

RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We Represent

**Evolving Public Art at the Saint Paul
City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse**

KRISTINA YOUSO, PAGE 20



Take a Hike

A CENTURY OF WALKS WITH THE ST. PAUL HIKING CLUB

BOB THOLKES, WITH MEREDITH CUMMINGS, PAGE 1

Minnesotans like to get outdoors and hike. They do today, and they did more than a century ago, as well. And why not? Hiking is fun, healthy, and opportunities abound at parks of all sizes in St. Paul, Ramsey County, and across the state. Check out these impressive statistics:

Number of parks in St. Paul:
179

Approximate acres of parkland in St. Paul:
5,000

Percentage of St. Paul residents within a ten-minute walk to a park:
99

Number of parks in Ramsey County (county/regional parks and regional trail corridors only):
20

Number of state parks and recreation areas in Minnesota:
75

Average number of visitors to Minnesota State Parks each year:
9,700,000

To learn more about a local hiking club that's covered thousands of miles over ten decades, see the article "Take a Hike: A Century of Walks with the St. Paul Hiking Club" on page 1.

SOURCES:

<https://www.saintpaulparksconservancy.org/>;
<https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/parks-recreation/parks-trails/find-park>; and
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/faq/mnfacts/state_parks.html.

ON THE COVER



Minnesotans are hardy people, and snow wasn't about to stop members of the St. Paul Municipal Hiking Club as they set out one chilly winter day in 1930. Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

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Message from the Editorial Board

Sometimes when we look closely, history helps us see the land and its people from different perspectives. In this issue, Bob Tholkes and Meredith Cummings share the history of the St. Paul Hiking Club. The dedicated members of this organization have been trekking around St. Paul, Ramsey County, and parts of Minnesota for one hundred years, exploring parks and neighborhoods from the ground up. Harriette Peterson Koopman and her daughter Connie Pettersen share vivid memories of Koopman's childhood, growing up in a large family on St. Paul's West Side Flats during the Depression. The children had exciting and sometimes harrowing close-up adventures on and around the great Mississippi River. One day, they even met a group practicing target shooting—possibly some of the infamous gangsters who sometimes hid in the city at that time! Kristina Youso fills us in on a much more recent change in perspective—the installation of new murals in the council chambers of the Saint Paul City Hall – Ramsey County Courthouse. This artwork better reflects the diverse heritage of the groups who have contributed to our city and county. And finally, bowing to the reality of the current pandemic, but also taking advantage of new technology, Jeremy Nienow tells us how to embark on virtual visits to local historic sites without leaving the comfort of our living rooms.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

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The Great Depression Through the Eyes of a Young “River Rat”

HARRIETTE PETERSON KOOPMAN, WITH CONNIE KOOPMAN PETTERSEN

In the late 1920s, my parents, Hans and Ermine (Brisson) Peterson, lived in Hugo, Minnesota, on my maternal grandpa's farm. My folks had been commuting twenty-one miles south to St. Paul to work when the Great Depression hit, making travel too costly. And so, when I was six, Dad bought a house less than a mile east of Concord Street in St. Paul's West Side Flats. There were only five of us kids at first—my two older brothers, Orv and Bob, were about nine and seven, Don was three, and Stella a baby. Three more young'uns were born while we lived in the Flats—Neal and twins Lloyd and Floyd.

Our house on Horace Street was next to the Mississippi River. We lived a half mile or so from Northern Cooperage, where they made

wooden barrels. Just north and east of the business was St. Paul's airport. A dense forest with trees and brush [and marshland] blocked our views of the more industrial areas. And so a new chapter—a new adventure living on the great Mississippi—began.¹

Living Day to Day

Times were tough. It was the beginning of nearly a decade of struggling to make ends meet. Ma had been working at the Saint Paul Hotel in housekeeping. After our move, she stayed home with the kids.

Property so close to the river was cheap but at high risk of flooding. Dad bought land and a four-room shack for \$500 on time payments.

