

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

#MinneAsianStories

**Illustrated Living History**

BERT LEE, YUSANAT TWAY, AND ZOUA VANG,  
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Ramsey County's 'Boy Problem'

# Snapshots of Boys Totem Town

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## By the Numbers . . .



The Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL) started in 2013 as a network for Asian Minnesotan leaders to connect, learn, and act together to improve community life. CAAL uplifts and elevates Asian American leaders and issues, celebrates the rich diverse cultures and histories of Asian Minnesotans, and works to build a strong and inclusive Minnesota for all.

Number of Asian ethnic groups in Minnesota?

**42**

Asian population in Ramsey County as of 2017?

**84,000**

Average age of Asian Minnesotans?

**29**

Asian Minnesotan buying power today?

**\$4 billion**

Number of Asian Minnesotan leaders in CAAL's Network?

**2,500**

Number of CAAL #MinneAsianStories publications?

**1, with No. 2 debuting May 2020**

SOURCES: Coalition of Asian American Leaders and United States Census Bureau.

To learn more, see "#MinneAsianStories: Illustrated Living History," beginning on page 16.

## ON THE COVER

Boys Totem Town, a juvenile detention center in Ramsey County, closed its doors in 2019 after more than a century. Photos (left to right) courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society and Ramsey County, Minnesota.

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## Message from the Editorial Board

Stories of youth are often the most compelling, and this issue opens a window into several of those in our county's history. Bobbie Scott details the one-hundred-year history of Boys Totem Town, which housed boys who had committed minor offenses in Ramsey County. In its early days, the detention facility provided important consistency in discipline and education for the boys, even though runaways were frequent. But as models for treating juvenile offenders changed and populations of color were overrepresented, Boys Totem Town became outmoded and finally closed its doors in 2019. This issue also includes engaging stories from three young Asian Americans—Bert Lee, Yusanat Tway, and Zoua Vang. These show daily living in different cultural settings in Ramsey County. Some of them were illustrated in a graphic booklet as part of #MinneAsianStories, a campaign of the Coalition of Asian American Leaders. Finally, Vern Schultz shares memories of his boyhood dream job, landed at age fourteen: a groundskeeper for the St. Paul Saints at Lexington Park in the 1940s. Among other duties, the ground crew scrambled to retrieve valuable hit-outside-the-park balls from such places as the Prom Ballroom parking lot and University Avenue!

*Anne Cowie*  
Chair, Editorial Board

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## Snapshots of Boys Totem Town

BOBBIE SCOTT, PHD

Nick Davis and his friends were hanging out one day in 1958 when they spotted a car—unlocked, keys inside—theirs for the taking. The teens from St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood enjoyed their wheels for over a month—until they ran out of gas. As they stood on Jackson Street near Mechanic Arts High School wondering what to do, an ambulance and squad car rushed by, headed to an emergency. The foursome instinctively reacted. Police in a second car noticed and also reacted, pursuing the fleeing boys. In the end, only Davis was sentenced—eight months at Boys Totem Town.<sup>1</sup>

Davis, who later in life converted to Islam and changed his name to Nathaniel A. Khaliq, found himself lost, angry, and asking, "How did I get here?" Upon arrival, he looked at the building on a hill—no fences in sight—and plotted his escape. But Donald Brandvold, the assistant superintendent, seemed to read his mind, "Mr. Davis, you can leave any time you want. But we will get you, and there's another place for you after that."<sup>2</sup>

Boys Totem Town closed in July 2019 after more than a century. As Chris Crutchfield, a deputy director with Ramsey County Community Corrections observed, "Totem Town meant so many things to so many people through so many administrations."<sup>3</sup> Because of its long and complicated history, however, we can only glimpse pieces of its story through the available public records, newspaper accounts, and memories of those who worked or were sent there.

Boys Totem Town was called the Ramsey County Detention Home—Highwood when it opened in 1913.<sup>4</sup> People also called it the Boys' Farm and most often, after 1935, the Home School for Boys.<sup>5</sup> Around that time, the institution's Boy Scout troop carved a totem pole from a dead tree. Over the years, more poles were carved, and in 1938, Superintendent George Reif began informally referring to the facility as

Boys Totem Town. The moniker became official in 1957.<sup>6</sup>

While the name changed several times, the staff's efforts to help troubled boys remained constant. The initial goal was to alter the behavior of Ramsey County's "incorrigible"<sup>7</sup> or "unfortunate" boys between the ages of eight and eighteen, who had committed lesser offenses, and keep them out of adult jails and the Minnesota State Training School at Red Wing. From the beginning, the facility had no fences or locked gates. Teachers from Saint Paul

Using homemade scaffolding, boys often created their totems from the top down. This 1942 totem was just one of many built over several years. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*



Public Schools provided instruction. Activities ranged from farming to fishing, from building a greenhouse to building a canoe. The number of boys in residence ranged from just four after the main building burned in 1936 to well over one hundred in the 1960s, and from primarily white boys to mostly boys of color over the last thirty years. By May 2019, only six remained.<sup>8</sup>

Boys Totem Town began as an innovative alternative to Red Wing but became an anachronism. Lack of investment, overcrowding, and runaways were always common. In its last fifty years, the problems grew more challenging. Concerns about abuse, safety for boys and staff, mental health, and rising costs were ever present. By the time Totem Town reached its hundredth birthday, big changes were on the horizon. The crime rate had fallen significantly, and juvenile justice workers were realizing that in most circumstances, out-of-home placements could be damaging to children.<sup>9</sup> For several years, Ramsey County had been turning to community alternatives, such as “functional family therapy and culturally specific services”<sup>10</sup> for the majority of juvenile offenders and didn’t need Totem Town anymore.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Early Years of Ramsey County’s Juvenile Justice System**

Less than a decade into Minnesota statehood, the state legislature recognized a need for a reform school to keep youth (mostly boys), “out of adult jails and prisons . . . and to provide education, shelter, and training for young people found guilty of crimes or neglected by incompetent parents.”<sup>12</sup>

The House of Refuge of the State of Minnesota opened in 1868, and for nearly twenty years, a Presbyterian pastor named John G. Riheldaffer and his wife, Catherine, took charge, incorporating educational and religious instruction and regimented chores. There were problems, including runaways, overcrowding, and four deaths from typhoid fever in 1874. The legislature relocated the school to Red Wing in 1891. This new, larger facility followed a similar mission for incorrigible children, but it also took in those who committed more serious crimes.<sup>13</sup>

