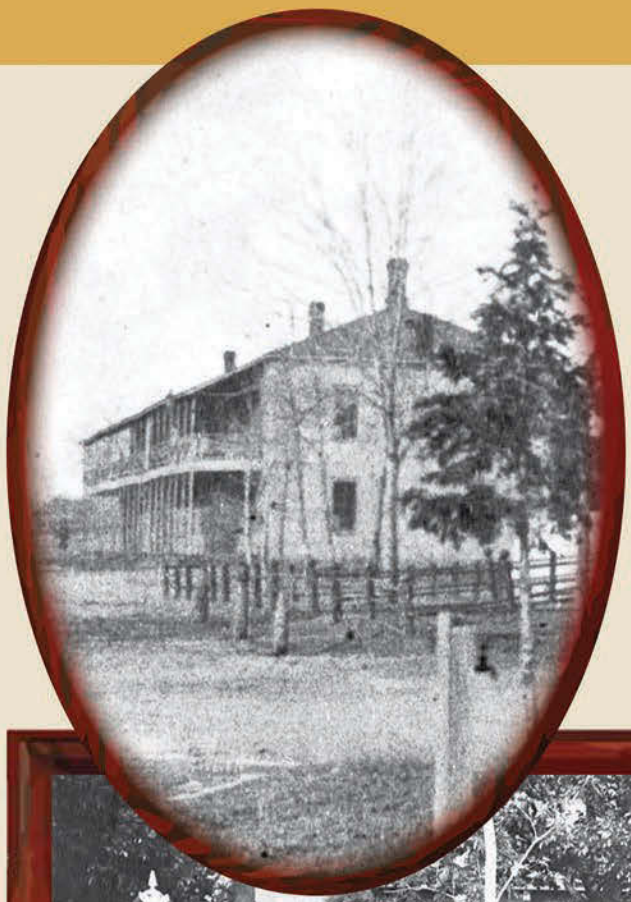
RAMSEY COUNTY
# History
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Historical Sleuthing*

**Solving the Mysteries of Fort Snelling through Archaeology**

JEREMY L. NIENOW, PAGE 12

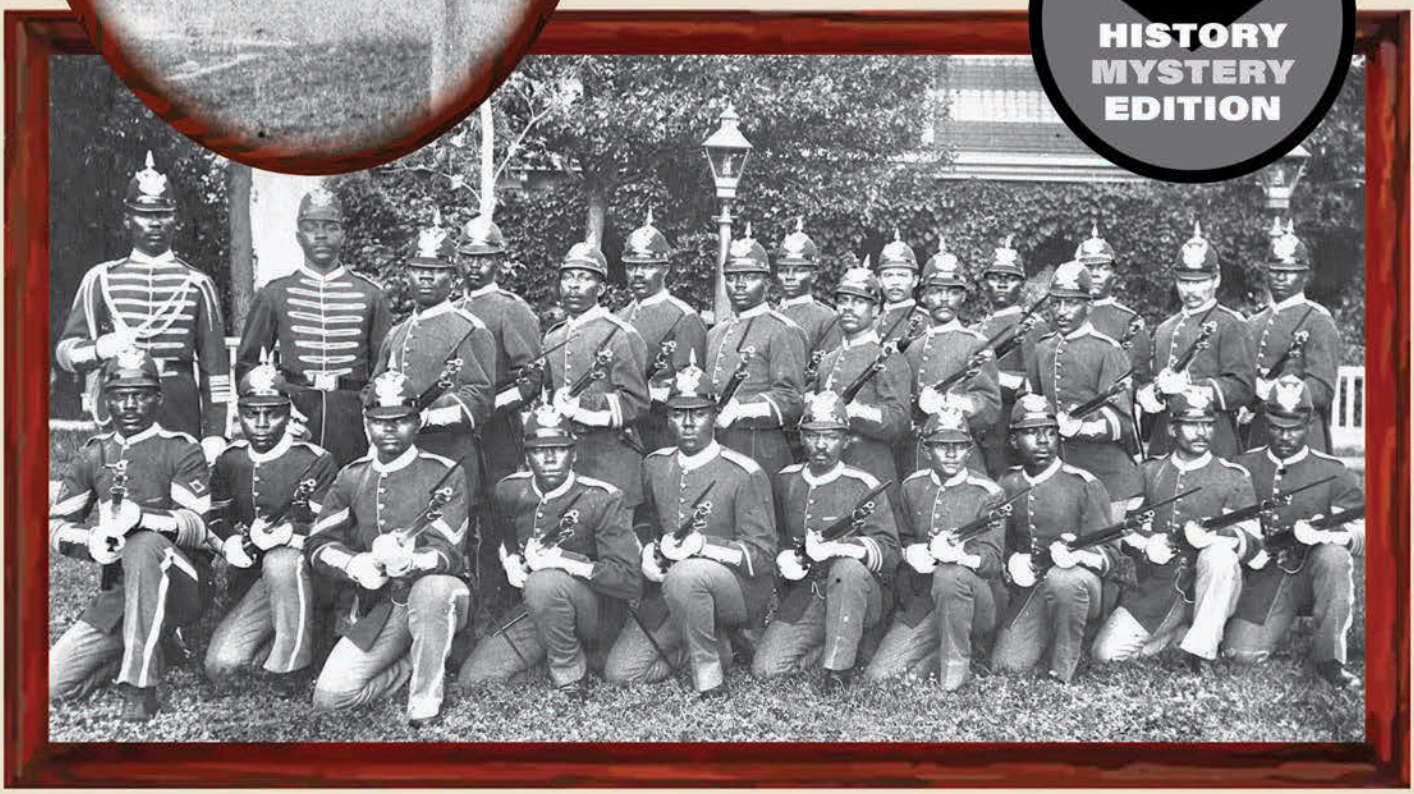


*A Fort Snelling History Mystery*

## The Lost Barracks and the Twenty-Fifth US Infantry Regiment

MATT FLUEGER, PAGE 1

AN RCHS HISTORY MYSTERY EDITION



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## By the Numbers . . .

For a few years in the 1880s, the African American Twenty-Fifth US Infantry Regiment was stationed at Fort Snelling:

Number of soldiers from the Twenty-Fifth that arrived in 1882:
**206**

Number of Twenty-Fifth Infantry companies living at the fort:
**4**

Number of children born to enlisted men of the Twenty-Fifth in the post hospital (records kept from 1884-88):
**8**

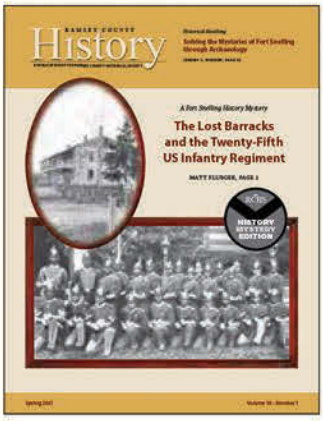
Number of years the Twenty-Fifth spent at the fort:
**5½**

Number of enlisted men from the Twenty-Fifth buried at Fort Snelling:
**9**

To learn more about this regiment and the mysterious building in which many of the men lived, see Matt Flueger's article "*A Fort Snelling History Mystery:* The Lost Barracks and the Twenty-Fifth US Infantry Regiment" on page 1.

