

Six Decades Making Music and Memories

Minnesota Boychoir

BARBARA W. SOMMER, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

Who doesn't love topping fluffy pancakes with melted butter and pure maple syrup? In Minnesota, it's a spring tradition to tap maple trees and gather all that delicious sweetness. So it's not surprising that one popular brand got its start here. See "The Man and The Can: Patrick J. Towle and the St. Paul Origins of Log Cabin Syrup" by Matthew M. Thomas on page 14. The history is fascinating, but as far as pure maple syrup goes, well. . . .

Percentage of pure maple syrup in the Log Cabin Syrup recipe in its first fifty years:

25^a

Percentage of pure maple syrup in the Log Cabin Syrup recipe today:

0^b

Amount Log Cabin Syrup collectors pay for early paper-label, cabin-shaped tins in very good to fine condition:

\$200-\$2,000^c

Year the iconic cabin-shaped syrup tin was invented:

1897^d

The last year the cabin-shaped tin was used to package Log Cabin Syrup:

1956^e

The average price for a quart of Log Cabin Syrup in 1910:

50 cents^f

SOURCES: For a complete source list, see endnotes on page 26.

ON THE COVER



Top photo: Young singers under the direction of Paul H. Pfeiffer in 1978. Front row (L-R): Sanford Jones, Tom Whitney, Brian Balcom, and Rollin Ransom. Photograph by Paul Shanboom, courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society; Bottom photo: Select members of the Minnesota Boychoir's Allegro choir in 2017-2018 (L-R): Noah Yager, Jacob Engdahl, Alejandro Ricart, Christopher Williams, Per Swenson, Gabe Hug, and Finn Jackson. Photograph by Diana Ricart. Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.

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Message from the Editorial Board

This year, the Minnesota Boychoir celebrates its sixtieth anniversary. Founded in 1962, the organization has, over the years, added to our state's international reputation for choral music excellence. What began with thirty members today features four choirs, headquarters in St. Paul, a small artistic and administrative staff, countless volunteers, and a wide repertoire of music. Thanks to historian Barbara W. Sommer, we learn what it's like to be part of this beloved tradition.

Nearly a century before the choir's founding, a young Lillie Belle Gibbs was tending to her chores at the family farm north of St. Paul. It was 1877. At the same time, Patrick J. Towle was working to make a name for himself in the grocery business in Chicago.

Gibbs was the daughter of market farmers. It was not an easy life, but it was a full one, as we witness in the historical fiction children's book *Grasshoppers in My Bed*, soon-to-be-published by Ramsey County Historical Society. Gibbs lived in an agrarian community. She was made by the land and farm.

Towle, on the other hand, was made by the city. He weathered financial ups and downs before moving to St. Paul in 1888 in search of a fresh start. With his Log Cabin Syrup, Towle helped usher in the era of marketing, branding, industrialization, and expansion into distant markets.

These three stories are deeply rooted in our history. Early residents found that Ramsey County was—and still is—a place of prosperity and opportunity—a place where people can make a full life, a prosperous living, and, of course, beautiful music.

Anne Field
Chair, Editorial Board

Correction: Regrets to Judge Tanya Bransford. She was incorrectly identified on page 5 in our Winter 2022 issue. She is a St. Paul native rather than a native of North St. Paul.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks former 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. Sincere thanks to Minnesota Boychoir for their financial support.

New RCHS Children’s Book Coming in May—Kickoff Event at Gibbs Farm

May 1877

Minnesota farm girl Lillie Belle Gibbs completed her fifth-grade term at the one-room schoolhouse near her home north of the burgeoning town of St. Paul. But there was little time for a “break,” as Lillie still had to keep up with her daily farm chores—ironing, tending to chamber pots, and feeding and cleaning up after the chickens. And soon, she would begin helping her mother and sister plant rows of potatoes, tomatoes, summer squash, beans, and pumpkins in preparation for the busy market season.

May 2022

Fast-forward 145 years, and that same farmstead—located off today’s Larpenteur Avenue—where Lillie once lived, worked, played, and dreamed of adventure, is a beehive of activity as Gibbs Farm staff members complete *their* chores, readying the site for their 2022 opening-day kickoff.

One headliner event featured is the much-anticipated launch of a new children’s historical fiction book published by Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS): *Grasshoppers in My Bed: Lillie Belle Gibbs—Minnesota Farm Girl—1877* by author Terry Swanson and illustrator Peggy Stern.

