

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Eliza Edgerton Newport and
St. Paul's Floating Bethel, 1891-1903**

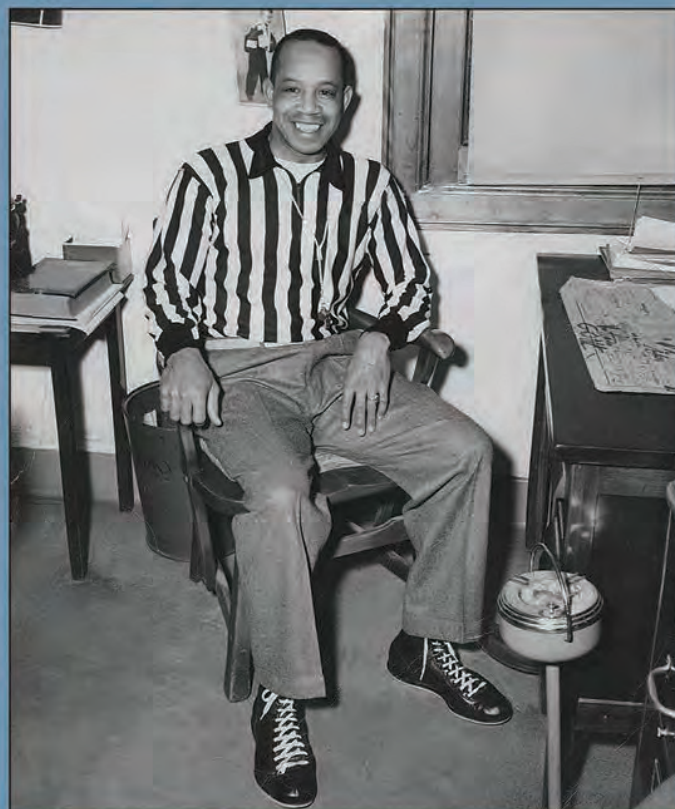
CHRISTINE PODAS-LARSON, PAGE 11



*Remembering One of
Our Community Legends—*

Jimmy Lee

FRANK M. WHITE, PAGE 1



Jimmy Lee was a respected go-to sports authority in the Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul, and throughout Minnesota.

By the Numbers . . .

Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities (UGMTC) oversees the Bethel Hotel, located at 435 University Avenue in St. Paul. It is the descendant of St. Paul's Floating Bethel.

Number of UGMTC locations, including the Bethel Hotel

5

Number of emergency shelter beds available for men in need at UGMTC

194

Number of beds for men at the Bethel Hotel, UGMTC's transitional housing program

107

Number of men served at the Bethel Hotel in 2018

1,286

Number of men enrolled in UGMTC's Christ Recovery Center programs

81

Number of women and children who found safe shelter through UGMTC in 2018

108

SOURCES:

Brian Molohon, V.P. Development, UGMTC
www.ugmtc.org/

Christine Podas-Larson's article, beginning on page 11, brings the story of St. Paul's Floating Bethel to life and celebrates Eliza Edgerton Newport, whose charitable work changed lives.

ON THE COVER



Jimmy Lee was an award-winning golfer. His love for golf and all sports led to a decade-long stint as a local sports columnist.

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Message from the Editorial Board

Some of the most fascinating parts of local history are the connections between the writers, their subjects, and even the readers. In this issue, Frank White introduces us to his childhood hero, Jimmy Lee, a respected black athlete and sports officiant. Lee wrote a column for the local African-American press and became the first black umpire in the Big Ten. Christine Podas-Larson tells the story of her great-grandmother, Eliza Edgerton Newport, a society woman who championed the working poor. Newport, an ardent temperance supporter, helped establish the Floating Bethel, a boat anchored on the Mississippi that provided beds, meals, and classes for those who needed support. Finally, Eileen and Aine McCormack present the history of the Tazewell Apartments at Laurel and Western. The Tazewell was home to middle-class tenants, including young professionals, teachers, stenographers, and railroad workers. In reading this article, I discovered that the authors included my favorite elementary school teacher, Gertrude Berg, who lived there for forty years. Thus, I happily confirm that Miss Berg did not, in fact, reside on the second floor of Linwood Park School, as I always assumed in fourth grade, but had her own life at the Tazewell, entirely out of school!

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. Thanks also to the Tazewell Condominium Association for their financial support.

Eliza Edgerton Newport and St. Paul's Floating Bethel, 1891-1903

CHRISTINE PODAS-LARSON

One man smelled smoke in the air as he entered the hallway; some felt the sudden heat as they lay in bed; others saw the lapping flames arising out their windows. In panic, they bolted from their rooms, yelled the alarm, and pounded on doors. On the night of July 5, 1893, eighty people were housed on the Bethel Boat—moored at Sibley Street on the Mississippi River—when fire broke out about 10:00 p.m. Within minutes, an inferno engulfed the boat, shattering windows, surging down corridors, crashing beams, and licking the decks. Passengers jumped into the fiery waters, inched in terror along railings to the gangplank, broke screens and leapt to safety across the chasm that separated the upper deck from the Milwaukee Railroad tracks. Boats nearby came to the rescue until forced by threatening flames to cut loose. Heroic crew carried and dragged to the dock those overcome with smoke and burned beyond saving. People on surrounding boats, the levee, and Robert Street Bridge witnessed hell in the waters below, as if from a scene in Dante.¹