SOURCES: John Nankivell, *History of the Twenty-Fifth Regiment, United States Infantry, 1869-1926* and various files at the National Archives. See article endnotes, pages 9-11.

### ON THE COVER




Very few images of the 1878 "lost barracks" at Fort Snelling exist *(top left photo)*. This cropped image is one of three that are known today. To see the original image that includes the trader's shop in the foreground, go to page 1. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

Company I, Twenty-Fifth US Infantry Regiment at Fort Snelling in front of the Commandant's Quarters (1883). *Courtesy of National Archives, photo no. 111-SC-83638.*



# Contents



## Message from the Editorial Board

We are used to addressing history as a set of immutable facts. But in reality, our view of the historical record changes and shifts, depending on who is telling the story and what new information comes to light. Sometimes it takes a fresh perspective and some old-fashioned sleuthing to uncover what really happened and where it occurred. In this issue, Matt Flueger examines the history of the "lost barracks" of Fort Snelling, where the men of the segregated Twenty-Fifth US Infantry Regiment lived in the late 1800s. He presents some of their stories, and through careful research and comparison of plans and photos, he was able to identify a long-forgotten building, which was destroyed after about ten years of use. Jeremy Nienow shares the meticulous process that he and his team of archaeologists used to uncover the barracks, as well as other buildings and discoveries at the old fort. And Matt Goff has unearthed new information that dispels portions of the enduring myth that Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant was the first settler in St. Paul.

The Ramsey County Historical Society Editorial Board has some changes, too. On a personal note, this will be my last message as editorial board chair. Over the last fifteen years, I have thoroughly enjoyed working with two great editors and a wonderful editorial team. Their creative ideas and diligent work have done justice to the legacy of our founding editor, Virginia Brainard Kunz, and have helped extend our reach to perspectives that fully address our amazing heritage.

*Anne Cowie*
Chair, Editorial Board

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

*Correcting Mystery and Myth*

# Not Everything You've Heard about Pig's Eye Parrant is True

AN RCHS HISTORY MYSTERY EDITION

MATT GOFF

It is believed that Pierre Parrant, a part-time resident in and around what is today St. Paul, didn't care to be called Pig's Eye. But it's this famous nickname and an unflattering sketch and description of him, ". . . one eye, unequally matched to its distant yoke mate, and precisely the shape of a pig's eye . . . ,"[1] that helped make him a legend.[2] Parrant was a man to whom several remarkable stories have been attached:

- He was the founder of St. Paul—the first person of European descent to erect a cabin here.
- He lent the area his homely nickname until it was rechristened with the more dignified saint's name in the 1840s.
- He lost a squatter's claim to his neighbor in a footrace.

Whether accurate or not, this image from an 1892 broadside is the most recognized likeness of Pierre Parrant. *"Saint Paul in its Infancy," an uncatalogued print, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

The problem with these particular stories is that they are just that—stories—that have been repeated, published, and republished from 1849 until today. But they are not true.

We are fortunate to have a strong tradition of historical scholarship that began before Minnesota achieved statehood and continues to this day. To benefit from the work of previous historians, however, current researchers must sift through past writings and question old assumptions. In Parrant's case, some legendary aspects of his life have fallen through the sifter, landing in works of serious scholarship. This article looks at these three myths to determine how they may have developed, who told the stories, why they have endured, and why some of Parrant's history must be corrected.

## Who was Pierre Parrant?

Parrant was a Canadian fur trader, born near Montreal in 1791. He worked for the American Fur Company in western Iowa in the late 1820s but "[d]eserted from Little Sioux River, having stolen property to a considerable amount . . . ."[3] Parrant likely left the trading post and moved to Fort Snelling soon thereafter. In March 1829, he is mentioned in letters between Alexis Bailey, who ran the nearby American Fur Company post, and Lawrence Taliaferro, an Indian agent at the fort.[4] For the next fifteen years, Parrant's name appears in various documents.

There is scant evidence of how Parrant made a living in the fort's vicinity and no evidence that he worked for the fur company on any official basis, although in 1834, he and others attempted to smuggle liquor up the Mississippi on behalf of his acquaintance, Bailey. There is indication that Parrant spent time at Prairie du Chien, and by his own account, he was briefly in Green Bay, Wisconsin, when not living near

the military garrison. In other words, he likely didn't live in any one place for an extended time between 1829 and 1838.[5]

## Moving "Beyond" the Fort

By the time construction of Fort Snelling was completed in 1825, the area was home to the Dakota, military personnel and their families, several enslaved people, and those involved with the American Fur Company. There was also another group of residents living nearby.

Lord Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk, was a wealthy philanthropist who founded a colony in North America in response to dire conditions in his native Scotland due, in part, to English subjugation. In 1811, the Hudson's Bay Company had granted Douglas land in modern-day Manitoba and Saskatchewan and parts of what is now North Dakota and Minnesota. The inhabitants of Red River Colony, as it was called, faced years of hardship, and many abandoned the group by the 1820s. Some traveled to Fort Snelling, where they were initially given permission to live and farm nearby.[6] Parrant likely lived among them.

In 1837, two treaties opened land east of the Mississippi for Euro-American settlement.[7] This allowed the military to better control their surroundings by sharply defining Fort Snelling's military reservation. Those not connected with the military were eventually forced to move further from the fort. Many tested the waters, figuring out where they could settle next. Several people or groups of people, including Parrant, laid claim near Fountain Cave in June 1838, not far from the fort on land that was still occupied by the Dakota.

At the time, this cave was a familiar landmark. Today, it's covered by Shepard Road, halfway between Fort Snelling and downtown. It became a tourist attraction in the late 1800s, which may partly explain why it possesses an outsized role in the city's origin story. Though it is not known exactly where Parrant's land claim was located, it is unlikely that he lived within Fountain Cave.[8] The cave was simply a convenient landmark for describing a location in the absence of a street grid or survey.[9]

## Myth 1: Parrant was the First Resident of St. Paul

Did Parrant claim land near or including Fountain Cave? The evidence says "yes." Does that make him St. Paul's first resident? The evidence says "no."

The most fundamental problem with this legend is that it is dismissive of the generations of Dakota and other Indigenous people who lived in the area before it was claimed by European colonizers. Stephen H. Long, an explorer with the US Army, traveled up the Mississippi to assess the future site of Fort Snelling and described the village of "Petit Corbeau," Little Crow's Village. Also known as Kaposia, it was located, at one point, near present-day downtown St. Paul.[10]

As for Parrant, here's what we understand, thanks to the journal of Agent Taliaferro. An entry from June 9 notes that a group from Kaposia complained about people moving onto tribal lands near Fountain Cave before the 1837 treaty was known to be ratified.[11] Parrant and the Abraham Perry family were among those named in that entry. There is no evidence to suggest that Parrant arrived before the Perrys.

When Edward Duffield Neill wrote the first history of Minnesota in 1858, he either didn't have access to Taliaferro's journal, or he chose not to focus on it. He does, however, claim that Parrant was St. Paul's first resident. He bases this claim not on Fountain Cave, but on the erroneous belief that Parrant was the first European to reside at the future town site of St. Paul.[12] It wasn't until the 1860s (most likely from the

Seth Eastman, who served two tours at Fort Snelling, was also an artist. His work, including this image of the village of Kaposia, depicted Dakota life. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

scholarship of Fletcher Williams, who will be more fully discussed below) that Fountain Cave became central to St. Paul's origin story.