It Started with a Simple Question

The seed of an idea for the book was planted during the first Gibbs Girl Day Camp years ago when a curious participant wondered aloud:

What was it *really* like to live on this farm back then?

In 1949, a century after the farm’s founding and thanks to the early efforts of local citizens and Lillie’s son, Lester LeVesconte, the then one-hundred-year-old property was saved from impending demolition. Soon after, staff with the newly created Ramsey County Historical



Society set to work to preserve, study, and document the Jane and Heman Gibbs family history so future questions like the one posed by the young camper could be answered—in detail.

Beginning in 2007, Swanson worked as Gibbs Farm program and site manager for ten seasons and often answered similar questions. “We’ve been sharing the story of the Gibbs family for decades now, focusing primarily on the life of Jane DeBow Gibbs, the matriarch of the family,” Swanson says. As a child, Jane spent time living near Ĥeyáta Othúnwe (Cloud Man’s Village), which was situated between Lake Harriet and the lake today called Bde Maka Ska in Minneapolis. Interestingly, it was Jane’s youngest daughter Lillie, who, as an adult, documented many of

her mother's childhood memories playing with Dakota children, learning the language, then later, as a grownup, reuniting with her Dakota friends.

Artifacts, Documents, and Maps

After her retirement, Swanson wondered if there was enough primary source material to tell Lillie's story. "The RCHS archives contain photographs, maps, programs, a personal Bible, Lillie's dictionary, and a few of her school notebooks full of essays, spelling words, and penmanship assignments," Swanson says. It was discovered that Lillie even signed off on much of her work as "Lillie," "Lillie Belle," or "Lillie Bella." Of course, Swanson worked those signatures into the book. Other helpful items include written historical accounts from Lillie's brother Frank and her father's accounting books.

"As far as we know, Lillie didn't leave a diary, per se," says Swanson. "Yet, there was enough historical evidence to establish an accurate imagining of the daily happenings at the farm when Lillie was eleven. A diary genre seemed the best way to answer the questions about day-to-day living at the site."

Because Lillie loved to sketch, Swanson felt it important to incorporate illustrations into the book. She enlisted her friend and colleague Peggy Stern, a local artist who has painted signage and murals at Gibbs Farm, to be the illustrator. Not only did Stern sketch and paint over 200 individual images for the project, she patiently and carefully hand-lettered title and



chapter pages and designed the colorful, creative crazy quilt-themed cover. "A friend once suggested I illustrate a book," Stern says. "When Terry asked me to partner on the Lillie project, I said 'of course!' The vivid detail in Terry's entries helped me imagine Lillie in action. With Lillie's love of drawing in mind, I took pen to paper, and the illustrations were born."

What's Next?

Following the launch of *Grasshoppers in My Bed* over Memorial Day weekend, Gibbs Farm is offering three now sold-out "Kids on the Farm—Grasshoppers in My Bed Edition" summer camps. Campers will go to class in a one-room schoolhouse on the property, tour the house

Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Opening Day 2022

Saturday, May 28; 10 am to 4 pm

Admission: \$8 adults, \$7 seniors, \$5 children over four.
RCHS members are free.

Preregistration opens on Monday, May 2.
Go to www.rchs.com to register.

Activities Include:

- Farmhouse and Dakota Lifeways tours
- Three scheduled *Grasshoppers in My Bed* author/illustrator talks, with book signings in the Red Barn (10:30, 12:30, & 2:30)
- Chore obstacle course in the farmyard
- Farm demonstrations

Seasonal Hours at Gibbs Farm:

- Saturdays 10 am to 4 pm from May 28 to October 29
- Fridays noon to 3 pm from June 17 to August 26

For information on spring and fall field trips, as well as a variety of summer camps, email gibbs@rchs.com or call 651-646-8629.

For a complete schedule of *Grasshoppers in My Bed* author/illustrator events: events@rchs.com; (651) 222-0701, ext. 226; or www.grasshoppersinmybed.com.

where Lillie grew up, help with the weekly wash, feed the farm animals, make butter, and more.

At the same time, Swanson and Stern will promote the book and meet and greet young readers at venues throughout the Twin Cities and across Minnesota and Wisconsin, including at schools, bookstores, libraries, farmers' markets, county fairs, and other locations.