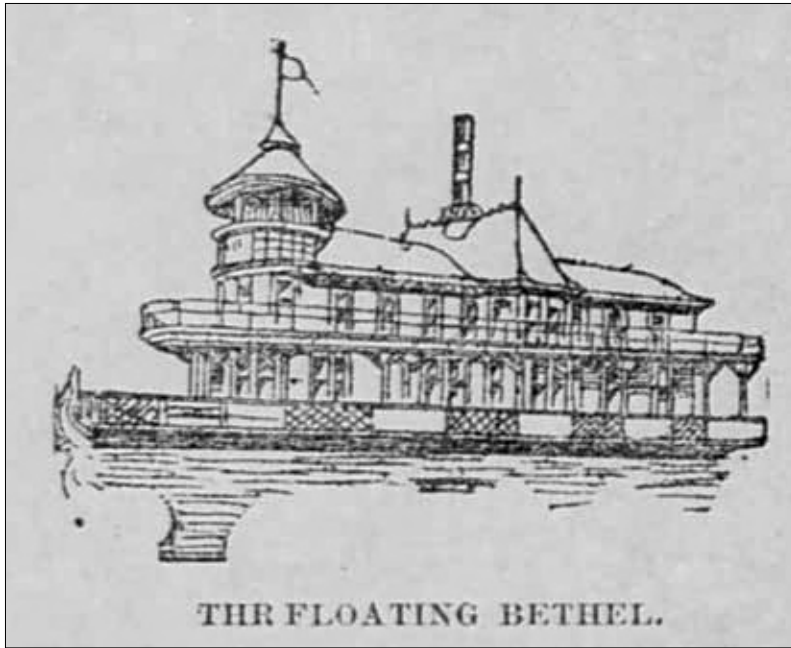
By morning light, the tragedy was clear: the boat was a charred hull; dazed passengers who had escaped waited anxiously nearby, their personal belongings forever gone. Three people died that night, and a fourth expired within the week. Lodgers in the Bethel's Friendly Inn had been the homeless and unemployed; traveling clergy; and those with temporary work in St. Paul. Most were river and railroad workers, one was an actor, another a photographer, another a wallpaper cleaner. There was a Scot who worked for West Publishing. There were families with small children. The Bethel's crew numbered its bathhouse attendants, its ministers, and its engineer and matron, both of whom perished. Among the dead was Lulu Morgan, teenage daughter of the boat's literal and spiritual skipper, Rev. David Morgan. The general consensus was that the Bethel Boat

was a lost cause, never to return to anchor on St. Paul's levee again.

Within days, Eliza Edgerton Newport, a trustee of the Bethel Association and president of its Women's Auxiliary called a meeting in her elegant home at 217 Summit Avenue to develop a strategy to raise \$5,000 to repair the boat. On July 15, she stood up in front of the press and staunchly challenged assertions that the boat was a fire trap that should be scrapped and should never have been allowed on the riverfront: "It was no more a fire trap than any other wooden building and not nearly so much as an ordinary steamboat," she asserted. "The facts should be clearly stated."² She went on to raise the required funds, and the Bethel's cafeteria and Sunday school reopened in October; by November, the Friendly Inn was again in business, and several hundred were served Thanksgiving dinner.³

The Bethel Fire, July 5, 1893, in which four people perished. Saint Paul Pioneer Press, July 6, 1893, p. 1. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.





Many area newspapers made mention of the opening of the Floating Bethel in May 1891. The Saint Paul Globe, May 3, 1891, p. 3. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

A true believer in the Bethel Boat's mission, Eliza Newport had the stature and determination to lead its resurrection so that it continued to serve the working poor in the heart of the waterfront for the next decade. The story of the Bethel Boat illuminates Eliza's commitment to the well-being of the working classes and epitomizes her civic leadership, which played a substantial role in shaping humanitarian, patriotic, and artistic aspects of St. Paul life in the late nineteenth century.

Introduction

Eliza Edgerton Newport came to Minnesota in 1872 as her husband, General Reece Marshall Newport, was engaged first as disbursing agent and later as treasurer, auditor, and chief land agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad.⁴ Brainerd, the railroad's early headquarters, was their first stop. In 1877, the Newports arrived in the Twin Cities. In 1882, they settled in a large home at 217 Summit Avenue, now site of the Cathedral of Saint Paul's parking lot. Over the next thirty years, Eliza would rise to become one of the most influential women in the state and the life of its capital city.

She charted new roles for women as leaders, and her 1909 obituary noted that she was "always foremost in movements for civic and Christian advancement and . . . heartily interested and active in every effort for the true and

lasting welfare of womankind."⁵ *Who's Who Among Minnesota Women*, published in 1924 fifteen years after her death, recognized Eliza's substantial accomplishments.⁶ The organizational and aesthetic impacts of her work in St. Paul remain with us today.

Early Life on the Ohio River

Growing up in Marietta and nearby Newport, Ohio, Eliza Edgerton and Reece Newport had known one another since childhood; both were born in 1838 and lived in the river-centered world of Washington County. Marietta, at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers, was the first city of the Northwest Territory, established 1787, with core values that prohibited slavery and allowed for female estate inheritance. Settled by New Englanders following the Revolutionary War, it evolved as a center of abolitionist sentiment and a haven in the Underground Railroad, just across the Ohio from Virginia (after 1861, West Virginia). Marietta has a feeling much like St. Paul on the Mississippi—an important river port with tall bluffs overlooking a broad wooded valley.

Eliza was the fifth of eight children of Luther Edgerton Jr. and Elizabeth Morgan. Eliza's was a pioneer family, descending from Plymouth Colony's William Bradford and migrating to the Northwest Territory from Norwich, Connecticut, in 1816. Her grandfather, Luther Edgerton Sr., built a ready-made clothing enterprise which her father evolved into a prosperous mercantile business along the Ohio, with homes and stores in Marietta and a few miles upriver in Newport.

Eliza's father was a model of entrepreneurial and community spirit and was very active in the civic and church life of Washington County. Always resourceful, he even issued his own currency in Newport during the Civil War!⁷ Eliza's mother, Elizabeth, was descended from the Revolutionary War Colonel George Morgan, who was also an explorer and agricultural entrepreneur; his vast Morganza estate outside Pittsburgh was Elizabeth's home until her marriage to Luther.⁸ This patriotic heritage resonated deeply with Eliza—it was vividly present in her daily home life as she heard and thrilled to heroic and pioneering stories told and retold and as she took to heart the values of democracy.

She later wrote, “I love my country . . . and through the traditions of my ancestry and personal experiences, have some faint realization of what it cost to establish and maintain our free institutions.”⁹

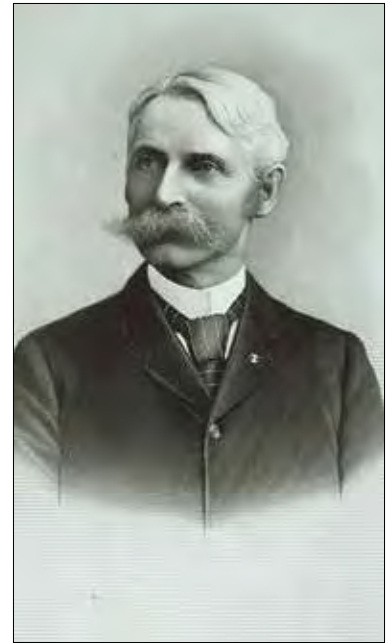
Elizabeth Morgan Edgerton’s family was well educated. Her father and grandfather had graduated from Princeton, and her great uncle, Dr. John Morgan, was in the first class of the University of Pennsylvania and later co-founded its School of Medicine (renamed Perelman School of Medicine in 2011). Luther and Elizabeth’s children were educated at home and in local schools.