Hans Peterson was Danish but grew up in German-occupied territory before coming to the US. Wild game and a large garden on his West Side Flats property kept his family from going hungry during the Great Depression. Ermine Peterson was a first-generation American whose parents had emigrated from Quebec. *Courtesy of Peterson Family Archives.*





Harriette Peterson's West Side Flats World: 1. Horace Street and the creek that ran alongside it to the Mississippi River. 2. Area across the river where the Petersons likely hunted and may have encountered gangsters. 3. Pig's Eye Island No. 1. 4. Post Office near Concord and Annapolis Streets. 5. Northern Cooperage Company on Arthur Avenue. 6. Hendricks School on Baker Street. 7. St. Paul Downtown Airport (Holman Field).

This 1928 plat map illustrates the "world" in which Harriette Peterson grew up. The large water feature was marshland that has since been filled in and is part of the municipal airport today. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*

Our house had maroon shingle siding, a slanted roof, and attic storage, but no electricity. We moved in, although it needed much fixing. There were only two bedrooms—a tiny one our parents and the baby shared, plus a large one for the rest of us.

We covered windows with blankets to keep out bugs and bats until Dad made screens. An abundance of mosquitoes swarmed by the water. He kept busy fixing the most important things to make the house both summer- and winter-ready.

Dad built a new outdoor biffy² with one big seat and a second small one. I was afraid of falling into the hole. We used bleach water³ to scrub the outhouse with a broom.

As our family grew, the outhouse was a place for quiet moments, if you could find privacy. Its path was well-trodden but spooky at night. I often escorted younger siblings, especially Don, who was a big coward in the dark. One night, I was mad because I had to wait for him. It was cold and windy, but it was expected of everyone to go outside regardless of weather or nightfall. That dark, eerie night I could hear water dashing against the riverbank. While my brother was busy inside, I got busy outside. I laid the end of a long piece of toilet paper by the door. When

Don stepped out, I ran with it, and the wind did the rest. Don fell down screaming. Ma and Dad rushed outside. I got the worst of it in the end.

Early on, there was no church in our area, although perhaps forty families resided there. Our first Sunday school began when a woman on a houseboat invited local children over. Then, a young preacher came along who invested money in an abandoned house for a Lutheran church and Sunday school. We helped him fix it and kept it clean.⁴

Every summer, our family planted a huge garden. We grew corn, beans, rutabagas, potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, and other produce. Planting, hoeing, and weeding were done by hand. In winter, Dad grew his plants from seeds in a hot bed made from storm doors. Every spring, he transplanted and sold any extras. We saved squash, pumpkin, and sunflower seeds to bake and salt for treats.

It was my job to pick disgusting potato bugs off plants and drop them into a kerosene can, where the insects settled to the bottom. We also helped Ma can produce. Canning was extra work, washing dozens of jars in a washtub, soaking them overnight in soapy water, and scrubbing them before boiling and sterilizing. Dad made an outdoor brick fireplace with a

Bob, Harriette, and Orv Peterson as youngsters before moving to St. Paul. Baby Neal, who was born in the city, standing in front of the West Side Flats shack. *Courtesy of Peterson Family Archives.*



grate for summer cooking and canning. We often ate outside at a huge picnic table with two long benches.

Eventually, Dad built a garage, barn, and chicken coop with a pigeon pen on top. We bought a cow for milk and butter, chickens, and a goat. Plus, we had pet cats and dogs. My dad and older brothers fished and hunted pheasants, ducks, geese, and rabbit. Chickens went into stews and soups. They stretched further with dumplings, rice, noodles, and vegetables. We ate a lot of oatmeal, porridge, and “Johnnie cakes” for breakfast.

We attended Hendricks School at 344 E. Baker Street. I didn’t start until I was seven after school officials found out I was at home. It was a long walk and to get there, we crossed several railroad tracks.⁵ Once, Bob crawled under a stopped train blocking our way. As he was pulling himself out, the train started up. We never did that again.

One winter day, Dad didn’t know how cold it was and sent us to school. Snowdrifts were four feet high. It was a struggle to get through. We were all worn out before long, and it was just too cold for me. I slumped down in the snow to sleep. My brothers carried me to Northern Cooperage

to warm me while they continued to school. Some men there rubbed my feet and hands and made me drink strong coffee to keep me awake. I finally thawed, and someone took me home. Dad was careful after that to check the temperature. If it was too cold, we skipped school.

