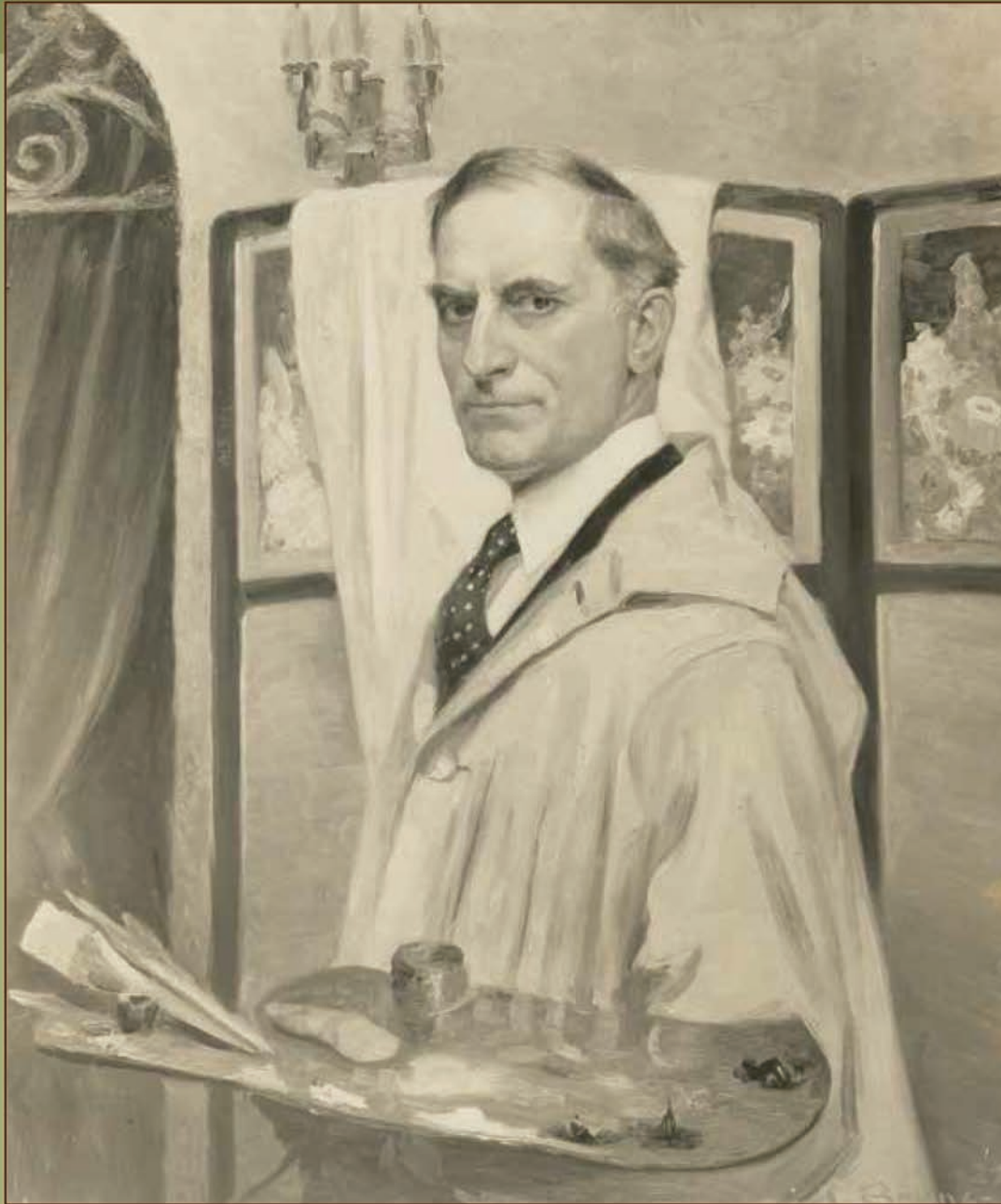


*Madame la Doctress in France*

**"Dr. Nellie:" One Physician's  
Experience Overseas in the Great War**

JOHANNES R. ALLERT, PAGE 12



Carl Bohnen self-portrait

*A St. Paul Artist Behind Enemy Lines*

## **Carl Bohnen, World War I, and Americanism**

STEVE TRIMBLE, PAGE 1

## By the Numbers . . .

*In the World War I years,*  
the number of Minnesotans who

registered for the draft  
**541,607**

were classified as fit for service  
**400,464**

served in the military  
**118,497**

were drafted  
**76,718**

served in Europe  
**57,413**

died in the war (civilians and military)  
**3,480**

served and died from disease  
(mostly influenza)  
**2,175**

killed in action  
**1,432**

SOURCES: Franklin F. Holbrook and Livia Appel,  
*Minnesota in the War with Germany*, 2 vols.  
(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1932)  
and David Thompson.

### ON THE COVER



A black and white photograph of Bohnen's 1937 self-portrait in oil. Photo courtesy of Steve Trimble.

## Contents

- 1 *A St. Paul Artist Behind Enemy Lines:*  
**Carl Bohnen, World War I and Americanism**  
STEVE TRIMBLE
- 12 *Madame la Doctoresse in France:*  
**"Dr. Nellie:" A Physician's Experience in the Great War**  
JOHANNES R. ALLERT
- 21 *"A Distinction Highly Prized and Not Easily Won:"*  
**Upholding the Amateur Ideal at the Minnesota Boat Club**  
SARAH M. RISSER

## Message from the Editorial Board

World War I, then known as the Great War, had an impact on Ramsey County in unexpected ways. Steve Trimble explores how Carl Bohnen, a well-known local artist, journeyed to Germany in 1914 to further his career and was subsequently caught up in that conflict. Further, his experiences after he returned to St. Paul in the summer of 1917 highlights the anti-German sentiment in Minnesota at the time. Dr. Nellie Barsness was the first woman doctor to graduate from the University of Minnesota medical school and later practiced in St. Paul. As profiled by Johannes Allert, the U.S. Army would not enlist women who volunteered as doctors, but the French military gladly accepted her service. Thus she was able to help many soldiers deal with traumatic injuries during her time overseas. On a lighter note, this issue also shows how Ramsey County residents have been using the Mississippi River for recreation for generations. Sarah Risser traces the early history of the Minnesota Boat Club, which established its headquarters on Raspberry Island in 1870. Although the Club went through some challenging times, Risser shows that rowing on the Mississippi persisted through the years because dedicated amateurs have always valued their sport.

