

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

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Emma F. Brunson:
The First Woman Registered
as an Architect in Minnesota

Diane Trout-Oertel
—Page 15

Fall 2017

Volume 52, Number 3

Onward Central, Onward Central: The 150-Year Legacy of St. Paul Central High School

Steven C. Trimble, page 3



St. Paul's Central High School as it was in the 1920s, left, and as it is today. As part of celebrating the high school's 150th anniversary, students entered the building through an arch of red and black balloons, the school colors. The Central mascot, the Minuteman, is shown in the patch on the right. The photo of the building in 1920 is courtesy of Steven C. Trimble; the photo of the students is courtesy of former Central teacher Jack Schlukebier; the patch is courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society; the other photos courtesy of John M. Lindley.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 52, Number 3

Fall 2017

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

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A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue brings us Steve Trimble’s thoughtful history of Central High School, St. Paul’s first and still-operating high school, which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. He traces the development of the school, which first graduated two students in 1870 with one giving a Latin oration! Over the years, Central has grown to a diverse and vigorous institution. Along the way, he highlights notable alumni such as Max Schulman, writer and creator of TV’s *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*; Jeanne Arth, Wimbledon champion; and Dave Winfield, member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. In Diane Trout-Ortel’s insightful examination of the work and life of Emma Brunson, we are treated to a profile of Minnesota’s first female registered architect. In the 1920s and ’30s, when most women were not employed outside the home and many were busy with domestic duties, Brunson designed and built a number of St. Paul homes. We are lucky that both of these authors have skillfully used primary documents and other records, a great resource for good local history. Trimble includes excerpts from Central’s literary magazine and student newspaper to set the tone and uncover stories of life at the school. And Trout-Ortel has interviewed the current owners of many of the houses that Brunson designed. Their accounts of the details of construction help us to understand what made them fall in love with their homes. Happy reading!

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Book Review

F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota: The Writer & His Friends at Home

Dave Page with photography by Jeff Krueger

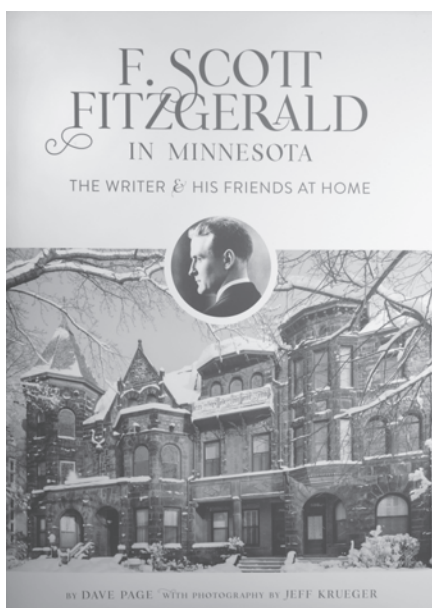
St. Paul: Fitzgerald in Saint Paul, 2017
296 pages; hardcover; 100 black and white photographs and 400 color plates; \$39.95

Reviewed by Robert F. Garland

F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota: The Writer and His Friends at Home, the admirable collaboration of writer Dave Page and photographer Jeff Krueger, will be thoroughly enjoyed by many readers of *Ramsey County History*.

Indeed, *Fitzgerald in Minnesota* is as much a book of Krueger's excellent photography informed by Page's splendid writing, as it is a book of Page's excellent writing illustrated by Krueger's splendid photographs. Writer and photographer have added greatly to our understanding of the youthful experiences that underlie much of Scott Fitzgerald's work. Those friends and those homes helped make him who he was, much as we're reminded in the old adage, "Where were you when you were in high school?"

Organized first along St. Paul's historic Summit Avenue and then on through Cathedral Hill, and Crocus Hill, and with side trips to Downtown, to Dellwood, and to Frontenac, we are able to join Scott Fitzgerald and his St. Paul friends in correspondence, conversations, visits, parties, and adventures in the context of dozens of beautiful homes of St. Paul and the other locations known to many who have lived in the area. Along the way we regularly



encounter people and places that we meet again in Fitzgerald's writings. Not only do we read what Scott did and felt, but we also see what he saw.

Dave Page's highly skilled writing is fully matched by the quality of all the work that has obviously gone before it. He has meticulously researched his subject, using not only Fitzgerald's writings, other published sources, document collections, newspaper and Internet information, but also less traditional sources such as census data or information derived from it. This allows much greater insight to questions of not only who lived where and when (and Scott's friends and their families moved from one house to another with surprising frequency), but also to how many siblings and servants were to be found "at home."

