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RAMSEY COUNTY
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Amelia Earhart in airplane, 1936. Photo by Harris & Ewing, courtesy of the Library of Congress.



An Insatiable Colonial Appetite
**The Rise and Fall of the Passenger Pigeon
in Ramsey County and Environs**

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The Rise and Fall of the Passenger Pigeon in Ramsey County and Environs

JENNINGS MERGENTHAL

In April 1864, the *Saint Paul Daily Press* advertised the lunch menu at the Star and Garter Concert Saloon: “Turtle soup, frog legs, roast beef, wild pigeon and mallard duck.” This fine fare could be had from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Fifth Street and Jackson Street, next to Illingsworth’s Mammoth Town Clock.¹

The “wild pigeon” they referred to was what we would know as the passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*), at one time the most populous bird in North America. The pigeon was slightly smaller than a crow, measuring fifteen to eighteen inches long and weighing up to three quarters of a pound. At their height, their massive flocks were capable of blocking out the sun as they passed overhead.² Their enormous communal nests were miles across and branches would break under the weight of their roosts.³ But just fifty years after this sumptuous lunch was served at the Star and Garter, only one passenger pigeon would remain.

Precolonial Ecosystems

The passenger pigeon was migratory, its nomadic range extending north into what we now know as Canada and west into the Dakotas. They wintered in the South and returned to the forests of the Great Lakes in the spring to roost. The conventional range derives from the research of the A. W. Schorger and his seminal 1955 work *The Passenger Pigeon: Its Natural History and Extinction*. It is also from Schorger’s work that we have the canonical estimate of the number of passenger pigeons in North America: three billion, possibly as high as five billion, though in Schorger’s words this is a “guess.”⁴

Though Minnesota is traditionally excluded from the historic range, Schorger’s notes reveal the extensive presence of nesting populations of passenger pigeons throughout the region, a



Mounted skin of an adult male passenger pigeon, collected in Philadelphia by John Cassin in May 1862. Image courtesy of the Naturalis Biodiversity Center.

unique portrait of the fortunes of a rising state mirroring that of a declining bird.⁵ Ramsey County exemplifies this relationship. Early settlers noticed (and devoured) flocks of nesting pigeons. For their descendants, pigeons would be procured for fine dining or recreational hunting. For the next generation, the passenger pigeon would be a quaint frontier memory or a dusty museum specimen. Birds, of course, are not particularly interested in political boundaries. But the active development within Ramsey County made it decreasingly suitable for nesting and feeding as the nineteenth century went on.

Pigeons were opportunistic omnivores, eagerly eating fruit, grain, and insects, but they preferred mast: nut-like seeds including acorns, beechnuts, and American chestnuts.⁶ These mast trees were common in the hardwood forests of the Northeast and Great Lakes, due to intentional cultivation from the sophisticated silvicultural practices of Native nations.

The pigeon, too, was an important part of the Indigenous diets and culture. An account from



Red oak, leaves and acorns (*Quercus borealis*) collected in 1941. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Biodiversity Atlas.



American hazelnuts, leaves and nuts (*Corylus americana*) collected in 1994. Image courtesy of the Minnesota Biodiversity Atlas.

1842 in the La Crosse area by Lafayette Bunnell observed a pigeon roost some forty-five miles long and a group of Dakota youths checking pigeon nests to see if eggs had been laid. Bunnell's interlocutor, James Reed, explained the prohibition on disturbing pigeons while nesting.⁷

Settler expansion throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries forcibly displaced Native nations from their lands and their forests. In turn, this meant that the mast from these cultivated groves were not harvested, leading to more available food and allowing the pigeon population to grow exponentially. Recent genetic analysis supports this updated narrative: While the bird was ubiquitous prior to the arrival of settlers, the immense flocks that dominate colonial narratives of the early 1800s can be understood as a symptom of the environmental disruption of colonialism.⁸

In the summer of 1850, E. S. Seymour published one of the first colonial accounts of his travels the previous year in the newly established territory of Minnesota. In Kaposia, Little Crow's Village, five miles downriver from St. Paul and in present-day Ramsey County, he noted that "the ground was covered with acorns and the trees were alive with pigeons."⁹ The following year, the Treaty of Traverse Des Sioux opened much of southern Minnesota for colonization. As settler towns were built, they established newspapers, which diligently tracked the location of pigeon roosts.

Over the coming decades, these newspapers described a seasonal rhythm. In late March or early April, the flocks of pigeons would return to Minnesota. Settling in wooded areas, they would establish their vast nesting sites and lay their eggs. The parents would incubate their egg



American beech, leaves and nuts (*Fagus grandifolia*) collected in 1946.
Image courtesy of the Minnesota Biodiversity Atlas.



American chestnut, leaves and nuts (*Castanea dentata*) collected in 1960.
Image courtesy of Utah State University.

about two weeks, and it would usually hatch in mid-May. To feed themselves and their young, pigeons would devour food in the nearby area, much to the chagrin of local farmers.

The squab, the young pigeon, would be fed by both parents, who would regurgitate a curdled substance rich in fat and protein called “pigeon milk.” The fattened squab would gradually incorporate adult food into their diets. After two weeks of care the parents would abandon the squab, which would be forced to leave the nest. After a few days the squab would fledge and take flight, joining the massive flocks. Reports of pigeons would persist in newspapers throughout the summer, waning by August and September when the pigeons would depart for warmer climates, returning the next spring.

The pigeon had many predators, but the tremendous quantity of squab ensured that while

many would be eaten, many more would survive. Pigeons were numerous in the Minnesota territory, and the early settlers were particularly eager for the opportunity to hunt the birds. The return of pigeons signaled not only the beginning of spring, but, more importantly, brought a cheap and accessible form of protein right to the settlers’ doorsteps. They were also commonly fed to pigs. Though their sheer numbers protected them from natural predators, that could never satiate the colonial appetite.

Squabbing Carnival

The city of St. Paul was incorporated in 1854. That same year, the *Minnesota Pioneer* noted pigeons “very numerous” in the area, as one man brought a horse load of two hundred into town to sell, having killed them himself earlier that day.¹⁰ While shot pigeons were perfectly fine

for small-scale personal consumption, netted pigeons were more prized commercially.¹¹

Indeed, anyone with a gun could hunt enough pigeons for a meal with only a few minutes' work. If ammunition were in short supply, pigeons could be had by other means. The *Chatfield Democrat* relayed the story of one nimrod, perhaps tongue-in-cheek: "We heard yesterday that a gentleman of this town, who is noted for his penuriousness, goes to the pigeon roost opposite every afternoon and kills the pigeons with a club, to save ammunition. We don't believe it."¹²

The woods near Chatfield, in southeastern Minnesota, would host one of the few perennial nesting sites in the state, and its denizens were eager to maximize their harvest. Nets could be strung from trees to ensnare part of the passing mass of birds. This was the method employed by at least one man in Chatfield, commended for his magnanimity:

Our friend Mr. Tompkins, a gentleman of leisure, who is stopping with Mr. T. Case, some six miles below this village, deserves to be classed among the benefactors of mankind for his kindness in furnishing the whole community hereabouts with Wild Pigeons. Mr. T. has a net which he handles with such skill that he is enabled to take just any number of birds desired, which are distributed to all who wish them without money and without price. We are indebted to Mr. T. for all the Pigeons we can use and—more too.¹³

Skilled commercial hunters could also make use of a stool pigeon. A live pigeon, its eyes usually sewn shut with silk thread, would be strung up as a decoy and raised and lowered as if it were landing. This would lure in flocks of pigeons who would descend into the waiting net traps.

If destined for the table, netted birds needed to be killed. Hunters broke the pigeons' necks with their hands, or by placing the still-living bird's skull in their mouths and crushing it with their teeth. Still others used specialized pincers or pliers designed to break the neck without detaching it.¹⁴

Some ensnared pigeons were fortunate enough to stay alive slightly longer. Netted pigeons were also valued by sportsmen: Hunting