Anne Cowie  
Chair, Editorial Board

*The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon.*



## Carl Bohnen, World War I, and Americanism

STEVE TRIMBLE

*The best thing about going abroad . . . is that you return a much better American than when you went away.<sup>1</sup>*

—CARL BOHNEN

For St. Paul artist Carl A. Bohnen, a trip abroad was the chance of a lifetime. He had an opportunity to spend two years in Europe with his family and to study with some of the leading artists of the time. The family experienced some rough seas during their 1914 voyage from New York to Italy, but little did they know that the bad weather during their ocean crossing might have been an omen of the stormy times they would face in the ensuing years. For Carl, his wife Lottie, and their three children, national and world affairs turned what was planned as a time of leisure and learning into an adventure with as many ups and downs as the waves on the Atlantic.

The turmoil in Europe that erupted soon after they landed brought out the resilience of the Bohnen family and the practical nature of its patriarch, who despite the upheaval resulting from war managed to study oil portraiture and increase his artistic production. Even while living in a foreign country, Carl was able to provide for his family, overcome food shortages, and deal with financial frustrations. Despite all that, the days following the Bohnens' return to America were possibly an even more challenging time for the artist as he tried to resume everyday life in a world that seemed to have gone mad.

### Bohnen's Early Years

Carl Bohnen was born on November 3, 1872, in Pennsylvania and raised near Meyer's Grove, a German-speaking community in Stearns County, Minnesota. According to one source, Bohnen showed an aptitude for drawing as a young child, sometimes marking up the walls of his home with pieces of coal. At the age of

fourteen he began doing portraits. After attending local schools, he entered nearby St. John's University and received his first formal art training. He graduated from the Commercial Department in 1892 with a degree in bookkeeping and penmanship.<sup>2</sup>

After college, Bohnen apprenticed with a "crayon artist" and traveled around doing pen and crayon portraits. While he was on one of these trips, he met Lottie Johnston (some sources identify her as Charlotte M. Johnson), who would become his wife in 1893. Soon he was part owner of a picture and gallery enterprise located in St. Paul. The firm of Bohnen & Council, as it was called, specialized in freehand crayon work.<sup>3</sup> To improve his skills, Bohnen also studied at the St. Paul Institute of Arts and Sciences and began doing illustrations for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and the *Dispatch*, usually pen



The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* published this photo of artist Carl Bohnen on February 18, 1914, along with an article about his impending study tour of Europe. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

and ink sketches of local prominent people or of performers who were visiting the city or some cartooning. Over time, he became known as one of the best portrait artists in the Twin Cities.

Bohnen's work attracted the attention of the city's elite and over time he became one of the favorites of those who graced newspaper society pages. While the work provided income, what he really wanted was to become proficient in painting with oils. A commission from Richard A. Jackson, vice-president and general counsel of the Great Northern Railroad, turned into a great opportunity. This executive decided to help Bohnen fulfill his ambition by sponsoring a showing of his paintings at the Jackson family home on Summit Avenue in November 1913.

Jackson also proposed to his neighbors that if nine other local sponsors joined him in putting up \$1,000 each, the money would finance a two-year overseas trip for Bohnen and his family so that he could train with accomplished European painters and teachers. In return for this sponsorship, Bohnen agreed to paint the portraits of his benefactors upon his return. The group of donors included Louis W. Hill, F. E. Weyerhauser, Pierce Butler, and Frank Kellogg.

A *St. Paul Pioneer Press* account of the plan reported that although Bohnen had won fame in executing black-and-white portraits, he wanted to work with oils. Speaking of the sponsorship that would allow him to hone these skills, the grateful Bohnen was reported to have said, "Nothing I could say would fittingly express my

appreciation for this kindness. My work must be the answer."<sup>4</sup> Just before Bohnen and his family departed St. Paul, the *Pioneer Press* carried a lengthy report on the upcoming trip. The writer explained how the artist had worked for years to perfect his "crayon exercises," but Bohnen felt this medium had limitations and he wanted to learn "to do with the brush what I have been doing with the pencil."<sup>5</sup>

Accompanied by his wife and children, Arthur, Roman, and Charlotte, Carl Bohnen left St. Paul on April 1, 1914. The family stayed in New York for a time while Carl did some commissioned work and then they were off to Europe. Their first stop in Italy had been "the greatest inspiration," Bohnen later wrote to a friend. Thanks to Paul Manship, a St. Paul sculptor who had studied in Rome (1909–1912) before returning to New York, Bohnen got access to all the Italian galleries and grand buildings he wanted to see and met many of the local artists.<sup>6</sup>

Fresh from his exposure to Italian art, Bohnen decided to spend his first year abroad in Munich, then go to Paris for several months before spending some time in England. He had established a connection to famed Wisconsin-born, German painter Carl von Marr (1858–1936), who was then living in Munich and whose brother happened to be a printer in St. Paul.