We had some bad luck in other seasons, too. One humid, summer day, Dad yelled, “Run down into the cellar! Hurry!” just as a storm hit. A huge oak fell, and a massive limb slammed through the kitchen and pushed in the window, breaking dishes and pinning the basement door. Dad strained to push us out. The tree had to be cut to get it outside. Hand sawing caused a tremendous workload. We cleaned glass and sawdust for hours. It may have been a tornado or straight-line winds because we saw trees with nails and straw stuck in them. It was fortunate our belongings didn’t blow into the river. In the heart of the Depression, it wasn’t easy to get what was needed immediately. We learned to wait until we had the means. It took time before Dad repaired all the damage.

Making Money Wasn’t Easy

Every summer, Dad put up hay and cut wood with the older boys. Orv and Bob also worked,

sweeping dirty grain off barges so they could be reloaded with fresh grain. Old grain was ours to keep. One day, Orv and Bob rowed between two barges. Bob climbed up a rope ladder to sweep. Orv, in the rowboat, watched the outer barge drifting closer before jamming his boat, making frightening cracking noises. Desperate, he tried to push the barge with the oars and his feet. He finally got out from between them, and the two rowed home. Orv told Dad that he had prayed, and the barges drifted slightly so he could push free.

To get to his job at the meat-packing plant in South St. Paul, Dad made a small boat and traveled down river whenever possible. We had an old truck, but it was unreliable, and gas was expensive. Wages during the Depression were low, and many were unemployed. He was lucky to get work.

We found creative ways to earn extra money. Dad sometimes worked for the Work Progress Administration (WPA).⁶ He was good-natured, could fix anything, and was a carpenter by trade. He could weld, farm, and run his greenhouse. He became the family barber, giving the boys monthly haircuts, and with a variety of iron shoe molds, he was our shoemaker, as well.

The Joys (and Dangers) of River Life

At school, kids who lived on higher ground nicknamed us “River Rats,” considered a derogatory term by some, yet life by the Mississippi was great fun. However, our guardian angels certainly worked overtime because our “fun” was sometimes perilous. It’s a miracle we survived without losing or critically injuring anyone.

One day, Bob found firecrackers as big as shotgun shells that we set off unsupervised. Another day, he lit a bonfire and tossed a handful of .22 caliber bullets into it. We had to duck and crawl as each exploded. After Dad built a tree swing, we’d dare each other to jump the farthest.

We loved to swim in the river, but it was dangerous. Dad gave lessons by dumping us out of a rowboat saying, ‘Swim, or you’ll drown!’ Day after day, we’d practice until we learned. The older boys swam like fish. It took me a while. I was skinny, with little endurance. I finally figured it out but still almost drowned a couple



times. Once, I fell through an inner tube, sinking to the river bottom. My brothers rescued me. We never told Ma, or that would have ended swimming. She was extremely strict.

The river was a great playground with huge mud turtles everywhere. We poked them with sticks and stole their eggs, which resembled small water balloons. Baby turtles became pets. We also caught minnows and fished using poles and lines. Don and I collected red-striped agates, threw stones at tin cans floating by, and shot logs with slingshots. We loved playing “Skippy” with flat rocks to see how many skips we could make across the river’s surface.

Spring mud was a problem near the water, and sometimes cars got stuck. Dad and the boys pulled them out for a fee (Another great way to make a little extra money!). We especially liked watching a local motorcycle club host their annual playday and races. They tore up the road, as we watched them slip, slide, and get caked in mud.

Some Sundays, we walked to the airport. Despite challenges with the mud, people liked to drive there and watch daredevil pilots perform. Charles “Speed” Holman was the best until he was killed in Omaha after nose-diving his plane.⁷ The schools closed for the funeral, and Dad let us stand along the road and watch the procession. Everyone was in mourning.

It was easy to find oneself in trouble on the river. One storm churned the waves, slapping them against the shore. A neighbor boy caught

Northern Cooperage Company (pictured here under new ownership as Greif Brothers Cooperage) was located between the Rock Island & Pacific railyard to the east and the Chicago Great Western yard near Concord Street. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

Riverboats, such as the Capitol steamer, were popular with individuals, families, social clubs, and other organizations for daytime tours of the Mississippi, as well as private moonlight dances in the warm summer evenings. *In Winona Daily News, July 23, 1928, 6.*



in a rowboat yelled for help. We pulled him in with our emergency rope. Another time, a man lost control of his car and drove into deep water. Dad grabbed the rope, dove, located the car stuck on rocks, and pulled the man out. Then there was a time when my brothers jumped in to rescue a dog with five puppies “sailing” by on a platform, complete with a doghouse!