By the time William Watts Folwell wrote *A History of Minnesota* in the 1920s, the legend that St. Paul began with Parrant's cabin near Fountain Cave was firmly established. Folwell was the first president of the University of Minnesota and later, president of the Minnesota Historical Society. His book remains a valuable resource for historians,[13] but his description of St. Paul's origin is clouded by the legend of Parrant:

> Pierre Parrant, a Canadian voyageur, who had been some years in the region and who had given Indian agent Taliaferro no little vexation by his illegitimate practices, to make sure of a first choice of location, began, about the first of June, 1838, to build a lonely hovel in a secluded gorge at the mouth of the creek which flowed out of Fountain Cave in upper St. Paul.[14]

That Folwell describes Parrant's claim as "a lonely hovel in a secluded gorge" is misleading. Per Taliaferro's entry, the Perry family was also there. Perry and his wife, Mary Ann, were originally from Switzerland. They came to Fort Snelling in the 1820s after giving up on the Red River Colony and moved their family to the Fountain Cave vicinity around the same time as Parrant.[15]

Taliaferro later puts the "first inhabitant" claim into question in a memoir he eventually wrote for the historical society: He acknowledges the Perrys but makes no mention of Parrant:

> A Frenchman[16] by name of Perry with his family remained and became a great cattle raiser; so much so that the commandant requested him to change his location to Carver's old cave, six miles below the fort, east of the Mississippi, which he cheerfully did. Here, it may be said, small things often decide our locality for us.[17]

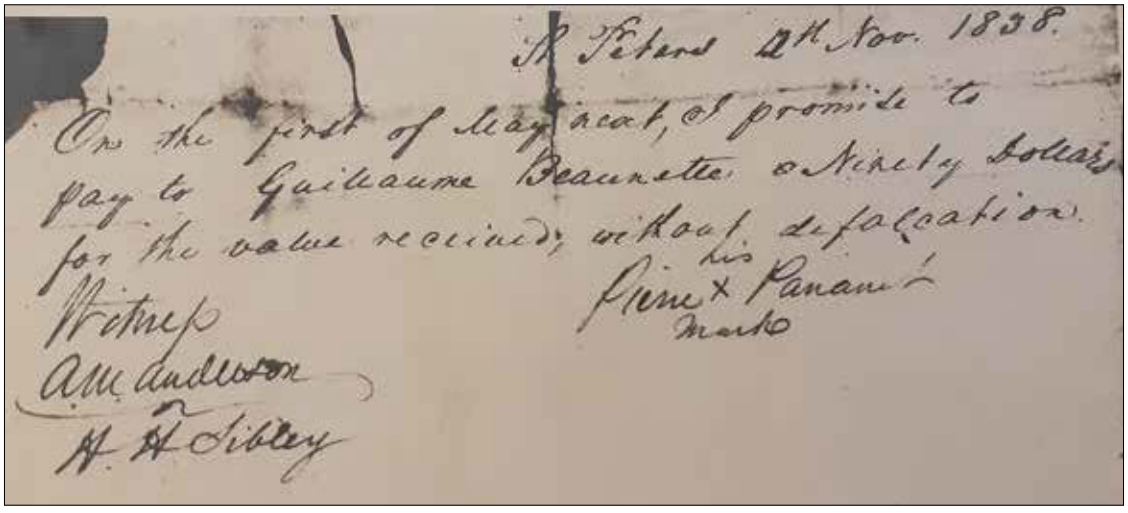
## History Corrected: Parrant was NOT the First Resident of St. Paul

We know Parrant claimed land in the area, thanks to Taliaferro's journal and a document Parrant signed with an "X." Dated November 12, 1838, it reads, in part:

> . . . I, Pierre Parrant, residing near the entry of the St. Peters River, and in Wisconsin Territory, do hereby make over transfer and quit claim to Guillame Beaumette of said St. Peters all my right, title and interest onto all that tract or portion of land which I, the said Parrant, now reside upon and occupy at the cave so called about four miles below [down river from] Fort Snelling.[18]

Parrant left that site soon after this document was created.

Parrant lived near the cave less than six months. The Perry family stayed for two years, but in May 1840, Fort Snelling soldiers forcibly ejected them and other remaining families from the land.


St Peters 2d Nov. 1838.
On the first of May next, I promise to
pay to Guillaume Beaumette Ninety Dollars
for the value received, without defalcation.
his
Pierre × Parrant
mark
Witness
Alex Anderson
H. H. Sibley

In this introduction to the promissory note mentioned above, Pierre Parrant "promises to pay to Guillaume Beaumette Ninety Dollars for the value received, without defalcation." *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

It is this exodus that is considered by some historians to be St. Paul's founding moment.[19] For the Perrys, Benjamin Gervais, Joseph Rondo, and others moved closer to Wakáŋ Tipi (Carver's Cave) just upstream from one of the Kaposia locations. Aside from Native peoples, *these* were likely the first "founders" of the future city. In fact, the area near Fountain Cave should not be considered St. Paul at all because it was, at the time, military property. With that, it can be argued that Pierre Parrant was *not* the first resident of St. Paul.

## Parrant at Pig's Eye

So where did Parrant go after he vacated the cave area in late 1838? This relocation is important to understand before addressing Myth 2.

Parrant moved about three miles below the future site of St. Paul, not far from Kaposia, which had recently been abandoned for another site. The area where Parrant set up his "new home" has been known by many names: Grand Marais, La Pointe Basse, and Pointe Leclaire.[20] Sometime between 1838 and 1840, it came to be known, as it is to this day, by Parrant's derisive nickname Pig's Eye.

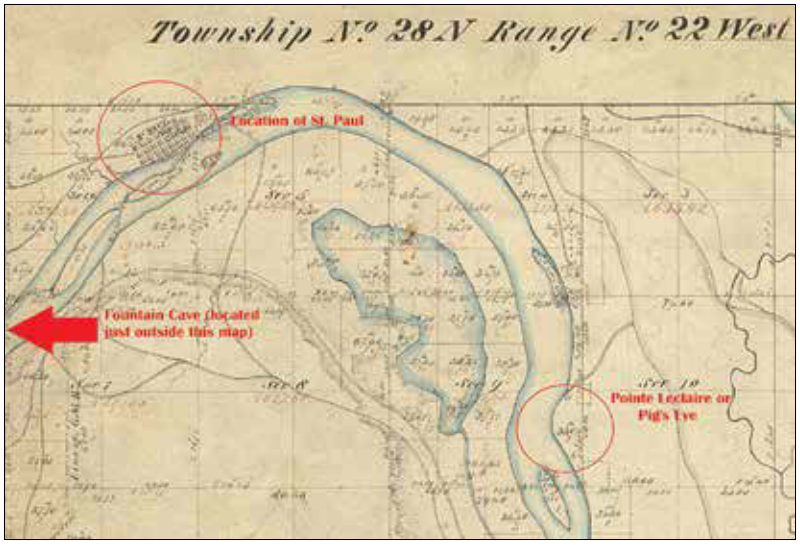
Historian Folwell described Pig's Eye as a "small and temporary settlement of Canadian voyageurs in the employ of the American Fur Company at the Grand Marais on the alluvial bottoms of the river."[21] After being absorbed into the city in the 1880s, Pig's Eye was platted and crossed with streets but remained sparsely populated. It is now occupied by a wastewater treatment plant as well as St. Paul's largest and least visited park, Pig's Eye Regional Park.[22]