Bohnen and his family arrived in Munich on July 1, 1914, but the outbreak of war in Europe a month later changed all their plans. "The excitement of the declaration of war made the people almost crazy with fear," Carl later explained. "I shall never forget how everything was in a frenzy of upheaval. Spies were arrested on every street corner and every stranger and strange-looking person was under suspicion. Mrs. Bohnen and I were arrested for Russian spies, but succeeded in clearing ourselves."<sup>7</sup> Rumors abounded and one morning soldiers came to every house in Munich "and notified the people that the water of the city of Munich had been poisoned. This announcement soon led the people to drink beer almost exclusively."<sup>8</sup>

## In Munich

Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in late June, Germany declared war first on Russia and then on France in early August 1914. Then the Germans suddenly

*Left:* By the time Bohnen went to Europe, he was already an accomplished portrait artist, as seen in this 1913 sketch of one of his local benefactors, Louis W. Hill. *Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

*Right:* This is an undated Bohnen sketch of Mrs. Homer Sweney, who was known to her family and friends as Mary Glyde Griggs. The sketch is reproduced courtesy of Patricia Sweney Hart. The border surrounding the sketch is taken from the Mary Molton Cheney Papers (1872–1950) in the collection of the Ramsey County Historical Society.



invaded the neutral nations of Belgium and Luxembourg. Imperial Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Italy constituted the Central Powers. These belligerents were pitted against Great Britain, France, Russia, and Japan, known as the Allies. President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed that the United States would remain neutral in the conflict and that he would try to mediate an end to the hostilities.

The Allies quickly turned to the United States for loans from American banks and to purchase food and U.S.-made armaments of all kinds. Although the United States had no prohibition on sending financial aid to the Germans or to selling American-made armaments to the Kaiser, that kind of support for the Central Powers was never as significant as it was for the Allies.

Prior to their arrival in Munich, Carl Bohnen had sent a St. Paul bank draft to a Munich institution that was to be drawn on a financial institution in London. Unfortunately, the draft was “lost in the mails” in the confusion that followed the opening of hostilities. Consequently in mid-August Bohnen wrote a letter to the First National Bank in St. Paul in which he reported he was “practically destitute.” This letter had to be written in German so it could be examined by the authorities. Bohnen then resorted to borrowing money from an American he chanced to meet in a Munich bank. Eventually the missing bank draft was found and the family settled down in a flat and studio in an artists’ section of the city.<sup>9</sup>

Sometime late in that summer, Bohnen sent a message that was said to have been smuggled out of Germany by a tourist he met. The *Pioneer Press* printed Bohnen’s letter in which he reported that he and his family were comfortably situated in Munich, they planned to remain there, and he predicted the war would soon be over because “almost without exception, every German peasant, burgher and aristocrat is confident that Germany will emerge triumphant from the European war.” With business activities almost at a standstill due to so many men having been called to arms, the Bohnen children were “lonesome for Grandma, but the two boys have made friends with the German lads and are having great times though, as they do not speak German, communication is difficult.”<sup>10</sup>

In mid-September 1914 Carl sent an upbeat letter to a friend in St. Paul that was published

in the *Pioneer Press*. He began the letter by acknowledging that in Munich he and his family were distant from the war zone and liked the city. In addition, “All the big artists are here with the exception of those who have gone to the front.” The boys were going to Handel School in the city. Bohnen had been studying with Carl von Marr and wrote that “If the Royal Academy [of Fine Arts where von Marr was a professor] opens in October, he will try to get me in, although I am beyond the age limit.” He concluded: “We Americans have been particularly well-treated here and I have no complaint to make.” Happily, he was voted into the prestigious institution that fall.<sup>11</sup>

As might be expected, communication with Minnesota was difficult and the September letter to his friend did not arrive until late November. Around this time, the St. John’s University student newspaper included a note in the *Alumni News* suggesting that people could get in touch with Carl. It said that Bohnen was “safely located at No. 9 Moltke Street, Munich, Germany” but was practically out of funds because of the war conditions. He could be reached by sending mail to him c/o the American Consulate or at his home. Letters had to be written in German and left unsealed.<sup>12</sup>

Bohnen’s financial situation must have stayed precarious because in January 1915 a group of St. Paul artists, actors, musicians, and authors held a “vaudeville benefit” to help their friend. They announced in the *St. Paul Dispatch* that they hoped the public would show up to help the Bohnen family who were “now stranded in Germany.”<sup>13</sup>

In spite of Bohnen’s prediction, the war did not end quickly and began to have serious consequences for the family. “We were stunned when the war came, and knew not what to do, or which way to turn,” he later wrote. “At first we did not feel it, then later, when the food regulations were put in force, we had it brought forcibly home to us.” There were ration cards for almost everything. “The only thing they did not issue cards for is breathing,” Bohnen quipped, “but give them time, the war is not yet over.”

Early on, people could buy or trade for ration cards. The Bohnens managed to get some from farmers or others who didn’t need them. A male model in his eighties who couldn’t chew meat



let them have his cards. “How we would cultivate the acquaintance of vegetarians in those days!” Carl recalled. But then the German government cracked down on the practice and the shortages for the family became even worse.

They could get a half-pound of meat a week, including fat needed for cooking. They also had to register with a specific butcher who would put a sign in the window saying meat would be available for people with certain numbers. In order to save his meat and bread cards, Bohnen took his noon meals at the military canteen that was in the building where his studio was located.<sup>14</sup> The five Bohnen family members shared one pint of milk a day. On the other hand, some types of food including beans, vegetables, and sauerkraut were readily available. Still, Bohnen wrote, “we were always half hungry. One never had the sensation of being well fed.” Arthur, the oldest boy, was able to make a small contribution. He helped out a woman who had a nearby grocery store and “she would aid us as much as she dared.”

There was no coffee, tea or chocolate, Bohnen lamented. Nevertheless, “the cafes, though, are crowded from morning until midnight. They have elaborate orchestras and the people seem satisfied with substitutes. They drink Kaffee ersatz. . . . They have ersatzs for almost everything.” Almost all the white and rye flour went to the military, so potato flour was used on the

home front. Carl judged it to be “nourishing but not all that palatable,” and added that “needless to say, there are no cakes or cookies in Germany.” He managed to get a small bar of soap “smuggled in from Holland,” but it cost twenty times the peacetime price.