At that time during the Progressive Era, organizations across the nation took an interest in the welfare of abused, neglected, and wayward

children, and many believed that children should be at school or playing, not working in factories. In 1895, Minnesota passed a law that no child under fourteen be employed in any factory, workshop, or mine, and that children under sixteen could be employed only during vacations.<sup>14</sup>

Such groups ushered in a new philosophy of juvenile justice, believing children were qualitatively different from adults, and the justice system should treat them differently. They also thought that sentencing a child as an adult did not provide deterrence and could stigmatize the child for life. In 1899, Chicago established the first juvenile court.<sup>15</sup> The goal was to rehabilitate rather than punish. That same year, Minnesota enacted a law allowing larger cities to hire a probation officer to attend municipal court hearings where a youth under eighteen was being tried and to act in his or her best interests.<sup>16</sup> In January 1902, Albert Graves was named boys’ probation officer in St. Paul. The *Saint Paul Globe* described the probation process:

If a child pleads guilty, or is convicted, the judge commonly asks the probation officer to talk with the bad boy or girl privately and report back to the court. . . . the court as a rule sentences the offender to a fine or to detention for six months or one year in the training school at Red Wing. Immediately, also, the court suspends the sentence and places the child “on probation” under the care of the probation officer. Thereupon the very naughty angels must submit in private to questioning by the probation officer.<sup>17</sup>

Ramsey County established a juvenile court in 1905, Judge Grier Orr presiding.<sup>18</sup> This removed “wayward” youth from adult courts and provided them with rehabilitative services. Boys had to report to probation weekly and refrain from frequenting saloons or pool rooms, smoking, and playing hooky.

Most boys brought to Orr’s court were there for larceny (stealing bicycles or other property), disorderly conduct (throwing stones or breaking street lamps), or truancy. Minnesota’s first truancy law from 1885 seems lax by modern standards. It mandated that children under sixteen attend school for at least twelve weeks a

year, six of which had to be consecutive. There was no mechanism for enforcement of even these minimal requirements.<sup>19</sup>

Over the next several years, the legislature amended the truancy law and added stricter attendance requirements. Eventually, Probation Officer Graves suggested the legislature authorize a detention home for children who were “going wrong.” The home would not be a prison but a milder version of Red Wing. Judge Orr agreed.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Reform School Idea Becomes Reality**

In 1906, the new superintendent of Saint Paul Public Schools, S. L. Heeter, wrote about “reaching the troublesome boy.”<sup>21</sup> He suggested creating a parental school—a day school for truants and incorrigibles—to accommodate petty, first offenders. The first parental school opened in 1907 at 509 Lafayette, the former homestead of Elias F. Drake, a wealthy businessman.<sup>22</sup> Elmer Bonnell, a teacher at Central High School, served as principal and teacher of fifteen to twenty boys—ages seven to fifteen—in one room.<sup>23</sup>

A few months later, the legislature authorized Hennepin, Ramsey, and St. Louis Counties to establish detention homes for more serious offenders.<sup>24</sup> In Ramsey County, a committee assembled by Judge Orr recommended that the parental school and a proposed detention home be housed together.<sup>25</sup> On November 27,

1907, the parties signed a three-year lease for the Mayall property at 753 East Seventh Street near today’s Metro State University. This dual-purpose facility, which opened in early 1908, was called the Parental School and Detention Home.<sup>26</sup> Mr. Bonnell continued as superintendent, with Mrs. Hattie Fox as matron.<sup>27</sup>

While the parental school served habitual truants or poorly adjusted boys, the detention home housed boys awaiting court action and those already sentenced by the juvenile court. This was a difficult combination. For one thing, the superintendent of the home only had authority over the boys sent by the court, not the day-school boys, who were the responsibility of the superintendent of schools. Despite the challenges, Heeter wrote:

Every item and influence surrounding the [parental] school as well as the Detention Home is “Parental.” The building is situated on a block of ground. The boys take care of the lawns in summer, make their own tennis courts, cultivate their own gardens, etc. In winter, they sweep the snow, care for the walks, build their own toboggans, and flood their own skating rinks. The home and the school are here brought together, a home such as the majority of the boys have never been permitted to enjoy, and a school perfectly adapted to their needs.<sup>28</sup>



Hattie Fox served as matron of the Parental School and Detention Home and later became the school’s superintendent. A 1911 grand jury report described her as “a woman of rare tact and a proficient student of boy nature. Her sympathy and patience, coupled with firmness, fairness and culture, especially adapt her for this important position.”  
*Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*



It became clear, however, that the Mayall building was too small, so Mrs. Fox began advocating for a new facility. For the next two years, during which time she was appointed superintendent, she prodded the county board. “One great trouble at present is that the little boys, almost infants, must be mixed with boys of fifteen or sixteen,” she said. “We could not have such a thing.”<sup>29</sup>

On August 5, 1912, Mrs. Fox asked the board for money to visit other parental homes.<sup>30</sup> To demonstrate how productive her boys were, she brought a basket of flowers and produce from the half-acre garden, including a large cabbage, which one commissioner pronounced first class.<sup>31</sup> That produce was a sign of the future.

### Looking for Other Options

St. Paul was not alone in its search for solutions in juvenile justice. The Hennepin County Detention Home for Boys opened at Glen Lake in 1909 on ninety-two acres that included meadows and farmland, with a farmhouse, outbuildings, and barns—fourteen miles from Minneapolis near the streetcar line.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Fox and Commissioner Louis Nash visited in 1912.<sup>33</sup>

Then Mrs. Fox traveled to other institutions, including the Ford Republic in Detroit, where boys were supposed to govern themselves. “The boys elect their own officers to enforce rules and keep order. The Republic has its own currency system, its graded school system, industrial department and gardening system which gives every boy his own garden.”<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Fox’s verdict: “It’s like an insane asylum.”<sup>35</sup> She did, however, like the Illinois Industrial Training School for Boys in Glenwood, featuring twelve cottages on three hundred acres with space for four hundred boys and staff. It included an administration building, school, club house, chapel, greenhouse, laundry and central heating plant, and a farm and dairy.<sup>36</sup>