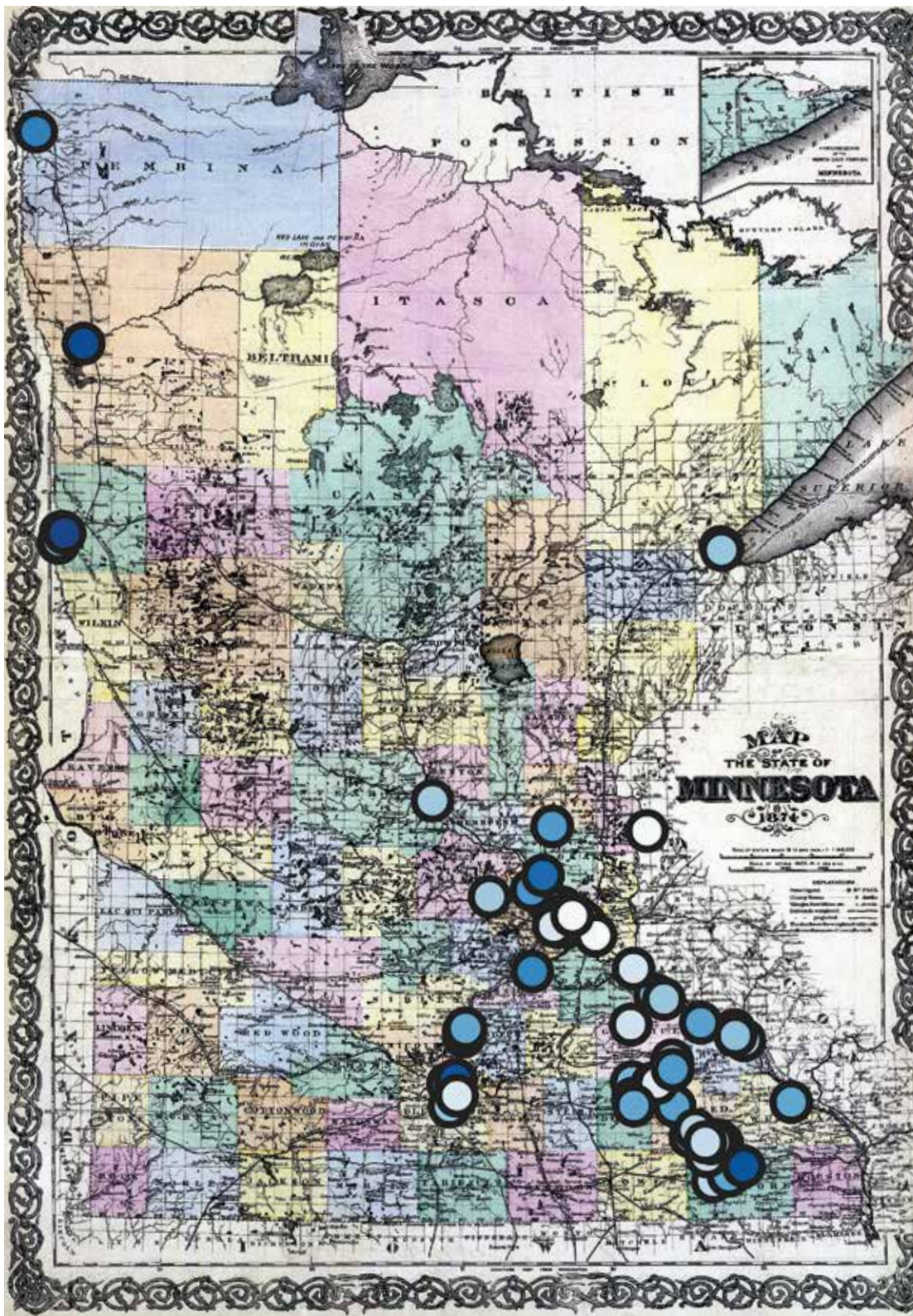
clubs, particularly in urban areas like the Twin Cities, would pay to procure live pigeons for shooting matches. Nearly three hundred such birds were purchased for an 1875 contest between the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Stillwater hunting clubs; all but about sixty met their demise as the St. Paul hunting club eked out a narrow victory.

It was not just adult pigeons who were eagerly sought. Of particular value were the tender young squab, considered ripe for the taking when fully sized but not yet fledged—saving the cook the additional work of removing their adult feathers. "Squabbing," as it was known, was a popular June pastime near large pigeon nests.

By and large, it was a happy summer affair, with community members flocking to the nests to enjoy festivities, brass bands, and plentiful roast squab. Newspapers salivated over the squab "crop" and speculated about when "persons desiring a feast" could expect it to be "fully ripe."¹⁵ The fat, flightless squabs could be had from the nests by knocking them out with poles or by climbing the trees, though this was not without its own perils: "Be careful—as the squabbing carnival will soon commence we advise all who expect to capture their game by climbing to prepare themselves with stout pants. Remember the awful calamity that happened to a gentleman one *day* last season."¹⁶

The gentleman in question appears to be a Mr. Isaac Day of Chatfield, who would spend at least the next ten years as the butt of breeches-related jokes from John McKenny, editor of the *Chatfield Democrat*: "The Chatfield woods are literally alive with wild pigeons, and are reported to be making the necessary arrangements for going into the 'squabbing' business on an extensive scale, in the same locality where they have nested two or three times before. Now for fun and pot-pies. Carry the news to 'Isaac Day.'"¹⁷ And again: "The wild pigeons will please take notice, that 'Isaac Day' has returned to Chatfield, with a new pair of leather breeches, and if they have any regard for their 'squabs,' they will vamoose the ranch immediately."¹⁸

But Isaac Day need not have worried about climbing in search of squab. In some cases, the harvest was done simply by shaking the trees themselves, though this had a greater risk of spoilage.¹⁹ If not caught, the fat squab would

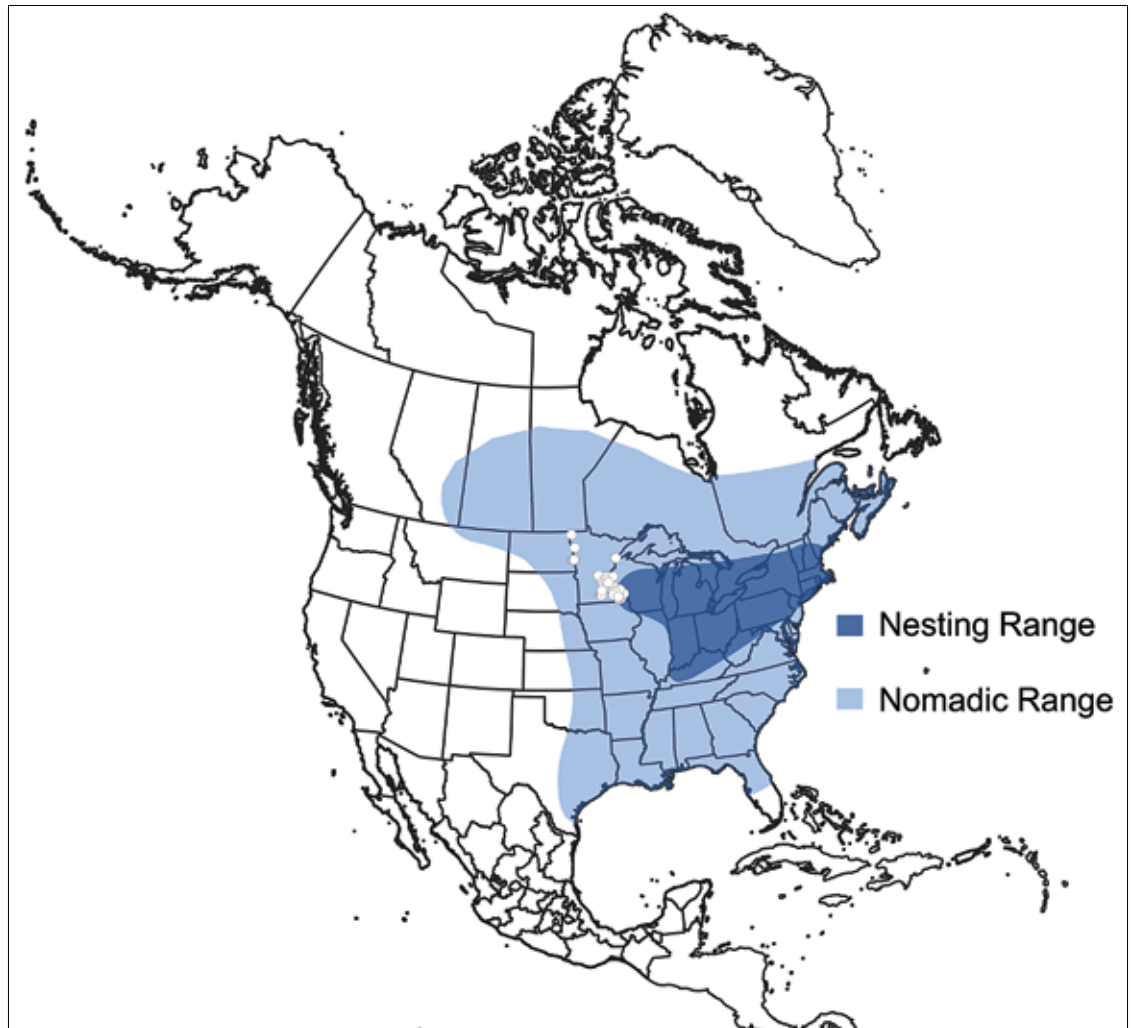


This map reflects every mention of passenger pigeons published in a Minnesota newspaper between 1849 and 1900. Each circle represents a reported sighting. The historical map with data overlaid is from Alfred Theodore Andreas's 1874 publication, *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*. Courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

You can explore an interactive version of this map, which includes the text of each newspaper article, via the QR code below. Click on the map to pan or zoom and click on a point to learn more!



Historically, the pigeons would winter in the South and nest in the spring in the woodlands around the Great Lakes, ranging into Canada as adults. This map is based on the ranges as identified by A. W. Schorger. The additional points outside of the traditional nesting ranges are reports of nesting or hunting sites in Minnesota. The 2022 map reflects "North American Environmental Atlas: Political Boundaries." Courtesy of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation.

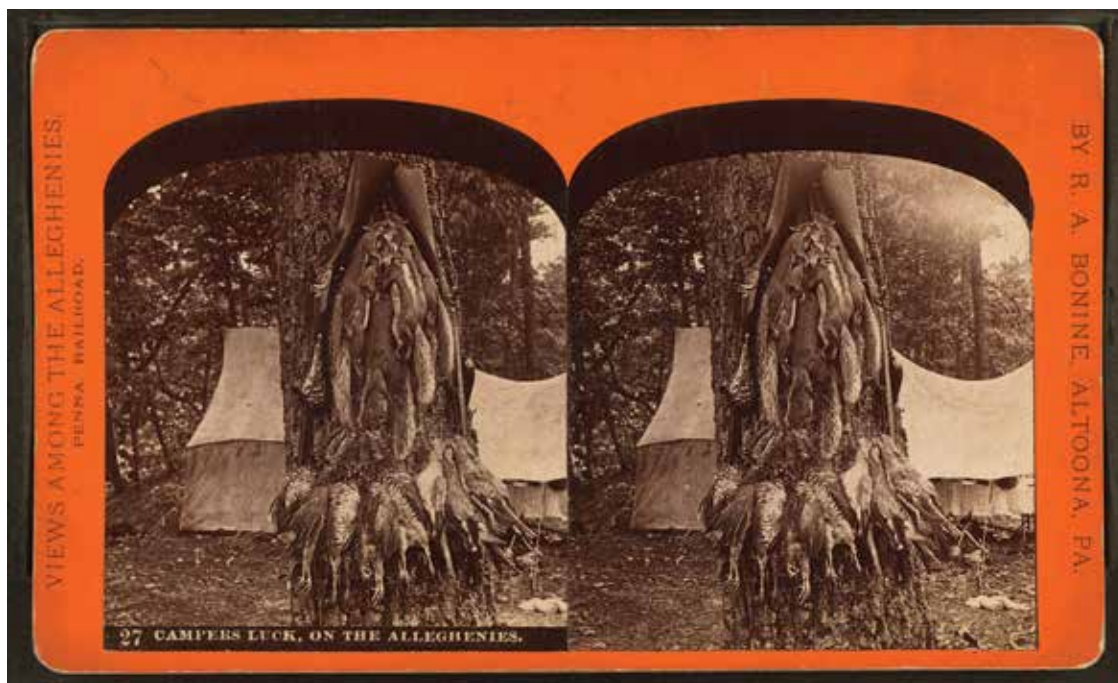


strike the ground and burst like so many over-ripe fruit.²⁰ The *Democrat* estimated more than ten thousand squab eaten in the annual celebration each year.²¹

