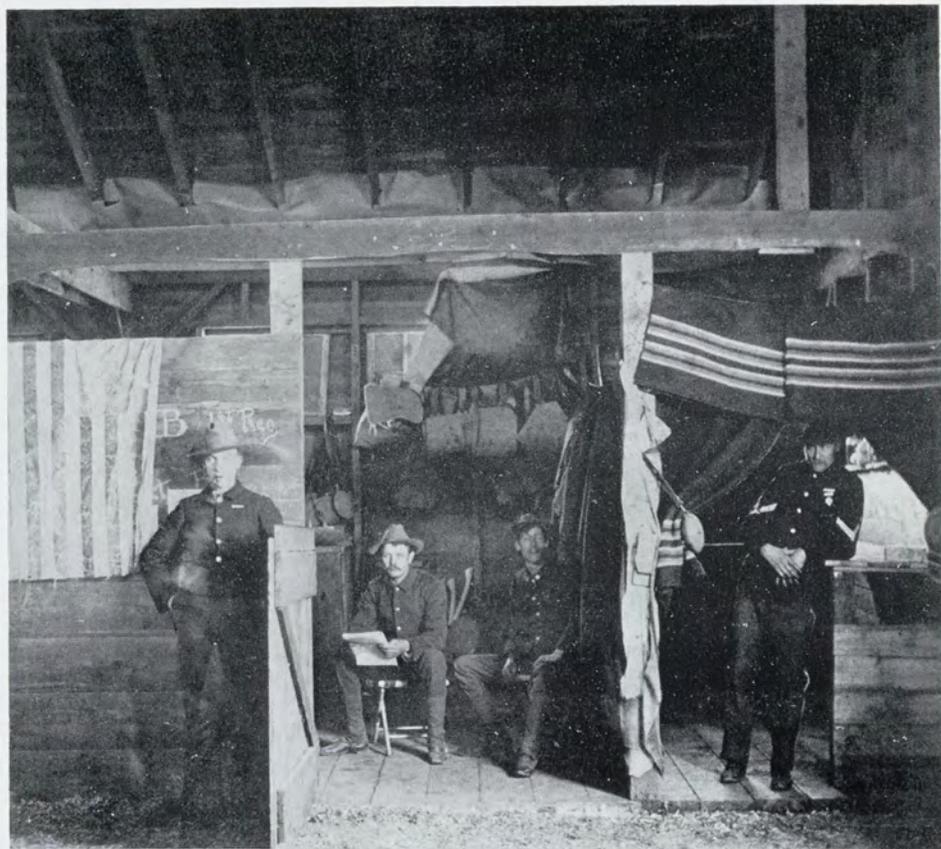
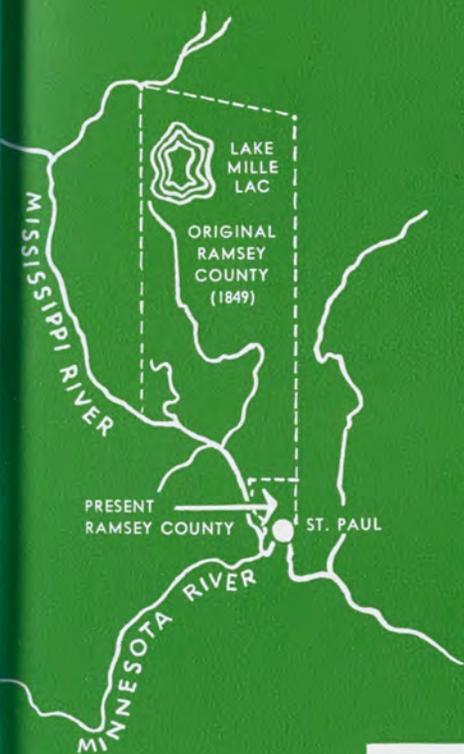


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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ment of the Minnesota Historical Society and the editor is grateful for the assistance of Eugene Becker, picture curator, and Dorothy Gimmestad, his assistant. The picture of Benjamin F. Hoyt is from the Territorial Pioneers' collection and published in the History of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society—1854-1910 by Darwin S. Hall.