### The Ramsey County Detention Home—Highwood

Mrs. Fox recommended that Ramsey County acquire a farm near a streetcar line. She requested individual rooms for boys rather than dormitories and stated that because most boys came from St. Paul, the city should furnish teachers.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, and despite neighborhood worries over lower property values,<sup>38</sup> the county acquired the eighty-acre Ambrose Tighe farm just within the city limits on the east side, but not near a streetcar line.<sup>39</sup> Commissioner Nash proclaimed the property “peculiarly adapted for the purpose for which it is desired,” though it required extensive alterations before it was ready for its new role.<sup>40</sup>

Mrs. Fox continued as superintendent and lived on the property with her husband, Solomon.<sup>41</sup> A cook and a laundress hired on, and H. J. Maas was appointed farm instructor. Teacher Elizabeth Newton, provided by the school district, completed the staff of five. In a 1942 interview, Newton said the boys walked about five miles from the Mayall building on East Seventh to the farm in Highwood on their first day in August 1913.<sup>42</sup>

Early visitors were impressed:

Mrs. Fox . . . appears to have the boys under very good and excellent control. Her discipline is of a nature that appears fruitful of good results. The boys are occupied in school studies and various chores about the establishment, and ample time is given for play and recreation.<sup>43</sup>

Almost immediately, the facility faced challenges. The dormitory grew crowded, and additional beds cluttered hallways. Repairs were slow. In May 1914, Commissioner Nash reported that wells kept filling with sand and, at times, the home had no water.<sup>44</sup> In July 1915, Mrs. Fox asked to replace two cows that died after eating a toxic chemical used to kill rodents. A few months later, she requested more than one bathroom for the boys.<sup>45</sup> In November 1915, the commissioner reported that some boys were sick with typhoid, possibly because the pipes leading to the cesspool were only six inches below ground.<sup>46</sup> In addition, during the home’s first decades, fires destroyed several buildings—the first school (1927), the barn (1934), and the main house (1936). No one was hurt.

### Keeping a Watchful Eye

Committees of the District Court’s grand jury were routinely appointed to inspect public



The original farmhouse was renovated to accommodate staff and boys, although it was too crowded from the beginning. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

institutions in Ramsey County, including the detention home, Ancker Hospital, and the jail. These inspections took place starting at least in 1907, and judging from available reports, usually happened twice a year. The most recent report is from 1958.<sup>47</sup> The members of these committees were regular citizens called to serve on the grand jury with no particular expertise in the institutions they were evaluating. They often spent just a few hours on site.<sup>48</sup>

Grand jury reports typically praised the program and the meals but repeatedly pointed out shortcomings elsewhere, including a lack of available water to fight fires. Year after year, they noted how bad the road to the farm was and that in the spring it could be impassable; a new road was built in 1931.<sup>49</sup> The main building was replaced as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in 1937 after the original farmhouse/dormitory burned. A school addition followed.

Challenges continued, but through the decades there were many positive opportunities for the boys, as well—from local Boy Scout hikes to camping trips to the Boundary Waters, from a variety of athletic programs to building canoes. And, importantly, consistent chores and schooling.



### The Farm

Then there was the farm. For decades, staff and boys grew their own produce and forage and cared for horses, cattle, pigs, and lots of chickens.

A 1928 inspection report praised the “thought of thrift and efficiency” of Mrs. Fox, “The vegetable cellar was literally filled with all kinds of vegetables, apples and berries grown in the

Superintendent George Reif wanted the detention center to feel as much like home as possible. During his administration, and at other times throughout the facility’s history, dogs lived on the property. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

gardens attached to the school.” A 1941 write up in *The Totem Pole*, a newspaper put out by the boys, included even more details:

Our fire proof dairy barn offers adventure and worthwhile experience for the boys. Here they learn to milk and care for the herd, consisting of six Holsteins and two Guernsey cows which are T-B and Bangs tested at frequent intervals. The dairy crew consists of six regulars, but at milking time extra boys who are interested may receive lessons in milking. All milk is consumed by the boys. Our team of horses furnish the power for plowing, cultivating, harvesting and the general work about the fields. The dairy crew looks after the pigs. . . . The butchering is done by our good neighbors at the City Workhouse Farm.

The boys raise most of our alfalfa hay which is cut, cured and stored by them;

moreover, they fill our silo each fall with corn fodder they have grown. The poultry yard is always popular with many of the boys and much valuable experience is gained through the work with geese, ducks, turkeys, chickens, guineas and pigeons. Caring for the flowers, lawns, shrubbery and orchard is a big project which is handled by the boys most satisfactorily and which seems to develop in them an interest in this type of activity and a love for real beauty.<sup>50</sup>

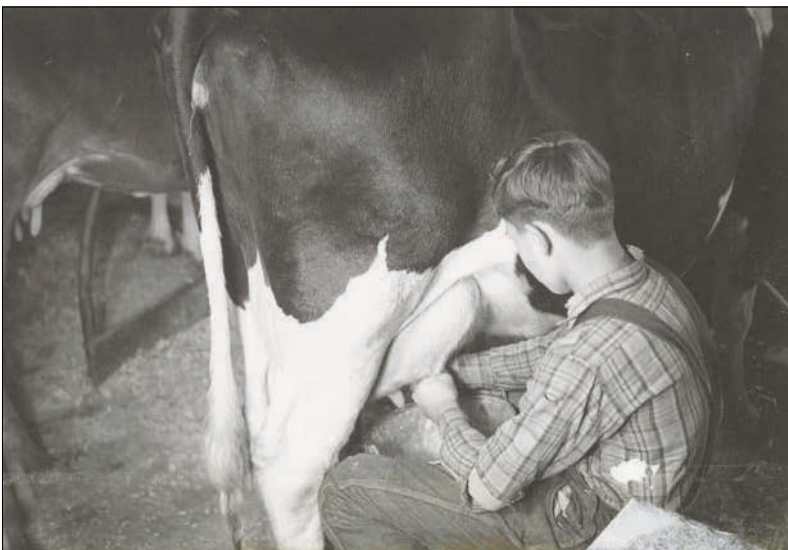
Eventually, though, the farming operation became difficult to maintain. Then came July 1954, when twenty-two boys showed signs of food poisoning. Suspicion landed on the milk. Dr. H. E. Erickson with St. Paul’s health department wrote that the milk was unpasteurized, inadequately cooled, dirty, and shouldn’t be used for drinking or cooking. Refrigeration also was inadequate, as was dishwashing. Meat in storage was uninspected, and sewage sometimes backed up the floor drains and toilet room.<sup>51</sup> Officials suggested the herd be sold, but the farm still had eight calves, and youth continued to work the farm as late as 1959.<sup>52</sup>

