

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Growing Up in Ramsey County

With a Dash of Foreign Spice

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One Hundred Years Serving New Americans

The Centennial of the International Institute of Minnesota

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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



GIBBS FARM

Pathways to Dakota & Pioneer Life
Experience | Understand | Grow

Book Review



The Crusade for Forgotten Souls: Reforming Minnesota's Mental Institutions, 1946–1954

Susan Bartlett Foote

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018
312 pages; soft cover; photos; \$22.95

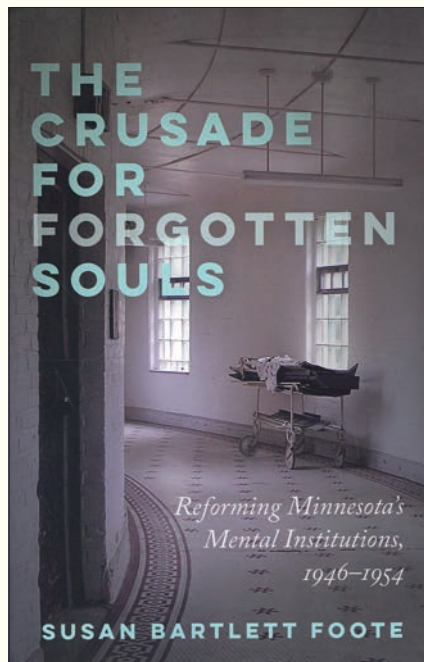
REVIEWED BY GARY F. GLEASON

Susan Bartlett Foote has written an impressive book that combines a great story and exhaustive research about the early years of social welfare reform. *The Crusade for Forgotten Souls: Reforming Minnesota's Mental Institutions, 1946–1954*, won a Minnesota Book Award in April and is seen through the lens of several mental institutions, the history of which dates from the late 1800s.

Foote, a professor emeriti in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota, relates how society, religion, and politics, meld and push key players beyond their comfort levels into a strong foundation still relevant today.

Foote's personal connection to this subject is significant. While closet cleaning one day in 2013, she discovered the personal papers of her former father-in-law, the Rev. Arthur Foote, who was a Unitarian called to ministry at St. Paul's Unity Church. Handwritten notes, newspaper clippings, and copies of speeches were primary sources that led her to unearth an array of material, answering many of her own questions and providing convictions for the future.

While relating sometimes tedious details, the author provides welcome narrative that creates a compelling story. Institutions then were known to be places where people were sent for social control, not for treatment. Most were committed involuntarily, and all were sorted by behavior, not diagnosis. To these circumstances come five key individuals:



The Crusade for Forgotten Souls: Reforming Minnesota's Mental Institutions, 1946–1954 by Susan Bartlett Foote won the 2019 Minnesota Book Award for nonfiction. The Book Awards is a program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

- Engla Schey, daughter of Norwegian immigrants whose father lived at a facility in Fergus Falls until his death. Because of her father's experiences, Schey found a calling in caregiving and worked in several Minnesota facilities.
- Arthur Foote, a young Unitarian minister from the Twin Cities.
- Genevieve Steefel, a social activist with ties to the Unitarians.
- Geri Hoffner Joseph, an award-winning journalist invited by Rev. Foote to report on the state institutions.
- Luther Youngdahl, the state's Republican Governor from 1947–1951, known as the Minnesotan who found himself in the midst of social reform.

This disparate group called for drastic improvements, each with a significant role in moving from treating people with mental illness as disgraced and incurable criminals to Youngdahl's proclamation that

“mentally ill patients are human beings, each one divinely endowed by his creator, which a theologian calls a soul and a psychiatrist calls a personality.”

It is widely thought that the Governor moved what had been a public policy issue to a moral crusade, inscribed in legislative action. He noted that the future would depend on how descendants of the Minnesota pioneers build for the future and maintain their inherited security, freedom, and democracy.

While not all of Youngdahl's work survived through the next administration, the foundation was set. Prophetically, he concluded with these words that ring true even today: “The world is in turmoil and crisis . . . yet hazards and uncertainties must not sap our courage or paralyze us into action.”

Foote writes with intertwining complexities that can seem overwhelming, as well they are and continue to be. She concludes with considerations she believes must remain intact. Effective political leadership is crucial, the policy making process needs improvement, citizen advocates are critical to proper oversight, and the media has a responsibility to present information that the system doesn't.

While it might be tempting to assign full blame to the institutions themselves for the conditions described, they did the best they could with what they had, and what they had was inadequate facilities and equipment, untrained staff, and some troubled souls who worked and lived in these conditions. Remarkably, Foote has crafted a stirring document that reminds us of the work done and challenges us to continue on this foundation.

Gary F. Gleason holds a B.A. in American studies from Hamline University and an M.S. in social services from Minnesota State Mankato. He built a career in executive management, leading community-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He also served in an executive role with the Episcopal Church in Minnesota.



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The entrance to the Midland Hills clubhouse in 1921 was by means of a gravel road that crossed in front of the old third tee. *Courtesy of Midland Hills Country Club Archives.*