In the educational avant-garde of her time, Eliza left home at age thirteen to board and study at the Washington Women’s Seminary in Pennsylvania, one-hundred miles from Marietta. The seminary’s headmistress was the inspirational Sarah Foster Hanna. Hanna was a protégé and close friend of women’s education pioneer Emma Willard, whose Troy Female Seminary was the first school for women’s education in America and set a national model for other visionaries such as Catharine Beecher. Willard sought to broaden women’s studies beyond the finishing school model. She vigorously promoted the study of science, math, history, geography, and philosophy. While Willard was consumed with promoting women’s education and not involved in women’s suffrage, it is worth noting that Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a graduate of the Troy Seminary in 1832. Willard was instrumental in securing the Washington position for Hanna and even came to the school in 1844 to deliver a fiery commencement address, lauding the capacity of educated women to move beyond service to their families into service to their communities and nation.¹⁰ Hanna embraced Willard’s model and built the core curriculum at the Washington Seminary from the Troy model.

Over her critical formative years, Eliza had an opportunity to learn first-hand about the executive capacities of women from one of tremendous intelligence, warmth, dignity, and self-assurance: “Once Hanna was firmly in charge of seminary affairs, she infused the . . . institution with a new energy and vigor. The influence of her great executive ability was at once felt in the growth and prosperity of the



Eliza Edgerton Newport in her mid-fifties, around 1892. Photo from the archives of the Minnesota State Society, Daughters of the American Revolution.



Reece Marshall Newport at age fifty in 1888. Photographer: Moreno and Lopez, 1888. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

school and in its influence on the community.” Having passed rigorous public examinations, Eliza graduated in 1855 and returned to teach in Newport and was living there with her parents when the Civil War began.¹¹

Marriage and Coming to Minnesota

Reece Marshall Newport was born in Sharpsburg, Pennsylvania. His family moved to a farm in Newport, Ohio, when he was a child. His father died when Reece was sixteen. Reece continued to work the farm until his mother’s death; he then moved to Marietta to pursue his education. He graduated from Marietta College in 1860, salutatorian and a member of Marietta’s first Phi Beta Kappa chapter. Reece was an ardent Republican, frequently contributing articles to the local newspaper in support of Lincoln and debating in favor of abolition in college societies.¹² When the Civil War began in 1861, he was studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York and saw the Union troops parade down Broadway. He was inspired to return to Ohio and volunteer in the state’s quartermaster’s department.

Eliza and Reece married in Newport in 1863, just before Reece was assigned to the Union Army’s depot in Baltimore. There, he quickly

rose to rank of colonel and chief quartermaster. Newport's position at the hub of a major Union Army supply line well qualified him to later assume a key position with the nascent Northern Pacific Railroad. Railroad and Civil War historian Daniel Carroll Toomey wrote, "As a quartermaster [Colonel Newport] was constantly ordering transportation from the B&O railroad and approving freight bills. He would have become intimately familiar with the types of equipment used and the language of railroading. He also would have a sound understanding of freight rates and train routes. He made contacts with managers on other railroads as well. All of this, combined with the large amount of money he had to account for during the war, made him an ideal candidate as an executive of a newly formed railroad."¹³

Eliza was with her husband throughout his tenure in Baltimore and their son, Luther, was born there in 1864. For his faithful and meritorious service, Newport was brevetted brigadier general in 1865 and resigned his post in 1866. Between then and the time they came to Minnesota, Reece and Eliza lived in Philadelphia, Columbus, and Cincinnati, where their daughter, Mary, was born in 1868. They came to the Northern Pacific's base in Brainerd, Minnesota, in 1872 and remained there for five years; during that time, Eliza was very involved in community life and taught school. When the railroad auditor's office was transferred to St. Paul in 1877, they lived briefly in Minneapolis and then moved to White Bear (where their youngest child, Reece M. Newport Jr., was born in 1878). In 1882, they moved to 217 Summit Avenue in St. Paul.

The Home on Summit Avenue

Eliza was educated, experienced, gracious, and self-confident; with boundless energy, she readily embraced her new city. The Newport home on Summit Avenue was a premier bluff-top address that later put Eliza in the midst of St. Paul's elite society—directly across Summit from the future home of James J. Hill (completed 1891); across Selby from Norman Kittson (home completed 1884; Kittson died in 1888; house razed 1906); and a block from Henry Rice (whose daughter Rachel would marry Luther Newport in 1894).

The Newport home came to serve as Eliza's base for a plethora of social and cultural gatherings, education programs, and organizational meetings. Countless newspaper articles over thirty years note this address as a place where people from all backgrounds were welcome and where bold civic initiatives were fostered: "From this St. Paul home has emanated a constant stream of beneficence for promoting the happiness and well-being of others. Around the cheerful fireside companies of homeless young men have been brought together to exchange kindly greetings; within its doors distinguished strangers have been welcomed with gracious courtesy. In its pleasant library was formed a society for establishing homes for young women, of which Mrs. Newport is Vice President, and later, a society for furnishing daily lunches for shop girls and food for the sick."¹⁴

Patriotism, Civic Aesthetics, and Social Welfare

Reece and Eliza joined House of Hope Presbyterian Church, and in the 1880s, she chaired its Ladies Society's work in home missions,

217 Summit Avenue

One of the first homes on the bluff, 217 Summit Avenue was built in the 1870s; the address was originally "130," noted as "old" in city directories of the early 1880s. Initially, the builder/owner, capitalist Henry D. Schmidt, rented it out, notably from 1873–1881 to General Alfred H. Terry, commander of the United States Army's Department of Dakota. At a prime location facing Summit and expanding back to Selby, the home boasted a large stable and beautiful gardens. General Reece Newport

acquired the home from Schmidt in 1881 and made some improvements in 1885. Following Reece's death in 1912, his three children inherited the property; they defaulted on the mortgage in 1914. Timothy Foley acquired it through public auction, and in 1917, he conveyed the property to the Archdiocese of Saint Paul for one dollar. It was subsequently demolished by the Archdiocese to provide for the Cathedral's parking lot.

sewing, and outreach to the sick and poor. She became an early member of women's organizations, such as the New Century Club. In the early 1890s, she moved beyond church-based work and came into her own as she founded and/or led a host of ventures that promoted the well-being of St. Paul's working men and women, deepened understanding of American history, championed the roles of women in society, and fostered civic beauty.