## Myth 2: St. Paul was Originally Called Pig's Eye

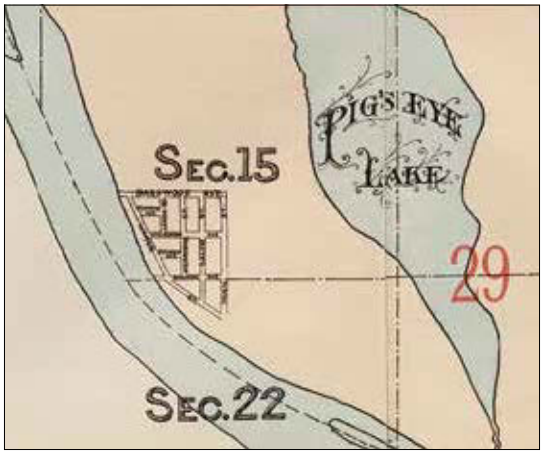
As is stated above, there was a place called Pig's Eye, but it was not and is not located where downtown St. Paul is today.

To understand the legend that St. Paul was once known as Pig's Eye, a good place to start is the New Year's address, which circulated to readers of the *Minnesota Pioneer* on the first day of 1850. It included a long poem with a crucial passage that is familiar to St. Paul historians:

> *Pig's Eye, converted, thou shalt be, like Saul*
> *Thy name henceforth shall be Saint Paul.*[23]




Rev. Lucian Galtier, a local Catholic priest, referred to Pig's Eye as "Pointe Leclaire." Michel LeClaire was Parrant's neighbor at Pig's Eye. Although LeClaire died in 1849, he lived long enough to register his claim at the land office. His name appears on a land patent, making it possible to identify his cabin. *An 1848 survey map on file with Bureau of Land Management. Descriptive elements courtesy of Matt Goff.*




This 1892 map shows part of Pig's Eye laid out into streets in Section 15. Pig's Eye Regional Park is where this small neighborhood was once located. *Courtesy of John R. Borchert Map Library at University of Minnesota.*

The line about Pig's Eye's conversion to St. Paul was repeated at the end, making this passage a focal point:

> *When one great city covers all*
> *The ground from Pig's Eye to the Falls,*
> *I then will claim Saint Paul for mine,*
> *The child of 1849.*
> *Pig's Eye, converted, thou shalt be like Saul,*
> *Arise; and be, henceforth—Saint Paul!*[24]

The tradition of newspapers circulating a new year's proclamation dates to the early 1700s. This was typically a long poem printed on a single sheet. In early form, these sheets were a way for carriers to solicit tips, but by the

mid-1800s, the address, among other purposes, summed up the previous year and set the stage for the year to come.[25]

The *Minnesota Pioneer's* 1850 New Year's address was the first given to the new Minnesota Territory. The publication, like many frontier newspapers, often served as the town cheerleader, promoting growth and a positive image.[26] That address summed up, not the previous year, but the prehistory and the lowly origins of the burgeoning city, setting the stage for its bright future.

A few months earlier in September 1849, the paper printed an article that described how Pig's Eye got its name.

> Once at a time within the memory of several of our citizens, there flourished upon the plain before us, a Frenchman, name Parrant. He was a ruling spirit, and otherwise distinguished, by all who had ever viewed him, as notable for having one eye, unequally matched to its distant yoke mate, and precisely the shape of a pig's eye. He being best known as the man of this peculiar visual organization—his identity became in the process of time, stamped with that name . . . On one occasion, a gentleman inditing an epistle at Parrant's desk, dated the letter, for want of a more definite designation, 'Pig's Eye, such and such a month, 1842.' The letter received in return was directed to Pig's Eye—in good faith. Hence the name. But after the erection of the Catholic Church in this place, the name of St. Paul exorcised the name of Pig's Eye, and the latter was driven back, as under the vagrant act, to its present place.[27]

Edmund Brissett was one of several residents from whom Fletcher Williams solicited stories about the early history of Minnesota. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

## History Corrected: St. Paul was NOT Originally Called Pig's Eye

The St. Paul church mentioned above was built in 1841, so 1842 is late for the place name Pig's Eye to be introduced for the first time if it is a predecessor to the name St. Paul. However, the article hints at a letter that may have helped give the name Pig's Eye "eternal" life.

Edmund Brissett (also spelled Brissettte in some documents) was born in Montreal in 1814 and came to the area as a teenager. He lived with Parrant in the winter of 1838 and '39 and worked for a neighbor named Michel LeClaire ". . . helping to build their houses and get out logs."[28] He was also a constable for Justice of the Peace Joseph Brown. In this capacity, he wrote a letter with Pig's Eye as the return address. Brissett turned Parrant's nickname into a place name:

> I was a constable for Esquire Brown at Chan-Wa-Kan (Medicine Wood). I wanted to write a letter to him. I looked at his eye. It popped into my head to date it at Pig's Eye. When Le Claire [sic] and Parrant found it out they threatened to whip me, but never tried it.[29]

Fletcher Williams, who wrote about Parrant, came to St. Paul in 1855 as a journalist, but he found his calling as secretary of the Minnesota Historical Society. Formed in 1849, the organization was suffering from neglect when Williams took on the part-time and unpaid position in 1867. He eventually became the Society's first paid staff member. Developing this institution and growing its collection would become his life's work.[30]

Williams is best known for his book *A History of the City of Saint Paul, and the County of Ramsey*.[31] Referring to Parrant several times in this tome and describing him in colorful language, the writer did more than anyone to solidify Parrant's legendary reputation. When

Williams relates the story of how Pig's Eye came to be named, the influence of Brissett's statement is clear:

> I looked up at Parrant, (says Brissett, in relating the circumstances,) and, seeing his old crooked eye scowling at me, it suddenly popped into my head to date it at Pig's Eye, feeling sure that the place would be recognized, as Parrant was well known along the river. In a little while an answer was safely received, directed to me at Pig's Eye. I told the joke to some of the boys, and they made lots of fun of Parrant. He was very mad, and threatened to lick me, but never tried to execute it.[32]

The embellishments are notable. "I looked at his eye" becomes "seeing his crooked old eye scowling at me," but one change is especially revealing. The addition of "I told the joke to some of the boys" seems to be added to cover a significant change in the final line. "When LeClaire and Parrant found it out, they threatened to whip me" becomes "He was very mad and threatened to lick me." In Brissett's version, this story clearly takes place where Parrant and LeClaire were neighbors, the place we now know as Pig's Eye.

As does the writer of the 1849 *Minnesota Pioneer* article, Williams manipulates the story so that Parrant and Brissett were in the future town of St. Paul when Brissett penned his letter. This manipulation supports the legend that St. Paul was first called Pig's Eye.

