



Hmong Foodways in Ramsey County

KRISTINA HER, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

For nearly fifty years, a large population of Hmong from Southeast Asia have called Ramsey County home. As the community grew, they brought seeds, planted gardens, opened grocery stores, joined co-ops to learn American farming practices, sold produce at farmers' markets, and opened innovative restaurants. Today, an integral part of the Hmong foodways community is the twelve-year-old Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA). This group of farmers owns 155 acres in nearby Dakota County and supplies fresh produce to Twin Cities' markets, schools, hospitals, and individual families. To learn more, see Kristina Her's cover story "Hmong Foodways in Ramsey County" on page 1.

Number of acres owned by HAFA:

155

Number of fruit, vegetable, herb, and flower varieties grown by HAFA farmers and sold to customers in the Twin Cities:

160

Percentage of Hmong American farmers among all farmers contributing to Twin Cities' markets:

50%

Number of years a typical farmer member at HAFA has been growing produce or flowers:

20

Typical plot size each farmer at HAFA works:

5-10 acres

SOURCES: Hmong American Farmers Association website, accessed July 2023, <https://www.hmongfarmers.com/>.

ON THE COVER



This exquisite Hmong village story cloth in the Minnesota Historical Society collections depicts the Hmong relationship with food and farms in Laos. Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

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Message from the Editorial Board

What defines us as a place or a people? The Civil War stamped the new state of Minnesota as the proud home of the First Regiment of the Minnesota Volunteer Infantry and shaped its future. Over 100 years later, Hmong refugees fleeing from war in Southeast Asia began arriving here, forever changing and enhancing the culture of Ramsey County. The struggles and triumphs of these disparate events are reflected in two of our articles this summer. Kristina Her writes lovingly of the important role that food has always played for the Hmong and how, after a rocky start, Hmong foodways thrive today in St. Paul and beyond. John Guthmann tells tales of his beloved *second* First Minnesota, a group of devoted reenactors faithful to the authentic experience of our original volunteer infantry. These and other articles in this issue offer insights into the many stories that define us.

Anne Field
Chair, Editorial Board

Corrections: In "A Slow Track to Nowhere: St. Paul's Downtown People Mover" (Spring 2023), Metropolitan Council Chairperson John Boland was misidentified. Also, Saint Paul City Council Member Vic Tedesco did not represent the West Side. At that time, council members were elected at-large and represented the entire city. RCHS regrets the errors.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks former Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the 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 The First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteer Infantry for their financial support.

Honoring WWII Codebreakers and the Founding of Engineering Research Associates

DAVE BEAL, LOWELL BENSON, DON HALL, JAY PFAENDER,
AND CHAD ROBERTS

In a salute to a remarkably powerful era of entrepreneurship, the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) celebrated the enduring economic and technological activity unleashed in the Twin Cities by Engineering Research Associates (ERA) more than seventy-five years ago. Before a crowd of 200 computer and technology industry leaders, historians, business people, and curious neighbors, a commemorative plaque was installed at the company's original site, 1902 Minnehaha Avenue West, on Thursday, June 15, 2023.

ERA was formed in 1946 by a group of US Navy codebreakers who had been brought together to help the country and its allies win World War II. They were mathematicians, physicists, engineers, and other specialists who interpreted German and Japanese electronic communications at a top-secret location near Washington, DC. When the war ended, the Secretary of the Navy hoped to keep them together because he saw the group as an important national resource. Securing funding proved difficult until John Parker, a US Naval Academy graduate working in corporate finance, raised \$220,000.

Although a Washington resident, Parker also owned a St. Paul-based glider business at 1902 Minnehaha that was deactivated after the war. He moved key employees from DC to his empty factory. In doing so, he established the Twin Cities as one of the cradles of the computer industry, eventually making it the home for many thousands of jobs in more than 100 technology companies.

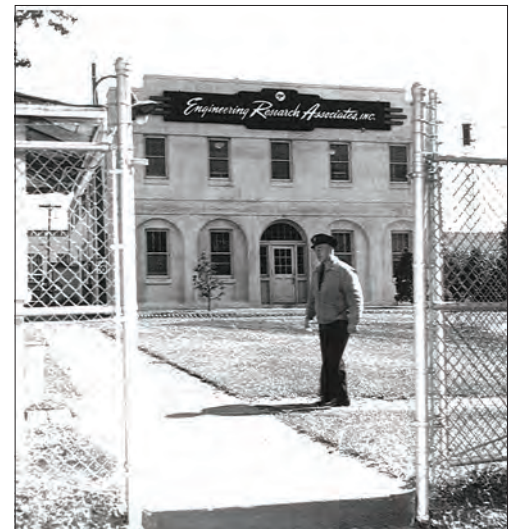
A lineage of corporate growth emerged in 1952, when Remington Rand bought and combined ERA and Eckert-Mauchly Computer Cor-

poration in Philadelphia to form Remington Rand UNIVAC (RRU). Four years later, Sperry Corporation acquired Remington Rand and renamed the company Sperry Rand. Its various computer activities were consolidated into the Univac Division. In 1986, Sperry and Burroughs Corporation merged to form Unisys, which then operated at twenty-eight sites around the Twin Cities.