In the years 1891–92 alone, she organized the Daughters of the American Revolution in Minnesota and became the first State Regent, was elected a trustee of the St. Paul Bethel Association and president of its Women's Auxiliary, was elected chair of the Young Women's Friendly Association board, and led a Ramsey County effort to develop an exhibition for the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago on the "power and place of women in the civilization of today."¹⁵ She expanded that list through the 1890s, as chair of the Women's Auxiliary of the 1896 Civil War Grand Encampment (the only woman on its Citizens Committee), a founder of the National Society of Colonial Dames in Minnesota, and leader of the civic Monument Association and other efforts to create public sculptures and improve the aesthetics of city streetscapes.¹⁶

Service to Working Men and Women

Eliza championed the wellbeing, sense of dignity, and self-worth of working men and women who struggled at the lower rungs of the economic ladder, with little or no job security and long separations from their families and distances from their hometowns. She wanted to provide a foundation for them to escape from dire poverty, isolation, and despair into a larger sense of civic, social, and cultural life and to build their employable skills. The organizations in which she became deeply involved shared that vision. Though they had religious leaders and spiritual foundations, these organizations were nondenominational and, while setting forth high moral standards, did not proselytize. They offered highly practical and even bold responses to real needs. In her leadership role, Eliza provided robust support for the compassionate vision and tireless work of organizational staff, raised substantial financial and in-kind support, dedicated countless volunteer hours in planning



217 Summit Avenue in the snowy winter of 1896–1897. *Courtesy of the author, from her grandfather's (R. M. Newport, Jr.) scrapbook.*



and developing charitable and artistic programs, and stood as an eloquent advocate for those who were rarely asked to speak, as successes were celebrated and challenges faced.

Eliza had closely observed and developed a deep understanding of the working classes from her early life in Ohio. Her father's stores and homes in both Newport and Marietta were quite literally on the working Ohio riverfront; thus she was familiar with those engaged in all levels of river commerce. Her family had built their clothing and mercantile businesses in the early nineteenth century through the hard work of all family members, including the women.

For nearly half a century, she was in a position to closely observe the growth of commerce

The Newport Home at 217 Summit Avenue next to the foundation of the Cathedral of Saint Paul. The home was eventually demolished and replaced by a parking lot. *Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis Archives.*

at river ports and railroad hubs. She had a keen eye to working conditions in Marietta along the Ohio River, in Baltimore during the Civil War, and in Minnesota through early development of the Northern Pacific and Western Railroads.

In 1882, within months of her arrival in St. Paul, she had organized a band of women to incorporate and open a coffee house near the river at 142 East Third Street in an effort to promote temperance and provide low-priced meals to workers.

The St. Paul Bethel

Eliza was likely drawn to the work of the Bethel Association because its mission and methods expressed values that she shared, including the Bethel's initial ties to the Presbyterian Church.¹⁷

The Bethel Association evolved from the Western Seamen's Friend Society that began in Ohio in the 1830s. It served the boatmen of the Western waters, and temperance was a core tenet. It soon associated with the Bethel [Presbyterian] Church in Cleveland and in addition to church-based efforts, evangelical "floating bethels" carried out itinerant missionary work. From 1867, the Bethel Union split from both the Society and Presbyterian Church to focus on nonsectarian social and educational relief work.¹⁸ As the Society spread west, its work in each city was put completely under local control.

Though locally autonomous, there was a loose structure for sharing and learning among Bethels in various states and some level of central guidance from an Ohio (later Chicago)-based superintendent. St. Paul Bethel Association was founded in 1872 and formally incorporated in 1882. Its mission was to serve both men and women and to succor workers who gravitated to the wharf and downtown districts and whose labor "separated them from home and the stability of family and church life."¹⁹ Many were homeless. The Association worked initially on an itinerant basis as its ministers visited riverfronts and boats, lumber camps, poor houses, hospitals, and prisons to offer prayer, religious and secular reading materials, and encouragement.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the population was shifting from country to city, thousands of new immigrants were arriving in St. Paul, and workers were flocking to the

city. Between 1870 and 1880, St. Paul's population grew from 20,030 to 133,156. Nearly all were at the mercy of boom and bust economic cycles that extended into the 1890s. With this rapid growth, slums and saloons arose in the city: "The liquor problem was making life increasingly difficult for poor working men and their families, with drink cited as the root of social evils."²⁰

In the face of tremendous need, St. Paul Bethel leaders Rev. Robert Smith and Rev. E. R. Pierce had long been aware of the need for a home for their work but lacked the funds to purchase or build a structure. Ultimately, the inspired solution was based on two models: the floating Bethels and coffee houses, such as the one established by Eliza in 1882, where people could enter for the minimal cost of a cup of coffee, meet other people, gossip, and discuss issues of mutual interest in an atmosphere devoid of alcohol, betting, and other vices.²¹

St. Paul's Floating Bethel was designed by architect Isaac Hodgson and constructed by a shipbuilder named Asa Batchelder in Stillwater for \$7,000. The funds came mostly from the sale of land that had been donated to Bethel by James J. Hill, a Bethel trustee. In May 1891, it opened on the riverfront's Lower Landing, docked at the base of Sibley Street as allowed by a special city ordinance. Rev. David Morgan was the Bethel's chaplain and skipper. Eliza was both president of the Women's Auxiliary (a typical organizational role for women at the time) and a member of Bethel's board of trustees (an unusual role for a woman).

The Bethel served the "floating class" along the river: boatmen, railroad workers, workers on the landings and depots.²² Some worked in menial jobs; others had been laid off or injured. Bethel served the women and children who were deeply impacted by the family breadwinner's unemployment or diminished financial circumstances. It also served the large population of transients who simply eked out an existence on the riverfront. All served were deemed the "worthy" poor.²³ The Bethel was a hands-on operation that provided what people needed: food, clothing, fuel, and shelter to tide them over temporary misfortunes. "There was nothing in the work to encourage idleness and dependency."²⁴

Indeed, the Bethel did not simply hand out food or provide free lodging. Nondenominational chapel services and Sunday school served as a foundation. In exchange for lodging, men had to abstain from intoxicants. Further, they were expected to saw wood to fuel the boat's engine room (any leftover wood was sold to the poor for low cost). Lodgers had to take a bath before retiring. For that purpose, a 120-foot barge with bathhouse, fed by artesian wells, was attached to the Bethel at the Sibley landing. It was thought to be the first public bath in the city, even before Harriet Island.²⁵ Included in the Bethel reading room's collection were trade and technical journals related to industries along the river and newspapers with employment ads. Rev. Morgan ran a kind of informal employment agency, regularly referring those served to opportunities in both the private and public sectors.