Acknowledging that Pig's Eye is indeed a separate place, Williams explains that "After Parrant removed to the bottom, below Dayton's Bluff, some three or four years subsequently, the name became attached to that locality."[33] Similarly, the newspaper story claims that the name Pig's Eye was driven away from St. Paul "as under the vagrant act, to its present place." It makes more sense, even more so now that we understand that Brissett wrote his letter from there, that the place we call Pig's Eye today was always known as such. Although Pig's Eye is now within St. Paul city limits, in the earliest years, St. Paul and Pig's Eye were distinctly separate locations.[34]

## Myth 3: Parrant Lost Claim in a Footrace

Joseph Renshaw Brown (referenced above), was among the troops to arrive at Fort Snelling in its infancy. He later joined the fur trade, and in 1839, became a local justice of the peace.[35]

A record of Brown's cases from 1839 to 1841 has survived. Parrant is mentioned several times. In particular, on February 26, 1840, Parrant made a complaint against his neighbor LeClaire for "forcible entry and detainer," a common complaint among squatters. It seems LeClaire took over Parrant's claim. Parrant sued. The casebook indicates Parrant lost the case and was required to pay thirty-six dollars in court fees.[36]

However, from this case, a legend developed. In his book, Williams uses this story to conclude Parrant's role in the area's early history:

> LeClaire summoned Parrant before Squire Joseph R. Brown, Justice of the Peace . . . so strong was the testimony that Squire Brown . . . could not tell on what side to make the decision. His irresistible love of a joke finally helped him out of the dilemma. He decided that neither party had any valid claim in the dispute, as they had not staked it out in the presence of witnesses, and defined its boundaries. It would, therefore, be the just property of the first who should do so. The result was, of course, a footrace back to the claim . . . Parrant was so worked up by this misadventure, that he soon after sold his claim and left the neighborhood . . .[37]

## History Corrected: Parrant Did NOT Lose Claim in a Footrace

The origin of this story is unclear, but of all the tall tales about Parrant, the footrace is the easiest to unravel. Justice Brown's casebook leaves little room for doubt: There was no footrace. There was a normal trial in which a jury decided for LeClaire and against Parrant. The casebook indicates that a jury was always empaneled to decide such cases, and the idea that a justice of the peace had the arbitrary power to decide a case in such a strange manner is absurd.

Exactly how this court case grew into legend is lost to history, but a possible explanation can be found in a 1996 Brown biography:

> Those trials on Saturday, March 7, 1840, must have provided the social event of the season. Just about everybody in the southern half of the county was there, if not as juror then as a witness for . . . the litigants. Forming the gallery—we can imagine the scene—were spectators and interested parties—officers, friends, relatives—all crowded into Brown's barely adequate log house at Chanwakan and overflowing into the yard.[38]

"The social event of the season" might have produced stories that people later tell and retell. Perhaps something happened during this event or the trial that inspired the footrace tale, but, in the words of authors Nancy and Robert Goodman, "Everything was handled in the best legal fashion."[39] Justice Brown's casebook confirms this analysis.

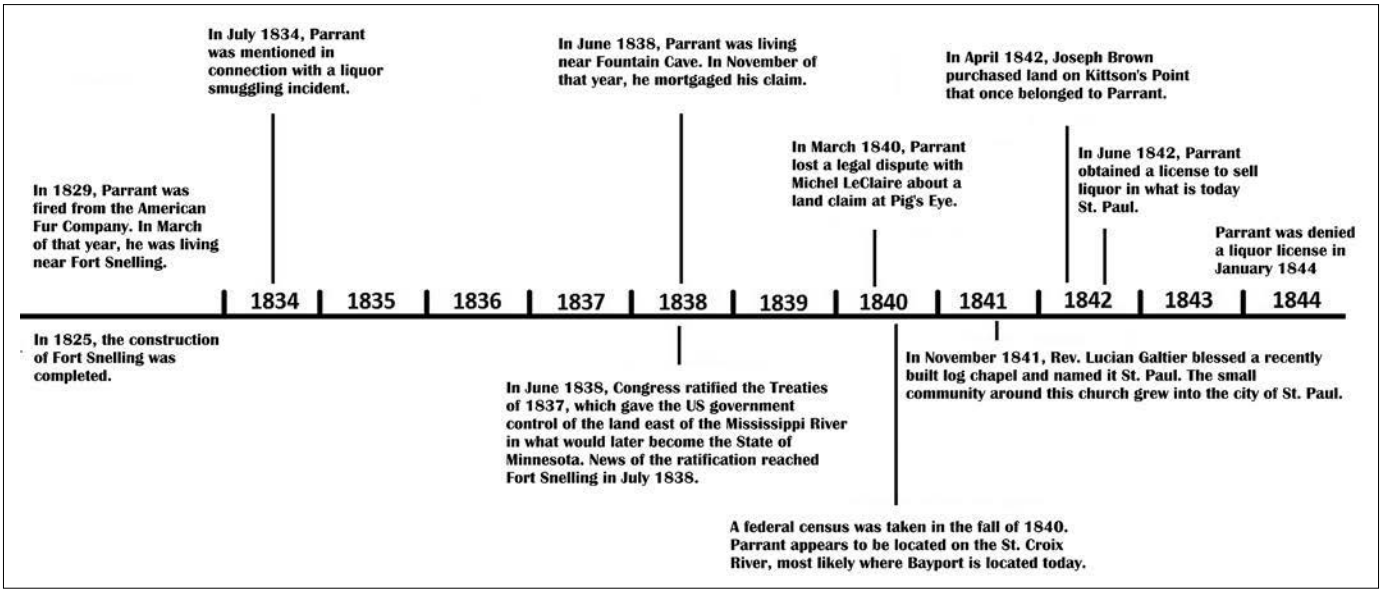
## Here, There, and Everywhere (Including St. Paul)

Williams claims that after this legal dispute, "Parrant was so worked up by this misadventure that he soon sold his property and left the neighborhood."[40] Whether or not Parrant had a claim to sell at that time, it seems that he did soon leave. When Parrant was named in the 1840 US Census, he was not living near LeClaire.

These census records are sparse. Only the heads of household are named, with little information about home locations. "Peter" Parrant is counted with a boy under five, and a woman between twenty and thirty years old. Parrant's age is estimated at forty to fifty. We don't know the nature of the relationship of those listed, but it appears to be two parents and a child. If correct, the listing also makes Parrant younger than indicated in other documents.[41]

What is noteworthy is that he appears to be living near the St. Croix River. Although location is not specifically stated, there is a clear east-to-west direction of the count. The list begins with St. Croix Valley residents and ends with those living near the Mississippi. Jesse Taylor, for whom Taylor's Falls was eventually named, begins the list. Parrant is fifth on the list, and a couple of spaces below is Louis Massey, whose land claim would become Hudson, Wisconsin. Further down, notable St. Croix Valley resident Orange Walker's name appears. The border of St. Croix County was the Mississippi River, so the residents at Fort Snelling and Mendota are counted elsewhere, but the familiar names from early St. Paul and Pig's Eye are at the end of the list. LeClaire, for instance, is one of the last people counted. Parrant's placement in this count suggests where he was likely living then, but another record is more specific.[42]

In April 1842, Justice Brown purchased land on Kittson's Point, "having been taken on an execution and sold as the property of Peter Parron."[43] The circumstances surrounding this sale are unclear but indicate that Parrant had possession of land there. Land possession




*Pierre Parrant Minnesota Timeline courtesy of Matt Goff.*

required physical occupation, so it's probable that Parrant lived on Kittson's Point. Because the September 1840 census seems to indicate that he was in the general vicinity of the St. Croix Valley, it is likely that Parrant spent the years 1840 to 1842 at Kittson's Point, which is now part of the City of Bayport.