Some of our favorite memories, though, were of the Capitol steamer, a beautiful riverboat with multiple decks and a huge paddle wheel. Sometimes, we’d row out to ride her big waves. People aboard yelled that we’d surely drown. Other times, they threw box lunches with apples, bananas, oranges, cake, and candy. What goodies we got for our efforts, but the danger we went through! We loved when the steamer returned in the evenings. People danced to band music on the deck. We didn’t have a radio, so it was great to hear their songs and watch the spectacular lights.⁸

Home Sweet Home Life

Our lives held adventure, laughter, and fun. Dad could make music out of anything from washboards, saws, pots and pans, and even water glasses. We loved to sing and harmonize. We played baseball, hide-and-seek, kick the can and Annie Annie Over.⁹ We made toys from old tires and played with marbles, yo-yos, tops, slingshots, and BB guns. We flew homemade kites in the summer and whooshed down hills on sleds in winter. One time, Orv and I slid too

far on the frozen river. When the ice began cracking, we carefully crawled back, pushing the sled ahead of us.

Because Dad’s pickup didn’t always start, we walked most everywhere. However, for doctor appointments we’d catch a streetcar. The closest store was over two miles away. We’d pull a wagon to carry groceries. If the folks drove, they bought more supplies and hundred-pound bags of flour and cornmeal.

We lived frugally, saving everything reusable and bartering goods. Money and food were stretched. Everyone had chores. I did housework, babysat, and washed clothes and diapers. Washing without electricity meant heating water and using a washboard. We dunked sheets up and down with a plunger. Everything was rinsed, hand wrung, and hung to dry. In winters, we had three clotheslines near the stove. We’d finish one wash and start again the next day.

I learned to bake when I was seven. Dad made huge batches of doughnuts, keeping them in a ten-gallon crock. We also loved molasses cake, oatmeal cookies, and “Johnnie cake”¹⁰ (cornbread) with homemade maple syrup, honey, or milk and sugar.

Dad, Orv, and Bob cut wood for winter. They rowed across the river to a forest, loading their boat. Everything was saved—twigs for kindling and sawdust for the cowshed floor. We had a fire all winter in the kitchen stove. A huge kettle of homemade soup was on most of the time.

We used kerosene lamps for a while, but they weren’t very bright. Dad kept the lamp chimneys clean with newspaper. We’d read and do homework by candles and lamplight. On very cold nights, Dad packed the stove with wood. If he overdid it, the stovetop and pipes turned bright red. Then he’d try to cool the fire by throwing salt in it. Being fire tender was hard but prevented a house fire. Late at night, we’d sometimes see him in his rocking chair with a leg swung over one chair arm as he smoked his pipe. Despite the all-night fires, in the mornings, we still broke ice off the drinking pail.

Watch Out for Gangsters!

Orv and Bob were great hunters, using slingshots, BB guns, and snares to catch rabbits. They trapped and sold skins. Expensive bullets were used only for deer hunting. The boys rowed

Peterson Family Recipes to Warm the Soul

During the Great Depression, families made the most of what little they had as they prepared meals for hungry youngsters. Hans Peterson was the primary cook in the family until his daughter Harriette began to help him. Doughnuts were, of course, a favorite!

Johnnie Cakes

2 c. buttermilk
1/2 c. cream
1/2 c. sugar
2 c. coarse cornmeal (or corn grits/polenta)
1 c. flour
1 egg
1 t. soda
Pinch of salt

Mix all ingredients. Pour into greased 9" x 9" pan.
Bake at 425°F for approximately 35 minutes.