Aboard the Bethel

Beyond the basics of subsistence, Bethel also intended to nourish mind and spirit: it created a community space—to gather and socialize, to read, learn and build skills, and to enjoy artistic programs. There, Eliza and the Ladies Auxiliary led the way. After initially seeing to the furnishing of the boat (including a well-stocked reading room), Eliza saw the need for outreach to women and children. She felt keenly that women needed a social environment for normal friendly conversation, education, and entertainment.

The involvement of the Auxiliary was not arm's length: it was visionary, energetic, and direct. By 1892, Eliza and Auxiliary members were presiding over weekly Mothers Teas on the boat, which welcomed women with beverages, sandwiches, cakes, and even ice cream in a congenial dining-room setting. The Auxiliary also provided daycare. A hostess at each table would introduce the women to one another, and they would chat and sew as a kind of ice-melting social strategy. The programs featured instruction by female physicians and other professionals in everything from family health and cleanliness to household finance. Eliza made special efforts to sponsor musical performances, present demonstrations by painters and sculptors, and introduce new technologies (including a demonstration of the phonograph). She reached out to

The Bethel Baths

The Bethel Baths opened in June 1893 (less than a month before the fire) and were considered St. Paul's first public baths. Moored just below the Bethel boat, the "natatorium" was a 120-foot long by 24-foot wide bath barge with access by planks over the river to both wharf and Bethel. It held a 70-foot long by 24-foot wide by 5-foot deep swimming pool fed by artesian wells so the water constantly flowed through to keep it pure.* The water was heated by a huge boiler in the stern of the boat. The pool even featured diving boards. Patrons checked in and paid five cents for soap and towel and then went below deck to change in dressing rooms and shower before getting in the pool. The Women's Auxiliary provided free bathing suits. In addition to serving guests of the Friendly Inn, the baths were open for free to the public, with special "ladies afternoons" on Wednesdays and Fridays becoming popular, especially among working girls as a break from long days in shops and domestic service. In 1897, the Bethel reported that 3,000 people had availed themselves of the free baths and another 3,000 paid the minimal charge for soap and towel. When improvements to the Union Depot in 1901 required removal of the Bethel bath barge, it was offered to Dr. Justus Ohage for use on Harriet Island—an offer he graciously declined (*St. Paul Globe*, May 17, 1901).

**The water in both pool and showers was kept pure by a steady stream of water flowing from an artesian well that had been dug 140 feet below the surface of the adjoining riverbank. According to Bob Tipping of the Minnesota Geological Survey, "bedrock layers in the Twin Cities area form a shallow basin—similar to stacked dinner plates, with artesian conditions in the center caused by recharging waters from the sides." Before heavy pumping of artesian water began in the metro area, you could have a real gusher: the Bethel's well threw a stream of water twenty feet in the air as it tapped into a major aquifer close to where it is confined at the lowest point at the river. Since the 1890s, pressure in those aquifers has gone way down. Tipping likens the Bethel's artesian waters to the demonstration well in the Science Museum of Minnesota's former Big Back Yard exhibition. "The well is drilled into the Jordan aquifer—a sandstone overlain by dolostone." He added, "It is good that water for the Bethel bath was steam heated, as this artesian water is consistently about 50° F year round!"*

include the Bethel as a venue in citywide events such as the 1896 GAR National Encampment.

According to the *St. Paul Globe*, "The place was so bright and cheery that the women loved to come, and did come every week."²⁶ This work had rippling impacts both for the women served and for Eliza. Women put the lessons learned at the teas to use in their homes; they formed a society across cultural and language barriers and

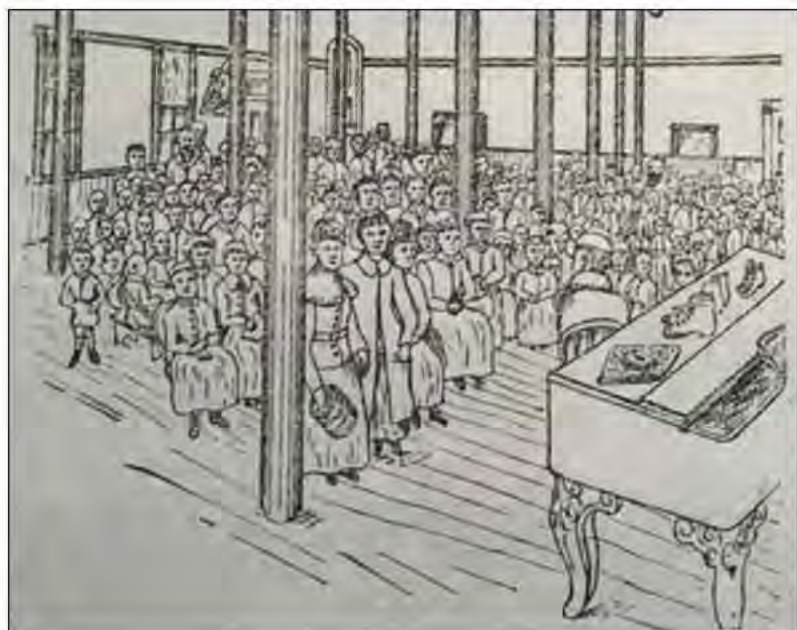
The Bethel Boat

The Floating Bethel was commissioned and built in Stillwater in 1891 for \$7,000. It was a "double decker" barge 120 feet long by 40 feet wide. Its first deck held a chapel, dining rooms, and housing for the crew. The upper "hurricane deck," known as the Friendly Inn, provided rooms for guests and a large auditorium, which accommodated the Industrial Room. The octagon housed the library and reading room. It was moored at Sibley Street by special city permit. With the adjacent Bethel Baths, the Bethel's overall footprint at the Lower Levee was substantial (a total of 240 feet in length), prompting perpetual calls from railroad companies and Lowertown business interests for its removal. A charming article in the *St. Paul Daily Globe* from June 14, 1892, p. 8, describes, "A Day at the Bethel," highlighting the breadth of reading materials available. The library was stocked with standard classics by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and others; it also carried a broad array of magazines. "One man was reading 'Russia's Treatment of Her Jewish Subjects' . . . one an essay on 'Memory,' another 'Adulteration of Food.'"

encouraged their family members and neighbors to attend. Eliza expanded this concept in her leadership of the Young Women's Friendly Association, with its downtown dining and social rooms and continuing professional education for young shop girls and office clerks.

The Auxiliary operated an Industrial Room where women would sew in exchange for credit at the Bethel store for not only the clothing they had made but also for shoes and other family

Sunday school aboard the Bethel. *Saint Paul Globe*, April 17, 1892, p. 8. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



necessities. A girls sewing room provided instruction, and a Boy's Brigade promoted habits of cleanliness, responsibility, and abstinence.