Technological innovation vastly expedited the ability of hunters. No longer was a man limited by what he could carry to market on his horse cart. Railroad connections allowed pigeons to be harvested in Minnesota and shipped to urban centers like Chicago, Milwaukee, or New York, where demand was high. Pigeons were packed three hundred to a barrel with straw or ice for travel to distant cities. Even the tender squab could be carefully chilled and shipped to satiate East Coast epicureans still (ideally) fresh.²² At times, though, the distributed commercial network could show its downsides: When a hunt was too successful, a glut of pigeons flooded the urban markets, leading to barrels full of pigeons left to rot.²³

Furthermore, the interconnectivity of rail travel meant that hunters could receive news of a large nest and descend on it in short order. The 1870s saw particularly big business for the hunters at the largest mass nesting on record in Sparta, Wisconsin. Minnesota, too, saw mass nesting in Wabasha, Rochester, and Faribault, as well as the perennial nesting site in the Chatfield woods. Indeed, the Wabasha nest was the largest recorded in Minnesota's history: "The *Herald* tells of a pigeon roost, extending from a point three miles below Wabasha to a distance of thirty miles up the river. The birds are nesting in merciless destruction by the ten thousand sportsmen who are slaughtering them night and day."²⁴ The effects of their rampage were widely felt:

For ten days every man and boy in this burgh has been lunny [*sic*] on the subject of pigeons. These birds are nesting



There are remarkably few pictures of hunted passenger pigeons. This stereopticon card, titled *Campers luck, on the Alleghenies*, features two braces of passenger pigeons in the bottom right. These cards were designed to be placed in a viewer so that they would be seen as one three-dimensional image. Image via the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, courtesy of the New York Public Library.

in immense quantities on the bottoms opposite the city, and make daily devastating attacks upon neighboring grain fields. There is an electric something about these clouds of birds as they wheel and circle about here in countless myriads that sets every sportsman's blood bounding. All the guns in the country have been brought to bear on the game, and a fusillade is kept up from dawn to twilight. Powder and shot is a scarcity in the market, butchers are thinking of suspension, and dry goods' clerks have taken unceremonious leave of absence for indefinite periods. Immense numbers are slaughtered. Large quantities, alive, and dressed, are shipped daily to markets. People who ought to know, say they haven't been so numerous in twenty-five years.²⁵

This meant more pigeons for the table, more for the market and more for the sportsmen. In June of 1875, the St. Paul Club shot a record 8,400 pigeons over Lake Como.²⁶

Lost Flocks

But troubling signs had been brewing. In 1868, the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* wrote, "Where are the pigeons? . . . They have selected some other country as a place of summer resort."²⁷

In 1876, the *Rochester Post* reported: "There has been a decided failure in the wild pigeon crop around here, this spring, but we learn, by our exchanges, that they are abundant in the woods in the upper portion of the state."²⁸ This aligns with a common mentality at the time: Surely the inexhaustible bird could not be gone, it must simply be elsewhere. Contemporaries speculated that they had moved west across the Rockies, or down to South America, or even as far as Australia.²⁹ Certainly, there were fewer nesting sites to be had, as commercial logging had denuded much of the hardwood forest on which the pigeons depended. Certainly, more prairie land had given way to the plow, but surely, the pigeons were not truly gone.

But by the end of the decade, even the perennial Chatfield nest would fail to reappear. In 1879, the *Chatfield Democrat* noted only small numbers of pigeons and no substantial roost. This would be their final mention.³⁰

At the beginning of the 1870s, this population decline was probably not inevitable. Had even a few of the mass nesting sites been allowed to reproduce unmolested, a critical mass of pigeons could have carried forward for a few more years. Conservation laws and hunting regulations were hardly a foreign notion. Minnesota enacted a law in 1867 protecting songbirds from hunting.³¹ This framework would be



The original print run of John James Audubon's *The Birds of America* was printed by Robert Havell and his son Robert Havell Jr. The younger Havell engraved Audubon's watercolors onto copper plates, with coloring and printing supervised by the elder. Havell Jr. would also add backgrounds and detail elements to many of Audubon's prints. He created this passenger pigeon engraving in 1829. Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Art.

strengthened in the 1870s when new laws would establish hunting seasons for some waterfowl.³² But in all cases, these laws excepted the passenger pigeon, as surely a bird so numerous needed no protection at all.

Ten years later, no more mass nests could be found in North America. Suddenly, the commercial trade for passenger pigeons had effectively collapsed. Hunters were already adapting to the decline. In 1887, the *St. Paul Globe* noted how hunting clubs were no longer procuring wild pigeons for target practice, but rather a modern contraption that launched glass balls or the relatively recent invention, the clay pigeon. These facsimiles flew much more consistently, and were easier and cheaper to procure than the live birds.

In this period, a new hunt began: to collect the last passenger pigeons for museums, rather than for dinner tables. An 1891 state conservation ordinance finally extended protections for passenger pigeons, preventing the collection of their

eggs and the disturbance of their nests.³³ But for the species this was far too little, far too late.

In 1895, the *Minneapolis Tribune* not only noted the decline of the species, but hazarded a guess as to its cause: "Some people have thought that the bird was extinct, but such is not the case. It has simply given America, with its vast fields of wheat, its acres of acorns, its hillsides of buckwheat, the shake because of ill treatment."³⁴ In this same article, they ecstatically proclaimed that the pigeons had returned, but in truth the flocks never came home to roost.

On June 21 of that same year, Oliver Jones of Minneapolis would shoot a male pigeon in Oak Lake Park near Lyndale Avenue, today the site of the Minneapolis Farmers Market. He would collect its nest and egg, the last ever found in North America, and donate them to the Bell Museum of Natural History, where they remain today.³⁵

As the century drew to a close, Minnesota neared its semicentennial. The newspapers took a distinctly nostalgic tone, recalling the passenger pigeon as a staple of the state's pioneer days. In 1901, William H. Hoyt recalled to the *St. Paul Globe* the wild early days of his boyhood:

In, I think, the fall of 1849, we saw a most phenomenally large flight of wild pigeons. It is an actual fact, as the old settlers will remember, that the sky was actually obscured for over an hour from beyond Dayton's Bluff to Fort Snelling by the immense flock of these birds. From Little Crow's Village (South St. Paul) well up to the Falls of St. Anthony, a practically solid mass of flying pigeons filled the air. A single discharge of an old flint-lock musket would bring down two or three of the birds every time.³⁶

Occasional passenger pigeon sightings continued through the early 1900s, but these took on a more mythological air as years passed. The pigeons did not breed well in captivity and their numbers dwindled as age and disease took them. The last passenger pigeon, Martha, would die in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. Her body would be shipped to the Smithsonian, where it remains today.

The extinction of the most populous bird in North America became a symbol of the end of the frontier and America's transition into

modernity. The pigeon was assigned the same rhetorical position as the bison, and indeed, the colonial view of Native nations: tragic figures, anachronistic in our modern world, and doomed to extinction as the march of civilization's progress transformed the landscape and the American people. The idea that human action had caused the pigeons' extinction was only beginning to be reckoned with, as popular narratives conceived of it as simply a passive natural process.

A number of North American birds were driven to extinction in this manner in the early 1900s, including the Carolina parakeet (the last captive individual died at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1918)³⁷ and the eastern heath hen (the last known individual died in 1932).³⁸ However, the very visible extinction of the passenger pigeon helped galvanize conservation efforts to protect other critically endangered species: The whooping crane and trumpeter swan were able to rebound thanks to human intervention. Even the wild turkey was considered at risk of extinction during the early 1900s but has rebounded significantly.³⁹

Advances in biology occasionally promise the de-extinction of the passenger pigeon: the idea that through DNA editing, a passenger pigeon can be born from another species' egg. But this neglects the fact that the vast forests of mast-bearing trees that sustained the pigeons are gone. Part of the success of the reintroduction of species like the bison has been due to the restoration of the prairie environment the animals need to thrive, as well as the partnership with Native nations that ensures responsible land stewardship. While idealistic, de-extinction is an incomplete solution to a systemic problem. Our modern built environment is not even compatible with the birds that have managed to survive: North American bird populations are down by nearly thirty percent since 1970.⁴⁰

In 1890, a taxidermic passenger pigeon was displayed in the Minneapolis Downtown Library. Those younger than ten or so might not have ever seen a single one, let alone the majestic flocks that blacked out the sky. The *St. Paul Globe* observed:

The wild pigeon which was a one time so plentiful in Minnesota has become such



a rarity that numbers of the visitors at the library wonder what kind of a bird that beautiful little one is with the ashes-of-rose breast and the glitter of molten gold around its neck. In the language of Rip Van Winkle: how soon we are forgotten when we're gone.⁴¹

Martha, the last surviving passenger pigeon, was taxidermized and preserved in the Smithsonian after her death. Image courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

The passenger pigeon was driven to extinction because colonial expansion was incompatible with the ecological environment needed to sustain the flocks. Its most lasting presence is as a largely unheeded lesson: No species is so numerous or so successful that it cannot go extinct.

