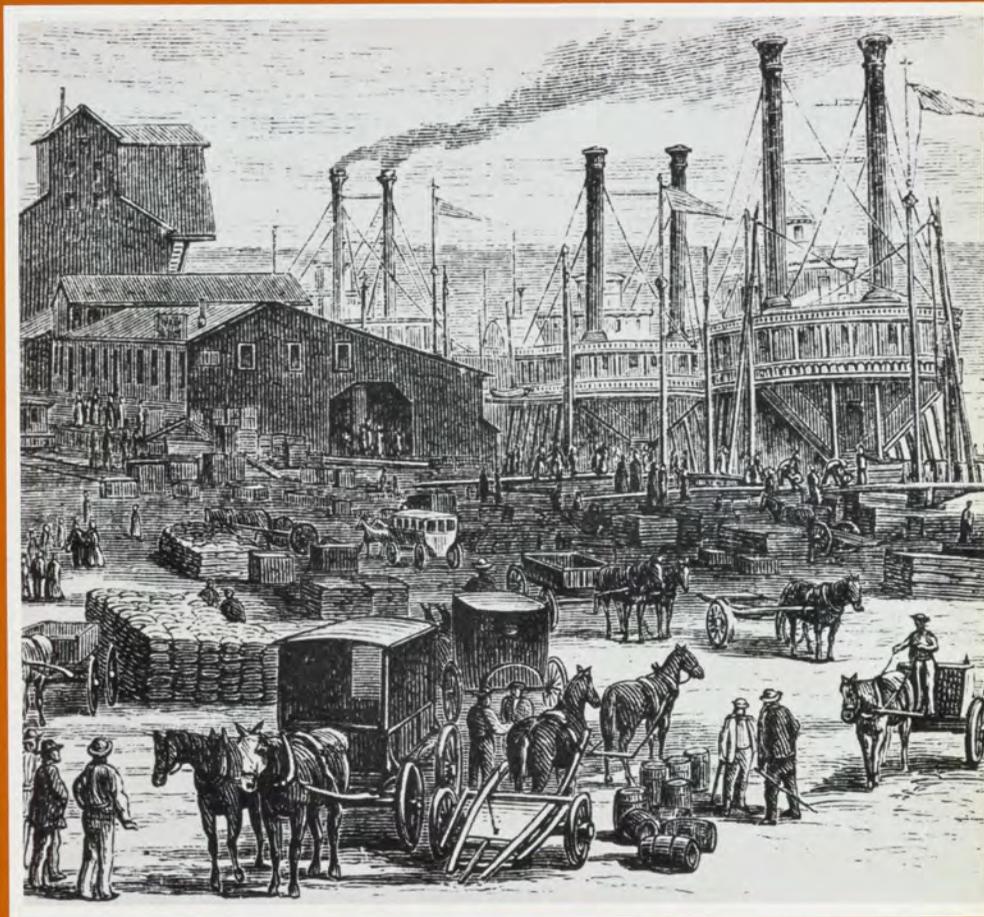
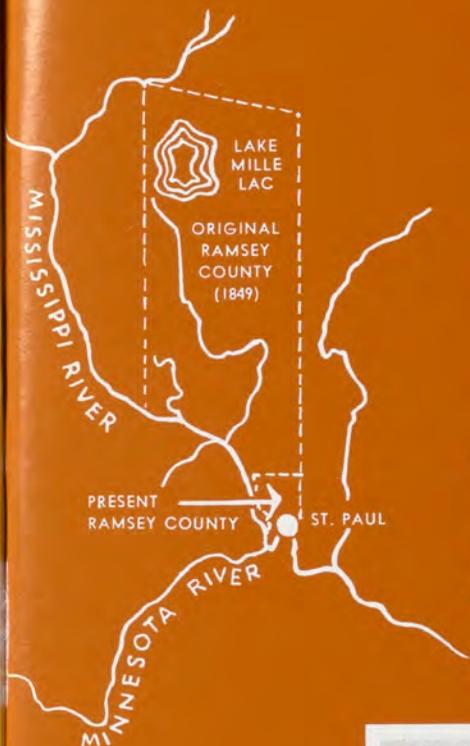


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Fall

1971

Volume 8

Number 2

# Ramsey County History

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*ON THE COVER:* This steel engraving of St. Paul's Lower Landing as it looked in 1853 shows the bustling river front during the boom years of steamboat travel on the Upper Mississippi. See story beginning on page 15.

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:* Pictures illustrating the story which begins on page 3 are from the author's scrapbook, except for the pictures of Battle Creek and the little railroad station. All other pictures used in this issue are from the audio-visual library of the Minnesota Historical Society. The editor is indebted to Eugene Becker and Dorothy Gimmestad, of the state historical society's audio-visual staff, for their help.

# ....And So Merriam Park Was Platted and Prospered

In 1882, when Colonel John L. Merriam platted Merriam Park, he recognized the appeal a village, rural in nature and halfway between Minneapolis and St. Paul, would offer. The steel engraving below of Merriam Park about 1884, probably was published originally in *The Northwest Magazine*. It shows how well Merriam, one of St. Paul's more astute businessmen, had played upon that potential. There is the park itself, with Prior Avenue curving around it

toward the depot, and the large Victorian homes which were on the blocks alongside of the railroad tracks. Although the bridge up to the north side of the park were obliterated when the freeway I-94 was built, other changes had taken place in Merriam Park in earlier years. Still, within very recent memory, stately old homes still fronted on the park. In the wooded area, beyond the righthand corner of this picture, lay Desnoyer's Halfway House



Colonel John L. Merriam's home (right) was typically Victorian in style, with a spacious veranda, well-proportioned windows, and two stories suggesting high-ceilinged rooms and square turrets.

The business section of Merriam Park (left) was made up of its sturdy buildings with intricate Victorian architectural details, remembered by many. All are gone.

The park (right) was reserved by Merriam as a three-acre parcel. He platted the development in 1882. Successful was Merriam that he later made four more additions to his original 140 acres. The park itself, however, remained a focal point. The small building was added at a later date. Today it no longer is a leafy bower but serves the needs of a new generation with its diamond, tennis courts and community center.

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### 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.