Boiled Dinner with Kielbasa (A favorite of Neal Peterson)

1 small cabbage, cored and chopped into pieces
4-5 carrots, peeled and sliced
2-3 stalks celery, diced
1 onion, chopped
1 Polish sausage or kielbasa, cut into pieces
4-5 small red potatoes, diced
salt/pepper

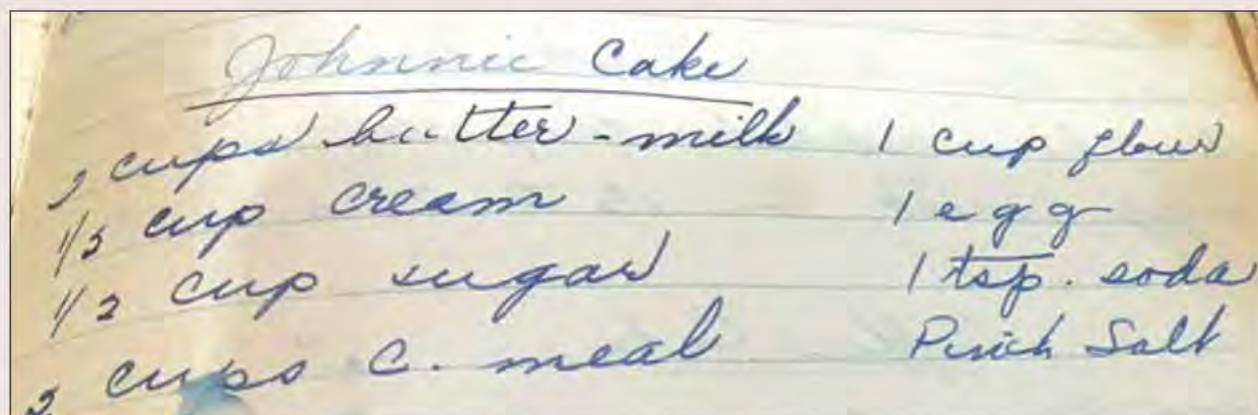
Put all into a 4- to 6-quart kettle with water to cover.
Heat to boiling for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to medium
for 30 minutes.

Dad's Doughnuts

4 t. shortening
1 1/2 c. sugar
4 well-beaten eggs
1 1/2 c. milk
7 c. flour
2 t. salt
10 t. baking powder
2 t. cinnamon
1 t. nutmeg

Cream shortening and sugar. Add eggs and beat well.
Add milk. Sift the flour with salt, baking powder, and
spices. Roll out on slightly floured surface 3/8 inches
thick. Cut with floured doughnut cutter and let stand
15 minutes. Fry in deep hot fat (about one quart) at
375°F until brown. Turn just once. Drain on cloth towel.
Makes 6 dozen.

Harriette Peterson Koopman's handwritten family recipe book today
resides in her daughter Connie Koopman Pettersen's kitchen in Aitkin,
Minnesota. This recipe for "Johnnie cakes" (Harriette's spelling) lists the
ingredients but no specific preparation or baking instructions. Connie,
a baker like her mother, shares instructions above. *Courtesy of Peterson
Family Archives.*





The Dillinger gang was known to lay low on occasion in the Twin Cities, and they were, indeed, hiding here in April 1934. It's not certain when or if the Peterson boys encountered the gangsters when they crossed the Mississippi to hunt, but the story makes for good telling among family members and friends. *In Minneapolis Tribune, April 24, 1934.*

across the Mississippi to hunt in a real paradise. One day, they came across well-dressed men who were shooting guns chosen from a pile on the ground. The men invited Orv and Bob to try the fast-shooting weapons that went *RatATatTat!*

When the boys returned home, Orv said, "They asked many questions—What were we doing over there? Where did we live? Were our parents home? Did we or neighbors have a phone or car? How long will it take to get home?" Dad's eyes grew big. He feared the boys had met a group of gangsters. "What did the leader look like? Dad asked. "Do you remember how to get back there?"

Orv, Bob, and Dad rowed across the river. Bullets were lodged in the trees that had been used for target practice. They also found where the car came in. I'm not sure if Dad reported the encounter. St. Paul had become a crime capitol and hideout for criminals. Local underworld icons and some corrupt police were paid to tip off gangsters before a raid. Dad knew it was best not to get involved. Later, he read that the John Dillinger gang was around at that time. Dillinger was wanted for murder and bank robbery.¹¹

The Barker-Karpis gang was also reported to be living near South Robert Street. They were involved in various bank robberies and in 1934, they kidnapped banker Edward Bremer, who was released with a \$200,000 ransom payment. People were doing all kinds of devilment for money in the Depression days that brought out thieves, bootleggers, and kidnappers.¹²

Our family had another run-in with gangster types. My little sister Stella knocked on an apartment door while trick-or-treating. A well-dressed man answered. Inside were other men,

plus a woman lounging on a bed. The woman asked Stella to come in so she could "see the cute kid in her Halloween getup." She gave Stella dollar bills instead of candy, which was a fortune back then. A few days later, we learned that the Barker-Karpis gang had been around but had left in a hurry. Who knows, maybe that generous woman was "Ma" Barker herself.