Jennings Mergenthal is a public historian, whose work often centers sites of contested history and what happens when once ubiquitous things vanish. They hold a Masters of Heritage Studies and Public History from the University of Minnesota. In preparation for this article, they made a pigeon pie based on a recipe from the 1850s. It turned out pretty well.

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Amelia Earhart's Sojourn in St. Paul

LISA HEINRICH

Over a hundred years ago, high school students in St. Paul were enjoying Central High School's new location at Marshall Avenue and Lexington Parkway. A new school building, designed by local architect Clarence H. Johnston Sr., had been erected in 1912. Little did those students know that in their midst was a woman who would become one of the most famous Americans of all time.

Central High School has several claims to fame, including being the oldest high school in the state (formerly St. Paul High School, founded 1866) and boasting famed alumni like Gordon Parks, Charles Schulz, and Dave Winfield. Yet the short presence of Amelia Earhart rivals the school's other bragging points in importance.

The Earhart Family's Path to Minnesota

Amelia's family consisted of her mother Amy, her father Edwin, and her sister Muriel. Both her parents had grown up in Kansas, Amy as the indulged daughter of a prosperous Atchison family living on Quality Hill, Edwin as the hard-working son of a poor minister. Amy's father disapproved of their marriage and required the young attorney Edwin to wait until he was earning fifty dollars a month before he reluctantly allowed them to marry.¹

The Earharts moved to Des Moines, Iowa, in 1908 when Edwin was offered a permanent position in the claims department of the Rock Island Railroad. It took Amy a year to find a house she thought suitable, during which time the girls stayed in Atchison with their grandparents. Edwin initially prospered in the job, and the family did well financially during this period, enough that they could afford to spend four summers on Lake Okabena in Worthington, Minnesota.²

Until this point, the two Earhart girls apparently had an idyllic childhood. They were very active and spent much time outdoors. They had



a .22 rifle as a gift from their father, which they used to shoot rats. He also took them fishing and got them boys' sleds and footballs.³ They were quite adventurous and built their own small roller coaster after seeing one at the St. Louis World's Fair.⁴ They read voraciously and had a strong sense of justice and fairness, cultivated by their mother.

But, during the time in Des Moines, the family's world began to crumble. As biographer Susan Butler describes it, "From a childhood spent with caring parents and grandparents, in comfort, surrounded by friends, all wants fulfilled, they would be plunged into the dismal ranks of broken homes and poverty. Des Moines marked the beginning of the end of Amelia's childhood."⁵

Edwin had begun to drink. Heavily. Amelia's sister Muriel writes in her book, *Amelia, My Courageous Sister*: "The shadows began to fall on our gifted father, and the amenities of life had to be sacrificed for the necessities of existence."⁶

Amelia Earhart in the cockpit of an Electra Airplane, 1937. Photo via Acme Newspictures, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

In short, Edwin's drinking eventually cost him his job, and "the reason for his release spread through the close-knit world of railroading," Donald Goldstein and Katherine Dillon recount in *Amelia*.⁷ After a long job search, Edwin was offered a job as a clerk in the freight office for the Great Northern Railway in St. Paul. It was a decided reduction in status, but it was a steady job, and so the family moved to St. Paul in spring

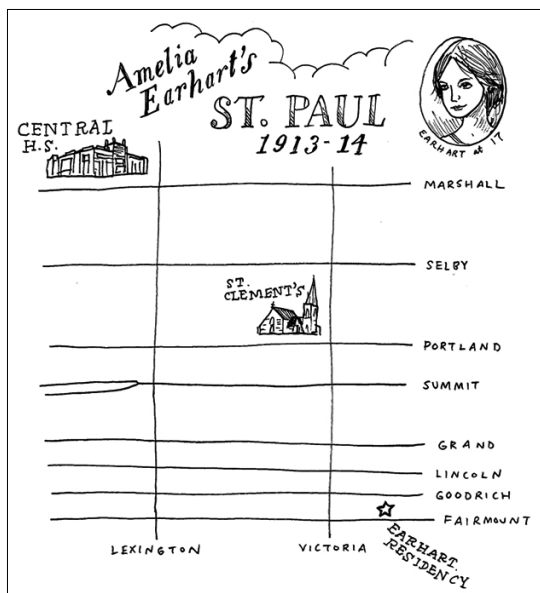
1913. The journey to St. Paul was disorganized and "lugubrious," as Amy wept when they left Des Moines.⁸

Hard Life on Fairmount Avenue

Edwin's drinking continued to cause problems, unfortunately, and the family was in reduced circumstances. They rented a house at 825 Fairmount Avenue, but couldn't afford the heating

825 Fairmount Avenue, 2026. Photo courtesy of the author.





The locations frequented by Amelia Earhart during her sojourn in St. Paul, 1913-1914. Drawing by Andy Sturdevant for MinnPost, reprinted with permission.

bills in cold weather, and so lived in a couple of rooms and shut the rest off. They had to scrimp on everything, such that the girls walked long distances to save money. When Edwin stumbled from a streetcar and was hit by an automobile, the ten-dollar hospital bill set them back so badly there was no money for spring clothes.⁹ According to biographer Doris L. Rich, “Amelia made Easter outfits for herself and Muriel, old blouses trimmed with new ribbon and skirts from silk curtains stored in the attic. Thread, ribbons, and buttons were bought with \$3.40 earned by selling empty bottles she and Muriel found in the cellar.”¹⁰

In these reduced circumstances, the family endured ostracism even from relatives. Amy’s uncle, Charles Otis, was a respected man from a respected St. Paul family; George Otis had served as a state legislator and as mayor of St. Paul, and the family law firm had been established in 1857.¹¹ Charles paid a short, perfunctory call on the Earharts and then ignored them.¹² As it turned out, Amy’s brother Mark had undermined her relationship with her once-beloved uncle. Later it was discovered that Mark had been mishandling the family estate, and likely hadn’t sent Amy money that was her due and that he told Charles he had sent.¹³

Once, Muriel recounts, the girls were walking because they were one penny short of enough



cash for a streetcar ride: “Homeward bound, laden with bundles and facing a biting wind, we felt an even more painful experience. Our great-uncle passed us in his car, and although he recognized us with a wave, he did not stop to offer us a ride.”¹⁴

Both girls were enrolled in Central High School, Amelia as a junior and Muriel as a freshman. Amy wrote to her brother Mark, “They [the girls] are both in the High School, taking the teachers course and Millie [Amelia] hopes to finish next year.”¹⁵

A 1932 *Pioneer Press* article, published after she had found acclaim, stated Amelia was a good student: “The record indicates that the woman who flew alone across the Atlantic ocean was more competent as a student of the German language than in other scholarly pursuits, although all her grades for the one year she attended Central were better than average.”¹⁶ Files at the Minnesota Historical Society contain a letter listing her grades for the two semesters and a letter from a former Central High librarian, Laurie C. Johnson: “I remember hearing Miss Dickson and others say that she was an attractive, friendly, red-haired teenager—not at all unlike her friends. Busy and popular . . .”¹⁷ She also played on the basketball team.¹⁸

The newspaper article also says she attended St. Clement’s Episcopal Church and sang in the choir as a soprano. According to Butler, “Blocked from every other social outlet, the church provided Amelia with friends and activities: she joined the Altar Guild, was a member of the Junior Auxiliary, and sang in the choir. Each Sunday she and Marion Blodgett, a student a year ahead of her at high school who lived a block away on Osceola Avenue, walked

St. Paul Central High School, circa 1940 but the same building at Lexington and Marshall that Amelia Earhart attended as a student. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

to St. Clement's together."¹⁹ As members of the Altar Guild, they performed all sorts of tasks, whatever was needed, though Amelia apparently was less than assiduous at times: "Marion would remember the times when what Amelia had done had to be redone by someone else. Marion would also remember how much Amelia loved singing in the choir, and that the two of them sometimes giggled so loudly they drew a reprimand."²⁰



St. Clement's Episcopal Church, 2026. *Photo courtesy of the author.*



Choir on the steps of St. Clement's Church in St. Paul, 1913. Amelia Earhart is not named in this photograph but she sang in the choir during this time. *Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

While her exterior life appeared good, Amelia's family life was still in disarray. Two critical events occurred while they were in St. Paul. One night, Amelia was packing for her father to go on a trip when she discovered a bottle of liquor hidden in his bag. As she was pouring the liquor into the sink, her father came in. He was "blazing with anger," writes biographer John Burke. "He approached the girl with his fist raised, but Mrs. Earhart caught his arm and he subsided in abject contrition."²¹ As Muriel told it, "He nearly hit Amelia, and he had never done such a thing."²²

The girls were not involved in the holiday social events of St. Paul, but looked forward to a Twelfth Night dance at the church. The second critical event occurred when their father was to escort them, but came home very late and drunk. They had planned to meet two boys and have them over to the house afterward for refreshments. Mary S. Lovell recounts that when Edwin arrived at home, "Muriel . . . burst into tears and retired to bed. Millie, steely-eyed and square-jawed, removed the Christmas decorations and pointedly cleared away the preparations she had made to entertain the boys."²³

Amelia Earhart never drank alcohol. In Muriel's estimation, "the hardship and mental suffering that Amelia and I endured as adolescents made an indelible impression upon us. It serves to help explain some of Amelia's actions and attitudes in her later life."²⁴

Shortly after the 1913–1914 winter, the family packed up again and went to Springfield, Missouri, where a job Edwin was promised never materialized. He returned to St. Paul and eventually moved back to Kansas, while Amy and the girls went to Chicago, where the family had close friends. Amelia graduated from Hyde Park High School in Chicago.

One can only speculate what effect Earhart's stay in St. Paul had on her, but the city and Minnesota in general can be proud to boast her as a young resident, however briefly she was here. Her courage, fortitude, and determination have made her a role model for women around the world for more than a hundred years now.

