

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

*St. Gaudens' New York Eagle:  
Rescue and Restoration  
of a St. Paul Icon*

Page 12

Fall, 2002

Volume 37, Number 3

*Lost Neighborhood*

**Borup's Addition and the Prosperous  
African Americans Who Lived There**

—Page 4



*A duplex at 555–561 in one of St. Paul's Lost Neighborhoods. This and other houses in the long-since razed Borup's Addition were the homes of pioneer African Americans who came to St. Paul after the Civil War. See article beginning on page 4. Photo by Camera Shop, Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society collections.*



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 37, Number 3

Fall, 2002

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

In February 1998 the Board of Directors of the Ramsey County Historical Society reviewed the Society's Mission Statement and reaffirmed and adopted the following statement:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve, communicate and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship of this history.

This issue of our quarterly magazine once again carries out the Society's goal of discovering and communicating Ramsey County's past. Historian David Riehle gives us a fascinating look at another of St. Paul's "Lost Neighborhoods," known as "Borup's Addition" in the late nineteenth century when this area was home to prosperous African Americans. Next, Christine Podas-Larson describes the construction of the ten-story New York Life Insurance Building, completed in 1889 at Sixth and Minnesota, and the creation of its magnificent sculpture, the *New York Eagle*, by the renowned Augustus St. Gaudens and his brother Louis. Although the building was torn down in 1967, the *Eagle* has survived and soon will soar again over St. Paul at Summit Overlook Park.

Long-time Society member and family historian Joanne Englund's "Growing Up in St. Paul" essay focuses on her grandmother Minda's experiences in spiritualism while living in the Midway district. Included is a remarkable photograph of Minda and the other women who worked at the Bohn Refrigerator Company about the time of World War I. Finally, *Ramsey County History* returns to an earlier era in state and local history with an account of the life and times of the colorful fur trader and entrepreneur. Norman W. Kittson.

*John M. Lindley*, Chair, Editorial Board



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## *Fur Trader, Banker, Danish Vice Consul*

### **This Was the Borup of Borup's Addition**



*Charles William Wulff Borup.*

Charles William Wulff Borup was a fur trader, banker, lumberman, and Minnesota's first Danish vice consul. He was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on December 10, 1806, the son of a prominent family. Educated in Europe, he earned a medical degree before a love of adventure took over and he set off at the age of twenty-one for St. Thomas, a Danish possession in the Virgin Islands.

A visit to New York in 1827, however, convinced him to remain in America. Through John Jacob Astor, Borup was hired as a clerk for the American Fur Company post at Mackinac, Michigan. In the summer of 1832, while at Mackinac he married Elizabeth Beaulieu, whose mother was a member of a Ojibwe band and whose father was a French-Canadian fur trader.

Borup rose quickly in the hierarchy of the fur trade. In 1835 he moved to La Pointe, Wisconsin, as the American Fur Company's chief agent in the Lake Superior region. For a time he was the only trained physician between Sault Sainte Marie and Fort Snelling. In 1848 he moved to St. Paul as agent for the St. Louis-based fur trading firm of Pierre Chouteau Jr. The following year he bought the Borup block, bounded by today's Ninth, Tenth, and Wacouta Streets, and there he built a villa for his family. His house at that time was out in the country north of St. Paul, but it became a social gathering place for St. Paul's elite.

A Swedish visitor to St. Paul in 1851, Fredrika Bremer, described the Borup home and family, writing of them with the nineteenth-century insensitivity that makes us wince today:

I have become acquainted with a Danish merchant, resident here, who has made a considerable fortune in a few years in fur trade with the Indians, and who has built himself a large and handsome country house at some little distance from the city. His wife, who is the daughter of an Indian woman by a white man, has the dark Indian eyes, and features not unlike those of the Feather-cloud woman (a Sioux woman). In other respects, she is as much a gentlewoman as an agreeable white lady. I promised this kind Dane, who retains the perfect Danish characteristics in the midst of Americans, that I would, on my return, in passing through Copenhagen, pay a visit to his old mother, and convey to her his greeting.

After Minnesota became a territory and the rush to settlement began, Borup and his brother-in-law Charles Oakes

formed the Bank of Borup and Oakes, the first legitimate banking house in St. Paul. The firm was advertised as "Bankers and Brokers" and dealt in loans, discounts, money-changing, and the sale of drafts. Appropriately enough, since speculation in real estate was rife during the mid-1850s, Borup & Oakes dealt in the purchase and sale of real estate and also invested in mortgages. Associated with Borup and his brother-in-law were two "silent partners:" Captain N. J. T. Dana, a graduate of West Point who had served in the regular army, and Alexander Faribault who, like Borup, had been a pioneer fur trader. The bank closed its doors in the Panic of 1857, but Borup already had become a wealthy man.

In a biographical sketch, Borup was described as "a lover of music and its refining influence, and did all to cultivate its sciences in others, especially his children." Charles E. Flandrau wrote in his reminiscences of Minnesota that "Dr. Borup was a . . . fine musician, he had a charming family and he erected a spacious and elegant mansion and entertained profusely. I attended musical soirees at his house, led by himself with the violin, accompanied by two grand pianos played by members of his family."

Borup died on June 6, 1859, of a heart attack, leaving behind "a comfortable estate for his wife and their nine surviving children." News accounts described him as the "wealthiest man in St. Paul." Today's Borup's Addition, once the home of prosperous pioneer African Americans and more recently an urban wasteland, is now the site of new apartments and townhouses. V. B. K.





*Minda was a Spiritualist and apparently subscribed to the Spiritual Science Magazine, copies of which were found among her belongings after her death. See Growing Up in St. Paul article on page 17.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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