In Sickness and in Health

The excitement never ended. One day, the older boys were building a tree house. Our dog Queenie and I sat beneath the tree. Suddenly Orv hollered, "Watch out! Here comes the hammer!" Those were the last words I heard. *Bang!* I was knocked out cold. Blood gushed from my head. The boys carried me to the creek that ran next to Horace Street and washed the blood away. When they decided I'd lost enough blood, they took me home. When I regained consciousness, I had a huge bump and a headache. No doctor was called. We seldom saw one for "trivial" things.

At one point, Dad installed a well near our porch. We took turns pumping water. One drinking dipper served everyone. It's no wonder we caught each other's germs and passed on mumps, colds, measles, and influenza. Every time, we had to put up a quarantine sign. Sometimes, only one kid was sick, but the rest had to stay home. For doctor appointments, we traveled to Ancker, the city and county hospital.¹³ Mostly, we doctored ourselves with homemade remedies.

One morning on the way to Sunday school, we took a shortcut. We kids ducked under a long board across a muddy driveway—all except Orv, who laid on the ground claiming he couldn't get up. We didn't believe him, but Bob

went back and helped Orv, who walked just fine afterwards. On our way home, however, the same thing happened. This time, we believed him. When we told Dad, he looked scared and asked if Orv had a headache or stiff neck. Orv admitted having had both for a few days. The next thing I knew, I was in charge of the house and kids, and Dad and Ma rushed my brother to the doctor.

It was a long day before they returned—without Orv. The doctor said he had polio and was already too weak to walk. It was such a scare for Dad, as the rest of us were exposed. Bob slept in the same bed with Orv. We all used the same dipper. We had to follow a strict regimen of decontaminating beds, dishes, and the house. The quarantine sign went up again. It was like having the plague. Our friends stayed away for weeks, even months.

Ma and Dad visited the hospital every day. They thought Orv would never come out alive, or he wouldn't be able to walk. After a while, the doctors told my folks about a new drug. They asked permission to use it but said it could kill Orv. It was a terrible burden for my parents to make such a decision, but they did.



This drinking dipper belonged to the family. Courtesy of Connie Koopman Pettersen.

Dad called us together to pray before they left. Doctors gave Orv the drug, and he slept. In the late afternoon, he woke and felt good. He asked for food, and his strength began to return. After a few days, doctors propped him up. The new medicine was working. Still, it was hard for Ma to cope with the fear of Orv's polio because, at the same time, she was pregnant with twins. A friend of Ma's helped with Neal and another with Joan, the newest addition. Stella was already living with relatives.

Eventually Orv moved to Gillette State Hospital for Crippled Children. He was starting to walk, but we could only visit through a window. No one else caught polio in the eighteen months Orv was hospitalized.¹⁴



Gillette State Hospital for Crippled Children on Ivy Street near Lake Phalen. Children wait with anticipation in their beds for a musical program in the auditorium. Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.

In May 1935, twin brothers Lloyd and Floyd were born, but Ma came home with only one baby. Lloyd was not expected to live. The doctor said the sickly twin was probably dying, needed to be loved, held, and given breast milk. He came home, and we watched the baby closely. Each day, I bathed and dressed him and took him out into the sunshine.

Christmas was difficult, but church members helped and brought a tree. What a joy to open boxes of clothes and food. We went to Sunday school and received candy, apples, and popcorn balls. Kind church members gave me a doll, but with real babies to feed and dress, I didn't have the time or interest to play with it.

Moving On, Moving Up

Just as the medical issues began to subside, the years of drought also subsided, and the rains began. The Mississippi River inched higher. Dad feared one more downpour would bring flash flooding. He sat up some nights and tied the boat to our front steps. He also left the attic door open with a ladder for quick escape.

