



RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

ALL BABA

OR MORGIANA and the FORTY THIEVES.

AS PERFORMED BY
DAVID HENDERSON
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1. I wonder if dreams come true. A TYPICAL NIGHTMARE 4
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 3. Laughing Song. 4
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ON THE COVER: "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" was one of the musical extravaganzas of the late Nineteenth Century which often depended upon feminine charm for their appeal. Reproduced is a portion of the cover for one of the musical numbers. From the private collection of Kenneth Carley, editor of Minnesota History.

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'Salubrious Minnesota'

Kohlman's Hotel and the Resort Era

BY JEROME O. SCHUELER

"In the country were fertile acres of corn in the shock, scattered over fields were rich, golden-hued pumpkins, flocks of prairie chicken and duck were seen, and beyond Little Canada two or three deer were spied seeking the cover." — Description by a passenger on the Lake Superior and Wisconsin Railroad.

DURING the latter quarter of the Nineteenth Century, before the territory northeast of St. Paul became the prosperous residential and industrial suburban area it is today, pioneers were busy cultivating the land and putting it to use as dairy and truck farms. Milk and vegetables were hauled to the market in St. Paul. That's the way most people made their living.

But in the years immediately after the Civil War, Minnesota also had acquired a somewhat undeserved reputation as one large health resort. This is not to say that the climate was not healthy, but only to point out that claims of the miraculous cures that could be wrought for sufferers of pneumonia and tuberculosis, in particular, were exaggerated, to say the least.

Yet, the state was advertised through the country as a place where victims of a variety of diseases could be healed and, consequently, thousands of persons came to St. Paul, particularly during the summer months, seeking out the lovely lakes between St. Paul and Stillwater where they hoped to regain their health.

BESIDES THE health-seekers, there were the citizens of the city who were looking for recreation. The lakes proved ideal for both groups because they were close to the city. Thus the resort era began in Ramsey County.

No one, apparently, understood the pos-

sibilities better than William Kohlman, who, following the American Civil War, emigrated from Germany. He came to St. Paul in 1870 when he was 26.

From General Henry H. Sibley, who owned a large tract of land near what is now Arcade Street and Labore Road in the northwest part of New Canada Township, Kohlman bought his initial property fronting on Lake Gervais and what was then called Fitzhugh Lake. He built his resort near where the two lakes are connected by a small channel.

AROUND 1880, Kohlman bought an adjoining 250 acres because of the growing numbers of health-seeking tourists who were coming to the Ramsey County area. Here, at the juncture of Lake Gervais and what later came to be called Kohlman Lake, was where what is still remembered as "the old hotel" did a thriving business for more than half a century.

Kohlman's Hotel, according to reports, was a legend in its own time. It was just the right distance from downtown St. Paul so that those who had their own vehicles could drive out and stay for a day or an afternoon of relaxation. The hotel also became a favorite and regular vacation spot for travelers from as far away as St. Louis, Missouri. It was a resort as well as a hotel.

Mrs. Edna Morrow of Little Canada is one of William Kohlman's five surviving grandchildren. Her home is on the original hotel property near the east shore of Lake Gervais. Going out to Kohlman's resort, she has said, was like going to one of today's fine restaurants or hotels. "And it was like today when people go to northern Minne-

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sota and rent cabins."

MUCH OF THE original property is still in the hands of Kohlman descendants because before he died the elder Kohlman made sure that each of his four sons and three daughters would get a portion of the land. The land has been passed on to the third generation, too, and thus all five of Kohlman's surviving grandchildren still make their homes on land he bought from General Sibley.

Mrs. Morrow recalls the days when the hotel was flourishing. "People came out in these tally-hos (double-decked, horsedrawn carriages), on horseback, and in surreys with the fringe on top."

Organizations such as Hamm's Brewery, Drury and Sons, and Villaume Box and Lumber Company had their summer picnics at Kohlman's and "two or three times a winter they'd have sleighrides there.