### Who Were Those Problem Boys?

The 1937 annual report of the probation officer listed the offenses committed by the boys who appeared before the juvenile court. Of 391 boys, 121 had committed larceny, ninety-eight had committed car theft, and fifty-six were cited for disorderly conduct. That year, forty-six boys were sentenced to Red Wing, while sixty-three were sent to the Home School. These statistics don’t tell us which offenses those sixty-three committed, but larceny and car theft were clearly common among this group.<sup>53</sup> Cars were a persistent temptation for boys; in the mid-1900s, many of the boys were sent to Totem Town for joyriding or “borrowing someone’s car without permission.”<sup>54</sup> Rich DuPaul describes his teenage car stealing this way, although he ultimately was sent to Totem Town for siphoning gas, not for “borrowing” cars. He spent his sixteenth birthday there in 1962.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the boys before World War II were there more from neglect than for crime. One shyly told a reporter in 1939, “Well, you know all

Many of the boys at the home were city boys who learned valuable farming skills, including working with animals, haying, and milking (1942).  
Courtesy of Ramsey County, Minnesota (top) and Minnesota Historical Society (below).





the kids out here are not here because they did something bad. Some of them are here because things aren't right at home. My mother and father wouldn't take very good care of me."<sup>56</sup>

Sometimes boys broke the law *and* were neglected. In 1964, the *Minneapolis Star* reported on ten-year-old Billy, already on his second stay at Totem Town. He was first sent to the facility after neighbors complained he was sleeping in their yards. The second time, he'd been caught housebreaking. Billy, indeed, might have been happy there. He had weighed only fifty-four pounds upon arrival; after five weeks, he had gained thirty-two pounds.<sup>57</sup>

Sometimes boys were just passing through. In 1924, police picked up two vagrants—teenagers sleeping in Rice Park. They'd left London, England, with the equivalent of \$300, their parents' permission, and the promise of jobs in Canada, but—no jobs, so they moved south and were sent to the school while the court decided what to do with them.<sup>58</sup>

Khaliq (then Nick Davis, the boy who had stolen a car with his friends) was one of a small handful of African Americans at Boys Totem Town in the late '50s. He remembers a late-night boxing match. He and his friend Chris sometimes teased a boy named Chuck, smacking him on the head. One night after lights out, Mr. Arthur Arnold called the three to the gym and announced the harassment would stop. As punishment, the boys could buff the rec room floor on their knees or box. Chris opted to buff. Young Nick faced off against Chuck. "That boy was born with muscles," Khaliq remembers, and the match wasn't called until both had pummeled each other good. Khaliq learned an important lesson about respecting others. He and Chuck got along the rest of their time there. Years later, the two ran into each other at a Rainbow Foods store, where they swapped news about their families and reminisced about their time at Totem Town.<sup>59</sup>

There are indications in staff meeting minutes that as more boys of color arrived at Totem Town, beginning in late 1950s, some staff grew uncomfortable. For example, at a September 1968 meeting, the superintendent congratulated staff for handling a series of incidents. "We have at least one negro boy who is looking for things he can complain about to his parents as



A very young boy sets the table for dinner, complete with flowers grown on site in one of the large gardens (1939).  
*Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

well as different organizations. He is here for insidious [sic] a riot. We are not going to give in to any of these people. Please be extremely careful how you handle these problems. Don't let them create prejudice."<sup>60</sup>

Was that boy looking for things to complain about? Was he the one creating prejudice? How were the other boys treating him? It had been a turbulent year with the assassinations of both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. Had this boy been influenced by the Black Power movement of the 1960s? Or perhaps by race riots? Was there anyone on staff who could relate to the circumstances of the boy's life?

Khaliq says that when he was there a decade earlier, staff discouraged boys of color from congregating even then. "They didn't realize we all came from a small neighborhood and knew each other. Of course, we gravitated together."<sup>61</sup>

Still, Khaliq says Boys Totem Town was good for him. While the now seventy-six year-old former president of the city's NAACP and retired St. Paul firefighter says the facility wasn't perfect, he credits the place for giving him a second



Many good counselors and teachers made a difference in the lives of the students at Boys Totem Town, including Dave Ardoff (above) and Dave Sondquist and Nora Eastman (below). Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

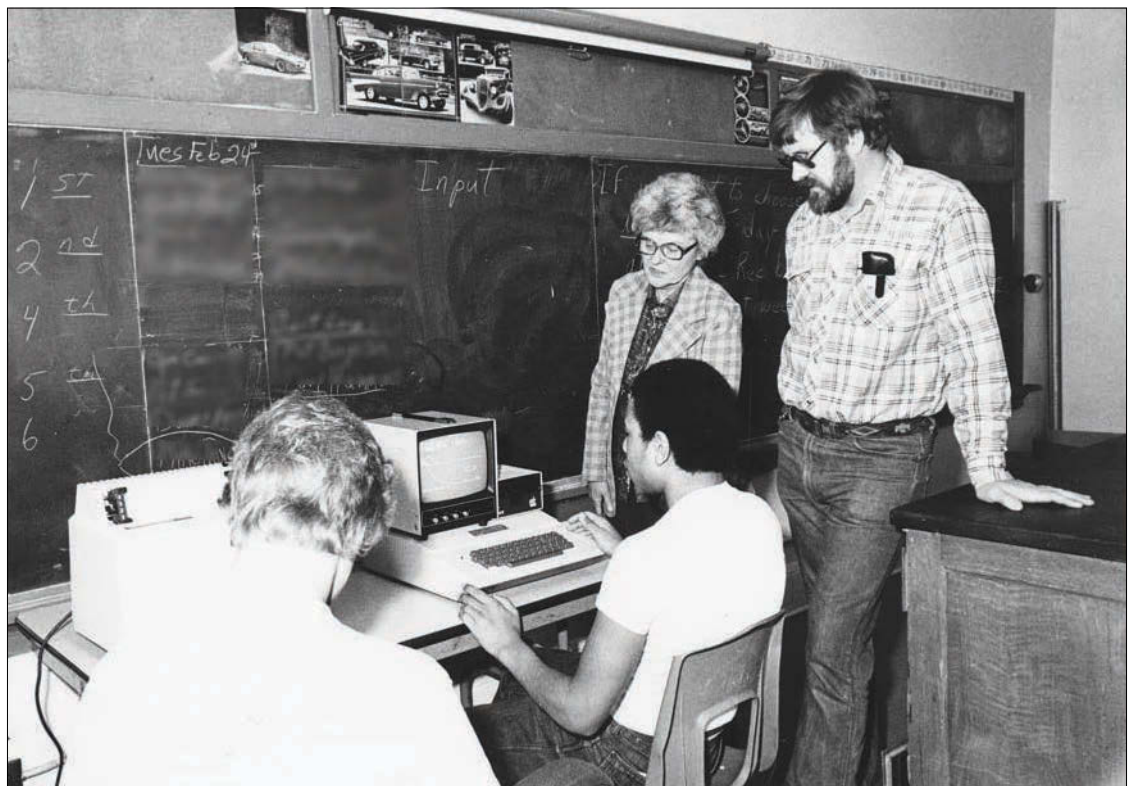
chance. “Mr. Arnold knew I was a knuckle-head, but he pulled me aside, and said, ‘If you straighten up, you will make something of your life.’”<sup>62</sup>