The first indication that Parrant eventually resided within the future site of St. Paul comes from the "Proceedings of the County Board of St. Croix, Wisconsin." The county formed in 1840 and included the triangle of land between the Mississippi and the St. Croix Rivers—today's Ramsey and Washington Counties.

In June 1842, two months after his land near the St. Croix River was sold, Parrant obtained a license to sell liquor at "Jervais bottom."[44] Benjamin Gervais (sometimes "Jervais") was a fur trader from Canada. He was an early resident who arrived from the Red River Colony. This area would soon be referred to as St. Paul.[45]

The wording of Parrant's license suggests the name St. Paul had not been firmly established yet. It is difficult to say for certain when the name was solidified, but it was before 1844. On the first day of that year, Parrant again applied for a license: "Application also made by William R. Brown in behalf of P. Paron of St. Paul for a license to keep a tavern at that place, which was not granted."[46] Besides mentioning St. Paul by name, this record is notable, as it is the last-known record of Pierre Parrant.

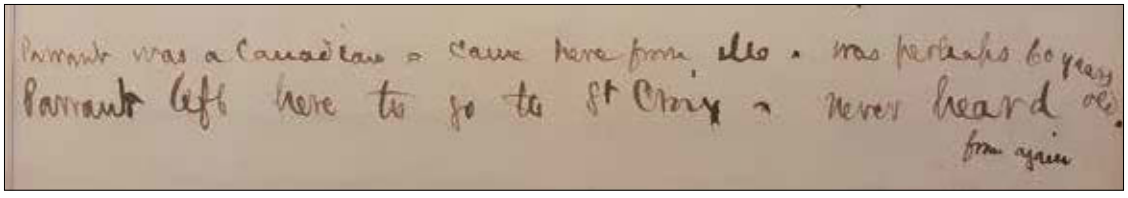
What happened to Parrant after that date, for now, is lost to history, although a clue appears in a statement from Vital Guerin in the Williams papers. Guerin was one of the first residents of St. Paul. He, along with Gervais, donated the land upon which the log chapel of St. Paul was built.[47] His name is on the original city plat. In 1866, Guerin wrote for Williams a meandering account of early St. Paul. The phrasing and structure of this document make parts of it difficult to interpret, but Parrant is mentioned multiple times.

John Schmitt painted this oil on canvas titled *Chapel of St. Paul* around 1845. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

One passage states: "Parrant sold whiskey—shanty under hill—sold to Roberts."[48] Louis Robert (sometimes Roberts) was an early resident of St. Paul. In fact, his is the first name listed on the plat. Today's Robert Street is named for him. Robert came to the area in 1843,[49] so the timing fits neatly for him to have bought Parrant's shanty near the river after Parrant was denied a tavern license.

Another passage reads: "Parrant was a Canadian—came here from [Montreal]—was perhaps sixty years old. Parrant left here to go to St. Croix—never heard from again."[50] This portentous conclusion might further confirm Parrant's connection with the St. Croix Valley. It could be that Guerin is confusing the comings-and-goings of Parrant when he sits down to remember them many years later, or perhaps this *is* an important clue to Parrant's ultimate fate.

Though there is no evidence of what happened to Parrant after 1844, there is—perhaps predictably—a legend. A granite monument in northeastern North Dakota marks the grave of




A handwritten entry in Vital Guerin's statement from the papers of Fletcher Williams. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

Adolph Carl and four of his children. This was an unmarked grave until Lillian Gilbertson, a great granddaughter, had the monument installed in 2001. While it honors the farmer and Civil War veteran, Pierre Pig's Eye Parrant is also mentioned on its face. This is because Carl was married to Eleanor Parrant, who is thought, at least by some of the descendants of the Carl family, to be the daughter of Pierre Parrant. This is likely family lore that has grown into yet another Pig's Eye legend.[51]

The lack of solid historical evidence about Parrant's life explains, in part, why so many legends are attached to him. As the never-ending process of historical examination continues to demystify the life of Pierre Parrant and the role he played in the history of St. Paul, perhaps, someday, aspects of this article will be exposed as mere legend, as well.

***Matt Goff*** *is an archivist for Kraus-Anderson, a Minneapolis-based construction and real estate company. He is also a part-time librarian for Hennepin County. From 2010 to 2019, Goff worked in the reference department of the Minnesota Historical Society's Gale Family Library, where he came upon many Minnesota history mysteries and the means to pursue them.*

## NOTES

1. "Etymology of the Name Pig's Eye," *Minnesota Pioneer*, September 20, 1849, 3.

2. Edmund Brissett, statement, 1866, J. Fletcher Williams papers, 943, Minnesota Historical Society Manuscript Collections, (Hereafter, Williams papers, 943, and MNHS Collections).

3. "American Fur Company Ledgers, Book T, 397, MNHS Collections.

4. "Pierre Parrant," Family Search, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, accessed March 31, 2021, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-899S-P3J5?i=173&wc=HCRD-929%3A15298201%2C16889401%2C17047502&cc=1321742. This website provides a 1791 baptism for Pierre Parrant from Saint-Martin in Laval, Quebec. A 1791 birth validates the age listed in the 1840 US Census; Alexis Baily, letter to Lawrence Taliaferro at St. Peters Indian Agency, March 2, 1829, Lawrence Taliaferro papers, 1813-1868, MNHS Collections, accessed March 24, 2021, http://collections.mnhs.org/cms/display?irn=10614146&return=q%3Dpierre%2520parrant.

5. Thomas P. Burnett, legal brief filed October 1835, MNHS Collections, accessed March 24, 2021, http://collections.mnhs.org/cms/display?irn=10613950&return=q%3Dpierre%2520parrant; Vital Guerin, statement, 1866, Williams papers, 943, MNHS Collections; Brent T. Peterson, Nancy Goodman, and Dean R. Thilgen. *Minnesota Beginnings: Records of Saint Croix County, Wisconsin Territory, 1840-1849* (Stillwater, MN: Washington County Historical Society, 1999), 272. Pierre Parrant gave testimony during an investigation into election irregularities about his citizenship status. He claimed he was granted US citizenship at a court in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Parrant lived four places between 1838 and 1844, including near Fountain Cave, Pig's Eye, Kittson's Point, and St. Paul.

6. John H. Bliss. "Reminiscences of Fort Snelling," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* 6 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1894), 350; Mary Lethert Wingerd, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 121-123.

7. Separate treaties were made between the US Government and the Ojibwe Tribes and between the US Government and the Dakota Tribes.

8. There is no precedence for either Dakota or early Euro-American settlers building homes within the caves of the Upper Mississippi. Fountain Cave, in particular, would have been a challenging location for a cabin, as it contained a lake substantial enough for nineteenth-century tourists to explore with canoes.