"They'd bring their own orchestra," Mrs. Morrow said, "We had a large dining room that we cleared the tables out of, and they'd have dances." The saloon was connected to the dining room, she recalls, but "you never saw anyone drunk, because they could have all they wanted."

About midnight "my aunts and my mother would serve a meal — the most wonderful things — cold ham, chicken, even homemade doughnuts. It was all homemade food."

Mrs. Morrow was about 12 when her grandfather died, but she said the hotel enterprise continued after the death of its founder. It was operated by the family and everybody had a job. One took care of the boat livery (which is still operated by Harold Kohlman, a grandson), another was in charge

Kohlman's resort hotel stood for many years in Little Canada near where Lake Gervais and Kohlman Lake are connected by a small channel. Today a few of the hotel's foundation stones still can be seen.

of the farming operation that provided food for the meals served to the guests. Even the "smokehouse" had an attendant whose specialty was curing the meat.

THERE WAS a huge garden near what is now Meadowlark Lane and, according to Mrs. Morrow, "they knew how to raise vegetables!" Not to mention the meat. "Grandpa had been a butcher in Germany" she said, "and he couldn't be beat in sausage making."

When they made sausage they always sold some and gave away some, but most of it was used in the hotel. The sauerkraut that went with the sausages was made in huge barrels, she said, and everybody helped himself.

The ice-house is another of Mrs. Morrow's fond memories. "Grandpa's brother came from Germany with him and he was a cabinet maker. Anytime Grandpa and the boys wanted anything done, this uncle would come out from St. Paul, where he had his business, and build it for them. So they built a huge walk-in refrigerator that was kept cold with ice. It would hold maybe four or five of those 500-pound ice chunks at one time."

MEAT WAS KEPT in the refrigerator and so was the cottage cheese they made. Fish, caught in Lake Gervais by Mrs. Morrow and her father, was served at every meal. Its spot in the refrigerator was right on top of a chunk of ice. To be sure of the fish supply, William Kohlman saw to it that the lake was stocked regularly. Fish were bigger than they are now, Mrs. Morrow said.

The Kohlman men cleared land in the



winter between their ice-cutting chores, and used the wood for fuel. They used the cleared land for farming and soon they had products to sell—more produce than was needed to feed hotel guests.

They did not haul their produce to market,

In the picture above, William Kohlman, right, founder of the resort, sits under the trees with a St. Paul friend, Emil Holmberg. Below is the resort's famed beer garden, a festive place with live birds in cages and Japanese lanterns hanging from the trees. Both pictures are the property of Mrs. Edna Morrow of Little Canada.

as did the other early truck and dairy farmers. City-dwellers came to the farm to get it. There was more exchange than buying though, Mrs. Kohlman said, because there wasn't much money around. Farm labor was exchanged, too, much like the farmers in rural areas do now, and Mrs. Morrow recalls the threshing crews. "They'd finish at one farm and move on to the next. And the way those men ate!"

The famous Lake Gervais cyclone was before her time, Mrs. Morrow admits, but the story of the death and destruction it caused in 1890 has been passed on to her.

"Father was the hero of the time, I understand," she said. There was a bridge out on the northwest side of the lake. All the storms came from that direction. Father took a team of horses, went through the water where the bridge was supposed to be, loaded up all the injured people, and brought them back to the hotel.

"THE INJURED were laid out on long dining room tables and they ripped up sheets for bandages and gave them first aid while father went to town for a doctor."

The hotel has been gone for some time now. All that remains of the business is Harold Kohlman's boat livery. But near Keller Parkway can still be seen the stone foundation that supported one of the most popular lake resorts in Ramsey County.





THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota.

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 farm 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. In 1966, the Society moved to its museum property a one-room rural schoolhouse, dating from the 1870's. The white frame school came from near Milan, Minnesota. Now restored to the period of the late 1890's, the school actually is used for classes and meetings. In the basement beneath the school building, the Society has its office, library and collections. In 1968, the Society acquired from the University of Minnesota the use of the white barn adjoining the Society's property. Here is housed a collection of carriages and sleighs which once belonged to James J. Hill.

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.