Earhart's Honors and Achievements

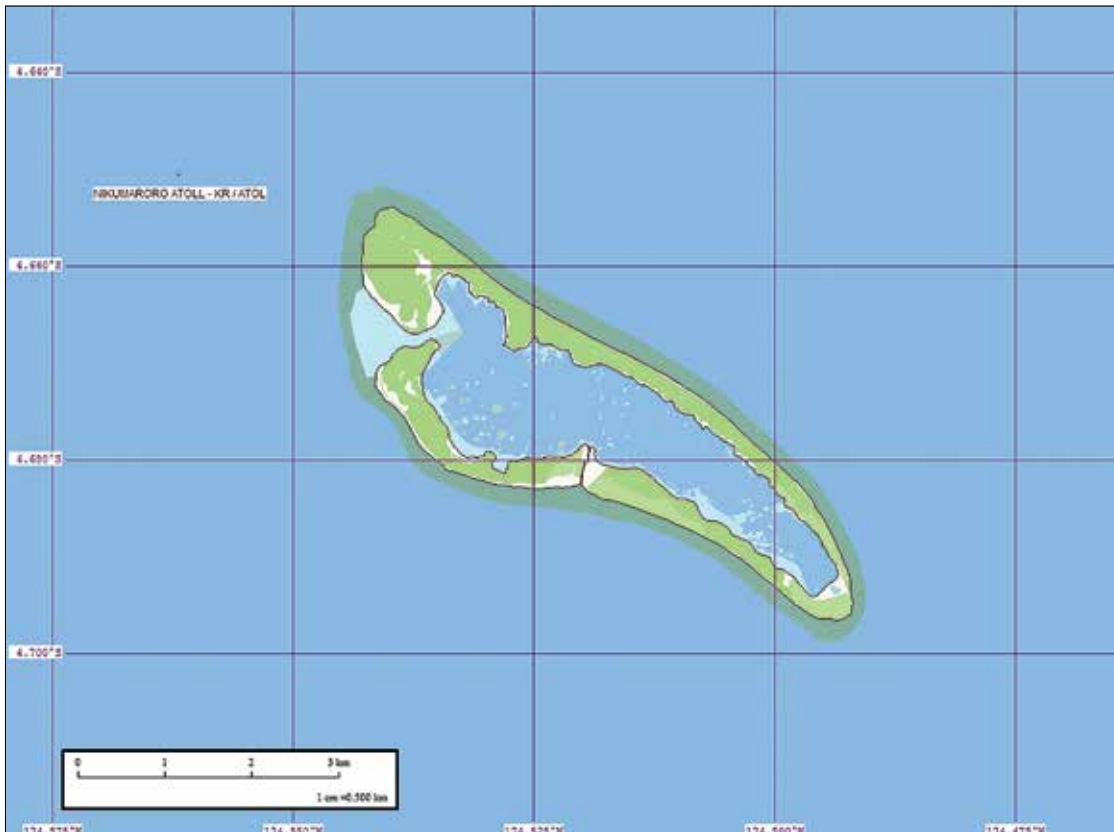
Still likely the best-known female aviator in history, worldwide, Earhart's accomplishments include:

- In 1928 she became the first female passenger to cross the Atlantic by airplane.
- In 1932 she became the first woman to make a nonstop solo transatlantic flight. For this she was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.
- Early in her flying career, she flew her Airster aircraft to an altitude of 14,000 feet, setting a record for female pilots on October 22, 1922. She set many other early aviation records for speed and altitude.
- She helped found the Ninety-Nines, an organization for female pilots.
- She was awarded the Legion d'honneur; she's in the Aviation Hall of Fame as well as the Women's Hall of Fame.
- She wrote bestselling books about her flying experiences. Since then, she has become a global cultural figure, and numerous films, documentaries, and books have recounted her life.

Part of the world's fascination with Earhart, in addition to all her accomplishments, is the mystery of her disappearance over the Pacific



Amelia Earhart in 1930. Photo by Underwood & Underwood, courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Map of Nikumaroro, Phoenix Islands, Kiribati, where an expedition will search for the remains of Earhart's plane. Image by Flickr user EVS-Islands. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.

Ocean on July 2, 1937, when she was attempting to become the first female pilot to circumnavigate the world.

Current Search Efforts

This October, a new expedition will be searching for the remains of Earhart's crash in Nikamaruro, a remote Pacific Island. Though theories about her disappearance abound, the prevailing hypothesis among scholars is that her plane crashed and she made it to this island before perishing there along with her copilot Fred Noonan. The expedition is sponsored by the Archaeological Legacy Institute and Purdue University. Researchers are pursuing the hypothesis that "the Taraia Object, a long-debated anomaly in the island's lagoon . . . could be part of the Lockheed Electra 10E once piloted by Earhart."²⁵ The article notes much skepticism from aviation historians; however, the artifacts include a woman's shoe, a compact case, a freckle cream jar, and a medicine vial, all dating to the 1930s. Plus, analysis of bones found on the island in 1940 indicated Earhart's bone lengths were

more similar to the discovered bones than those of ninety-nine percent of people in general.²⁶

Time will tell whether this decades-old mystery will be solved. Watch for news of the expedition this fall.

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Previous versions of this piece were published in the *Villager* as well as lisastories.com; the author retains copyright for all.

NOTES

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We Should All Be Public Historians

KYLIE LINH HOANG

My history education began in a very ordinary classroom with a whiteboard and a large world map. I remember reading atlases and encyclopedias and diligently copying down dates and names into my notebooks for future study. I understood that I needed to get good grades to get into a good college to get a good job and build a good life. I did not understand why I needed to take history classes to do it, though. Of the “good” jobs that I was aware of as a child, it wasn’t immediately clear to me what role, if any, learning history played in them. Did medical doctors ever study history? Did lawyers and astronauts? Do you have to know history to be the president? I know now that, yes, all of these professions likely require at least *some* history education, but it wasn’t until I started college that I began to unpack why that was important.

One particularly frigid winter in undergrad, I enrolled in a course entitled “The Classical World of Harry Potter,” with Professor Mitchell Parks. I had read the series many times and was excited to be among other “Potterheads” that didn’t write the saga off as merely children’s literature. Naively, I thought we would spend the term reanalyzing the magical world that we already knew and we would all receive top marks for it. I do not align with the incredibly harmful rhetoric J. K. Rowling has since become infamous for, but the course taught me a lot about how people engage with antiquity outside of academia. I read Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Virgil, just like Rowling would have while she was studying classics at Exeter.¹ I also reread *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, just like I had in elementary school, and was delighted at how much richer the world became when I understood the classical references. As a recently declared history major, I thought a lot about literature’s role in history, and why it seemed like they were synonymous at some points and diametrically opposed at others. Coupled with my courses on historiography and history pedagogy, I began to understand history as less of



a study of static dates and places, but rather a collection of research methods and strategies on how to understand the world through the ways that we have documented it.

My previous understanding of history as merely a study of the past was complicated by the question of what, exactly, comprises a study. Who conducts it? Is history-making only for professional historians? In *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Raphael Samuel argues that history is an activity rather than a profession, and one that requires the passion, skills, and expertise of many, many

Kylie Linh Hoang gives a talk about Seong Moy in front of one of his artworks (at bottom left). Photo courtesy of the author.

Ramsey County Historical Society's Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center, located in Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul. The research center is open to the public, with appointments strongly encouraged. Learn more at www.rchs.com. Photo courtesy of Emily Gastineau.



people. Theoretically, this could even include children's literature darlings. He writes:

History is not the prerogative of the historian, nor even, as any postmodernism contends, a historian's "invention." It is, rather, a social form of knowledge; the

work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands. If this is true, the point of address in any discussion of historiography should not be the work of the individual scholar, nor yet rival schools of interpretation, but rather the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are

embedded or a dialectic of past-present relations is rehearsed.²

Samuel goes on to describe the “motley character” of those essential to creating history scholarship.³ He celebrates the writers, ghost writers, indexers, copy editors, archivists, librarians, and even those whom he refers to as the “great army” of collectors who “have so often anticipated the directions which scholarship was later to take.”⁴ This understanding shifts priority from the output of history-making to the *process*. Rather than understanding the historian as an intrepid, isolated academic, we can begin to understand the historian as the facilitator for collaborative conversations larger than themselves.

The term “public history” entered into the historical lexicon to serve as a broad descriptor of all the ways history work was being done outside of traditional methods. Outside of the academy, museums, libraries, and archives have expanded access to historical knowledge and challenged the consensus around what counts as “real” history work. The reification of historical scholarship happening in galleries, state parks, and community centers is often understood to be much more accessible than that kept behind the paywalls of academic journals or conference circuits, and requires a greater willingness to engage in dialogue because of the breadth of engagement.