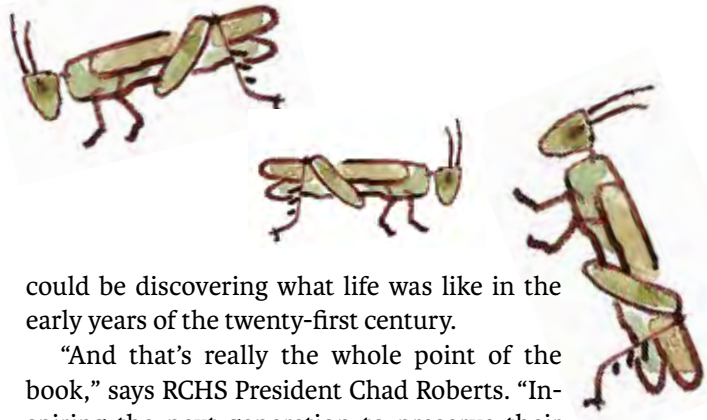
Of course, the creative duo knows they'll need to be ready for even more questions, including, "Why is the book title *Grasshoppers in My Bed*?"

Swanson's response to that question is grounded in her history background, as well as her time at Gibbs Farm. "For historical fiction to be believable, it is important to demonstrate how the times affected individual lives." By 1877, much of Minnesota had suffered years of ruined crops, thanks to hundreds of thousands of hungry grasshoppers that descended upon the state (grasshopper plague of 1873-1877). The troublesome pests not only blanketed the ground, the crops, the animals, and the windows, they likely were found all over the inside of the farmhouse—including *in* the beds.

Everyone Has a Story to Tell

The 176-page book with a map and 138 diary entries from December 1876 through December 1877 is written for nine- to ten-year-olds in fourth to fifth grade. It also may be enjoyed by older readers, as well as younger children who may learn about Lillie while sitting on grown-ups' laps and listening to them read.

The book encourages young people to ask questions about their own families, providing opportunities to better understand their heritage by searching through ancestral documents stored under beds or in dusty attics. In addition, it's hoped the diary will encourage children to record their experiences in the here and now by writing accounts of daily life in 2022. We all live adventures in one form or another. Like Lillie, it's common for children (and adults, too) to believe their lives are mundane, but when they begin journaling about their days at home, school, in their community—and, now, having lived through two years of a pandemic—they likely have much to share. And if those writings, photographs, and other artifacts are preserved, ten decades from now, children of the future



could be discovering what life was like in the early years of the twenty-first century.

"And that's really the whole point of the book," says RCHS President Chad Roberts. "Inspiring the next generation to preserve their heritage while learning about their ancestors is a win-win for our community.

"Authors like Terry are doing incredible work researching and writing about history right here in our own backyard," Roberts says. "In this case, Lillie's story is one we know so intimately that we feel comfortable using the historical fiction format to help bring the story to life for readers of all ages. Several years ago, we published *Jane Gibbs: "Little Bird That Was Caught"* by Anne Neuberger. That work was about the early years of Lillie's mother. With *Grasshoppers in My Bed*, we have come full circle."

This new "diary" of a real-life Minnesota farm girl provides another way for RCHS to share the Gibbs story. Of course, there would be no book without the forethought of Gibbs family members to document memories and save and hand down family heirlooms that were then lovingly shared and preserved by the historical society and others. This book also would not have happened without the generous financial support of the Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts and Laurie M. Murphy, a longtime member of the RCHS board of directors and editorial board.

Grasshoppers in My Bed: Lillie Belle Gibbs—Minnesota Farm Girl—1877 is a softcover book that includes additional historical materials and suggested reading lists at the back. Cost is \$20; \$18 for RCHS members. It is available for discounted preorder beginning May 2 at www.rchs.com. It can be purchased from RCHS and other area vendors after the May 28 book launch.

FOR INFORMATION, contact Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 West Fifth Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102; events@rchs.com; (651) 222-0701, ext. 226; or www.grasshoppersinmybed.com.

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Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2022, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758.

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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 (RCHS) strives to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, deliver inspiring history programming, and incorporate local history in education.

The Society was established in 1949 to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, the original programs told the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Ĥeyáta Othújwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved 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 and rededicated in 2016 as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers 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. The Society serves more than 15,000 students annually on field trips or through school outreach. Programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, & Inclusion

RCHS is committed to ensuring it preserves and presents our county's history. As we continue our work to incorporate more culturally diverse histories, we have made a commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion that is based on this core idea: RCHS exists to serve ALL who call Ramsey County home. To learn more, please see www.rchs.com/about.

Acknowledging This Sacred Dakota Land

Mnisóta Makhóche, 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 Makhóche. RCHS acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands.