“The greatest hardship in Germany was the food lines,” Carl declared. “I have gotten up at four a.m. in the dead of winter and stood in line till nine when the shops opened, and then sometimes had to go home without food because the store was sold out before my turn came. This was in the summer of 1916 when matters were at their worst.” Sometimes they could buy game without ration cards and venison was often plentiful. The rules for rationing did not, however, apply to horsemeat. “You could buy all the horseflesh you wanted at a very low figure. Many buy it and it has become quite popular. I have eaten it,” he admitted. “It is a little too dry and sweet for pot roast, but in a stew or fried in butter as steak and smothered in onions it is really delicious.”<sup>15</sup>

### Dealing with Wartime Hardships

Along with an estimated three to four thousand other Americans who were in Munich when the conflict broke out, the Bohnens did their best to cope. “I was in Germany and could not get out, so was compelled to make the best of a bad situation,” Carl wrote. In fact, there were some pleasant times. “We were fortunate in being allowed to hold dances—they are forbidden during the progress of war—and to these we welcomed the rest of the American colony. They came gladly, for it was a break in the monotony of existence.” The American library was a frequent meeting place with afternoon teas served there on Saturdays. “We always had special gatherings with one of the American ladies as hostesses. In the winter we had sacred concerts every two weeks in the American Episcopal church, which is connected with the library.”<sup>16</sup>

There was even an American Artists Club in Munich and Bohnen was elected to be its president shortly after his arrival. “In one respect” the war time situation “was not without compensations,” he recalled, “for there were not many students there, the artists of the warring countries were, for the most part at the front so that gave the students of the neutral countries

Once Bohnen and his family were settled in Munich, Germany, he studied with several major artists of that city and produced paintings that would generate income. In an August 1916 letter to the *Pioneer Press* about his experiences overseas, he included two photographs of his sons. Roman, left, is dressed in the uniform of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and his other son, Arthur, is wearing the uniform of an army lieutenant. For boys in Germany, modeling themselves after their war leaders was considered great fun.



a better opportunity as we received more personal attention from the professors.”<sup>17</sup> In spite of the difficult living conditions, Bohnen was making artistic progress.

He had enrolled in the Munich Academy of Fine Arts and at first studied with Angelo Jank, an illustrator and poster designer. Then he spent a year with Carl von Marr, a man he came to know as a close friend. He rented a studio where he could do work of his own as well. Because he was an experienced artist, he was given a studio in the Academy and an allowance for hiring models.

Through a woman he had known in St. Paul, Bohnen received commissions in Vienna in 1917. He made plans to go there, but a new law prohibited travel by aliens from one country to another without German government-issued passports. This was a financial blow because Bohnen had counted on doing portraits such as those to help pay for the family’s living expenses. Now there might not be enough money to leave Germany, even if it had been possible.<sup>18</sup>

As the war continued unabated on the Western Front, Bohnen’s cablegrams were not getting through to the United States and since letters took so much travel time, he decided to “set to work earning a living until better fortune might come.” Eventually it did. In 1916 he received money from the United States; so now he might have enough money to pay for passage home. He also give an exhibition of his works at a local art association that was well received by critics and resulted in some new commissions.<sup>19</sup>

Carl was not the only family member who sent letters to Minnesota. In one letter to a St. Paul friend, Lottie reported running into some hostilities in the summer of 1915. She told her acquaintance, “Americans are chided on the streets because ammunition is supplied to the Allies from this country.”<sup>20</sup> Their younger son, Roman, penned a short note to his aunt telling her that he and his brother were attending a gymnasium, or high school, in Munich. “Dad painted a picture of a sailor and it was accepted by one of the leading German magazines. . . . Father also has exhibited a number of pictures and has received high praise,” he proudly related.<sup>21</sup>

While at the American consulate one day, Bohnen ran into Myron Nutting, an artist friend from St. Paul. In an oral history interview done



One of Bohnen’s paintings from his time in Munich was reproduced as a postcard. The German phrase at the bottom means “Lost Happiness.” Photo courtesy of Steve Trimble.

years later, Nutting recalled, “We were very glad to see each other, and for the few days that I had left in Munich, I saw something of him. To my surprise I found that he had really done rather well in Munich” by working out “a very good commercial idea.” Nutting explained that when Bohnen drew a portrait, he would “have photographic copies made so his client would have the original paper and attractive photographic copies which would make very nice presents. . . . They really got their money’s worth.”

Nutting went on to explain that Bohnen had also talked the owners of a bookstore into letting him display drawings in its big window and he had an exhibition of these drawings he had completed and the photographic copies of them. “So when he found himself in Munich at a time when artists couldn’t expect any sort of a living (people were not thinking very much about having pictures or portraits painted or anything of that sort in those days),” Nutting concluded, “he got along quite well by his good business acumen.”<sup>22</sup>

Bohnen also continued to work for people back in Minnesota, in all likelihood working

Here is another Bohnen painting that became a postcard. This time Bohnen used his favorite model. The phrase at the bottom translates as "We Hold On!" As the war dragged on, Germans increasingly used "Wir halten durch!" to encourage each to persevere in spite of the hardships they were experiencing. Photo courtesy of Steve Trimble.



from photos he brought with him to Germany. In July of 1916, for example, the *Deutschland*, a civilian freighter used to supply U-boats, arrived in New York harbor. It delivered a package of twelve portraits of former Minnesota secretaries of state that Bohnen had finished in Munich.<sup>23</sup> Bohnen had a friend travelling on the vessel and he visited it before the ship made its last trip to the United States and back. This may explain why Bohnen was also commissioned to paint portraits of Captain Paul Koenig and the crew of the *Deutschland*.<sup>24</sup>

### Getting Out of Germany

When the U.S. severed diplomatic relations with Germany in early February 1917, Bohnen intensified his efforts to leave Germany for Switzerland. Initially the Bohnens' prospects for obtaining permission to leave looked good, but official action dragged on until the United States declared war on the Central Powers in April and the necessary papers were refused. "Rumors were then current in Germany that the United States was interning large numbers of Germans and, in retaliation, all Americans in

Germany were held." Consequently Bohnen had to make frequent reports to the police. "There are now about a hundred Americans in Munich peacefully following their everyday vocations," he said. "They have to report occasionally, but otherwise are not molested."<sup>25</sup>

Once the U.S. entered the war, the Bohnens realized they had to leave Germany as quickly as possible and there were personal repercussions. "My worst inconvenience because of America's declaration came when I was ordered out of the Royal Academy to which I had been elected as a member," Bohnen later stated. As a result, he lost the use of a large studio and the stipend that had been receiving each month to hire models.