The term “public history” is more widely known today, but its definition remains surprisingly fluid. More than one historian has stated that public history is a bit like pornography in that one will know what it is when they see it.⁵ The National Council on Public History (NCPH) has seemingly embraced the ambiguity of the term, providing descriptions of what it could be rather than what it definitely is. Officially, NCPH states:

Public history describes the many and diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world. In this sense, it is history that is applied to real-world issues. In fact, applied history was a term used synonymously and interchangeably with public history for a number of years. Although public history has gained ascendance in recent years as the preferred nomenclature



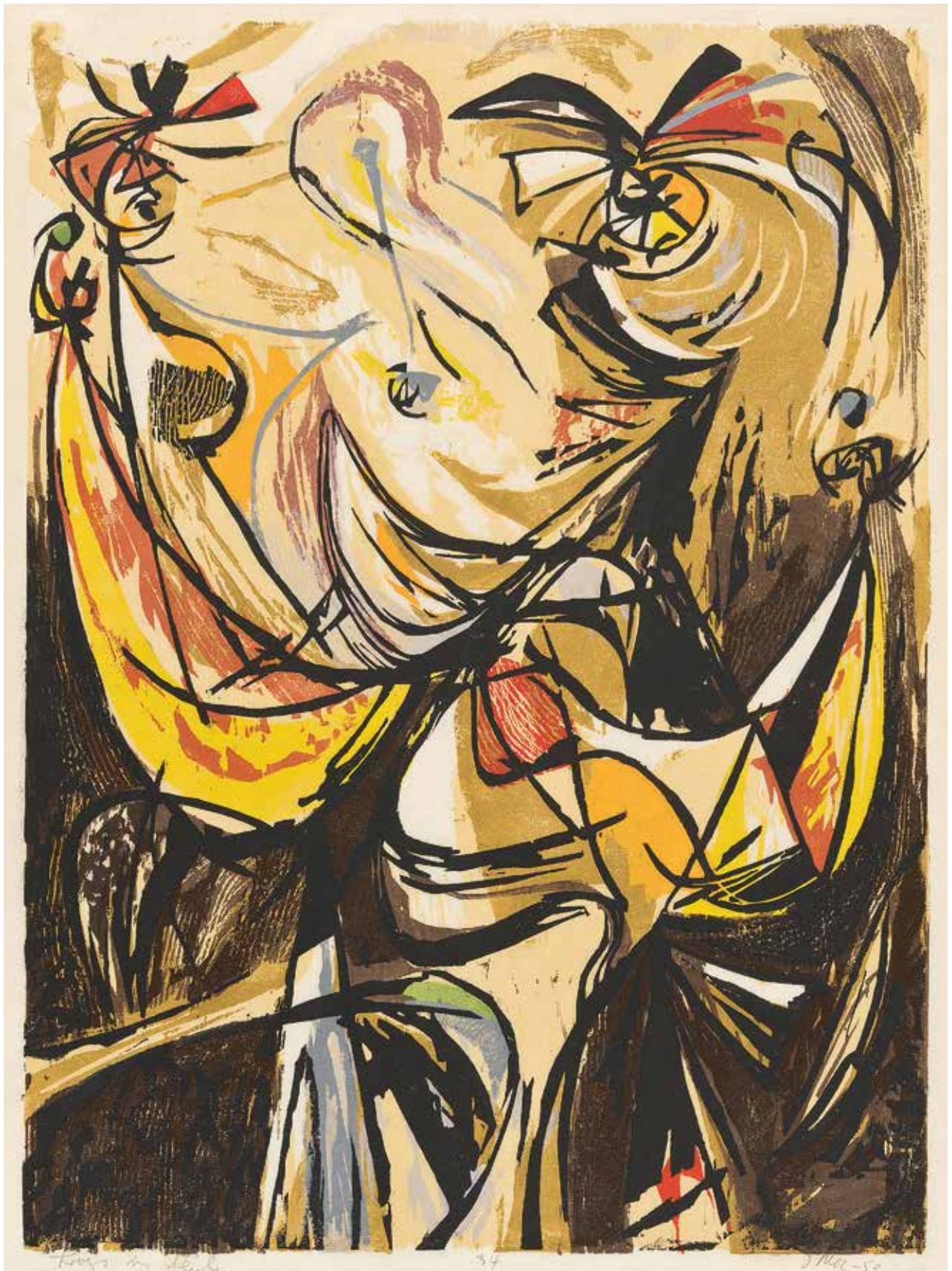
Ramsey County Historical Society's Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center, located in Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul. The research center is open to the public, with appointments strongly encouraged. Learn more at www.rchs.com. Photo courtesy of Emily Gastineau.



Ramsey County Historical Society's Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center, located in Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul. The research center is open to the public, with appointments strongly encouraged. Learn more at www.rchs.com. Photo courtesy of Emily Gastineau.

especially in the academic world, applied history probably remains the more intuitive and self-defining term.⁶

As a history student, I met self-identified public historians who presented exhibitions and worked directly with the community, many



Lovers in Flight, a woodcut on paper created by Seong Moy in 1953. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

of whom maintained explicitly collaborative practices. This usually meant sharing curatorial decision-making authority with those that were involved (and their descendants) in the interpretation of historic events. Hilda Kean, previous Dean and Director of Public History at Ruskin College, Oxford, implores historians to embrace the opportunity to pedagogically engage with the blurred lines between the “public” and the “historian.” I do believe that centering the public as active consumers of history can significantly lower the access barrier and raise collective investment in histories that are representative of the world we live in—but the way I have seen public historians work is more reciprocal than just considering an audience outside of academia. Rather, the most successful public history work that I have witnessed acknowledges that knowledge is shared laterally throughout communities, and that everyone can both teach and learn simultaneously. This pedagogical approach has the potential to topple the barriers built between “history” and the “historian,” to embrace a more collaborative and inclusive history-making process. In 2010, Kean described this important work as “demystifying what historians do through sharing conceptual and not just content-based knowledge.”⁷

Making history can mean a myriad of different things. In Ramsey County, public history is happening all around us. The very magazine this essay appears in could be (and I might argue *should* be) considered a bold public history endeavor, as it solicits both autobiographical and researched articles from and about the residents of Ramsey County. Some organizations, including Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS), engage with public history by hosting archives open to researchers from the community. As another example, the Hallie Q. Brown Community Archive (HQBCA) has the explicit goal to “collect and preserve items of enduring historical value relating to the historic Rondo Neighborhood in St. Paul, Minnesota.”⁸ The HQBCA cares for expansive records related to Rondo, including the personal papers of significant community figures, the administrative records for the community center dating back to 1929, and photographs of life in Rondo provided by the community. In addition to organizations, individuals in



The Contemporaries, a poster created by Seong Moy in 1960. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Ramsey County are engaging with concepts of community history and legacy as well. Seitu Ken Jones, a self-proclaimed “nephew of Rondo,”⁹ is formalizing plans for The Black Gate: a vision for an “artist-in-residence program, a studio, community library and archive in the heart of Frogtown.”¹⁰ Jones’s radical vision addresses the ongoing, systemic exclusion of Black artists from larger archival projects and seeks to create opportunities to rectify the current gap in the historical record.

Public institutions like RCHS, HQBCA, and The Black Gate are important for history-making as they allow for opportunities to engage and preserve, as well as actually *make* history outside of the academy. Decentering universities as the ultimate paragon of knowledge allows communities to take an active role in creating history from multiple perspectives. An independent nonprofit with a collection, archive, and research center allows anyone who is passionate or curious about history to produce high-level research without an institutional affiliation. Community archives, by definition, include community perspectives, values, and priorities in the materials they preserve. Central to the success of public history in Ramsey County is the spirit of reciprocity exemplified by Jones’s vision for The Black Gate. By supporting artists in the present through residencies that provide time and space to work, and then strengthening their tools to organize their creative archives, Jones hopes to address historical inequities as well as prevent future research gaps. While there are many reasons why one might choose to not engage with history as it is known in the academy, public history invites a multimodal, multivocal, and conceptually flexible framework to embrace the individual passions of each public historian and the community they come from. For all those who have entered the archive and found it lacking in the materials they care about, the democratization of the historical record is exhilarating.

My central efforts as a public historian are to ensure that we have broad documentation of important people, ideas, and movements that shape our culture and inform our present. As I expand my practice beyond museum work, I am reflecting heavily on the absence of scholarship related to the artists that I find most interesting.

In a similar vein as The Black Gate, I have noticed a distinct lack of documentation and analysis around the lives and work of artists of color working in Minnesota before the postmodern era—an example of which can be drawn from the lack of critical writing on printmaker Seong Moy. As I begin my next project on this exciting, under-celebrated artist, I hope to embrace Hilda Kean’s petition to demystify the work of the (public) historian by inviting you into my process.¹¹

Recently, I included Seong Moy’s 1952 color woodcut *Homage to Leoi Pei* in an exhibition about making connections across people, time, and space.¹² I was drawn to the gestural, dynamic quality of the angelic figures. While I was able to find primary sources, I was not able to find many secondary sources. From his oral history interview with the American Art Archives, I learned that in 1931, Moy immigrated from China to St. Paul, Minnesota at the age of ten. He studied painting at the St. Paul School of Art under Cameron Booth, and eventually moved to New York to continue his studies.¹³ He participated in multiple notable exhibitions during his lifetime and his work is in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Seemingly, the primary source material for this artist is rife. His artwork is striking and exemplifies a sophisticated understanding of color and form. In addition to Moy, I have been interested in many other printmakers from the interwar period, many of whom have not received the celebration I feel they deserve. On the whole, I find it to be an understudied time period and I have hypotheses about why.

As with any project, I begin with questions: What do I already know, and what am I hoping to learn from this process? In the case of Seong Moy, I know that I am excited about his artwork. I am curious about how his life experiences may have impacted his aesthetic taste and I am eager to examine his work in greater detail. I want to know more about the artists that he studied with. Who was enrolled at the St. Paul School of Art around the same time he was? Is there relevant documentation of his studies?

Once I know what I don’t yet know, I would typically begin an annotated bibliography. Because I have already unsuccessfully attempted



A poster created by Seong Moy for Muriel Latow Interiors in 1954. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



Homage to Leoi Pei, a color woodcut created by Seong Moy in 1952. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art.

to find secondary source material on this artist, I will principally focus on the primary sources. Does Moy have any family members with stories about his artwork and are they willing to speak to me? How might I reach them? I know that Moy lived from 1921–2013, so it isn't totally out of the realm of possibility that he might have been active on social media. Could I learn anything from a Facebook search? What can I learn by reexamining the 1971 oral history interview? Would any of the museums that hold his work in their collections be willing to share their curatorial research files for this artist? I'll take furious notes as I read, and eventually I'll transpose them into something more legible. At this point in the process, though, my goal is to deepen my own understanding. I'm not yet worried about how I'll share my findings. I allow myself to be messy and uncertain, as I know my own brain well enough to know that I need time to simmer

before I'll be ready to begin synthesizing what I've learned into something I can share.