Soon, the water did overflow the banks. That was it. "We're getting out of here!" Dad decided. He rented a house near Agate and Lawson, well away from the river, and we moved in 1936.¹⁵ I was twelve. Our new place had water and electricity, and life was a little easier. The next spring, our former neighborhood flooded again.

Our years near the Mississippi during the Great Depression were hard, but the rest of the country also faced similar economic difficulties. Poor as everyone was, neighbors helped one another. And while we endured nicknames like "Poor River Rats" that hurt our feelings, most of our experiences were abundant with adventures and working together in laughter and camaraderie.

I also saw many blessings. A sickly, dying twin gained weight and lived. Orv returned from Gillette walking and healed of polio, and no one else caught it. A few years later, he even passed the Civilian Conservation Corps physical, serving two years along with Bob. Those of us siblings old enough to remember living in the West Side Flats during those tough years were very lucky because we came away rich as kings with our Mississippi River memories.

Afterword

Eight boys and three girls were born to Hans and Ermine Peterson, and the children grew into productive, wage-earning citizens. All of the boys served in the military; the oldest three in World War II. Don, a Navy munitions expert, died in a plane crash off the coast of Faro, Portugal. Neal became a Navy corpsman in Washington during the Korean War. Floyd and Lloyd enlisted in the Navy at age seventeen. Ray, born in 1938, became an Army military policeman, and Paul, born in 1940, served as an Army paratrooper. Harriette and Stella did defense work. Joan was placed with a foster family and lived most of her early years with them. She married Joe Dettmann, a young soldier, when she was seventeen.

The late Harriette Peterson Koopman was born at Ancker Hospital in St. Paul in 1924. She lived in the West Side Flats for seven years during the Depression before her family relocated. As a young woman, she worked at Mickey's Diner and the Saint Paul Athletic Club and took a defense job at International Harvester during World War II. She then moved to Vanport, Oregon, where her father welded battleships. Later, she married Al Koopman, a South Dakota farmer. They lived near Ramona and, later, Yankton, before moving to St. Paul with their two children,

The eight surviving sibling of Hans and Ermine Peterson in 1983. *Back row (L-R): Raymond, Paul, Neal, Lloyd, and Floyd. Front row (L-R): Harriette Peterson Koopman, Orv, and Stella Peterson Schoen. Three siblings were deceased: Don, 18, killed in World War II; Bob, 36, a St. Paul policeman killed in an off-duty car accident with his father in 1958; and Joan Peterson Dettmann, 49, who died in 1983. Paul and Neal are the surviving siblings today. Courtesy of Peterson Family Archives.*



David and Connie. She worked many years at St. Paul's Dayton's department store and as an electrologist from her home. Harriette was a poet, songwriter, and artist, and enjoyed gardening. She died in 2011 and is buried with her husband in Oakland Cemetery.

Connie Koopman Pettersen is a freelance writer/journalist. She worked as an editor/transcriptionist until retirement. Her work has appeared in NewsHopper, Aitkin Independent

Age, Cricket, Aglow, and numerous anthologies published by Bethany House, Multnomah, and Zondervan.

Acknowledgments: Harriette Peterson Koopman's story, as told to and edited by her daughter, Connie Koopman Pettersen, is adapted from a four-part series that ran in 2008 in *News Hopper* in Aitkin, Minnesota. Thanks to Neal and Paul Peterson and other family members for helping with details.

NOTES

1. Harriette Peterson was born January 8, 1924; *St. Paul City Directory* (St. Paul: R.L. Polk & Co., 1932), 862, 921, 11, 77, 1412; *Plat Book of St. Paul* (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins & Co., 1916, 1928), 49; *Sanborn Insurance Plat Map 5* (NY: Sanborn Insurance Company, 1927-1955), 600. By 1930, the Petersons lived on Horace Street or possibly just off Horace on the levee in Campbell's Addition, but their address in city directories (beginning in 1932) was the US Post Office near the intersection of Concord and Annapolis Streets; Horace Street no longer exists. It was about where the Southport [shipping] Terminal is today. Michael Murray, whose home still stands in Irvine Park, founded Northern Cooperage Company in 1884 on Arthur Avenue. Greif Brothers Cooperage Corp. purchased the business in 1960. Arthur Avenue later became Barge Channel Road, directly south of the airport.