Just before the U.S. declaration of war, Bohnen had completed portraits of von Marr and another leader of the Academy and was set up to paint portraits of twenty-four professors, but that opportunity was lost.<sup>26</sup> The family was finally told they had three weeks to conclude their business in Munich, dispose of their household goods, and get the various permissions worked out. They packed their luggage and sold almost all their furnishings. Just when they thought they would be allowed to leave, the authorities said there would be another delay. Bohnen later wrote:

We lived in the house for five weeks longer, with scarcely any furniture save the beds. The neighbors were very kind and did much to make things more pleasant. When I was refused permission to leave the country in this manner, I immediately brought suit against the Munich police through the Bavarian government.

The local government took up the case, but matters continued to drag on. They "were almost reconciled to settling down again in the flat, reporting to the police three times a week," when one morning a card came that told Bohnen to report to the authorities and receive a passport for Switzerland. "You can well appreciate my haste in complying. It is a queer feeling to be imprisoned in a city, although I must admit the Bavarians were nicer to us after America declared war than before." The German authorities then took a day to look through their things.



They carefully examined the fifty paintings Bohnen was bringing back to make sure that they had no information of military value.<sup>27</sup>

In June 1917, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* contained a short article with a headline that declared: “Local artist safe, his friends learn.” According to a State Department bulletin, the family had been found among the refugees in Switzerland and that Bohnen was trying to get home but was “virtually without funds.”<sup>28</sup>

The Bohnens were now out of Germany, but they still faced problems. “After a beautiful trip, we arrived in a free neutral country once more,” Carl said, “and it certainly gave us a new courage to be able to purchase all we wanted.” They were short of funds because only part of their money arrived from Munich and they had to arrange with the postal authorities to have the balance that was still in Germany sent as money orders to them in Switzerland.

They kept waiting for the funds to arrive. Finally Carl telegraphed a friend in Munich and found out that the money orders had been confiscated. “Once more we were stranded,” Bohnen said, “but since it is interesting to get into tight places if one can again get out of them, I got busy at once.” With help of the council of Zurich and an American army surgeon who was in Switzerland, he was able to raise enough money for the trip home.<sup>29</sup>

Their next stop was France, where they faced new problems. A notation in red ink that said “Coming out of Germany” had been added to their passports and it made the French apprehensive. “We were made to strip, and searched all over for messages,” Bohnen remembered. To prove that he was an artist, he spent two hours painting the portrait of one of the French officials.<sup>30</sup>

The family wanted to visit Paris, but they were not given permission to do so and soon headed home. They did meet some of the first American troops who had come to France when they got to Bordeaux, where they attended a “very enthusiastic” Fourth of July celebration. “When I had my ticket for America finally in my possession,” Bohnen said, “I thought that, relatively speaking, our troubles were about over, for outside being sank by a submarine, there were no obstacles before us.”<sup>31</sup>

In fact, a German U-boat did attack Bohnen’s ship on June 15, 1917. The captain had been



warned to keep a close watch for submarines because a nearby ship had already been sunk. He spotted a periscope 500 yards away and then the wake of a torpedo heading toward his vessel. Quickly the captain gave orders that caused his ship to veer out of the path of the incoming torpedo. Then when the submarine surfaced, the crew on Bohnen’s ship shot their stern gun and hit the enemy vessel which exploded and sank.<sup>32</sup> For the next two nights on the ship the passengers were ordered to sleep in their clothes with life belts handy and they were given frequent drills “in case of a disaster.” According to Bohnen, who may have been unaware of the near miss, there were no major problems “except the general uncanny atmosphere of a ship running without lights of any kind.”<sup>33</sup>

### Back in the U.S.

On his arrival in New York harbor, Bohnen commented that “the dear old U. S. looked so very good, and a feeling came over me as though my dear old mother wanted to take me in her arms, and press me to her heart.” They spent a few days in the city and felt that it looked “very frivolous, and we can hardly believe that the United States is at war, and that our boys will soon be in that awful slaughter.”<sup>34</sup> The weary travelers finally arrived in St. Paul on August 28, 1917. Carl said they intended “to live in absolute quiet,” but he was soon caught up in controversies that landed his name in the newspapers and brought him under suspicion.<sup>35</sup>

Shortly after returning, Bohnen gave a major talk outlining his views of the situation

Bohnen was a member of the American Artists Club in Munich. None of the artists is identified. Photo courtesy of the Louis Grell Foundation.

in Germany and his belief that the war would likely be over in the fall. “The time is here for peace,” he said, but then he added,

the soldier at the front, and the people at home in Europe, want peace, they are tired and weary of this terrible war. . . . The housewife, who has to manage with the short rations of food, to keep the spirit of the home going, keep the children fed, and besides in many cases has to do a man’s work will have great bearing on the politics of the country and the people at home will force the government to close the war.