Jeff Krueger's wonderful color photographs show equal attention to all aspects of his craft. They are wide view

and close-up, day and night, multi-seasonal, and indoors and out. Moreover, they are joined by numerous and well-chosen black and white historical photographs, to the extent that the illustrations alone would make the book one of the most "well-thumbed" in many libraries.

Krueger's color photos also provide welcome assurance of the homes themselves. Many of the great houses of Summit Hill and environs are of long-lasting stone and brick and have aged reasonably well. However, others of these towering, old Queen Anne and Victorian Revival houses are mostly of wood and subject to more wear and tear. It is great to see all the fine restorations in color, bric-a-brac included!

Editorial and production support by Jim Bindas, Jodie Ahern, and Heidi Miller have been fully equal to the quality of the writing and photography. The numerous appropriately chosen historical illustrations complement the skilled work of the author and photographer. The book seems expertly designed. It looks and reads well, and shows attention to detail and the readers' interests and needs. Even the well-known photograph of the 1910 class of Scott's dancing school (a St. Paul institution that this reviewer can attest was still going strong almost 40 years later) has added a complete caption showing all those present.

The publisher's president, Stu Wilson, sums all this up by aptly describing the book as "a museum catalog for the permanent and perpetual exhibit of buildings and landscapes that inspired F. Scott Fitzgerald in his youth."

As readers of *Ramsey County History*, our takeaways from *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota* will vary. Some of

us (especially those of “of some years”) will collect familiar names of school-mates, neighbors, coworkers, business associates, and other friends, such as Dunn, Van Ness, McQuillan, Armstrong, Bigelow, Driscoll, Dean, Stringer, Daniels, Ingersoll, Jackson, Ramaley, Baillon, Ogden, and Seymour.

Just as they value photos of old friends, others will treasure the photographs of the old houses that we always see driving down Summit Avenue, or once were invited to, or are reminded of in Fitzgerald’s short stories, or remember as the one across the street from our grandparents’ house.

And perhaps a few will attempt to frame minor items of Fitzgerald-connected trivia as in the case of my late mother’s second cousin, the late Dr. Warner Ogden, who attended at the birth of the very obscure St. Paul author of this review. That medical practitioner performed a very pale repeat of the delivery of a newborn son that his father, Dr. Benjamin Harvey Ogden, performed at the much more important attendance at the birth of our great St. Paul and Minnesota author, F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Showing how well Page and Krueger have captured the influence of the important friends and homes of Fitzgerald’s younger days, let’s end this review with some of Scott’s words spoken by Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*: “. . . and the street lights and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family’s name.”

Bob Garland is a retired corporate executive and former member of the RCHS board of directors. He is also the author of more than a dozen books, including a mystery series featuring ex-spy, ex-corporate leader, now university computer science lecturer and sleuth, Humboldt Prior. High Winter Murders (2017) is Garland’s most recent addition to this series.



**WORLD WAR I
MINNESOTA**
★
ERIC NATHANSON



World War I Minnesota

Eric Nathanson

Charleston, S.C.: The History Press,
2016

144 pages; photos; \$21.99; softcover

Reviewed by John M. Lindley

Although World War I began in August 1914 some eight weeks after a Serbian nationalist assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his wife, the United States didn’t join the conflict until early April 1917. Unrestricted submarine warfare employed by the Imperial German Navy was the immediate cause for the U.S. declaration of war, but many Americans opposed joining Great Britain and France in the fighting (in the Senate there were 82 votes in favor, 6 opposed, and 8 not voting; in the House the vote was 373 to 50 with 9 not voting). By the time an armistice ended the war on November 11, 1918, the military conflict had raged across northern Europe, parts of Africa, and portions of the Middle East.

Author Eric Nathanson recounts in this short book Minnesota’s political and social mood during the war. His purpose is to give us what might be called the “executive summary” of what

happened at home and on the battlefield that involved Minnesotans. A skilled writer, Nathanson has published numerous books and articles dealing with Minnesota history, particularly as it relates to Minneapolis. Thus much of this book is about the impact of the war on the home front in the Twin Cities but not exclusively. There is, for example, a brief account of the initial Minnesota outbreak of the influenza pandemic in September 1918 at an army training camp in Wells Village in Faribault County.