Education was key when it came to turning many boys around. DuPaul, (the boy who siphoned gas) dropped out of high school prior to his sentence, but after spending two months at Totem Town, his counselor helped him enroll in an evening program through Mechanic Arts High School. He completed his education, married, attended trade school, and worked as a machinist until retirement. Today at age seventy-four, he is active in the city’s Dayton’s Bluff neighborhood.<sup>63</sup>

### Rehabilitation, Not Punishment . . .

From its founding, the intent at Totem Town was to change a boy’s behavior and keep him out of Red Wing. The rehabilitation or treatment philosophy included a system of earning rewards and losing privileges. Breaking a rule might bring the loss of dessert or eating at the silent table. The most valuable reward was the chance to spend a weekend at home.<sup>64</sup>

A 1942 staff editorial in *The Totem Pole*, explained:







We see our institution as a home and school. We see our charges as real normal boys. There is no blame, no criticism as rebuke, and no sentimentality in our attitude toward our boys, just an acceptance of the fact that many of these youngsters have had no chance for normal, wholesome development, and that it is our privilege to give them the opportunity of which they have been deprived. . . .<sup>65</sup>

A 1954 grand jury committee reported, “The boys themselves appeared happy, well-mannered and well disciplined. We are particularly impressed with the positive form of discipline as against a negative form of corporal punishment.”<sup>66</sup> But how much could these “inspectors” see on a short visit? Every boy had a story.

At a 1963 meeting, the new superintendent, Wayne Johnson, told staff:

The policy of the institution is that boys are not to be slapped in the face, and this is not to be used as a disciplinary measure, staff may shake a boy or “slap him on the butt.” This is not our decision but is from the Main Office. . . . We do not want to have to answer to Downtown on any lawsuits. . . .<sup>67</sup>

In 1975, the typical daily population was sixty-three, with an average stay of three months, and the facility was understaffed. That year, a resident attacked a staff member; a resident assaulted another resident; a fire was apparently set deliberately; there were 142 runaways; and boys filed twelve complaints that staff had physically abused them.<sup>68</sup> Late in the year, Totem Town received a six-month conditional license. The inspection team criticized supervision, staffing, programs, policies, and the buildings. A Task Force voted 7–6 in early 1976 to close Totem Town,<sup>69</sup> but, instead, the county and staff made improvements. Steve Dornbach, the new superintendent who started in October 1975, instituted numerous changes in policies and upgrades. As a result, there were fewer runaways, fighting was reduced, and better and more individual counseling was introduced. Staff grew from thirty-seven to forty-six.<sup>70</sup>

In the 1980s, Totem Town used PEARS (Personal Effort and Responsibility System), a method of behavior modification that rewarded good behavior and pointed out where individuals could improve.<sup>71</sup> In recent years, staff introduced the Juvenile Response Model of positive reinforcement. Boys could still get home passes, but there were other rewards as well at the

From the beginning up until the facility closed, most boys slept in dormitory rooms with individual cots and lockers. *Courtesy of Ramsey County, Minnesota.*

bronze, silver, and gold levels. Under this system, residents with a gold card could watch a movie on the large TV in the staff conference room and eat treats.<sup>72</sup>

### Runaways

Runaways were a problem throughout the life of the institution. For much of its history, boys were not locked up, so it wasn't difficult to leave. Usually the boys headed for their families and were easily retrieved. While residents could earn the privilege of a weekend at home, the practice was temporarily suspended in 1958 after twelve boys ran away, and one beat another boy while at home.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, the privilege was reinstated.<sup>74</sup>

Two young teens escaped from Totem Town in November 1962. Barefoot and wearing only pajamas, they made it three miles to a Kroger's Food Market on Conway Street, where they jumped into a truck loaded with 240 cases of Coca Cola and drove away. By the time they were caught in Wisconsin, they were wearing bib overalls over their pajamas. They were returned to St. Paul. The newspaper didn't report

In 1997, artist Brian Taylor got to know the boys at Totem Town and painted this mural as a way to share and celebrate their diverse backgrounds and interests. Also, the boys learned to build canoes, like the one displayed here, with the help of the local non-profit youth development organization Urban Boatbuilders. Courtesy of Ramsey County, Minnesota.



the amount of soft drinks consumed while the boys were on the lam.<sup>75</sup>

A statistical report from 1965 shows that 160 boys ran away that year compared to eighty-seven in 1964 and 136 in 1963. A similar report from 1973 showed 168 runaways, while 1976 saw 286.<sup>76</sup> Sheldon Johnson, a social worker at Totem Town in the '80s, remembers when about fifteen boys snuck out a dorm window on a warm fall night. The boss wasn't happy with him the next day.<sup>77</sup>

In its final few years, the number of runaways was almost non-existent, as the Department of Corrections hired staff from within the community who built stronger relationships with the boys.<sup>78</sup>

### Ramsey County Begins to Rethink Juvenile Justice

By the 1980s, boys of color were overrepresented at Totem Town.<sup>79</sup> A decade later, African Americans made up about forty percent of the residents, far above their proportion in the general population. Hispanics, American Indians, and Asians also were over-represented, and yet staff remained predominantly white.<sup>80</sup> According to longtime Totem Town corrections aide Michael Callender, staff needed cultural competency training when East Asian boys arrived at Totem Town. Telling a boy to "look me in the eye" was asking him to do something rude and disrespectful, Callender said.<sup>81</sup>