He felt that the United States “can do much in bringing this war to settlement and call it a draw and start the world all over again” because of “her high principles of humanity and great sportsmanship, big-hearted good fellowship, and the principles of justice.”<sup>36</sup>

But the America Bohnen had returned to was quite different than the one he had left three years earlier. In April 1917, the Minnesota Legislature had created a Commission of Public Safety to place aliens under surveillance and actively search out any possible subversion or anti-American attitudes. Various groups around the state sponsored loyalty parades, made speeches, wrote pamphlets and newspaper articles and looked into what school textbooks contained. There was an almost militant patriotism,

heavy anti-German propaganda, and a crusade of Americanization.<sup>37</sup>

In this charged climate, Bohnen sometimes made statements that got him in trouble. In an article in the *Pioneer Press*, he suggested that the Kaiser was greatly misunderstood. He was not trying to “whitewash him” but was going “to give the accepted idea of him in Germany.” The German leader believed that the war was forced upon him and that they were “fighting for their very existence.” Bohnen cautioned: “Remember, I am not giving my views here, but the opinions of those around me when I was in Germany.”<sup>38</sup>

Although surviving records don’t specifically identify which of Bohnen’s utterances were found to be objectionable, he was investigated by the Department of Justice and “his loyalty was questioned because of alleged statements favorable to Germany.” There is no evidence that he was ever charged with a specific crime.<sup>39</sup>

Bohnen’s artistic efforts, on the other hand, seemed to be going well. His work again began to appear in local newspapers and in early 1918 the *Pioneer Press* commissioned Bohnen to create a series of portraits of prominent women of St. Paul.<sup>40</sup> In early March 1918 the *Pioneer Press* noted that the St. Paul Institute of Art was going to host Bohnen’s first show since his return from Germany at the Auditorium and it would include a portrait of Mrs. Bohnen. The paper said that the artist’s early training in black and white gave him a “special gift for likeness that gives his oil portraits a rare intimacy and repose which has gained him much distinction abroad.”<sup>41</sup>

### A Question of Loyalty

Suddenly, there was negative publicity. A local newspaper reported that the artist “who has been in the limelight of late on charges of disloyalty,” was under investigation. T. E. Campbell, chief agent of the Justice Department, found out that a Mrs. Adolf Pokorny of 349 Nelson Street had draped a small American flag on a picture of the Kaiser—Imperial Germany’s leader—in her home.<sup>42</sup> She claimed Bohnen gave it to her as a “yuletide gift,” adding “that picture has caused me more trouble than anything I ever had. And I wish I had never seen it.” The agents seized the portrait and felt it was evidence of “alleged disloyalty” and brought Bohnen “into discredit.”

For a time after his return to St. Paul, Carl Bohnen had a studio in the St. Paul Hotel. Here he is seen with a number of his oil portraits, about 1922. On March 1, 1931, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reproduced this photo as part of an article on Bohnen, but the newspaper airbrushed out the two paintings of nudes. Northwestern Photographic Studios photo. Photo courtesy of the Carl Bohnen Papers, 1888–1977, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



As a native of Germany who had not become a naturalized American citizen, Mrs. Pokorny was considered by many as a suspicious alien. There was a connection between the two. Mrs. Pokorny was an old friend who had given Bohnen a farewell party when he left for Germany. His family had also stayed with her for a time after his 1917 return.

Bohnen presented a different story. He explained that “a few days before Christmas . . . at a certain art store here, the proprietor came across a small, valuable print of the Kaiser. I exclaimed, ‘You better get rid of that thing! Tear it up or destroy it.’” The dealer instead suggested giving it to someone who would appreciate its artistic value. “I mentioned Mrs. Pokorny,” Bohnen continued. “The facts of the case are that the picture was sent to her by the store to get rid of it. The picture was not a gift.”<sup>43</sup>

A week later a headline in the *St. Paul Dispatch* blared “Bohnen Affirms Loyalty.” The story confirmed that the artist had been questioned after the incident but no further action was taken. Even so, Bohnen wanted to renounce any hint of pro-German sympathies, “I believe in only 100 per cent Americanism. I believe if a man is a fraction of 1 per cent in sympathy with Germany in this war that he is pro-German.” The Kaiser and his son “are the two arch murderers of the world.” Bohnen said he would like to see the German army annihilated and “a peace that is 100 per cent Entente [Allies] made. . . . I will fight for the respect of myself and family and will hunt down any frame up as to branding me disloyal to our flag.”<sup>44</sup>

The investigation may have ended, but its repercussions continued. In early April the *St. Paul Daily News* reported that the St. Paul Institute’s planned art show of Bohnen’s work had been postponed. Mrs. Foster Hannaford, head of the events committee, carefully explained: “I have no reason to believe Mr. Bohnen is concerned with any pro-German activities” then added “but neither do I think him aggressively pro-American, and we feel that there is no room these days for anything but aggressive pro-Americanism, even in matters of art.” In an attempt to show empathy, she added that it would also not be fair to display his pictures “at a time when there has been so much unpleasant argument about his loyalty.”<sup>45</sup>

The next day Bohnen gave a major address at the Current Topics Club and once again vigorously took on his critics. The title of his speech was “Sensations of a Loyal American under Suspicion” and was given at the St. Paul Association Dining Rooms. The *St. Paul Daily*

*News* report of the event was headlined “I Hate Kaiser.” In his talk, Bohnen explained why he had stayed with a German alien after his return. “When I arrived at the depot here I did not find any loyal friends offering to give me a home. Mrs. Pokorny offered my family the use of rooms in her home, and now I am accused of accepting hospitality of an alien. I did. No American offered me hospitality.” He lashed out at those who too easily labeled others as disloyal in an attempt to show their own patriotism. “I hate the Kaiser,” he emphasized, “and I hate his cause. Any damn liar who says I do not has got to fight me. I am not a sneak and a coward as are those who attack me.” He went on to add, “I am just as good an American as a man with an American name or a French name . . . we are all foreigners. We should get the seeds of race hatred from our hearts.”<sup>46</sup>

---

*“[T]here is no room these days for anything but aggressive pro-Americanism, even in matters of art.” —Mrs. Foster Hannaford*

---

The controversy eventually died down. Bohnen, whose family was then living with his sister on Holly Avenue, finished the commissioned paintings for his ten St. Paul benefactors at a studio on the twelfth floor of the Lowry Hotel. Sometime in 1919, he left St. Paul for Chicago and remained there until his death in 1951. Bohnen did return to France, where he maintained a studio for many years. In 1932 Bohnen gave an interview in which he said “besides wanting to be an artist, I always wanted to be an actor or a musician, but I turned out to be just a portrait painter.”<sup>47</sup> That was quite an understatement. He went on to gain a national reputation with widely distributed prints of such famous national figures including Charles A. Lindbergh, General Douglas MacArthur, and President Harry Truman.