This history has six chapters. They cover the ways in which Minnesota rallied behind President Woodrow Wilson once war was declared and how young men from across the state registered for military conscription and were subsequently drafted into the army or volunteered for military service. Nathanson then summarizes the activities of the Commission of Public Safety that the Legislature established in April 1917. Putatively organized to defend Minnesota, it was coopted by an extreme and outspoken civilian leader, John F. McGee. This new state agency became the means for stamping out any speech or action deemed to be disloyal or subversive, thereby trampling on a wide range of civil liberties. Its principal targets were hyphenated Americans, particularly German-Americans living in New Ulm and elsewhere, and supporters of organized labor.

Later chapters discuss the Liberty bond drives to aid the U.S. in financing the war effort, the failed attempt of the workers of the Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company to strike for higher wages in the late fall of 1917, and the unsuccessful attempt of Charles A. Lindbergh Sr. of Little Falls, a progressive candidate endorsed by the Non-Partisan League, to challenge incumbent governor J.A.A. Burnquist in the gubernatorial election of 1918. The NPL was an agrarian-based reformist organization with roots in North Dakota that was an anathema to the Commission of Public Safety and its allies.

Nathanson, however, makes no reference to the influence the war had other

major issues that touched Minnesota at that time such as the efforts to pass constitutional amendments instituting national Prohibition (18th Amendment ratified in January 1919) and women's suffrage (19th Amendment ratified in August 1921). No mention of the part played by women such as Clara Ueland in Minneapolis or Nellie Griswold Francis in St. Paul seems to this reviewer to be a big omission. Given the magnitude of the political and social changes that emerged from these campaigns that had deep roots in the nineteenth century in the U.S., they alone could easily have made up another chapter in this otherwise informative book.

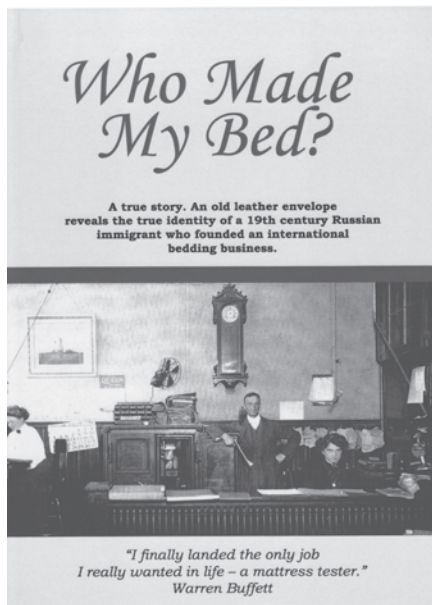
After the army organized and trained the millions of men who volunteered or were drafted into the service, many were sent overseas to France. The best-known Minnesota unit to serve in Europe was the 1st Field Artillery, a part of the state's National Guard. This unit became the 151st Field Artillery in the army's 42nd Infantry Division, known as the Rainbow Division because it was composed of National Guard units from twenty-six states. American soldiers got more training from their allies following their arrival in France. Then their units were committed to operations in the front-line trenches.

Nathanson devotes only a handful of pages to military service involving Minnesotans in 1917–1918. In two appendixes to this book he does reprint some key passages from the *History of Base Hospital 26*, a hospital unit in France that was organized by personnel from the University of Minnesota, and from Louis Collins's history of 151st Field Artillery (1924).

Given the constraints of the format of this book, the lack of coverage of military operations involving personnel or units from Minnesota is understandable. Anyone seeking this information would be better served by consulting Franklin F. Holbrook and Livia Appel's two-volume history, *Minnesota in the War with Germany* (1928–1932). What is surprising about the sources other than newspapers of the time that Nathanson identifies for this book is that he makes

no reference to the lengthy (twenty-five pages) analysis of the streetcar strike of 1917 that is provided in Mary Lethert Wingerd's *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (2001). On the other hand, he does list three articles published in *Ramsey County History* in his bibliography of some thirty sources.

John M. Lindley is the editor of Ramsey County History.



*Who Made My Bed?
A True Story. True Identity of
a 19th Century Russian Immigrant
Who Founded an International
Bedding Business*

Edward Bronstien and Dee Horwitz
Bloomington, Ind.: iUniverse, 2009
202 pages; softcover; photos; \$17.95

Reviewed by John M. Lindley

Who Made My Bed? is not a book that has just come from the press, but it deserves review in these pages because it's about an aspect of local history in Ramsey County, the origins and development of a family business, that is sometimes overlooked. Coauthors Edward Bronstien Jr. (1927–2014) and Dolores (Dee) Horowitz, members of the family under review, have crafted

a family history and a story of a family business that is informative and insightful while also being honest and humorous. Here there is little separation between the history of the family and the business that the family created. The family in this book is the Bronstiens of St. Paul and their business, the United States Bedding Company. Along the way, we learn about many members of the family, their connections to the family business, and their personalities.