Eliza had the extraordinary executive ability to present a compelling vision and marshal women to engage in the Bethel's good work. As chair of the Auxiliary, she saw to the recruitment, training, and deployment of hundreds of women: Thirty-two served on the Auxiliary board; many others taught sewing, managed the Industrial Room, hosted teas, and visited clients in the community. She was unstinting in her efforts to raise support for the Bethel, making the rounds of churches and social clubs to introduce Bethel leaders, holding fundraisers (always capped by tea and musical performances), and appealing to women of the city to provide in-kind support (sewing machines, reading materials, and other supplies).

At its peak in the mid-to-late 1890s—the post-fire years—the floating Bethel's Friendly Inn typically accommodated eighty to one-hundred men each night. The Bethel served 600 meals each day on a cafeteria plan at the astoundingly low price of a nickel. Three-hundred young people attended its Sunday School, most of whom lived along the river and on the West Side Flats. Nine-hundred women worked in its Industrial Room, 350 girls learned to sew, and 200 boys were enrolled in the Brigade. By 1902, 150 women regularly attended the teas and entertainments each Friday. All of this on a boat at the Lower Landing!²⁷

The Evolving Riverfront and the Last Years of the Floating Bethel

By 1901, the riverfront had changed. As railroads boomed and businesses expanded along Jackson and Sibley, the "tempest tossed" Bethel was condemned by many as a nuisance and hazard: "an eyesore" in the view of many.²⁸ There were objections to the clientele of the boat, rumors about lewd behavior and harassment of good citizens, and even concern that its image would sully the reputations of the St. Paul women involved in the organization's leadership! All of this presaged arguments in St. Paul a century later as organizations such as Listening House sought to remain in the midst of downtown or move to Dayton's Bluff, and the location of the Dorothy Day Center was debated.



The wreck of the Bethel marked the end of "the floating era," but the work to help those in need of assistance moved on shore and continues even today. *Saint Paul Globe*, March 11, 1903, p. 10. *Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

There was a push by the Milwaukee Railroad to remove the Bethel from the depot pier at Sibley to Jackson Street—a move ardently resisted by the Diamond Jo Line Steamer Company and localized river interests. At one point, the Bethel was moved to Robert Street, but the city engineer deemed it a hazard to river traffic and the bridge structure. Moored again at Sibley, in March 1903, a huge block of ice rammed into its hull, and the boat sank in ten feet of water to settle on the muddy river bottom. Shivering lodgers were saved, and no one was injured, but the boat was a total loss.²⁹

Through all of this, Eliza remained a loyal and dedicated trustee, organizer, and leader. The need and demand for services did not abate after the disaster. It was clear something had to be done, and, this time, not on a boat. Resources were quickly secured to purchase and renovate the old Grand Opera House building at Wabasha and Fourth streets (that building had suffered extensive fire damage and closed in 1899). In August 1904, the new land Bethel opened, serving both men and women with 142 rooms (some for families), a cafeteria that could serve 500 meals per day, the familiar reading, industrial and sewing rooms, a new assembly room

for teas and entertainments, and even a gym and bowling alleys.³⁰

Final Years

Reece had left the railroad in 1888 to start his own real estate, mortgage, and insurance business, first with partners Thomas Cochran and Emerson W. Peet and later with his son Luther. For a decade, his enterprise thrived, but in 1898, he was hard hit by the rippling impacts of economic recessions. He rented out the Summit Avenue home between 1900 and 1905, as he and Eliza temporarily moved to a smaller home at 433 Ashland.³¹ The business recovered, and they returned to 217 Summit in 1906, though Eliza's health was failing. She died there on May 27, 1909, at age seventy-one. Reece died on November 1, 1912.³² They are both interred in Oakland Cemetery.

Rev. David Morgan remained with St. Paul Bethel through 1915; after that, it remained open under new leadership for another three years and then went dormant. In 1927, the Bethel Association entered into an agreement with the Union Gospel Mission, making it a conditional gift of all its assets (totaling \$42,500). Union Gospel Mission had undertaken a campaign to raise funds for a hotel for workingmen at Eighth and

Union Gospel Mission's Bethel Hotel at Wacouta between Seventh and Eighth Streets around 1960.

The Bethel has been in its present location since 1980 at 435 University Avenue.

Photos courtesy of Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities.



Wacouta Streets and, thereby, promote the purposes for which the Bethel had been founded. It seemed a perfect solution for both organizations. Under terms of this gift, The Mission was obligated to operate the hotel in a clean and orderly manner and in such a way as to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of workingmen, all at the cost to the Mission for furnishing those services. Further, any religious teaching had to be

nondenominational in nature. The Union Gospel Mission's Bethel Hotel remains with us today at 435 University Avenue.³³

Christine Podas-Larson is the founder of Public Art Saint Paul and great-granddaughter of Eliza Edgerton Newport.

NOTES

1. The story of the Bethel Boat fire was extensively covered in Twin Cities newspapers, especially the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 6, 1893, p. 1; the *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 6, 1893, p. 3; the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 6, 1893, p. 1 and July 7, 1893, p. 1; and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, July 7, 1893, p. 3.

2. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 15, 1893, p. 2.

3. The coroner's jury attributed the fire's cause to an explosion in the kitchen, *Saint Paul Globe*, July 11, 1893, p. 2. The restored and fireproofed boat reopened in the fall. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, October 2, 1893, p. 2 and December 1, 1893, p. 2.

4. Gen. R. M. Newport's biography is featured in Henry A. Castle, *Minnesota: Its Story and Biography* (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1915), 3:1615–16 and C. C. Andrews, ed., *History of St. Paul, Minn. with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Manson & Co., 1890), 165–168. His time in Brainerd with the Northern Pacific Railroad was extensively covered in the *Brainerd Tribune* from the time he first arrived there in 1872; on June 3, 1876, p. 1, the paper expressed regret that the Newports would soon be relocating to the Twin Cities, noting that "Mrs. R. M. Newport [is] a well-beloved teacher of the school and . . . her de-

parture from among us . . . will be seriously regretted by our citizens."

5. *St. Paul Dispatch*, May 28, 1909, p. 16.

6. Mary Dillon Foster, compiler and editor, *Who's Who Among Minnesota Women: A History of Woman's Work in Minnesota from Pioneer Days to Date, Told in Biographies, Memorials and Records of Organizations* (St. Paul: Mary Dillon Foster, 1924), 233.