Carl Bohnen was commissioned to paint the official portrait of Minnesota Governor J. A. A. Burnquist in 1919. Bohnen positioned his subject facing to the viewer's right with a strong light coming from the left, thereby casting a deep shadow on the adjacent wall. Considering the treatment Bohnen experienced following his return to St. Paul, the unconventional manner in which he posed the chairman of the Minnesota Commission on Public Safety may be an indication of what Bohnen was feeling while he was at work on the portrait. *Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*



The newspaper wire services widely reproduced this 1948 photo of Bohnen while he was painting a portrait of President Harry S. Truman. Typically the cut line for the photo in the newspaper was something along the line of "the President Gets a New Tie," because Bohnen was asked to alter his painting by giving Truman a more conservative polka dot neckpiece. *Photo courtesy of Steve Trimble.*



## Leaving St. Paul

Although Bohnen never again lived in Minnesota, he did maintain contact with the state. He made several visits to his alma mater in Collegeville. There were occasional art shows in the Twin Cities, including one held at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. A big art event was held at the St. Paul Hotel and a 1931 show at the University Club featured paintings of prominent Minnesotans. Between 1919 and his death, he painted seven portraits of Minnesota governors that now hang in the State Capitol. And while his residence was elsewhere, the *Pioneer Press* still proudly referred to Bohnen as "an artist of St. Paul and Paris."<sup>48</sup>

There is no definitive answer to the question of why Bohnen decided to leave St. Paul in 1919. He may have wanted greater access to the much larger audience (and potential commissions) in Chicago. Bohnen's granddaughter, Marina Bohnen Pratt, provides some insight on a possible reason for their relocating. When the Bohnens went to Europe in 1914, their plan was to be there for two years. The war extended their stay and forced Bohnen to borrow money to cover their additional expenses.

When the Bohnens returned to St. Paul, Bohnen "discovered that people who had helped fund his adventure had become impatient because he did not have the money to pay them back." The allegations that Bohnen was pro-German had taken their toll and Bohnen "could not get work to raise the money he owed." Compounding this financial problem was the fact that Bohnen's children "openly spoke fluent German to each other" and that made "the situation much worse."<sup>49</sup>

In moving to Chicago, Bohnen may also have wanted to be closer to the American artists he had known in Munich who had collectively relocated there.<sup>50</sup> More likely, the treatment Bohnen received in St. Paul following his return hurt him deeply. Two pieces of evidence make this explanation the most likely one. In April 1918, Bohnen graphically revealed how he felt he had been treated. He showed a newspaper reporter a drawing he had made of himself to which he had added horns. "It featured two horns and a 'satanic expression,'" wrote the reporter. Next Bohnen pointed out that the devilish self-portrait

“is as I am seen through the eyes of my friends” and went on to say, “I am looked upon as though I were a rattlesnake. I am willing to do anything for America. It’s a shame that we in America have to fight at home first.”<sup>51</sup> Many years later in 1931, his son, Roman, wrote a letter to his father after an exhibition of Bohnen’s paintings had been held in St. Paul. In this letter, Roman comments on why Carl left for Chicago: “It was marvelous to hear about your reception in the Twin Cities. It must

be gratifying after the treatment you received after the war to have these people come bowing around. I suppose they were only human beings during those hectic days, for heaven knows the world had gone mad.”<sup>52</sup>

*A St. Paul resident, Steve Trimble is a local historian who has published multiple articles in this magazine. He is a member of the RCHS Editorial Board.*

## NOTES

1. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 1, 1917.
2. *St. John’s Record*, July 1, 1932.
3. *St. John’s Record*, January 1897.
4. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 8, 1914. According to the newspaper, “the arrangements made on Bohnen’s behalf represent merely an advance payment on commissions.”
5. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 19, 1914.
6. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 21, 1914.
7. *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 9, 1914.
8. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 16, 1917.
9. *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 9, 1914.
10. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 12, 1914.
11. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 21, 1914.
12. *The Record*, October 1, 1914.
13. *St. Paul Dispatch*, January 20, 1915.
14. Carl Bohnen, “The Statesmen of Europe Will Be Forced to Make Peace in Spite of Themselves, by the Tired Hearts of the Mothers and Wives and Soldiers,” Carl Bohnen Papers (1888–1977), Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
15. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 9, 1917 and September 12, 1917.
16. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 30, 1917.
17. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 1, 1917 and August 19, 1917.
18. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 30, 1917.
19. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 16, 1917.
20. *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, July 3, 1915.
21. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, December 3, 1916.
22. “An Artist’s Life and Travels: Myron C. Nutting,” interviewed by Donald J. Schippers (in 1965–1966), vol. 2, pp. 796–7, Oral History Program, Library, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, Calif.
23. *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, July 14, 1916.
24. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, December 16, 1916.
25. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 23, 1917; *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 26, 1917.
26. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 1, 1917; September 16, 1917.
27. *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 26, 1917.
28. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 1, 1917.
29. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 16, 1917.
30. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 1, 1917.
31. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 16, 1917.
32. *New York Tribune*, July 20, 1917.
33. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 16, 1917.
34. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 19, 1917.
35. *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 26, 1917.
36. Bohnen, “The Statesmen of Europe Will Be Forced to Make Peace . . .”
37. See Carl H. Chrislock, *Watchdog of Loyalty: The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety During World War I* (St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1991); Carol E. Jenson, “Loyalty as a Political Weapon: The 1918 Campaign in Minnesota,” *Minnesota History*, 43:2 (Summer 1972): 42–57; and John Christine Wolkerstorfer, “Persecution in St. Paul: The Germans in World War I,” *Ramsey County History*, 13:1 (1976): 3–13. A 1917 Circular issued by the Safety Commission stated, in part: “Anyone who talks and acts against the government in time of war, regardless of the ‘Constitutional right of free speech’ which has been sadly abused, is a traitor and deserves the most drastic punishment” (quoted in Wolkerstorfer, p. 5).
38. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 16, 1917.
39. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 28, 1918.
40. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 17, 1918.
41. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 3, 1918.
42. Undated newspaper clipping, Bohnen Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
43. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 28, 1918.
44. *St. Paul Dispatch*, April 3, 1918.
45. *St. Paul Daily News*, April 5, 1918.
46. *St. Paul Dispatch*, April 3, 1918.
47. *St. John’s Record*, July 1, 1932.
48. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 1, 1931.
49. Maria Bohnen Pratt emails to Steve Trimble, March 12 and 25, 2018.
50. See the Louis Grell Foundation website ([www.louisgrell.com](http://www.louisgrell.com)) for a list of many of the Americans who studied art in Munich during the years that Grell was there (1900–1915). Grell studied art with several German professors who also taught Bohnen.
51. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 7, 1918.
52. Roman Bohnen to Carl Bohnen, 1931, box 2, folder 4, Roman Bohnen Papers.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