ON THE COVER: *Minnesota's National Guard regiments mustered into federal service in 1898, at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, were encamped at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds, renamed Camp Ramsey. Quarters, of course, were makeshift, with most of the troops bedding down in the stock barns. Pictured on the cover are men from Company B of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Regiment.*

Random Recollections-Forty-Five Years as a School Board Member

BY ROBERT M. JORDAN

Where should the new school be built? A vote to settle the issue ended in a tie and the unsettled question was what prompted Herbert L. Ostergren to run for the school board in 1919. He won on the premise that the new school should be built where there was more opportunity to expand and where more people were going to be located. His vision and prophecy were good after forty-five consecutive years as a school board member. He retired in 1964 having served one of Minnesota's finest school districts—District 623 as its Board Chairman from its inception.

The first two years of Herb's formal education were spent in the one-room rural school he later helped direct as its school board chairman. While 1919 would hardly



Herbert L. Ostergren is shown above as a high school graduate and, below, as he is today.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Robert M. Jordan is president of the Ramsey County Historical Society. A professor on the faculty of the University of Minnesota, St. Paul Campus, he is greatly interested in the history of the Middle West and the Great Plains states. His article is based on a tape-recorded interview he made with Herbert Ostergren, whom he has known for some years.

qualify a school to be considered an antique, schools and education have changed more in Herb Ostergren's time than pots and pans have in 100 years.

Ramsey County School District No. 1 lay in the Edgerton area between what is now highway 36 and the St. Paul city limits and was about two miles long and a mile wide. With few exceptions the children attending this school came from farm homes. Market gardening and dairy farming were the main enterprises. With a big demand for labor (kids make good onion weeders) and only moderate interest in education by parent and pupil alike the years spent in school were often limited to three to five years. During about the first 30 years that Ostergren served as a school board member rural Ramsey County had no high schools. Therefore, if one's parents could afford the tuition and if they saw the need or a special

talent in their youngster they sent them to high school in Minneapolis or St. Paul. For the north side of rural Ramsey County, Minneapolis had the nearest high school. Although only a few of the youths entered high school, the Ostergren family saw to it that all of their children graduated from high school.

ACCORDING TO HERB in order to teach in rural Ramsey County all one needed was a high school diploma. The teachers were paid \$40 a month plus \$2 extra if they did their own janitor work. Herb used to earn the \$2 a month janitor service for the old Edgerton school during the years when he was attending school in St. Paul. On his way to high school, old Cleveland High School (now Johnson High School), he carried a pail of water from the cemetery pump into the Edgerton School and started the fire. On his way back from school (a three-mile hike) in the evening he swept out the old school house and carried in wood for the next day.

School teachers seldom stayed more than a year or two and this, according to Ostergren, detracted from a school district's development and maximum educational opportunities. Expecting one teacher to teach eight grades all in the same room was clearly another big stumbling block in rural education. Only unmarried women were hired in the early days and as Herb puts it "the school board would have been lynched if