7. The Edgerton family genealogy is recorded in records of the Colonial Dames of America and in the Edgerton Bible, printed in Philadelphia (1809), now in the collection of the Campus Martius Museum in Marietta, Ohio. The history of the Edgerton business in Marietta is related by Adrienne E. Saint-Pierre in "Luther Edgerton's Clothing Books: A Record of Men's Ready-to-Wear from the Early Nineteenth Century," a chapter in *Textiles in Early New England: Design, Production and Consumption* published for the Annual Proceedings of the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife in 1997. The author has Luther Newport Jr.'s Civil War scrip in her personal collection.

8. The genealogy of Elizabeth McKennan Morgan is recorded in the records of the Daughters of the American Revolution and in an article about "Mrs. R. M. Newport" by Ada Walker Adams in *American Monthly*

Magazine, (July–December, 1892): 368–73, published by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Morgan family story is related in the biographical sketch from *The Journal of Dr. John Morgan of Philadelphia from the City of Rome to the City of London 1764*, published in a limited edition by J. B. Lippincott Company Philadelphia, 1907, in the collection of the author with inscription “to Eliza E. Newport the great-grandniece of Dr. John Morgan.”

9. Records of the Daughters of the American Revolution in the Minnesota Historical Society: “*Report by Eliza Edgerton Newport, First State Regent to the Chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Minnesota*,” 1898.

10. Emma Willard, “Address to the Pupils of the Washington Female Seminary,” (G. Parkin, 1844), 13.

11. Eliza studied and boarded at the Washington Women’s Seminary from 1851–55. The Seminary’s early history noting Eliza’s graduation is related in the program of the Semi-Centennial Celebration of the Washington Female Seminary, 1838–1886, Washington, Penna., 1886 courtesy of Citizens Library, Washington, Penna. Harriet K. Branton wrote of “Sarah Foster Hanna and Washington Female Seminary” for the *Washington Observer*, July 1978.

12. Records of Reece M. Newport’s college life, including his participation in debating societies, are in the archives of the Marietta College Library, Marietta, Ohio.

13. Daniel Carroll Toomey in an email to the author, May 3, 2018. Toomey is a Civil War historian and author of *The War Came by Train: The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad during the Civil War* (Baltimore: B&O Railroad Museum, 2013).

14. *American Monthly Magazine*, 1:572.

15. *The Saint Paul Daily Globe*, February 18, 1982, p. 2.

16. Eliza’s leadership in the GAR 30th National Encampment was extensively covered in Twin Cities media, notably in the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, December 17, 1896, p. 2 and August 26, 1896, p. 2; the *Souvenir Program for the GAR 30th National Encampment*, *St. Paul 1896*; and in her own words in the *Report of the Officers and Chairmen of the Committees of the Thirtieth National Encampment GAR held in Saint Paul, Minnesota August 31 to September 5, 1896*, pp. 62–65. Her leadership of the Young Women’s Friendly Association was featured in the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, October 25, 1903, p. 33. Her leadership in promoting the aesthetics of the public sphere is noted in the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, April 15, 1897, p. 2 and July 16, 1897, p. 10.

17. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 4, 1882, p. 2 and *St. Paul Daily Globe*, November 5, 1882, p. 3.

18. Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, Case Western Reserve University, 1998.

19. *St. Paul Globe*, March 15, 1891, p. 2.

20. Virginia Brainard Kunz, *Where the Doors Never Close: The Story of Saint Paul’s Union Gospel Mission* (St. Paul: The Union Gospel Mission, 1993), pp. 12–13.

21. The history of the Saint Paul Bethel Association and its decision to open a Floating Bethel is described in

the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, June 1, 1884, p. 4; March 15, 1891, p. 2; and May 21, 1894, p. 2.

22. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, May 21, 1894, p. 2.

23. St. Paul Bethel and other late nineteenth-century charities worked hard to distinguish the “worthy/deserving poor” from those who were viewed as tramps and vagabonds. Newspaper coverage of charitable efforts in the Twin Cities, speeches by organizational leaders, and fundraising pamphlets of the time emphasized this distinction. In its printed appeal for land and support for the Bethel in 1903 (in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society), the St. Paul Bethel Association restated its motto: “to help those who will help themselves” and included a testimonial crediting the Bethel with keeping tramps away from St. Paul’s waterfront.

24. The *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 7, 1893, following the Bethel fire.

25. Commission and opening of the Floating Bethel and its early operation received broad coverage in local newspapers throughout the 1890s, especially in the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, May 3, 1891, p. 3 and the *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 11, 1891, p. 3. The opening of the Bethel Bath was featured in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 24, 1893, p. 7 and July 15, 1893, p. 10; the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, June 24, 1893, p. 4; and the *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 5, 1893, p. 3.

26. The Mothers Teas began soon after the Floating Bethel opened and continued to draw crowds over the next decade. The *St. Paul Globe*, November 2, 1902, p. 29, told the story of “St. Paul’s Unique Mothers Club.”

27. Newspapers regularly featured stories about life aboard the Floating Bethel throughout the 1890s. Extensive coverage was featured in the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, April 18, 1892, p. 8 and April 10, 1898, p. 18.

28. The *St. Paul Globe*, November 8, 1901, p. 2. The location of the Bethel was often at issue before Saint Paul’s Board of Alderman as reported in the *St. Paul Globe* in short news updates throughout 1901 and 1902.

29. The boat was hit about 9:30 in the evening on March 10, 1903, as widely reported, especially in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 10, 1903, p. 2 and the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, March 11, 1903, p. 10. The *St. Paul Daily Globe* carried a beautiful eulogy to the Floating Bethel on March 29, 1903, p. 14.

30. The *Saint Paul Daily Globe*, August 14, 1903, p. 2.

31. *The St. Paul City Directory* tracks the residences of the Newports in St. Paul from 1882 until Reece Newport’s death in 1912, and ads in the *St. Paul Daily Globe* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 1901–1905 carry advertisements for rental of 217 Summit Avenue by R. M. Newport and Sons. Louis and Maud Hill rented 217 Summit while their own home was under construction across the street (at 260 Summit), and their daughter was born there, per announcement in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 12, 1903, p. 5.

32. Obituary of Reece M. Newport, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 2, 1912, p.1.

33. Bruce Sanborn papers in the collection of the Ramsey County Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

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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 offers a wide variety of public programming for youth and adults. Please see www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps at Gibbs Farm, and much more. RCHS is a trusted education partner serving 15,000 students annually on field trips or through outreach programs in schools that bring to life the Gibbs Family as well as the Dakota people of Cloud Man's village. These programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not yet a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

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



William Shields Fallon (1931–2018): A Tribute

William Fallon, former president and chairman of the board of the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS), couldn't get enough of his history. Fallon was born in the midst of the Great Depression, October 2, 1931, in St. Paul, and his father, William H. Fallon, served in the U.S. Seventh Army under George S. Patton from 1942 to 1946. Both monumental events shaped the way the younger Fallon thought about history beginning early in his life, and as he grew older, he operated with a global view of how important the past is.