RCHS 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.

Find our full Land Acknowledgment Statement on our website, www.rchs.com. This includes actionable ways in which RCHS pledges to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóche.

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

www.rchs.com

info@rchs.com



(651) 222-0701



Gibbs Farm 2022

Open to the Public on Saturdays starting May 28th
10:00 am-4:00 pm

Visit our website
for Opening Day details:

www.rchs.com

651-222-0701
gibbs@rchs.com



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RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

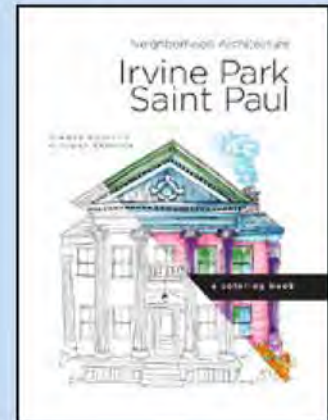


Ramsey County Historical Society congratulates this year's David Stanley Gebhard Award winners:



Jeremiah E. Ellis
Article Prize for
“St. Paul’s Distinct Leadership Tradition:
A Century of the Sterling Club”
Ramsey County History magazine
(Summer 2019)

Jeanne Kosfeld and Richard Kronick
Honorable Mention Book Prize for
*Neighborhood Architecture—
Irvine Park Saint Paul: a coloring book*
(RCHS 2021)



The Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians
will formally present these awards in May.

History Revealed 2022

Making Minnesota: Natives, Settlers, Migrants, and Immigrants

History Revealed programs in 2022 will explore the often untold stories, histories, and experiences of some of the worldwide immigrant, African American, and Indigenous communities that make up our most diverse Minnesota county.

Upcoming programs are planned on the Hmong, Irish, Swedish, African American, and Indigenous people in our community, among others.

For program information, see

www.rchs.com

Past programs are on our YouTube channel.

Go to www.youtube.com and in the search bar enter:
ramsey county historical society



Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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THE SYRUP CAMP Try This Delight **THE SYRUP CAN**

TOWLE'S LOG CABIN SYRUP

The use of this delicious syrup will give you and the family a new joy.

FROM CAMP TO TABLE

The quality or the flavor of Log Cabin never changes.

It is the same today as it was when Mr. P. J. Towle (The Pioneer of Absolutely Pure and Full Measure Maple Syrup) discovered, that in addition to the Towle Process, a small amount of Cane Sugar Syrup blended with the Maple Syrup, greatly improved and balanced the color as well as the flavor, making it soft, mellow, deliciously sweet, still retaining that delicate Maple Character.

It matters not where you purchase Towle's Log Cabin Syrup, from the dealer you have always traded with or at a store where you are a stranger. The Log Cabin Can insures you uniform quality, uniform purity and uniform full measure.

We are so positive that Towle's Log Cabin Syrup will suit you and your family that if your grocer does not sell Towle's it will pay you to go to one who does.

Towle's Log Cabin
The Pioneer Maple Syrup
Full Measure—Full Quality—Full Flavor

We have an attractive book "From Camp to Table" which tells of the many ways Towle's Log Cabin can be used and gives thirty-three prize recipes.

Every housewife should have a copy of this interesting book. By its aid you can delight the family with many new delicacies.

Send for It. It's Free

To every reader of this advertisement who sends us 10 cents in coin or in 2 cent U.S. stamps, we will mail, postpaid, an always useful article: a beautiful, full size, long wearing, silver-plated teaspoon, as illustrated—no advertising on it.

A Souvenir of Towle's Log Cabin

There is a coupon on every can of Log Cabin Syrup, which enables you to secure more of these spoons. Address

The Towle Maple Products Co.
St. Paul, Minn., U. S. A.
Refineries and Offices:

St. Johnsbury, Vt. In the Virgin Mtns. Range, France. St. Paul, Minn. In the center of North America.

San Francisco, Cal. Seattle, Wash. Headquarters.

Get Mother, but this is good Syrup

"The Man and The Can"

Patrick J. Towle and the St. Paul Origins of Log Cabin Syrup

MATTHEW M. THOMAS, PAGE 14

Color advertisements were fairly rare in the early twentieth century. This one, which appeared in the October 10, 1910 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, is aimed directly at young boys, who loved syrup on their pancakes and bread, and their mothers, who most likely made the purchasing decisions for the family. Log Cabin Syrup was produced in St. Paul. From the collection of Matthew M. Thomas.