractions on the island at Phalen Park was concerts performed by the Newsboys Band, which was made up of young newspaper vendors. Photo from the *St. Paul Daily News*, June 6, 1906, p. 11.

## No More Clap Trap

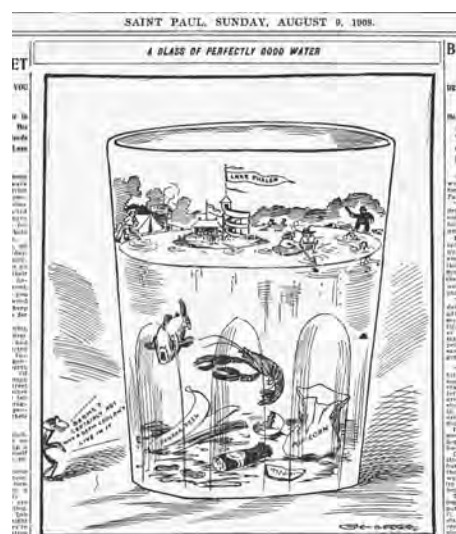
The absence of toilet facilities near the island hastened the demise of the amusement park. The number of visitors to the island dwindled and proceeds slumped.<sup>15</sup> Early in August 1908, Barnet asked the Board of Park Commissioners to waive a

past-due payment of \$1,000 and to release him from the remainder of the contract.<sup>16</sup> Park commissioners welcomed the opportunity to void their Phalen Park contract with Barnet; they voted to forgive the overdue payment and to accept his proposal that he immediately remove all buildings, stages, tracks, devices and apparatuses, including the pavilion counters and fixtures and the giant figure-8 rollercoaster.<sup>17</sup>

A headline in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* announced, “Phalen Park is Rid of Clap Trap; Get-the-Money Devices Banished from Island.” The opening sentences in the article declared:

Phalen Park is to be rid of clap-trap amusement features. No longer will its beauty be marred by the whirl and buzz of innumerable get-the-money devices that didn't get. The pavilion is to be kept open until Oct. 1 for the accommodation of patrons, but the gasoline engines and steam tramways stop at once.<sup>18</sup>

The amusement park closed without fanfare on August 7, 1908. One week later, Barnet filed for bankruptcy,<sup>19</sup> although he remained the assistant manager of the Como Park pavilion and refreshments through at least 1912.<sup>20</sup> The Phalen Park lakeside pavilion, which had been constructed of wood, suffered winter ice damage and was dismantled in 1922. No beach or bathhouse was constructed at Round Lake. Today's Phalen Park beach was established on the southwest shore of Phalen Lake in 1915 after the expan-



A cartoon from the August 9, 1908 edition of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* dramatized the potential for pollution of St. Paul's drinking water resulting from the faulty sewage system at Phalen Park.

sion of a city water pumping station at McCarron's Lake enabled the Saint Paul Board of Water Commissioners to relinquish Phalen Lake as a source of city water. Today's beach is at the site of the former Phalen Lake city water pumping station.

*Janice R. Quick enjoyed growing up near Phalen Lake and wonders why the island at Phalen Park is unnamed. She leads cemetery art tours and local history hikes. This is her fourth article in Ramsey County History.*

## Notes

1. *St. Paul Globe*, June 9, 1903, p. 1.
2. Agreement by and between Jacob Barnet and the City of St. Paul via its Board of Park Commissioners, June 3, 1903, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department, St. Paul, Minn.
3. *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City of St. Paul for the Year Ending December 31, 1905* (St. Paul: Minnesota Typographic Co., 1906), 44, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department. A copy of this document is also available at the Minnesota Historical Society.
4. *St. Paul Daily News*, July 31, 1906, p. 7.
5. *St. Paul Daily News*, July 31, 1906, p. 7.
6. Entertainment features on the island were noted in various issues of the *St. Paul Daily News*, 1905–1908.
7. *St. Paul Daily News*, July 29, 1906, p. 9.
8. *St. Paul Daily News*, July 7, 1906, p. 7.
9. Board File No. 739 (July 3, 1905) St. Paul Board of Park Commissioners, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
10. Letter from George Doorley, Inspector, to John Caulfield, Secretary, Board of Water Commissioners, July 6, 1906, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
11. Letter from Justus Ohage, M.D., Commissioner of Health, to the Board of Water Commissioners, September 25, 1906, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
12. Letter from employees of the St. Paul Department of Health to Gustav Renz, M.D., Commissioner of Health (following the resignation of Dr. Justus Ohage), July 3, 1907, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
13. Letter from Jacob Barnet to George Redington, Secretary, Board of Park Commissioners, October 20, 1907, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
14. Handwritten response from James Michael, Corporation Attorney, added to the letter of October 20, 1907, from Jacob Barnet to George Redington, March 2, 1908, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
15. *St. Paul Daily News*, August 6, 1908, p. 1.
16. Letter from Jacob Barnet to Daniel Aberle, President, Board of Park Commissioners, August 3, 1908, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
17. Resolution of the Board of Park Commissioners, adopted August 6, 1908, archives of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department.
18. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; August 7, 1908; p. 4.
19. *St. Paul Daily News*, August 12, 1908, p. 1.
20. Jacob Barnet Papers (P1366), History Center, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn. For a few years in the 1920s, Barnet managed concessions at Wildwood Park in White Bear Lake.

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*This photograph of Chief Sitting Bull was made at the photography studio of Alfred Palmquist and Peder T. Jurgens in St. Paul in 1884. The signature at the bottom of the cabinet card adds to the value and importance of the photo. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress. For more on Sitting Bull and Palmquist and Jurgens, see page 13.*