When I feel like I have read everything I possibly can, I'll start drafting an outline with topic sentences. I'll begin to pencil in where I think sources will have the most impact, and I'll try to find and address any conceptual gaps that may exist. I think it's important to acknowledge that we all have internalized biases, so I'll ask myself if there's a perspective that I'm missing or if there's a better source for an argument I'm making. History-making is an intensely personal endeavor, and I want to be transparent about how my lived experiences influence the work that I do. Why am I writing about this? Why am I doing it right now? Why am I doing it for this venue? Why is it important that *I* am doing it? My drafts are often long and unwieldy, but they are pruned and polished by my friends, colleagues, and patient editors.

If I am successful in creating a piece of scholarship that I am proud to share, I always try to share it with the artist or their descendants before presenting it publicly. Histories can be very personal, and while I've never had an artist ask to abridge the writing, I feel it is only a collaboration if they are afforded the right to withhold information that is better suited for private conversations. In this sense, I am often reminded of the questions posed in Robert Cozzolino's article, "Is it Okay to See This?" Discussing archival research, he questions, "Are some details too painful to share? Would they speak as freely if they knew I was listening? What would it feel like to have everyone looking when you are at your lowest?"¹⁴ These questions often don't have definitive answers, but I let Cozzolino's queries be a guide for compassionate, empathetic scholarship. In the case of Seong Moy, I wonder if secondary scholarship is incomplete because of a desire for privacy. I wonder if his family would be excited to hear from me, or if they might decline my request to connect. Chinese immigration to the United States in the

1920s was not an uncomplicated endeavor, and I wonder how I might go about asking about it in a sensitive way.

Working within the margins as a public historian, I am able to address the historical record as it stands and take part in building the history that I want to see. I am grateful for the opportunity, but believe passionately, fervently, that we should all think of ourselves as public historians in some way or another. Because the relationship between history, the public, and public history is fluid, difficult to define, it is constantly in a state of evolution. We know that our histories are deeply important to understanding our own identities, and yet we have a confounding number of ways to define who the history-makers are and who they can be. Why can't it be you?

Kylie Linh Hoang is an independent curator and public historian based in the Twin Cities. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in History and Museum Studies from Knox College and her Master of Heritage Studies and Public History from the University of Minnesota.

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2. Raphael Samuel, "Unofficial Knowledge," *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (Verso, 2012), 8.

3. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 23.

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8. "Interested in researching Rondo?" Rondo Center of Diverse Expressions, accessed July 6, 2026, <https://rcodemn.org/researchdatabase>.

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13. Seong Moy, interview by Paul Cummings, Oral History Program, Archives of American Art, January 18–28, 1971, <https://www.si.edu/object/archives/sova-aaa-moy71>.

14. Robert Cozzolino, "Is It Okay to See This?" *Archives of American Art Journal* 58 no. 2 (Fall 2019): 81.

IN OUR COLLECTION

In Our Collection shares the pieces acquired by Ramsey County Historical Society.

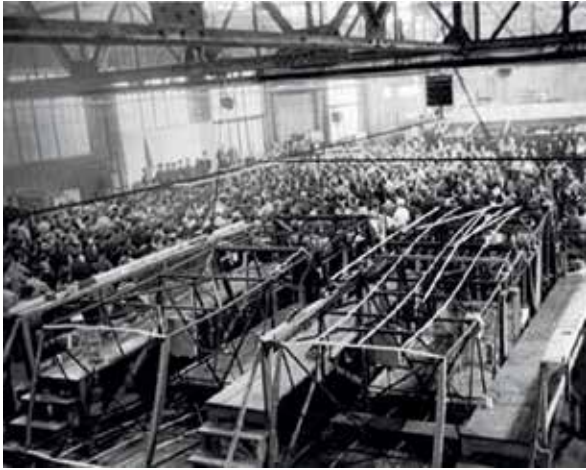
The collection contains tens of thousands of pieces, including archives, books, objects, and photographs, which are maintained by Director of Collections and Exhibitions, Mollie Spillman, in downtown St. Paul.



This identification badge from the Northwestern Aeronautical Corporation (NAC) is stamped with employee number 3493 and features a photo of an unidentified woman standing before a height chart. The reverse is marked “PAT. APLD. FOR.” which is a reminder of the wartime security measures surrounding one of Minnesota’s most significant defense manufacturers.

NORTHWESTERN AERONAUTICAL CORPORATION
DONATED BY: MARYLOU AND JAMES MCADOO OF PORTLAND, OREGON
ACQUIRED: 2012
ITEM DATED: 1943
RCHS COLLECTION: 2012.3.2

IN OUR COLLECTION



Glider frames in the NAC plant, early '40s.



ERA plant in the 50s, top right had had glider frames.

Photos courtesy of NAC became ERA article by John M. Lindley, adapted for the VIP Club's Legacy Anthology by Lowell Benson

The badge represents far more than an employee credential—it is a tangible link to the thousands of men and women whose work helped support the Allied war effort during World War II. Founded in 1942 under the leadership of John E. Parker, NAC was created to build military gliders, overcoming material shortages, production challenges, and tight deadlines to meet urgent government contracts. Workers from across the Twin Cities contributed to this remarkable industrial effort, embodying the determination and patriotism of the Greatest Generation.

In 2005, the Unisys/LMCO Retirees Club Legacy Committee preserved the largely untold story of NAC through recollections and historical research. Their work documents not only the company's wartime achievements but also the people behind them—the factory workers, engineers, and managers whose contributions had long remained overlooked.

When World War II ended in 1945, NAC faced an uncertain future. Rather than close its doors, Parker transformed the company into Engineering Research Associates (ERA) in 1946. While a handful of NAC employees remained, ERA attracted a new generation of engineers and technical specialists who pioneered early electronic computing. Between 1946 and 1952, ERA became Minnesota's first computer company, helping establish the Twin Cities as an important center of technological innovation.

This simple identification badge captures a remarkable story of transformation—from wartime aircraft production to the dawn of the computer age—making it a rare artifact that represents both Minnesota's industrial heritage and the origins of one of America's earliest computing enterprises.

viewfinder

In Ramsey County, the most memorable places aren't always the ones marked on a map. Beyond the familiar landmarks of St. Paul lie quiet corners, overlooked buildings, and tucked-away landscapes that hold rich, often untold stories. This feature invites you to look closer—down side streets, behind historic facades, and into spaces that rarely make the spotlight. From forgotten gathering places to subtle traces of the past woven into everyday surroundings, these hidden locations reveal a deeper layer of the county, waiting for curious explorers willing to slow down and notice what others pass by.

By James D. Fleming



Descendents of Joseph Burger gather for the dedication in May 2026. Photo courtesy of James D. Fleming.

Joseph Burger, Civil War veteran and Medal of Honor recipient, is buried at Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul [1]—but, until recently, a visitor to Burger's grave would not know of his distinguished service and extraordinary valor. Previously, only those who served after April 16, 1917, were eligible for a Veterans Affairs grave medallion recognizing recipients of the nation's highest military decoration. That all changed when Congress passed the Mark Our Place Act in November 2024. [2]

Joseph Burger would later be honored for his part in the events of February 15, 1863, when he was a private with Company H of the Minnesota 2nd Infantry. At Nolensville, Tennessee, this "detachment of 16 men . . . heroically defended a wagon train against the attack of 125 cavalry, repulsed the attack, and saved the train." In July of 1864, Burger lost an arm in the line of duty at Dalton, Georgia. He was promoted to captain on December 22, 1864, before being honorably discharged from the United States Army in June 1865, at age seventeen, having served the duration of the war. [3]

Burger would go on to represent Blue Earth County in the Minnesota Legislature. [4] He was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1897. Joseph Burger's grandson was Warren E. Burger, Chief Justice of the United States from 1969 to 1987. [5]

On May 23, 2026, the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War dedicated the Medal of Honor Medallion to the grave of Captain Joseph Burger at Oakland Cemetery. [6] Fourteen members of the Burger family were in attendance, and Sara Burger-Edwards, Joseph Burger's great-granddaughter, remarked that it was fantastic that her relative was honored in this ceremony. *Potius sero quam numquam*—better late than never!

[1] "Joseph Burger," Find a Grave, September 27, 2003, www.findagrave.com/memorial/7915445/joseph-burger.

[2] US Congress, Senate, Veterans' Affairs Committee, Mark Our Place Act, 118th Congress, S.3126, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/3126>.

[3] Mark Fischenich, "Young Soldier Made a Lasting Impression," Mankato Free Press, April 24, 2011, https://www.mankatofreepress.com/news/local_news/young-civil-war-soldier-made-lasting-impession/article_c2197dfa-a221-527a-93fc-b21a2b0ce6e0.html.

[4] "Youngest Civil War Captain Dead at 73," The Daily Pantagraph, January 3, 1921, 1.

[5] Fischenich, "Young Soldier."

[6] Many thanks to the Col. William Colvill Camp 56 Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, for helping to make this commemoration possible.



Joseph Burger's grave marker at Oakland Cemetery, with newly added medallion. Photo courtesy of James D. Fleming.

Visit Oakland Cemetery at:
927 Jackson Street
St Paul, MN 55117



James D. Fleming is a retired attorney who in thirty-six years of practice served as Chief Public Defender in the Fifth and Second Judicial Districts in Minnesota. Fleming serves on the Board of the Ramsey County Historical Society and lives in Minneapolis.

BETWEEN 2 URNS

What is your favorite place in Ramsey County? Crosby Farm Regional Park is a great hidden gem to walk in summertime. Como Conservatory in the winter to soak up some light when you need a little sun!

What is your favorite restaurant in Ramsey County and your "must order" dish? I love a deal, and my coworkers and I usually crash Bar + Cart for a yap and the "Big Ass Glass of Wine" on their (actually worthwhile) happy hour menu. I could throw a glass back with some oysters Rockefeller or a shrimp po'boy. For an actual plate: scallops at Gus Gus, or literally any seasonal pasta dish at Hyacinth or Mucci's.