9. "Local and Transitory," *Minnesota Pioneer*, July 11, 1850, 2. This tells the story of soldiers, including Joseph Brown, setting off a canon within the cave as part of a July 4th celebration; Greg Brick, "What Happened to Fountain Cave? The Real Birth Place of St. Paul," *Ramsey County History* 29, no. 4, (Winter 1995): 4; Guerin, statement, 1866. In a statement made decades later, Guerin addresses this question, but the statement is confusing. He writes: "Parrant's shanty was above the cave, his shanty was in the coulee." The coulee seems to describe the small stream coming out of the cave, and this is where Parrant's cabin is normally imagined to be, but the statement directly says that his cabin was above the cave. Parrant borrowed ninety dollars with this land claim as collateral. This suggests that Parrant's claim actually included the cave within it. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why the land would be worth ninety dollars when other land was freely available.

10. Stephen H. Long, *Voyage in a Six-Oared Skiff to the Falls of St. Anthony in 1817* (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1860), 5; *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (St. Paul: Ramaley, Chaney & Co., 1867), 31. Kaposia was relocated multiple times.

11. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1921), 230. Folwell doesn't cite a source for dating Parrant's arrival to "about the 1st of June," but he mentions Lawrence Taliaferro's journal on the same page. If there is another source for this date, the author is not aware of it. Taliaferro (pronounced like Tulliver) is an important source of information regarding Parrant. From Virginia, he volunteered for service during the War of 1812 and sub-

sequently made a career as a military officer. Through a personal connection with President James Monroe, Taliaferro was appointed an Indian agent. Note: the Taliaferro journal has been digitized and is available online at Minnesota Historical Society.

12. Edward D. Neill, *The History of Minnesota: from the Earliest French Explorations to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1858), 475-479.

13. J. Fletcher Williams, (1876) 1983, *A History of the City of Saint Paul to 1875,* Reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 84. Williams calls Parrant "The Romulus of our future city;" "William W. Folwell Completes First Volume of His Minnesota History," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, June 5, 1921, 66.

14. Folwell, 230. It appears Folwell, like others before him, drew his own conclusions from Taliaferro's journal.

15. Lawrence Taliaferro papers.

16. All sources indicate that Perry was Swiss. It may be that Taliaferro referred to him as a "Frenchman" because he spoke French.

17. Lawrence Taliaferro, *Auto-Biography of Major Taliaferro, 1864*, In *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1894), 229-230. By "small things often decide our locality for us," Taliaferro is referring to how the seemingly small matter of the Perry family moving their cattle to a more convenient location resulted in the founding of the City of St. Paul.

18. Pierre Parrant, promissory note, November 12, 1838, MNHS Collections, P1815.

19. Evan Jones, *Citadel in the Wilderness: The Story of Fort Snelling and the Northwest Frontier* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 225.

20. "Memoir of Rev. Lucian Galtier: First Catholic Priest of Saint Paul," *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* 3 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1880), 226.

21. Folwell, 223.

22. "It's the biggest park in St. Paul. And nobody knows about it," *Pioneer Press*, October 24, 2017, accessed March 8, 2021, https://www.twincities.com/2017/10/24/st-paul-biggest-park-nobody-knows-pigs-eye-regional-daytons-bluff.

23. "Minnesota Pioneer to its Patrons," *Minnesota Pioneer*, January 2, 1850, 2.

24. "Minnesota Pioneer to its Patrons," 2.

25. Gerald D. McDonald, *A Checklist of American Newspaper Carrier's Addresses, 1720-1820* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1996), accessed March 30, 2021, https://library.brown.edu/cds/carriers/essay_intro.html.

26. Mary Wheelhouse Berthel, *Horns of Thunder: The Life and Times of James M. Goodhue Including Selections from His Writings* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1948), 75.

27. "Etymology," 3.

28. "Brissett, statement."

29. "Brissett, statement." Brissett uses the spelling "Le Claire." Most other sources, however, spell the name "LeClaire." In reference to the location also known as Pig's Eye, it is "Pointe Leclaire."

30. Mary Wheelhouse Berthel and Harold Dean Cater, "The Minnesota Historical Society: Highlights of a Century" *Minnesota History* 30, no. 4 (December 1949): 309.

31. Williams, 1983.

32. Williams, 1983, 85.

33. Williams, 1983, 85-86.

34. Pig's Eye was well outside the original boundaries of St. Paul. In the 1850 US Census, the two locations are specified as separate locations.

35. Nancy and Robert Goodman, *Joseph R. Brown Adventurer on the Minnesota Frontier 1820-1849* (Rochester, MN: Lone Oak Press, 1996), 29-160.

36. Joseph Renshaw Brown, Samuel J. Brown, Moses E. Clapp, William Watts Folwell, R. I. Holcombe, Charles A. Maxwell, Edward M. Mix, et al. Joseph R. and Samuel J. Brown and Family papers, 1826-1956. MNHS Collections, 1826, microfilm roll 26.

37. Williams, 1983, 147.

38. Goodman, 179.

39. Goodman, 179.

40. Williams, 1983, 147.

41. Guerin, statement. Guerin says Parrant was about sixty. Williams repeats this claim in *A History of St. Paul*, 1983, 65.

42. "Peter Parrant," 1840 US Federal Census. St. Croix, Wisconsin Territory.

43. *Minnesota Beginnings*, 129.

44. *Minnesota Beginnings,* 21.

45. *Minnesota Beginnings,* 31.

46. John Ireland, *Memoir of Rev. Lucian Galtier: First Catholic Priest of Saint Paul* (Stockbridge, MA: HardPress Publishing, 2013), 227-228. Father Galtier, the priest who decided the location of the church of St. Paul, suggests in his memoir that the name caught on fairly quickly: "On November 1st, 1841, I blessed the new basilica . . . The church was thus dedicated to St. Paul and I expressed a wish that the settlement should be known by no other name . . . When Mr. Guerin was married, I published the bans as being those of 'a resident of St. Paul.'" From the Williams papers, we see that Vital Guerin and Adele Perry were married in 1841; *Minnesota Beginnings*, 32.

47. Guerin's name appears on the original plat of St. Paul proper.

48. Guerin, statement.

49. Williams, 1983, 141.

50. Williams papers.

51. "Monument Dedicated to Founder of St. Paul," *Bismarck Tribune*, June 12, 2001, 7C; Lillian E. Gilbertson, *The Memoirs of Lillian E. Gilbertson: Pig's Eye's Great-Great-Granddaughter*, edited and self-published by Janell Norman, 2004. Available at the Minnesota Historical Society, F605.1.G462 A3 2004; Janell Norman, to whom the author is indebted for her years of research on Pierre Parrant, has traced the genealogy of the Parrant family and convincingly suggests that Eleanor Parrant (also spelled Parant) is descended from Joseph Parant, who has his own interesting story but is not Pierre Parrant.

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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 Ḣeyáta Othúŋwe (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 Ḣeyáta Othúŋwe. 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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## *Acknowledging This Sacred Dakota Land*

Mnisóta Makhóčhe, the land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds, extends beyond the modern borders of Minnesota and is the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Dakhóta (Dakota) people. It is also home to the Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples, all who make up a vibrant community in Mnisóta Makhóčhe. The Ramsey County Historical Society acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands.