The thinking behind the juvenile justice system began to change significantly under Michael Belton, the deputy director of Juvenile Corrections in Ramsey County in the 2000s. In testimony before the House Education and Labor Committee, Belton pointed out that Minnesota had disproportionate numbers of youth of color in the juvenile justice system, with black youth nearly ten times as likely as white youth to be detained.<sup>82</sup>

At that time, Ramsey County began participating in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI).<sup>83</sup> The program brought together judges, law enforcement, prosecutors, public defenders, mental health specialists, teachers, and corrections staff to work with kids in the juvenile justice system. Community members, many of them parents, were also involved.<sup>84</sup>



According to County Manager Ryan O'Connor, together, they asked some basic questions: What is the purpose of detention? What alternatives could be found to detaining a child prior to a judge finding that child delinquent? What was the cause of the racial disparity seen in the kids held in detention?<sup>85</sup>

Judge George T. Stephenson was the presiding judge for Ramsey County's juvenile court for three years, handled delinquency cases for five years, and participated in JDAI for more than a decade. He shared this conclusion:

The leadership of Ramsey County's juvenile justice partners (schools, law enforcement, prosecutors, corrections officers, and judges) agreed that racial disparities could be traced in significant part to bias and the implicit bias that impacts the discretion exercised by justice partner actors at every step of the process that ultimately results in referrals to juvenile court. The discretion exercised by teachers when they refer children to school resource officers; the discretion exercised by school resource officers and other law enforcement officers in referring cases to the County Attorney's Office; the

discretion exercised by county attorneys in their charging decisions and sentencing recommendations; the discretion exercised by probation officers in their sentencing recommendations; and the discretion exercised by judges in detention and disposition decisions were not the only factors, but all contributed to racial disparities and the disproportionate representation of children of color in our juvenile justice institutions. Research and statistics and JDAI have confirmed this conclusion.<sup>86</sup>

With this in mind, the county, Totem Town staff, and the JDAI worked to find solutions. Russel Balenger, who volunteered at Totem Town, credits Belton for hiring people who looked like the boys.<sup>87</sup> Balenger and his wife, Sarah, also helped. Their work in the Rondo community led to the creation of The Circle of Peace Movement in 2010 in an effort to reduce crime and violence and promote healing for youth and affected families. Boys from Totem Town participated in the program.<sup>88</sup>

Still, problems persisted. The facility remained under scrutiny for its treatment program, questionable record keeping, and abuse

The doors to Boys Totem Town closed in 2019. It is unclear what will become of the property in the future. *Photos courtesy of Ramsey County, Minnesota.*





and other safety concerns.<sup>89</sup> In February 2016, Ramsey County judges voted unanimously to stop sending boys to Totem Town. The decision was reversed that May after the county made supervisory changes. Most importantly, Ramsey County hired Keith Lattimore as superintendent and Kim Stubblefield as assistant superintendent of Boys Totem Town. They were the first African American leadership team at the facility and within Community Corrections. The pair worked together to upgrade staff training, better understand the needs of the boys, install additional security cameras, and make other pertinent changes.<sup>90</sup>

Over the last six years, Ramsey County, JDAI, and other juvenile justice partners continued working together, improved how youth are treated, and came to understand the harm suffered by juveniles who are detained. They concluded that incarceration should only be used in the most serious cases. In 2014, St. Paul had 140 youth in out-of-home placements. By 2019, the number averaged twenty-six per day, and at Boys Totem Town, only six residents remained, with a staff of forty-two and a facility that cost

about five and a half million dollars to run annually.<sup>91</sup>

Today, the county relies on community placements in most cases.<sup>92</sup> These placements, along with cultural programs or family therapists, help keep youth in their schools, where they are more likely to graduate, and in their communities, where they can form stronger relationships with role models and mentors. Kids are provided with structure and the services and support they need and are more likely to age out of delinquent behaviors. With these and other changes, there was simply no place for Boys Totem Town in the mix of treatment options. Although it began as an innovative solution to keeping troubled boys out of Red Wing, society and corrections changed, as did the understanding of what works in treating children and what can damage them further.

A fixture in the community for over a century, Boys Totem Town saw many successes and many failures. Nathaniel Khaliq and Rich DuPaul feel they benefited from their time there so many years ago. Many boys did. Others did not. But that was then, and this is now. In May,



the county board voted to close the facility. A public commemoration for current and former staff, judges, volunteers, and residents was held on August 14, 2019.

*Dr. Bobbie Scott started her career as an archaeologist studying the Viking settlement of Orkney and Shetland in the North Atlantic. She has worked in public history in Minnesota for more than fifteen years. Her recent research includes the woman suffrage movement in Minnesota*

*and the European American women of Fort Snelling in the nineteenth century.*

**Acknowledgment:** Many thanks to Charles Rodgers, Shawn Rounds, and Anjanette Schusler with the State Archives and Heidi Heller with the Gale Family Library, (both located at the Minnesota Historical Society) who generously made the Boys Totem Town collection available before it had been completely processed.

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## NOTES

1. Nathaniel A. Khaliq, interview with editor, December 11, 2019.

2. Khaliq, interview. Donald Brandvold was likely referring to the Minnesota State Training School at Red Wing.

3. Chris Crutchfield, interview with author, January 12, 2020.

4. "Ramsey County Detention Home—Highwood," *St. Paul City Directories* (St. Paul: R. L. Polk & Co., 1913), 1479. Highwood was a more rural area on the east edge of the city.

5. "County Home School for Boys," *St. Paul City Directories*, 1021; George H. Reif, letter to Eugene A. Monick, July 31, 1942, Boys Totem Town archival collection, Minnesota Historical Society.

6. "Historical Establishment and Progression of Boys Totem Town," unpublished manuscript, 2003, 8, Boys Totem Town archival collection, Minnesota Historical Society. Today sixty years on, the name Boys Totem Town is considered offensive to some, including many indigenous people because it uses a sacred object from Pacific Northwest nations, disconnecting it from its specific cultural and sacred tradition and geographical home.