President

Chad P. Roberts

Founding Editor (1964-2006)

Virginia Brainard Kunz

Editor

John M. Lindley

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Board of Directors

Jo Anne Driscoll

Chair

Jerry Woelfel

First Vice Chair

Mari Oyanagi Eggum

Second Vice Chair

Susan McNeely

Secretary

Kenneth H. Johnson

Treasurer

James Miller

Immediate Past Chair

Jo Emerson, Thomas Fabel, Martin Fallon, Tim Glines, John Guthmann, Susan Handley, Richard B. Heydinger, Jr., Judy Kishel, David Kristal, Carl Kuhrmeyer, Robert W. Mairs, Jeffrey Martin, Father Kevin M. McDonough, Jonathan H. Morgan, Robert Muschewske, Chad P. Roberts, Roxanne Sands, George T. Stephenson, James A. Stolpestad, Chris Taylor.

Editorial Board

Anne Cowie, chair, James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, John Diers, Martin Fallon, John Guthmann, Lisa L. Heinrich, John M. Lindley, Jeffrey Martin, James Miller, John Milton, Laurie M. Murphy, Robert Muschewske, Paul D. Nelson, Richard H. Nicholson, Jay Pfaender, David Riehle, Chad P. Roberts, Steve Trimble, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

Honorary Advisory Board

William Fallon, William Finney, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan.

Ramsey County Commissioners

Commissioner Jim McDonough, Chair

Commissioner Toni Carter

Commissioner Blake Huffman

Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire

Commissioner Rafael Ortega

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt

Commissioner Janice Rettman

Ryan T. O'Connor, Manager, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2018, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.

The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Email address: info@rchs.com; website address: www.rchs.com

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

The mission statement of the Ramsey County Historical Society adopted by the Board of Directors on January 25, 2016.

The Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to be widely recognized as an innovator, leader, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and using local history in education. Our mission of *preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future* guides this vision.

The Society began in 1949 when a group of citizens acquired and preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family had acquired in 1849. Following five years of restoration work, the Society opened the Gibbs Farm museum (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974). Originally programs focused on telling the story of the pioneer life of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the historic site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, building additional structures, and dedicating outdoor spaces to tell these stories. The remarkable relationship of Jane Gibbs with the Dakota during her childhood in the 1830s and again as an adult encouraged RCHS to expand its interpretation of the Gibbs farm to both pioneer and Dakota life.

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, an expanded commitment from Ramsey County enabled the organization to move its library, archives, and administrative offices to downtown St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An additional expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to better serve the public and allow greater access to the Society's vast collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, due to an endowment gift of \$1 million, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS has continuously focused on ensuring it serves Ramsey County's diverse citizenry. As part of this ongoing effort, please check the RCHS website at [www.rchs.com](http://www.rchs.com) for the opening of an impactful new exhibit, "Selma 70," the publication of the Lower-town Interpretive Plan, and other scheduled events and programs at Gibbs, Landmark, and elsewhere in the community.



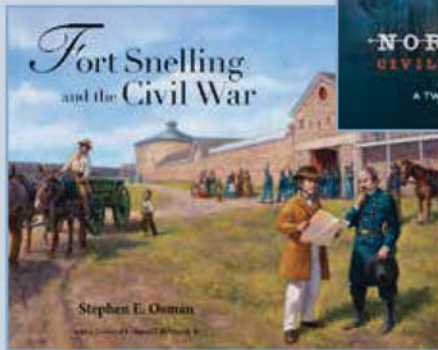


## Rewards for Amateur Oarsmen



The Citizens Cup, left, and the Mayors Cup were presented to the winners of the Junior and Senior Four-Oared races at the Minnesota Boat Club's annual Fourth of July Regatta. Both cups were given to the Minnesota Boat Club in 1877. The elaborate engraving on each cup is visible in these photos and it includes the names and dates of some of the winners of these cups.

*Photos of the trophies by Sarah Risser, courtesy of Bruce Kessel, captain of the Minnesota Boat Club.*



The Ramsey County Historical Society publishes a wide variety of award-winning books, DVDs and digital content on historical subjects for children and adults.

Our recent publications include a ground-breaking study of Fort Snelling during the Civil War and the Dakota Conflict, *Fort Snelling and the Civil War*; the history and restoration of *Custom House*, the Art Deco-style Post Office in Lowertown; and in partnership with TPT, *North Star: Civil War Stories*, a film on the experiences of African-American Minnesotans who fought in the Civil War, (available as a DVD).

Past issues of *Ramsey County History* and other digital content is available on the website.

To order or explore more about our magazines, films and publications, see the website at [www.rchs.com](http://www.rchs.com) or call RCHS at 651-222-0701.

<https://publishing.rchs.com/>  
651-222-0701

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



Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society  
323 Landmark Center  
75 West Fifth Street  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Twin Cities, MN  
Permit #3989

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Dr. Nellie N. Barsness in uniform shortly before her 1918 departure from New York for service with the Women's Overseas Hospital U.S.A. in France. For more on Dr. Nellie and her experiences at the front, see Johannes Allert's article on page 12.