Edward Bronstien's grandfather, Samuel Bronstien (1865–1934), was a Russian immigrant who came to the United States in 1897 from Kishinev (now known as Chisinau), which is in Moldova, a country bordered by Romania and the Ukraine. At the time he departed Russia, Samuel's birth name was Simcha Shapotschnick. Once he reached America, probably using a passport that had belonged to another young man who had died, he was known initially as Samson Bronstein, but when he founded the bedding company that later became U.S. Bedding, Samuel spelled his last name with an ie, or Bronstien and *not* Bronstein.

The woman Samuel later married, Anna Milkes (1869–1949), also came to this country just before 1900. They met on the ship that took them to Ellis Island. The destination for the Milkes family was St. Paul and Samuel went with them. Like many who were native to Russia in the late nineteenth century, the anti-Semitic laws and pogroms under Czar Alexander III led many Jews such as Samuel and Anna to leave their homeland and come to the United States.

Apparently Samuel and Anna learned English quickly and Samuel began working in the food business operated by the Milkes family. Soon Samuel and Anna married and decided in 1898 to start a business in their home on Goodrich Avenue making mattresses. They called the company the United States Bedding Company.

From its start in 1898 U.S. Bedding Company found a ready market and the business was innovative in its manufacturing practices and astute in selling. Early in his career, Samuel used

his initials, “S.B.” as a trademark; later that trademark became known as “Sleep Better” and it helped market their products. Incorporated in 1905, by 1912 United States Bedding was selling a complete line of mattresses, bed frames, pillows, and couches. Soon it employed more than 150 and had outgrown two makeshift factories.

Because the Bernstien family was growing at the same time the company was increasing its sales, Samuel’s sons, Edward Sr., Charles, and Sam, joined the business. A growing population and a strong economy in the 1920s translated into more sales, especially after 1923 when Samuel was awarded a patent for a non-stretchable mattress. High quality standards and a dedication to customer service also helped the firm to grow. Then in 1927 a fire destroyed the company’s manufacturing facility. Fortunately only one of 200 employees was seriously injured. Thanks to insurance and a determination to continue, U.S. Bedding relocated to a building in the Midway neighborhood. When the founder, Samuel, died in 1934, the company employed 400 workers. The three Bernstien sons—the Three Bs, as they were known—took over the business.

One of their innovations in 1930s was to hold a contest to select a name for their improved bed spring. That’s when they picked “King Koil” as the winner and the brand name that has ever since been associated with the company. Today the company is best known as King Koil Sleep Products.

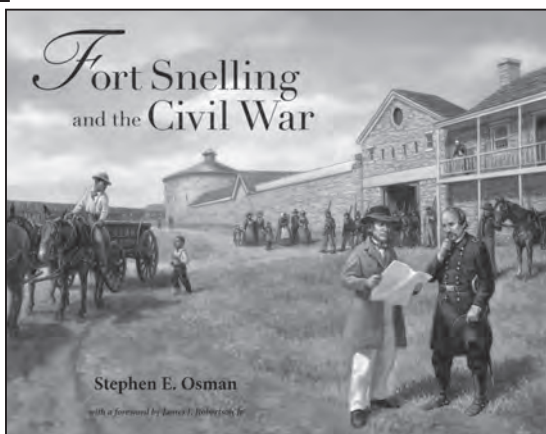
During World War II the company prospered from supplying beds, cots, and mattresses to the armed services. After the war, Edward Bronstien Jr. joined the business as a member of the third generation. He was a graduate of the St. Paul Academy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Minnesota. He had served as a photographer in the Air Force during the war. Bronstien used his education as a metallurgist to move the company forward, improve its products, and ride the economic expansion of the 1950s and ’60s. He became the company president in 1968 and oversaw expansion to new manufacturing plants in Minnesota and elsewhere. He also engineered the merger of U.S. Bedding with the Englander division of the Union Carbide Company. Englander was three times the size of U.S. Bedding and at the time it was the only competitor besides

Simmons that could handle national accounts with a single price quote.