7. "Compulsory Education-Truant Schools," Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes 1905 General Laws, chapter 14, 288, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/1905/cite/14/pdf#search=%22incurable%22>. The law didn't define "incurable," but the Minnesota statutes stated children who were "incurable, vicious or immoral in conduct" could be sent to truant schools. Essentially, incurables were considered unruly, difficult-to-control youth.

8. Cathy Wurzer, "Boys Totem Town in St. Paul to close," *MPR News*, May 23, 2019, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2019/05/23/boys-totem-town-in-st-paul-to-close>.

9. "Reduce Out-of-Home Placements," Ramsey County website, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/projects-initiatives/juvenile-detention-alternatives-initiative-jdai-deep-end-reform/goals-outcomes/reduce-out-home-placements>. Out-of-home placements include group homes, short-

and long-term residential programs, sex offender treatment, and, until recently, Boys Totem Town.

10. "Boys Totem Town to suspend operations beginning Aug. 1," Ramsey County website, accessed January 28, 2020, <https://www.ramseycounty.us/content/boys-totem-town-suspend-operations-beginning-aug-1>.

11. Tad Vezner, "Boys Totem Town officially closed: An old facility falls to a new philosophy in treating young offenders," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 4, 2019, accessed December 25, 2019, <https://www.twincities.com/2019/08/04/boys-totem-town-officially-closed-an-old-facility-falls-to-a-new-philosophy-in-treating-young-offenders/>.

12. Paul Nelson, "State Reform School, St. Paul," MNopedia, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://www.mnopedia.org/structure/state-reform-school-st-paul>.

13. Paul D. Nelson, "Early Days of the State Reform School," *Minnesota History*, Winter 2012-2013, 134, 136, 141-2. The reform school was located where Concordia University and Central High School stand today.

14. "An act to regulate the employment of children," Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes 1895 General Laws, chapter 171, 386-7, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1895/o/General+Laws/Chapter/171/pdf/>; "The child labor bill was passed," *Saint Paul Globe*, May 12, 1895, 1.

15. Wright S. Walling and Stacia Walling Driver, "100 Years of Juvenile Court in Minnesota—A Historical Overview and Perspective," *William Mitchell Law Review* 32, no. 3 (2006): 889, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://open.mitchellhamline.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1127&context=wmlr>.

16. "Official Publication of the General Laws of Minnesota Passed During Session of 1899," *New Ulm Review* (April 26, 1899): 14.

17. "How St. Paul cares for its bad boys and girls," *Saint Paul Globe*, June 19, 1904, 10.

18. Henry Anson Castle, *History of St. Paul and Vicinity: A Chronicle of Progress and a Narrative* (Chicago & New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1912), 1068, accessed November 27, 2019, [https://archive.org/stream/historystpaulano2castgoog/historystpaulano2castgoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/historystpaulano2castgoog/historystpaulano2castgoog_djvu.txt).

19. Alice W. Cooley, "Rescue Work: City Boys and Girls," in *Proceedings of the Seventh State Conference of Charities and Correction* (St. Paul, MN: The Pioneer Press Company, 1899), 63-67.
20. See "To improve youths: Minneapolis women visit St. Paul to observe methods employed by juvenile court," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 22, 1906, 6.
21. S. L. Heeter, "Superintendent's Report," *Forty-Seventh and Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of School Inspectors of the City of St. Paul, for the School Year Ending June 16, 1906; Manual for the School Year, 1906-1907*, (St. Paul, MN: Pioneer Press Company), 64-69.
22. "Answers the call," *Saint Paul Globe*, February 16, 1892, 2.
23. "Historical Establishment," 1.
24. "An act to amend chapter 285 of the Laws of Minnesota for the year 1905 – county board authorized to establish detention home," Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes 1907 General Laws, chapter 172, 193-4, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1907/0/General+Laws/Chapter/172/pdf/>.
25. Minutes of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, Book M, June 3, 1907, 147-148; "Historical Establishment," 2; Minutes, Book M, December 30, 1907, 269; "Board approved of home for children," *St. Paul Daily News*, December 30, 1907, 2; Records of the Clerk of District Court of Ramsey County, Chapter VII, 286.
26. Minutes, Book M, January 27, 1908, 295; "Historical Establishment," 2.
27. Ramsey County Grand Jury Committee Report, 15048, December 7, 1911, in Louis Schuldt, *Histories and Present Program of Home Schools for Boys in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties (Minnesota), 1941-1942*, Chapter 7, Vol. II, research project submitted for Master of Arts Plan B (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota), 1942, 852.
28. S. L. Heeter, "Superintendent's Report," *Forty-Ninth and Fiftieth Annual Report of the Board of School Inspectors of the City of St. Paul, for the School Year Ending 1907; Manual for the School Year, 1907-1908* (St. Paul, MN: Pioneer Press Company), 46.
29. Minutes, Book O, August 5, 1912, 267.
30. Minutes, 267.
31. "Mrs. Fox, superintendent, shows county board samples of flowers and vegetables which have been raised on a half-acre tract," *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 19, 1912, 9.
32. Annual Report of the Glen Lake Farm School for Boys, 1911, 6, accessed November 29, 2019, [https://reflections.mndigital.org/catalog/mps:2830#/image/6?searchText=&viewer=OSD\\_VIEWER](https://reflections.mndigital.org/catalog/mps:2830#/image/6?searchText=&viewer=OSD_VIEWER).
33. Minutes, Book O, August 19, 1912, 277.
34. Helen E. Keep and M. Agnes Burton, *Guide to Detroit* (Detroit, MI: Detroit News Company, 1916), 23.
35. "Mrs. Fox Tells of Detention Home," *St. Paul Daily News*, October 21, 1912, 8.
36. "About Us," Glenwood Academy, accessed December 7, 2019, <https://www.glenwoodacademy.org/pages/content-migration/about-us>. This facility was founded by Robert Todd Lincoln and Oscar Dudley. It still exists as Glenwood Academy.
37. "Says boys need a 100 acre farm," *St. Paul Dispatch*, October 21, 1912, 9. Mrs. Fox was not granted individual rooms.
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39. "Tighe is offered \$15,000 for farm," *St. Paul Dispatch*, November 11, 1912, 7.
40. Minutes, Book O, November 11, 1912, 337; Schuldt, Vol. I, 314.
41. "Historical Establishment," 6.
42. Schuldt, Vol. I, 314.
43. Schuldt, Vol. II, 854.
44. Minutes, Book P, May 18, 1914, 217; Book P, June 22, 1914, 255; Book P, July 17, 1914, 297.
45. Minutes, Book P, July 26, 1915, 612; Schuldt, 310 with reference cited: Record of Board of County Commissioners, Book Q, October 18, 1915, 50; Also, Committee Report of the Ramsey County Grand Jury, June 20, 1934. Mrs. Fox's request was apparently ignored, as the problem appeared again in a report in 1934.
46. Minutes, Book P, November 17, 1913, 48.
47. "Agency Background History, 1959-1967," Minnesota Department of Corrections website, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://mn.gov/doc/about/agency-background-history/>. State government was reorganized in 1959 when the Department of Corrections (DOC) was formed and the new Juvenile Court Code was approved; "Licensing and Supervision of Facilities," Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes 2019, chapter 241, section 021. Today the DOC is responsible for inspecting all public and private correctional facilities in the state.
48. "Criminal Procedure," Minnesota Office of the Revisor of Statutes 1905, chapter 104, 1110. Paragraph 5283 directs that, "The grand jury shall inquire: 1. Into the condition of every person imprisoned on a criminal charge triable in the county, and not indicted; 2. Into the condition and management of the public prisons in the county; and 3. Into the willful and corrupt misconduct of office of all public officers in the county."
49. Schuldt, Vol. II, 851-892.
50. "Life at Totem Town," *The Totem Pole* 7, no. 1, September-October 1941, in Schuldt, Vol. II, 989.
51. "Boys' home conditions held 'unsanitary,'" *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 15, 1954, 1. However, short manuscript called "A History of Boys Totem Town 1938-1969" (Rita Smith, n.d., in *Totem Times*), Boys Totem Town archival collection, Minnesota Historical Society, says it was later discovered that the sick boys had been eating green apples.
52. Minutes of the Boys Totem Town Staff, August 26, 1959, Boys Totem Town archival collection, Minnesota Historical Society.
53. *The 32nd Annual Report of the Probation Officer In Connection with District, Juvenile and Municipal Courts* (St. Paul: City of St. Paul, 1937), 461-463.
54. Rich DuPaul, interview with author and editor, January 10, 2020.
55. DuPaul, interview.



