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Fall	100 Years Ago at the University	Page 3
1969	The Letters of Samuel Pond, Jr.	Page 8
Volume 6	Kellogg Boulevard: The Story of Old Third Street	Page 14
Number 2	Forgotten Pioneers . . . VIII	Page 16
	Norman Kittson and the Fur Trade	Page 18

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ON THE COVER: Samuel Pond's old mill at Shakopee. After years of service to the Dakota Indians in Minnesota, the pioneer missionary was living here in 1869 when his son, Samuel Pond, Jr., a student at the University of Minnesota, wrote the letters used in this issue. Gideon Pond lived across the Minnesota River in what is now Bloomington.

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Forgotten Pioneers...VIII



BISHOP JOSEPH CRETIN

IT was a hot day in July, 1851. The steamboat pulled into the landing at St. Paul's Lower Levee, and a small man, "fine and intellectual looking, with a very pleasant face," stepped off the boat. For the other passengers, it had been a relatively short trip up the Mississippi River from Prairie du Chien, but for Joseph Cretin, it had been a journey of 4,800 miles and 52 years.

Joseph Cretin was born in Montluel, France, in 1799, into a devoutly Catholic family. In 1814, he entered the seminary at Meximieux. During his years there, one of his professors was Mathias Loras, a man destined to play an important role in the young seminarian's career.

After ordination at the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris, Cretin was appointed to the parish of Ferney, where Voltaire lived during the years he was producing many of his major works. There Joseph Cretin organized a school for sanctuary boys and, later, a school for higher education. The young abbe taught literature, mathematics, music, and encouraged physical prowess and an interest in nature, leading his boys on field trips across the countryside.

Apparently, however, he was not happy in Ferney; his chief interest lay not in a local parish, but in his church's world missions. On several occasions he asked to be appointed to missions in China, but was refused.

IN 1838, when Abbe Cretin was 39, Mathias Loras, who had become bishop of the diocese of Dubuque, Iowa, returned to France to seek out young men to serve as missionaries

RAMSEY COUNTY has had its share of famous pioneers whose names fill the pages of the history books. But there also have been many more men and women who have been almost forgotten but who also made outstanding contributions and left their names upon streets, parks, buildings, and in the official records. The following article is the eighth in a series of sketches of "forgotten pioneers," a special feature in Ramsey County History. It may seem strange to label as a "Forgotten Pioneer" the first bishop of the diocese of St. Paul. Yet, Roman Catholic historians point out that, in fact, Bishop Cretin's contributions during his brief tenure in Minnesota have been largely forgotten.

in Wisconsin and Iowa villages. Although much of this area was part of the diocese of Milwaukee, it was closer to Dubuque and thus it was administered by Bishop Loras.

Joseph Cretin accompanied Bishop Loras to America where he served for almost 12 years as a missionary in Iowa and western Wisconsin. In 1843, Cretin was named vicar-general. His duties included teaching and direction of the high school (which later became Loras College), work with the Indian missions and parishes and with the Temperance Society.

In 1849, Minnesota became a territory, and its new political status brought settlers to the area. In 1847, Father Ravoux held services every other Sunday in St. Paul, in both French and English; by 1851, he was holding services two Sundays in St. Paul and one Sunday in Mendota. The bishop of Dubuque decided it was time for the new territory to have its own bishop.

On January 27, 1851, in Belley, France, Joseph Cretin was consecrated bishop of the diocese of St. Paul, a 166,000 square-mile-area with 10,000 white inhabitants, 2,000 of whom were Catholics.

THE NEW BISHOP spent a few months in France recruiting men for the diocese. Two priests and three seminarians accompanied him to St. Paul. They were met by Father Ravoux who directed them to the episcopal "palace," a building one-and-a-half stories high and about 18 feet square.



The "cathedral" was the little log church built by Father Lucien Galtier.

Bishop Cretin needed a place to board and, using the home of Mrs. Anabelle Turpin as his base of operations, began organizing the Catholic church of Minnesota.

Before Bishop Cretin's arrival, Father Ravoux had purchased from the pioneer settler, Vital Guerin, twenty-one lots of land for \$800. For \$100 he bought the lot on which the new cathedral would be built. The twenty-two lots included almost the entire block now bounded by Wabasha, St. Peter, Sixth and Seventh Streets, and it became known as the "Catholic block." Father Ravoux had been unable to pay for the land and possessed only a bond for the deed. Wanting to keep the church out of debt as long as possible, the bishop used what money he had to pay the purchase price and received the deed.

IN LESS THAN five months, Bishop Cretin had erected on one of the Guerin lots a three-story building measuring 84 by 44 feet. This was the diocese's second cathedral; there also was a residence for the bishop and his assistants. In a small courtyard, he planted apple trees which he had dug up from the cathedral grounds in Dubuque and carried up the Mississippi. In a few months, rooms in the basement had been converted to schoolrooms for boys. (Years later, this became the first Cretin high school.)

From that time on, progress was rapid. By 1852, the Sisters of St. Joseph had founded a girls' school and a hospital and Bishop Cretin had purchased the land for a cemetery, founded an orphanage and organized a novitiate, all with his own money.

In 1856, he founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society to help those who had been stricken by the cholera epidemic of 1855 and 1856. One of his greatest accomplishments, in his own eyes, was the organization of a Catholic Temperance Society based on the society with which he had been associated in Dubuque. When a law was passed outlawing alcohol in the territory, the bishop

"Catholic block," bounded by what is now Wabasha, St. Peter, Sixth and Seventh Streets. The third cathedral, begun by Bishop Cretin, is at left; next is the bishop's residence and, at right, the second cathedral, later a school.

was greatly pleased and ordered the church bells rung. Only one person complained about the show of enthusiasm: the owner of the bell who was an ardent anti-prohibitionist.

It was through the Temperance Society, (which was open to anyone 12 years of age or older), that Bishop Cretin first met the young John Ireland. The boy expressed an interest in the priesthood. When he was 15,

the bishop sent him to France where the Most Reverend Alex Raymond Devie, bishop of Belley, who had consecrated Bishop Cretin, had promised a free education to any young man in the diocese of St. Paul who wanted to become a priest. The boy later became the first archbishop of St. Paul and a world-famous religious leader.

THE THIRD cathedral, built at St. Peter and Sixth Streets, was begun in July, 1854. Again, money was a problem and work proceeded slowly. In July, 1856, the cornerstone was blessed by the Most Reverend John Timon, bishop of Buffalo, New York. But the work came to a halt with the death of Bishop Cretin on February 22, 1857, after a long, painful illness. More than 1,500 attended his funeral, the largest in St. Paul up to that time.

Bishop Cretin spent only six years in St. Paul. When he arrived in 1851, there were five churches, two missions and three clergymen in the territory. By 1857, the diocese had 50,000 parishioners, twenty-nine churches, thirty-five stations, twenty priests, two communities of men and one order of nuns, a primary school, a free school, and two select schools, St. Joseph's Academy, and St. Mary's College. St. Joseph's Hospital had been built.



Photo by Henry Hall

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.