

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Ramsey County Historical Society

The Fire and Marine: Facts, Fancies, Legends
The First 100 Years of Minnesota's
Oldest Business Corporation

Volume 23
Number 2



Ramsey County History

Published by the
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Editor: Virginia Brainard Kunz

Contents

The Fire and Marine:
The First 100 Years of Minnesota's
Oldest Business Corporation

By Ronald M. Hubbs - Page 3

A Record-Setting Winter -
And the Ice Harvest on Lake Owasso

By Neill J. O'Neill - Page 19

Love and Marriage
on the Old Frontier - Page 22

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ISBN 0-934294-55-0

Ramsey County History is published several times a year and copyrighted 1988 by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 West Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102. Membership in the Society carries with it a subscription to Ramsey County History. Single issues sell for \$3. Correspondence concerning contributions should be addressed to the editor. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Manuscripts and other editorial material are welcomed. All articles and other editorial material submitted will be carefully read and published, if accepted, as space permits.

ON THE COVER: San Francisco was severely damaged by the fire that followed the earthquake of April 18, 1906. It was the greatest single fire insurance loss on record and some companies never recovered. As the plaque (small photograph) proclaims, Fire and Marine entered the auto insurance business around 1900, perhaps the second United States insurer to do so.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: All photographs used with the article on St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company are from the archives of The St. Paul Companies. The photograph on page 21 of soldiers harvesting ice at Fort Snelling is from the audio-visual library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

served as an introduction to people you otherwise would never have met. Most of the bulk of the crew members went from lake to lake, as there were several ice houses located in the county. In addition, they usually finished the season on the St. Croix River between Stillwater and Bayport, packing ice directly into railroad boxcars. With fish and game still quite prevalent then, some trapping and poaching rounded out their incomes quite well for many years until manufactured ice came into being.

The ice company's insurance firm came out at the beginning of the harvest and addressed all of us with

promises of a big party at the end of the season if there were no accidents. This turned out to be one keg of beer at one of the corner taverns. Because we weren't paid until the end of the harvest, we would get one check for perhaps four weeks of work which the beer joint would obligingly cash with money borrowed from a brewery. This, after paying any bills and giving the proper share at home, would usually be spent in the time-honored fashion set by lumberjacks, sailors and cowboys—all in one night. Contrary to popular opinion, none of us felt especially bad about it the next day.

Love and Marriage on the Old Frontier

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although Fort Snelling for some years was on the edge of civilization, love, marriage and family life flourished, for the most part, on the frontier. These brief accounts were drawn from an address, "Fort Snelling Echoes," which Edward Duffield Neill, pioneer educator and historian, presented to the officers and troops of the Third United States Infantry at Fort Snelling on March 15, 1889.

On the second of May, 1849, the President of the United States of America, with his wife and a married daughter, received a visit of respect from one who had been a member of Congress from Pennsylvania but had recently been appointed by him the Governor of a new territory which had been created by an act of Congress.

The President was Zachary Taylor, and the visitor was Alexander Ramsey, the First Governor of Minnesota Territory, who was about to leave for his post of duty, then an insignificant hamlet, designated by law as the capital, called St. Paul, on the verge of the military reservation of Fort Snelling, where the President had once been the commanding officer....

As Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor of the First United States Infantry in 1829, he was on duty at this fort, and it is noteworthy that he had once been Major of the Third Infantry now represented here....

On the 12th of July, 1829, Col. Taylor left for Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien. His interesting daughters had enlivened the society of the post, and the assistant surgeon, R.C. Wood, after the boat which carried them away was out of sight felt as if the walls of his heart would cave in. It was not surprising that early in September he obtained leave of absence to visit Fort Crawford in an open boat, and that he should return before the close of the month with a lovely bride by his side, the daughter of Col. Zachary Taylor....

When Col. Taylor went to Fort Crawford another daughter was persuaded by a young lieutenant, Jefferson Davis, to run away and marry him, and he became the President of the so-called Confederacy....

Joseph Plympton made a pleasant commanding officer. When the war with Great Britain began in 1812, he was engaged in commercial pursuits, but

that year was commissioned a second lieutenant of the Fourth Infantry, and in June, 1821, was a captain of the Fifth Infantry. He was a handsome, courteous blue-eyed young officer, and in 1824 married Eliza Beekman Livingston of New York, known among her associates for energy and vivacity....

Of all the commanders of the fort, Captain Seth Eastman was the most literary. He was a native of Maine, and before coming to Fort Snelling had been for several years assistant professor of drawing at West Point. In 1835 he married Mary, the daughter of Surgeon Thomas Henderson of the army, who sympathized with him in his studies and pursuits. At Fort Snelling Captain Eastman devoted his leisure in painting pictures of the scenery and Indians of Minnesota, while his wife noted their manners and customs. In 1849, she published "Dacotah: or Life and Legends of the Sioux Around Fort Snelling," and at a later period two other works on Indian life....

The first commander of Fort Snelling after the Mexican war was Brevet Major Samuel Woods, then Lieut.-Col. Gustavus A. Loomis of the Sixth Infantry succeeded....

At the time he was the commandant he was a widower, and it is said fell in love with a gentle and fascinating young woman, when to his great disappointment a second lieutenant, not recognizing the superiority of the commander in such matters, urged his suit and was accepted. The lieutenant and his wife still live, and she is recognized in the community where she resides as one of the best of women.

On the 15th of April, 1850, Major Samuel Woods of the Sixth Infantry was united in marriage to Miss Barney of Baltimore. The ceremony took place at the fort, and she had the prospects of a long and happy life. In a few years her husband was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, and she accompanied him to this new post, where was also stationed Major E.A. Ogden, who in 1835 was married to the daughter of then Captain G.A. Loomis. The cholera broke out in the garrison, and Major Ogden and Mrs. Woods died.

San Francisco after the fire and earthquake of 1906. See page 12.



Alexander Wilkin, first president of St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company. See page 5.

Ramsey County History
published by
the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
St. Paul, Minn. 55102



Ice Harvesting about 1890. See page 19.



Fire and Marine's second headquarters, 1909. See page 11.

The Gibbs Farm Museum, owned by the Ramsey County Historical Society, at Cleveland and Larpenteur in Falcon Heights.



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