In 1979 U.S. Bedding reported that its sales had exceed \$1 million after taxes and that it would go public. That didn’t happen, however, because the market wasn’t interested. Instead U.S. Bedding’s stockholders sold the company to a competitor, Van Vorst Bedding Company, in California. Van Voorst, however, didn’t do well and it eventually filed for bankruptcy. Although this business failure was personally disappointing to members of the Bronstien family, they survived financially and were able to keep intact the memory of Samuel’s legacy to them and to future generations of Bronstiens.

Every family business has a story that often hinges on the question of who will succeed the founder when the time comes. For U.S. Bedding, the second and third generations expanded and grew the company they inherited. Theirs is a story of hard work and success that is also a part of the history of Ramsey County.

John M. Lindley is the editor of Ramsey County History.



Gifts for the Historian!
Fort Snelling and the Civil War
Stephen E. Osman

Stephen Osman’s new book explores the role of Fort Snelling as a major military post in Minnesota, and its transformation during the Civil War and the U.S.-Dakota conflict. Using detailed research and first-hand accounts, *Fort Snelling and the Civil War* tells the stories of the men and women who created a community in the old Fort.

Fort Snelling and the Civil War is an exploration of a period, a place, and a series of events that shaped Minnesota and the country. It is a book that belongs on the shelf of anyone who is interested in the people and places that made Minnesota, as well as those who are devotees of Civil War and national history.

Beautifully illustrated with more than 100 photos and 7 maps, 16 chapters, source notes, bibliography and index in 336 pages.

Fort Snelling and the Civil War is available in softcover from the Ramsey County Historical Society

\$27.00 regular price, \$24.00 for RCHS Members

Price includes tax

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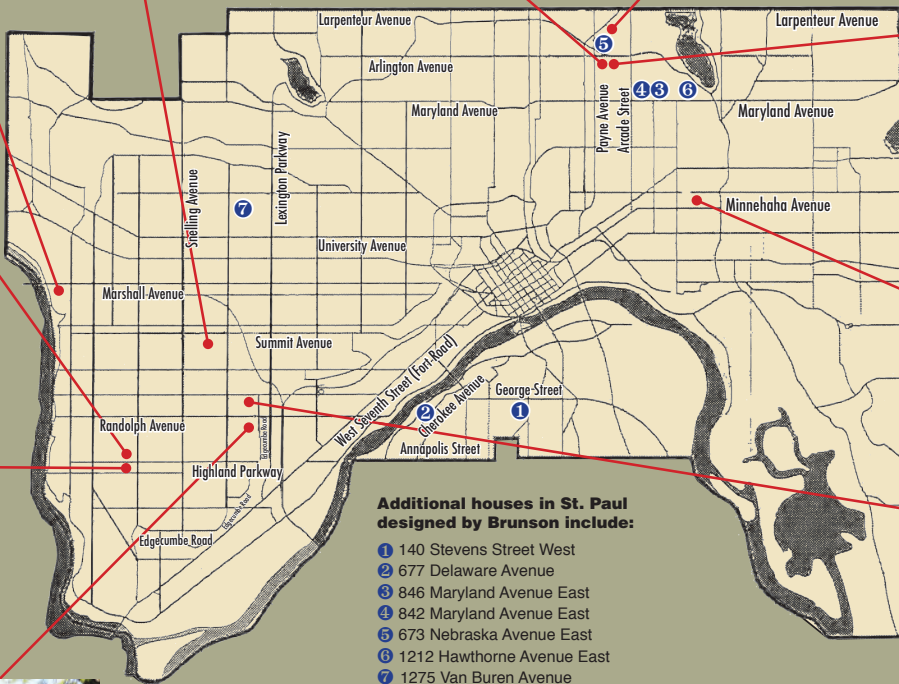
732 Arlington Avenue East



1847 Eleanor Avenue



1855 Pinehurst Avenue



640 Gotzian Street



1233 Edgumbe Road



1435 Edgumbe Road

Emma F. Brunson was the first woman to be registered as an architect in Minnesota. This map shows the location of all the Brunson-designed houses in St. Paul that have been identified to date. Surviving records indicate that there are at least three other houses that she designed, but these records don't state where these houses were. As indicated in the chart on page 19, the house at 846 Maryland Avenue East was later demolished and another structure was built on that site. The photos shown here highlight 10 Brunson-designed houses discussed in Diane Trout-Oertel's article beginning on page 15.