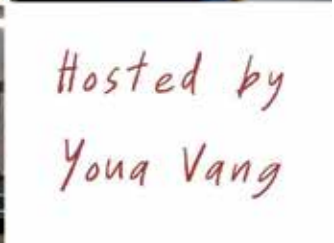
What is your favorite song—currently or all time? These change cyclically, although I maintain a playlist called "Top Ten All Time" to keep track of the best of the best on rotation. On this spring day, sipping a green smoothie as I walk Bde Maka Ska, I'll declare my personal greatest song of all time: "Superstar" by Carpenters.

If you could invite any three people from history to dinner, who would you choose? Nightmare dinner party, but out of the range people I wish I could meet, I'd invite: Amy Winehouse, Joan Didion, and Robin Williams.

What is your favorite part of the day? I do my best work in the early hours of the morning when I am most focused and uninterrupted.



DIGITAL EDITOR, MSP MAGAZINE
JOURNALIST





LISTEN
TO THE
PODCAST



C H E F

What is your favorite place in Ramsey County? My favorite place in Ramsey County is my home! We live in Ramsey County. We are real St. Paul people.

What is your favorite restaurant in Ramsey County and your "must order" dish? I'd say my favorite restaurant in Ramsey County is Meritage. I am Hmong but was born and raised in France so I do feel homesick a lot and nothing beats a well-executed French meal to remind me where I'm from. My go-to dish is the beef tartare! Chef Russell and his team do a phenomenal job, they have nothing to shy away from a Parisian bistro!

What is your favorite song—currently or all time? I go by mood for songs. Right now (for the past seven years lol) I'm into Latino music such as reggaeton, salsa, dembow. Right now, the song that plays on repeat in my car is "YO y TÚ" by Beele. For the goat, I'd say "Purple Rain" by our Prince!

If you could invite any three people from history to dinner, who would you choose? If I could invite any three people from history, that's a tough one . . . Steve Jobs, I'd love to have a conversation with him and pick his brain. Jesus, I was born and raised Catholic but I don't practice anymore. I have a ton of questions about humankind and the afterlife. Leonardo Da Vinci is not just an artist (painter) but an engineer, architect, and scientist. He was so ahead of his time. Same as Steve Jobs, I'm fascinated by how these people think.

What is your favorite part of the day? Working out! That's where I get the most inspiration for my work. And plus, it feels so good when I'm done because truthfully, I hate working out.

B E T W E E N 2 U R N S

Between 2 Urns is an interview-based podcast that weaves together the personal stories of everyday people doing extraordinary things—and extraordinary people living everyday lives. Each episode invites listeners into a conversation that explores what drives us, challenges us, and connects us as humans.

Through thoughtful, empathetic interviews, *B2U* uncovers the humor, heartbreak, and hope within real human experiences—from artists and educators to entrepreneurs, community leaders, and change-makers.

Get to know our guests before you listen.

This podcast was made possible by the Harlan Boss Foundation for the Arts.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

Established by a community of history lovers led by Mrs. Ethel Stewart, Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) has been preserving, interpreting, and presenting the remarkable history of our capital county since 1949. Created to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, a National Register of Historic Places site since 1974, RCHS has expanded to include publishing, exhibits, preservation, research, and public programming spanning the entire county.

RCHS's vision for the future recognizes the trusted role it plays in our community as a key steward of our shared heritage. As we strive to preserve and share the lessons of the past, our hope is that it will help all of us build a better future for our descendants.

Vision: *Ramsey County Historical Society will continue as a trusted, innovative steward and teacher of history, committed to working with our community to build and sustain a more just and vibrant future.*

The largest and most popular program of RCHS is Gibbs Farm, serving more than 15,000 students every year as well as thousands of teachers, families and individuals. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of *Ĥeyáta Othúnwe* (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 and in 2010, it created the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center. Collections entrusted to RCHS total more than four million items ranging from a historic farmstead to building permits to images and maps that capture the unique history of our community.

Our mission, vision, and values guide our work and unite a team of volunteers, members, donors, and staff to serve more than 50,000 people every year while ensuring our history is preserved and accessible. We are honored to have the support of so many in our community and welcome you to join us if you have not already.

Values

- We strive for **AUTHENTICITY** and **ACCURACY** in all programs and activities.
- We embrace **INNOVATION**; seeking new and unique ways to collaborate with and educate our community about familiar and unfamiliar history.
- We act with **INTEGRITY**; adhering to the highest ethical and professional standards.
- We prioritize **INCLUSION** and **EQUITY** in our activities, processes and decision-making.
- We embody **RESPECT**, listen with intent, and work to build trusting relationships.

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.



www.rchs.com

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Support the History That Connects Us

Your support helps keep Ramsey County's history alive. When you give to Ramsey County Historical Society, you help protect the stories, artifacts, and records that connect our community to its past. Your gift safeguards our collections, supports the work at Gibbs Farm, and makes it possible for researchers, students, and neighbors to explore the people, places, and events that shape our county. These stories belong to all of us, and they deserve to be preserved and shared. With your generosity, we can continue caring for this history today so it remains accessible, meaningful, and inspiring for generations to come.



ON THE COVER



Passenger pigeon squab on cardboard box, August 1896. This pigeon chick—one of a species that is now extinct—lived in captivity in the aviary of Charles Otis Whitman, professor of zoology at the University of Chicago. *Photo by J. G. Hubbard, courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.*

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Message from the Editorial Committee

This issue of *Ramsey County History* presents three articles about three very different topics, but they all add to our understanding of local history here in Ramsey County.

Jennings Mergenthal's article about the passenger pigeon is a tale of how westward expansion and easy hunting doomed a bird to extinction. It's remarkable how quickly the passenger pigeon disappeared from the Midwest skies. This article becomes a cautionary tale about how human intervention can rapidly change and disrupt the natural environment.

Amelia Earhart's life continues to fascinate and inspire people, almost ninety years after her tragic disappearance. It's truly a remarkable legacy. Lisa Heinrich's article about Earhart sheds light on the year that Earhart lived in St. Paul when she was a teenager. This little-known chapter in Earhart's life was unfortunately a difficult time for the family. It's fascinating to think that this soon-to-be legendary aviator was in St. Paul, living only about a mile away from soon-to-be legendary writer F. Scott Fitzgerald—although it's highly unlikely their social circles connected during Earhart's brief stay in St. Paul.

Kylie Linh Hoang's article, "We Should All Be Public Historians," is a piece about historiography that asks important questions like, "What is history? Who gets to tell it?" Through this magazine, RCHS seeks to tell stories that readers won't find anywhere else. Local history is vitally important to understanding communities. *Ramsey County History* relies on local residents researching and writing stories about topics that fascinate them. Public history is exactly what RCHS does. This essay has piqued my interest in Seong Moy's life, and his beautiful mid-century artworks.

I'm excited that RCHS has a new Executive Director, Brandie Macdonald, and I'm looking forward to working with her.

Mark Taylor
Chair, Editorial Committee



Visit Gibbs Farm during public hours on Fridays until August 28, 2026 (12pm-3pm) and Saturdays until October 17, 2026 (10am-2pm). Please check www.rchs.com for more info.

Top photo: Guests from Opening Day at Gibbs Farm - May 23, 2026

Bottom photo: RCHS will be hosting north (October 14, 2026) and south (October 21, 2026) walking tours with Denise Dunnell Wells.



Dear readers,

How does history come into being? Each of the articles in this issue of the magazine offers a perspective on this question: what shapes the stories that we are told, the stories we tell ourselves, and the stories we live by. The information that remains about passenger pigeons, more than a century after their extinction, is skewed by the migration patterns of early settlers in Minnesota territory, which determined where newspapers existed to document the flocks.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dominant white culture privileges the written word and so these accounts become elevated in the narrative of this species. On a different tack, if we look at a renowned figure like Amelia Earhart and foreground the brief era of her life in Ramsey County, then the story we tell about her might begin to shift. Bringing a local history lens reframes the narrative.

The third article in this issue addresses these issues directly, and as such departs from the format that has typically been found in this magazine. You are likely accustomed to reading the finished product, after the narrative has been streamlined, where the messiness of research is trimmed away and unanswerable questions have been cut. Whether stated explicitly or not, personal factors inflect this process at every stage: from the initial curiosity, to the available routes to access information, to the particular details that stand out, to the forms and channels through which the story can be shared.

Thinking alongside scholars like Saidiya Hartman, if we believe that the gaps in the archives matter, that the lives of people left out of the dominant narrative are worth attention, then we must also rethink the methods that have been used to create that narrative. This is why I am sharing an exploration of process with the readership of this magazine, in the form of a public historian offering a window into the early stages of her research. I hope this sparks your own questions, because as a reader and lifelong student of history, you too are a vital participant in its creation.

This issue of *Ramsey County History* will be my last as editor, as I am moving out of state to begin a PhD program. But RCHS has much to look forward to! This summer, we welcomed a new Executive Director, Brandie Macdonald, who brings a wealth of experience in the nonprofit and museum field. Her practice centers community engagement, experiential learning, radical hospitality, and transformative storytelling. We also welcomed a Betsy Keyes as our new Board Chair. Fall is also busy with programming. We hope you'll join us for any of the events highlighted here!

History Revealed: Fall 2026
• August 19, 2026: Catherine Hinz of The Conservatory
• September 23, 2026: F. Scott Fitzgerald Walking Tour with Mark Taylor
• October 1, 2026: W.A. Frost
• October 14 and 21, 2026: Oakland Cemetery with Denise Dunnell Wells

EMILY GASTINEAU



Highlands to Home Exhibit: The Hmong Journey to Ramsey County opening at Landmark Center
L to R: See Vang, Exhibit Designer - Wone Vang, Event Speaker and President of Normandale Community College - Pakou Yang, RCHS Director of Collections and Exhibits - Mollie Spillman, RCHS Vice President - Youa Vang
Photo by Sher Yang