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61. Khaliq, interview.
62. Khaliq, interview.
63. DuPaul, interview.
64. Gorman, 952.
65. Editorial, author unknown, but possibly Superintendent Reif, *The Totem Pole* 7, no. 3, January-February 1942, in Schuldt, Vol. II, 991.
66. Report of the Ramsey County Grand Jury Committee, March 3, 1954.
67. Minutes BTT Staff, April 17, 1963.
68. Ann Baker, "Totem Town's woes cited in state study," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 29, 1975, 7.
69. Ann Baker, "Totem Town closing backed," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 2, 1976, 5.
70. Greg Hughes, "Totem Town 'grad' would see many changes," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, n.d., 15.
71. Sheldon Johnson, interview by author, November 26, 2019.
72. Gwen Rouleau, tour with author, July 16, 2019.
73. Minutes BTT Staff, February 28, 1958.
74. Minutes BTT Staff, May 8, 1963.
75. "Boys Travel Light: Barefoot, Pajamas, and Stolen Truck," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 13, 1962, 22.
76. Boys Totem Town Statistical Report, 1965, Boys Totem Town archival collection, Minnesota Historical Society.
77. Johnson, interview.
78. Chris Crutchfield, email with editor, January 30, 2020.
79. In Boys Totem Town Statistical Report, 1981, "127 white boys for the year, 21 Negro, 5 Mexican/Spanish, 3 Indian, and 1 Other, for a total of 157 boys." The black boys made up about 13 percent of the Totem Town residents that year, yet a 1980 Minnesota census shows blacks made up only 1.29 percent of the state's population. "Population by race - Minnesota," CensusScope, accessed January 16, 2020, [http://www.census.gov/scope.org/us/s27/chart\\_race.html](http://www.census.gov/scope.org/us/s27/chart_race.html).
80. "Boys Totem Town Statistical Report, 1993–1997.
81. Michael Callender, interview with author, January 18, 2020.
82. Statement of Michael Belton in *Reforming the Juvenile Justice System to Improve Children's Lives and Public Safety*, Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor, April 21, 2010. Serial No. 111-56, U.S. Government Printing Office, 23.
83. County Manager Ryan O'Connor, interview by author, November 15, 2019. JDAI is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
84. Judge George Stephenson, email to editor, January 3, 2020.
85. O'Connor, interview; Stephenson, email.
86. Judge George Stephenson, phone conversation with editor, January 28, 2020. Judge Stephenson also serves on the editorial board of *Ramsey County History*.
87. Russel and Sarah Balenger's work in the Rondo neighborhood led to the creation of The Circle of Peace Movement in February 2010 as a way to promote racial healing, reduce violence, and build peaceful communities. In recent years, some boys from Totem Town attended the weekly community dinner and circle where they could engage in respectful conversation.
88. "Who We Are," The Circle of Peace Movement website, accessed January 23, 2020, <https://tcopm.org/who-we-are/>.
89. Richard Chin, "Totem Town therapist gets jail sentence for having sex with teen client," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 14, 2016, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.twincities.com/2016/10/14/totem-town-therapist-gets-jail-sentence-for-having-sex-with-teen-client/>. In 2016, a contract therapist helped two boys run away and then had a sexual relationship with one of them.
90. Chai Xiong, "Ramsey County resumes sending boys to newly secure Totem Town," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 25, 2016, B4.
91. Shannon Prather, "Ramsey County's century-old Boys Totem Town closes for good," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 14, 2019, accessed January 14, 2020, <http://www.startribune.com/ramsey-county-s-century-old-boys-totem-town-closes-for-good/543201792/>.
92. O'Connor, interview.

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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](http://www.rchs.com) for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps at Gibbs Farm, courthouse and depot tours, and 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.

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RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

  
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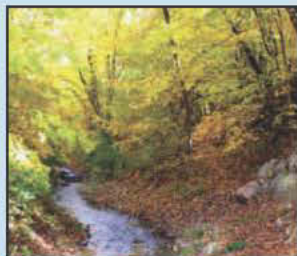
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Young Vern Schultz loved everything baseball. Not only did he play the game every chance he could, he also worked as ground crew at Lexington Park for his beloved St. Paul Saints in the 1940s. *Courtesy of the Vern Schultz Collection. See story on page 25.*