Dakota people are the first people of Mnisóta Makhóčhe and have lived here for thousands of years. In the nineteenth century, Dakota lands were greatly diminished by a series of one-sided treaties that continue to benefit the United States government and the descendants of those who immigrated to Minnesota. These treaties were knowingly mistranslated, and land and annuities promised to the Dakota were stolen and never received. In 1862, war broke out between some Dakota and the Governments of the United States and Minnesota. As a result of that war, Governor Alexander Ramsey (namesake of Ramsey County) called for all Dakota people in Minnesota to "be exterminated or driven forever beyond the borders of Minnesota," their homeland. This codification of genocidal State policy resulted in the violent and forced removal of Dakota people from their homeland, including offering bounties for killing Dakota men, women, and children and years of exterminatory military campaigns.

Yet the Dakota people have survived this attempted genocide and the ongoing attempts to erase their histories and culture through assimilation practices, including sending Dakota children to boarding schools and erasure by omission of Dakota history in curriculum in educational institutions.

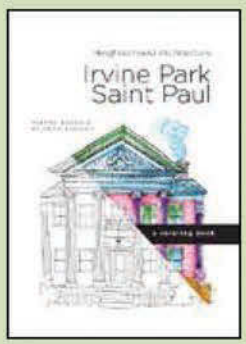
Ramsey County Historical Society is committed to preserving our past, informing our present, and inspiring our future. Part of doing so is acknowledging the painful history and current challenges facing the Dakota people just as we celebrate the contributions of Dakota and other Indigenous peoples.

We pledge to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóčhe by:

- Continuing to share an accurate historical curriculum at Gibbs Farm that covers the seasonal life of the Dakota of Ȟeyáta Othúŋwe (Cloud Man's Village) at Bdé Makhá Ska;
- Developing improved language for signage and curriculum that more accurately describes colonization;
- Providing a platform for Dakota and other Indigenous partners to showcase their work at our physical sites through virtual programming, exhibits, and publications;
- Maintaining relationships with Dakota community members, and organizations;
- Supporting Dakota and other Indigenous-owned businesses;
- Providing space for traditional and contemporary Dakota cultural activities and events;
- And by advocating for the respectful and equitable treatment of Dakota people, culture, and history.

*The staff and board of the Ramsey County Historical Society extend their heartfelt thanks to Teresa Peterson, Dakota & Upper Sioux Community citizen; Chris Pexa, PhD, Spirit Lake Dakota Nation; and Šišóka Dúta (Joe Bendickson), Sisseton Wahpeton Oyáte, University of Minnesota–for their support of RCHS and advice regarding this statement.*

**For references for this statement, please see**
**https://www.rchs.com/news/dakota-land-acknowledgement/**

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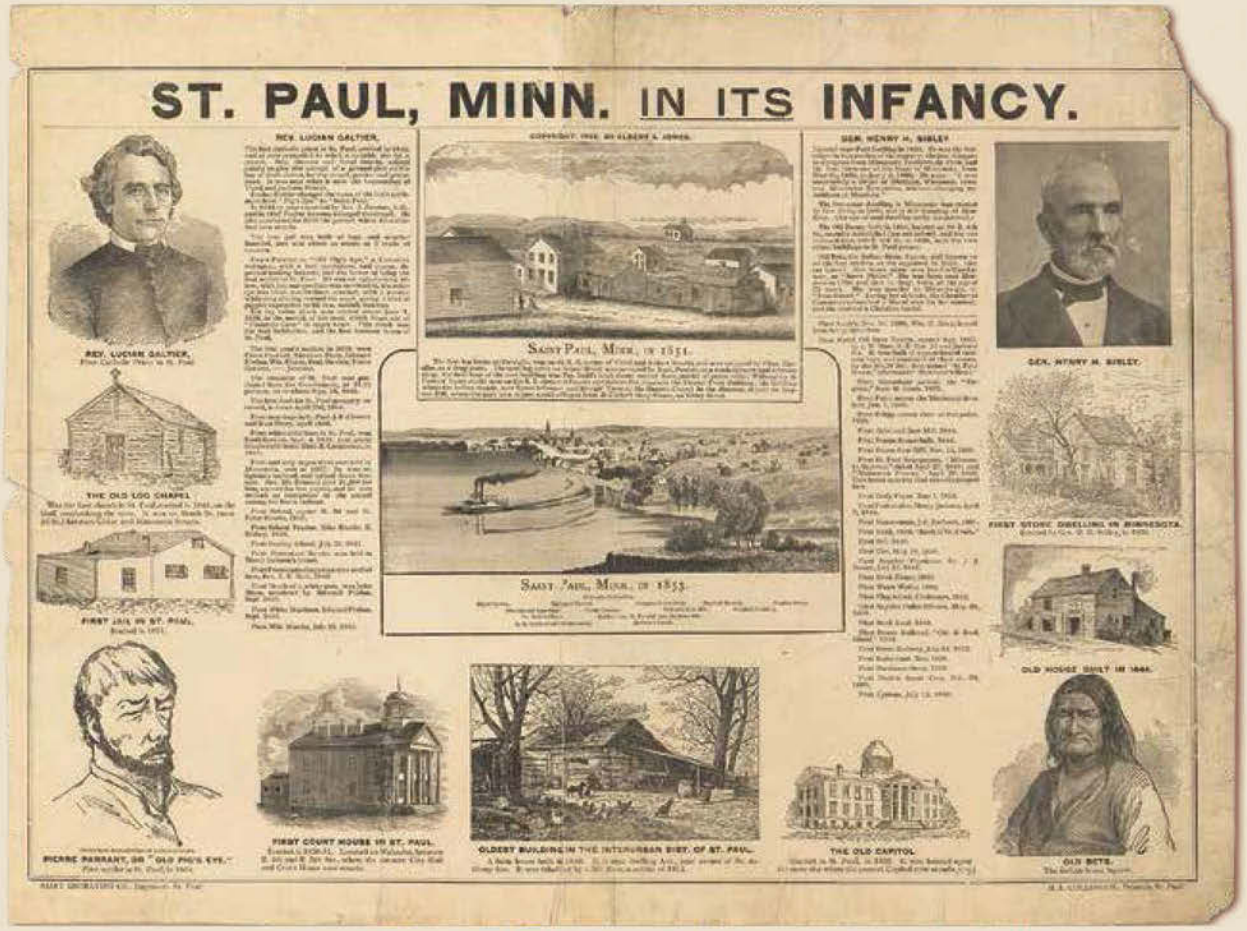
*Correcting Mystery and Myth*

## Not Everything You've Heard about Pig's Eye Parrant is True

MATTHEW GOFF, PAGE 20




This 1892 broadside, copyrighted by Albert A. Jones and printed by H. L. Collins Co., celebrates St. Paul's many "firsts," including the first governor, school teacher, Protestant church, and even the first murderer. Many facts are true. Others have been questioned, including those related to a man named Pierre Parrant, whose image is illustrated in the bottom left-hand corner. Parrant's narrative has shaped this city's history, but author Matt Goff argues that some of these oft-repeated stories are just that—stories—that should be reconsidered and corrected. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*