William Norris was an early member of the codebreakers group and of ERA. In 1957, he left RRU to found Control Data Corporation, which became one of the world's leading computer manufacturers and spawned dozens of spinoff companies. Seymour Cray, an employee of ERA and later Control Data, left the latter in 1972 to form Cray Research, a company that dominated the supercomputer market well into the 1980s. The successes of these companies inspired local engineers to apply their technical expertise to medical products and create dozens of medical device companies.

By the 1980s, Control Data and Unisys each had more than 20,000 employees in Minnesota. But, with the invention of the microchip, the country's computer technology center moved, in large part, to Silicon Valley, California. Still, at least four Control Data descendants, all in Bloomington, remain in the region: Ceridian, SkyWater Technology, Polar Semiconductor, and Seagate Technology Holdings. Unisys retains a service center in Eagan.

"The plaque memorializes the ERA story, serving as reminder of Minnesota's place as an early founder of the region's high-tech economy while also underscoring the importance of entrepreneurs to our community," said Chad Roberts, president and CEO of RCHS.



Among the speakers at the event were John Rollwagen, who was CEO at Cray Research, and Manny Villafaña, who left Medtronic to found Cardiac Pacemakers, St. Jude Medical, and other medical technology firms. “It’s true that individuals start companies from scratch and build them into big companies,” Rollwagen said. “I still believe it can happen.” Villafaña has founded and taken public seven medical technology companies and is now on his eighth startup. “We’re still the mecca of the med-tech industry,” he said.

This is not the first time the Minnehaha Avenue site has earned a commemorative plaque. Lowell Benson has consistently kept the ERA story alive as the historian of the VIP Club, which has represented retirees from ERA and its successor companies since 1980. Benson said Sperry placed a plaque on the site in 1986, but it disappeared in the 1990s.

The Ramsey County Historical Society acknowledges the work of Benson and of the University of Minnesota’s Charles Babbage Institute, which has assembled an extensive collection of documents about the computer industry in Minnesota. Erwin Tomash, an engineer at ERA, founded the institute, and Dr. Arthur Norberg, who held the university’s ERA Land Grant Chair for the History of Technology, was the institute’s first chair.

RCHS appreciates the generosity of Don Hall in making this event possible. Hall is the author of *Generation of Wealth: The rise of Control Data and how it inspired an era of innovation and growth in the Upper Midwest* (2014). RCHS also thanks the project team of Hall, Dave Beal, Lowell Benson, Jay Pfaender, and Chad Roberts, as well as the current owners of the building, Capital Partners, for their assistance with this project.

The original Engineering Research Associates (ERA) building from the 1950s still stands on Minnehaha Avenue in St. Paul’s Midway area. In June, guests and visitors witnessed the unveiling of a new historical marker at the site. *Courtesy of Keith Myhre, Lowell Benson, and Jay Pfaender.*

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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.





Pathways GALA

Benefiting children's hands-on educational programming



Pathways Gala
Tuesday, September 12, 2023
Wabasha Street Caves

Join RCHS for a night of food, fun, and philanthropy at the Wabasha Street Caves, Saint Paul's famed prohibition-era hideaway for the most notorious gangsters of the '30s.

Enhance the evening with a unique Pathways Gala VIP Experience.

For event details and registration
rchs.com/event/pathways-gala
or call 651-222-0701



Photo credit: Jen Strom

Gibbs Farm Fall Public Hours: Saturdays through October, 10am-4pm

Festivals:

Apple Festival
Saturday, September 30
10am-2pm

Enjoy music, tours of the apple orchard and historic buildings, fun apple crafts, and much more!



Adult Evening Events:

- **Early Harvest Grounds & Gardens Tour**
Tuesday, August 29, 5:30-7:30pm
- **Behind-the Scenes Farmhouse Tour**
Wednesday, September 6, 5:30-7:30pm
- **Late Summer Grounds & Gardens Tour**
Wednesday, September 20, 5:30-7:30pm

Halloween Trick-or-Treat Trail

Saturday, October 28

12-6pm

Our all-ages Steampunk Trick-or-Treat Trail is back! Pre-registration opens in September.



Details and tickets can be found on our website:

www.rchs.com

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These young teens were members of St. Michael's Skating Club. Such clubs for devoted "rink rats" were popular in the 1950s and '60s. *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*

Rolling through the Decades

Roller Skating in Ramsey County

HEIDI HELLER, PAGE 22

