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RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We Should All Be Public Historians
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Before Her Ascent to Fame
Amelia Earhart's Sojourn in St. Paul
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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**
JENNINGS MERGENTHAL, PAGE 1

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



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