2. Slang for outhouse or privy.

3. Nothing went to waste. After washing clothes, Dad added bleach to the remaining water to clean the privy.

4. *St. Paul City Directory* (St. Paul: R.L. Polk & Co., 1932), 390. Likely the First Evangelical Lutheran Church at 464 Maria Street (today, 463) with Rev. John G. Milton as pastor; Connie Pettersen, email with Pastor Chris Olson Bingea, November 2020. The church (then called First Evangelical Lutheran) took over abandoned houses to create neighborhood parishes and help families during the Depression.

5. The children crossed tracks belonging to the Rock Island & Pacific and the Great Western railyards.

6. Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Work Progress Administration in 1935 to help Americans who'd been out of work. Over eight years, 8.5 million newly employed workers helped build roads, bridges, airports, and more.

7. "The life and death of aviator 'Speed' Holman," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 11, 1949. Charles Holman earned his nickname following a motorcycle stunt, and it stuck as he learned to fly airplanes. He was the operations manager at Northwest Airways, but he gained

fame performing stunts, including wing walking and parachute tricks. His most famous stunt, nosediving within ten feet of the ground, killed him on May 17, 1931, in Omaha. He was thirty-two years old. In the Twin Cities, thousands lined the streets to pay respects. Holman is buried at Acacia Park Cemetery in Mendota Heights. The St. Paul Downtown Airport is known as Holman Field.

8. The Capitol steamer docked at Jackson Street. A 1933 advertisement in the *Minneapolis Star* announced, "Two Big Outings Daily—10 a.m. through Hastings Lock and an 8:45 p.m. Moonlight Dance." Tickets cost 75 cents.

9. A game between two teams in which a ball is thrown over the top of a small structure. If caught, a team can tag someone on the opposite side.

10. The Peterson family uses the term "Johnnie cake," rather than the traditional spelling of johnnycake.

11. Joseph A. Ferris, "Dillinger Believed in Twin Cities After 3 Shoot Way Into St. Paul," *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 24, 1934, 1-2. In 1934, police believed John Dillinger and others escaped from a Wisconsin resort following a gun battle and hid in St. Paul. It is not known if the Peterson boys encountered Dillinger at all, let alone around the time of this incident, but it is possible.

12. In addition to kidnapping Edward George Bremer Jr., the Barker-Karpis gang also took William A. Hamm Jr., president of the Theodore Hamm Brewing Company, hostage the previous year. Fred Barker and his mother Kate, or "Ma" as she was known, were killed in a shootout in 1935. Alvin Karpis spent years in Alcatraz and other prisons.

13. St. Paul's City and County Hospital, built in 1872, became Ancker Hospital in 1923. It was named after Dr. Arthur Ancker.

14. John Diers, email correspondence with editor, December 12, 2020.

15. *St. Paul City Directory* (St. Paul: R.L. Polk & Co., 1936-7). The family lived at 147 E. Lawson in 1936 and 163 E. Lawson in 1937.

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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 Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and incorporating 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 preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. The original programs at Gibbs Farm (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974) focused on telling the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways. RCHS built additional structures and dedicated outdoor spaces to tell the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Heyate Otunwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved its library, archives, and administrative offices to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to allow greater access to the Society's collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers a variety of public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. RCHS serves 15,000 students annually on field trips or through outreach programs in schools that introduce the Gibbs family and the Dakota people of Heyate Otunwe. 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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History informs us, inspires new choices, brings people together, and builds community. Likewise, it can be misused to inspire fear, create division, and perpetuate racism and other injustices. We resolve to present history in accordance with our values of Authenticity, Innovation, Inspiration, Integrity, and Respect. We believe that by doing so, our community will be more informed, more engaged, and will become stronger.



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Growing Up Along the Mighty Mississippi

The Great Depression Through the Eyes of a Young "River Rat"

HARRIETTE PETERSON KOOPMAN, WITH CONNIE KOOPMAN PETTERSEN, PAGE 10



During the Great Depression, Harriette Peterson and several of her siblings lived with their parents in a tar-paper shack along the Mississippi River in St. Paul's West Side Flats. The children grew up with fond memories of wonder and adventure, despite the lean times and hardship.
Courtesy of Kyle Imdieke and Peterson Family Archives.