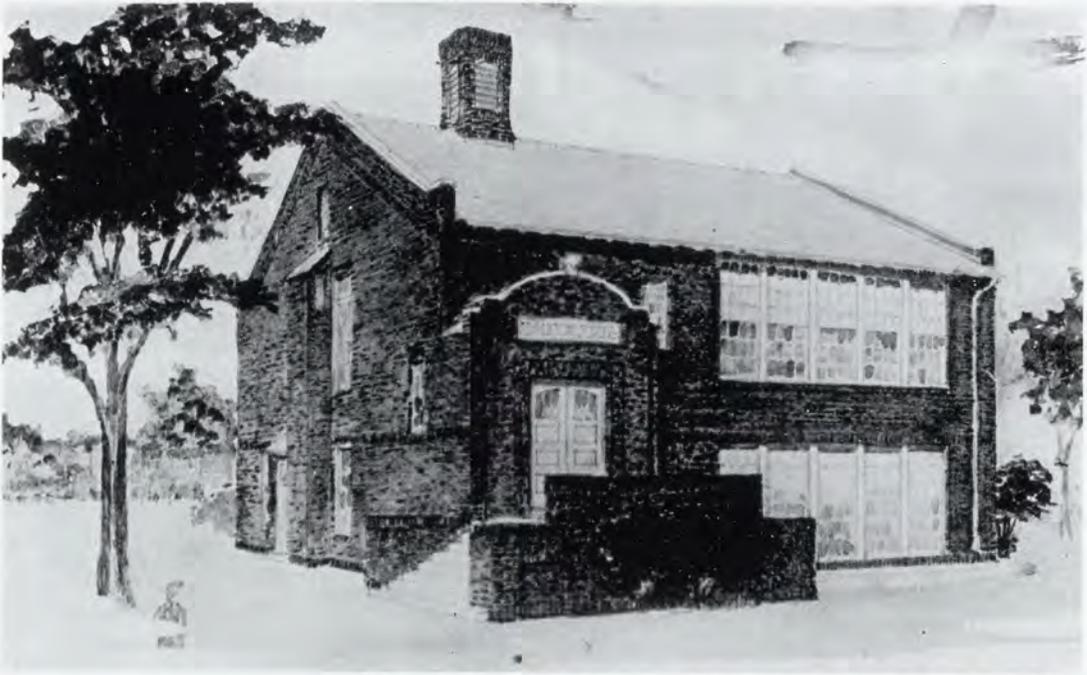
they had hired a married teacher." This policy persisted in the old district until the mid-1940's.

Meanwhile people were moving from the city of St. Paul to north Ramsey County. District I changed from a one-room school (1919) to a two-room school in 1920 and then to a four-room school in 1938. George Reif was County Superintendent of Schools during the early 20's; George Belland, who originally studied to be a priest but later turned to market gardening, succeeded Reif and served as County Superintendent of Schools for 16 years. He was followed by Emmet D. Williams, the present Superintendent of Roseville Schools.

School Boards took little or no part in curriculum planning. Their main responsibility was to establish policies, pass on the teachers hired and arrange for the necessary finances with which to operate the school and plan for the future. One forward looker was Otto Ashbach, founder of Ashbach Construction Co., who in the early 1930's was serving on the Lake Owasso School Board. He advocated the consolida-

When Herb Ostergren attended high school in St. Paul, he sometimes caught a ride into town with a market gardener, such as the one shown here, who was taking his produce into the city to sell. This photo is from the J. W. G. Dunn collection in the Minnesota Historical Society.





Edgerton School, Edgerton Street and New Canada Road.

tion of a sufficient number of the small districts into one large enough to support a high school. Ashbach was ahead of his time but according to Ostergren should be credited with the idea of consolidation of the school districts in northern Ramsey County.

In 1947 the Minnesota Legislature passed a bill permitting the consolidation of school districts in each county provided they had sufficient tax base to support a high school. Ramsey County School District No. 1, the old Edgerton School District joined Brimhall, Little Canada, Lake Owasso, Lexington and Lauderdale to become the first district in the State of Minnesota to take advantage of this new law and became the new Roseville School District later changed to District 623. Herb Ostergren who had served as chairman of District 1 became chairman of the new consolidated district and was instrumental in hiring the former County Superintendent of Schools, Emmet Williams in 1949.

To go from a one-room school with a budget of a few thousand dollars to a school district that encompasses many grade schools and two big high schools meant quite a change and yet it was this period of

school consolidation that Herb Ostergren enjoyed the most and may have contributed the most. He is a great believer in keeping youngsters busy and so enthusiastically gave full support to a sound extracurriculum program that provided maximum opportunity for all students to participate in athletics, bands, drama, etc. A far cry from the old one- or two-room school where nothing was provided the kids but a ball and a swing. Herb feels everyone has a debt to society and their fellowman. As he puts it "life has been good to me and I would like to leave things as good or better than I found them. Everyone has a debt to pay to society and his fellowman and my years served on the school board are but a small price to pay for the many privileges I have enjoyed."

Where is Herb Ostergren now? He is busy in community affairs, bowls three or four times a week, plays at least 36 holes of golf a week during the summer, enjoys fishing and is an avid gardner. Herb Ostergren may be best characterized as one who looks to the future as if he will be here and a part of it forever.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue W., St. Paul, Minn.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958 the Society erected a barn, behind the house, which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.