Fallon passed away November 27, 2018. He'll be remembered as a loving husband, father, uncle, and grandfather, as a local attorney for half a century, and as a pillar in his community and church. The one interest of his that connected all of these roles was his hunger for history.

According to his longtime friend Father Kevin M. McDonough, "History was not so much an acquired taste for Bill, as it was a genetic inheritance." McDonough explained that Fallon was proud of his rich Minnesota heritage that included a familial connection to General James Shields, a Minnesota pioneer and Civil War general. In addition, Fallon's father was a mayor of Saint Paul (1938–1940), and his wife Jean Marie (Landherr) Fallon's family helped shape the town of Rose Creek in the southern part of the state.

Fallon majored in history at the College of St. Thomas, moving on to earn a law degree from the University of Minnesota. His son Martin Fallon imagines his father might have become a history professor, if he had it to do all over again. Fallon continually read about, studied, and jumped into all things history.

"He was a voracious reader," said Martin Fallon. "In fact, starting in 1982, he kept lists of every book he read. He had three manila envelopes of legal pads listing books; general history, ancient history, modern history, Russian history ... He had a very curious mind."



Fallon got involved with RCHS in the 1980s and served several terms in the 1990s as president and chairman of the board. He was active with the organization as a board member until he retired in the early 2000s and remained an honorary board member until his death. Fallon's son remembers that his father liked working with the Society's first magazine editor, the late Virginia Brainard Kunz.

"He was most proud of that magazine," said Martin Fallon, who himself is now a member of the RCHS Board of Directors and Editorial Board. "For a local historical society, [my father] knew they had a top-shelf scholarly journal."

In his later years, Fallon worked as chancellor of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and, according to Father McDonough, part of Fallon's job was that of chief archivist of the Archdiocese. "He always told me that he considered the chancellor position to be the best job of his life because of the Catholic faith he treasured, because he admired his coworkers, and because he became a steward of 150 years of Minnesota history," McDonough said.

Certainly William Fallon, this man who loved history, will be remembered as an important figure in St. Paul's own history. It was an honor working with Mr. Fallon, and we are grateful for all he did for the citizens and organizations of St. Paul and the Ramsey County Historical Society.

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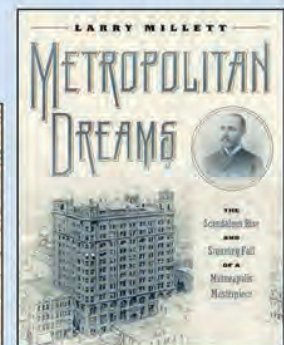
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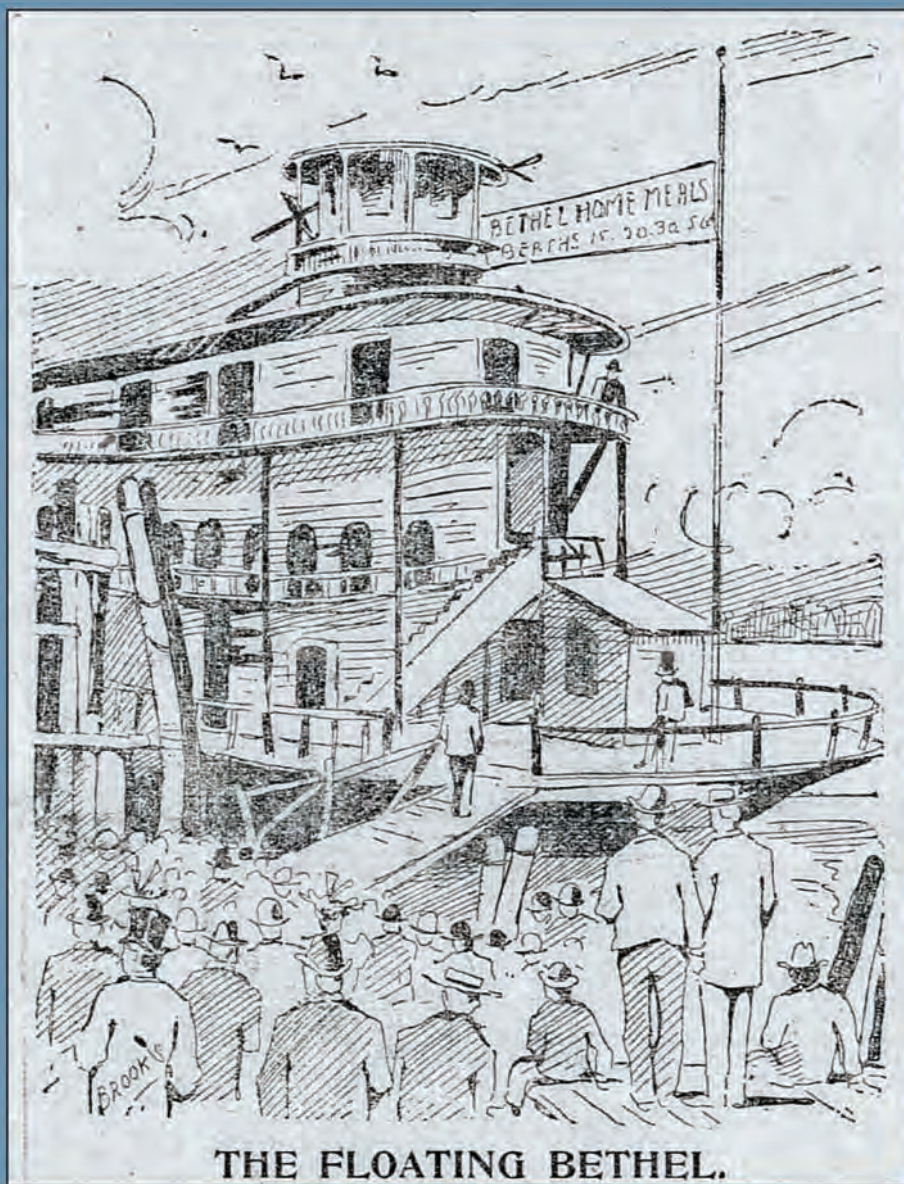
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The Floating Bethel, 1893, two years after it opened on the St. Paul Riverfront at Jackson Street. *The Saint Paul Globe*, July 7, 1893. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.