



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.

A Tribute to John Watson Milton (1935-2023)

JOHN M. LINDLEY, RCHS EDITOR EMERITUS

I didn't know John Watson Milton as a politician; I only knew him as a man who was passionate about politics.

Dick Nicholson of St. Paul introduced me to John, probably in 2008. Dick was a member of the editorial board of the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS), a volunteer group of which I was also a member. At one of those board meetings that always began at 8 a.m. in a drafty, fourth-floor courtroom of the Landmark Center, Dick welcomed John as a guest and told us a little about his work as a writer and historian. It was the beginning of a fruitful collaboration between John and RCHS. Shortly afterward, the society published an article in its quarterly history magazine that John had written. Soon, he joined the editorial board, writing additional articles for *Ramsey County History*.

A graduate of Princeton University and the Harvard Business School Executive Program, John worked for several businesses, including Fortune 100 and healthcare companies. He was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 1972 and 1976. There, he chaired the health subcommittee and authored major bills to improve healthcare, especially for seniors.

John was also writing, publishing, and speaking about issues that interested him. In 2005, he published *The Fallen Nightengale*, a biography of Enrique Granados (1867–1916), a Spanish composer of classical music. This award-winning book was published in Spanish and Catalan, as well—languages in which John was fluent.

In 2011, John approached RCHS about publishing his biographical manuscript of the late Minnesota senator from St. Paul, Nicholas D. Coleman (1925–1981). John had served in the senate with Coleman and was an admirer of the late senator's politics and accomplishments. John spent years researching, interviewing, and writing this book. Published in 2012, *For the*

Good of the Order: Nick Coleman and the High Tide of Liberal Politics in Minnesota, 1971–1981 was well received and has become a standard account of Minnesota politics in the 1970s.

Writing about state politics wasn't new for John. In 2008, he published *Time to Choose*, a novel that addressed the complex issues related to abortion. In 2010, he wrote the afterword to the late Senator Allan H. Spear's memoir, *Crossing the Barriers*. Spear (1937–2008) was one of the first openly gay Americans to serve in elected office. In the senate, the two had worked together to bring what John identified as "fairness, opportunity, shared sacrifice, justice, and peace" to Minnesotans. They became close friends.

John Milton was never at a loss for words. When I worked with him on *For the Good of the Order*, my biggest challenge was determining how to trim some of his words and sharpen his prose so that the verbal volume didn't put off readers or cause them to miss his point. John had a keen eye for detail and nuance. Those strengths in his writing rose out of the vast research he'd done as he immersed himself in his subject. He also knew how to construct a scene, whether in historical writing or in fiction. When appropriate, he might introduce a musical reference, such as a piece or segment by a particular composer that helped set the tone. As someone who spent eight years casting a vote on a host of bills in the Minnesota Senate, John didn't shy away from telling you where he stood on a question. He knew how to make a choice. He did the same in his writing.

The Ramsey County Historical Society is grateful for all John Milton contributed to the board and the society through his writing, reviews, advice, and humor. He is missed.



John Watson Milton at a book signing in Barcelona around 2005. Courtesy of Maureen Acosta.

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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

