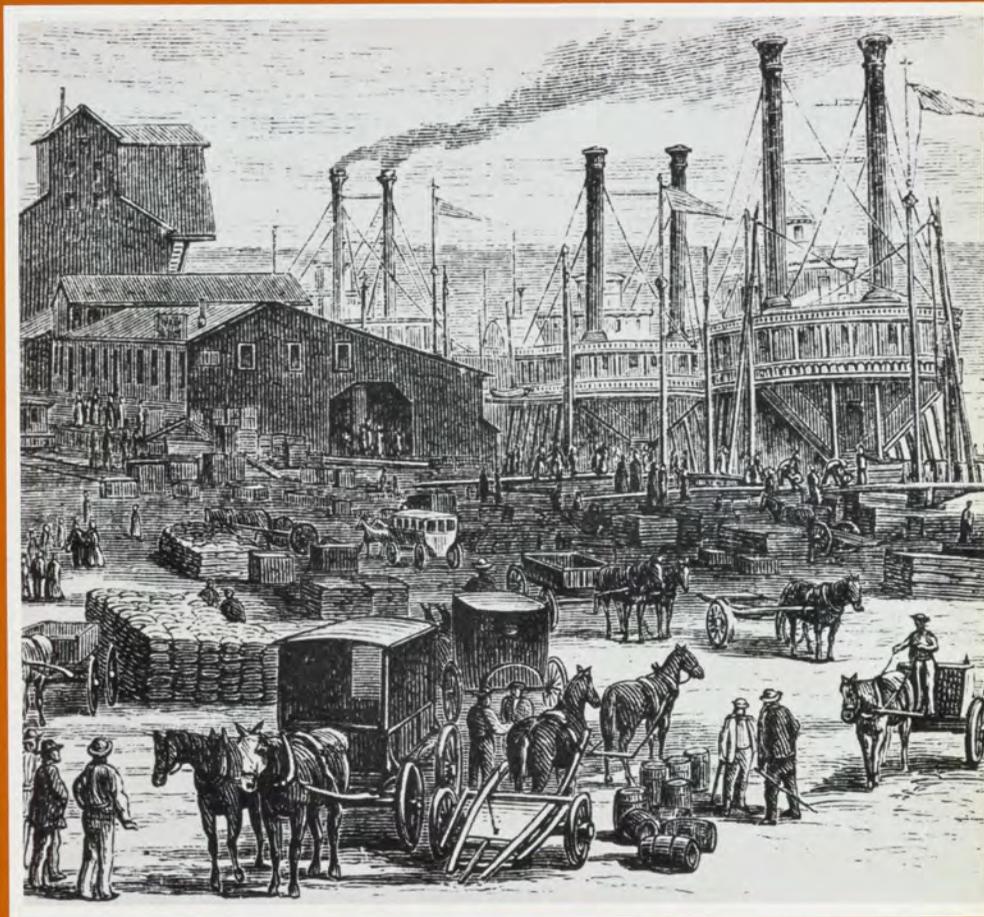
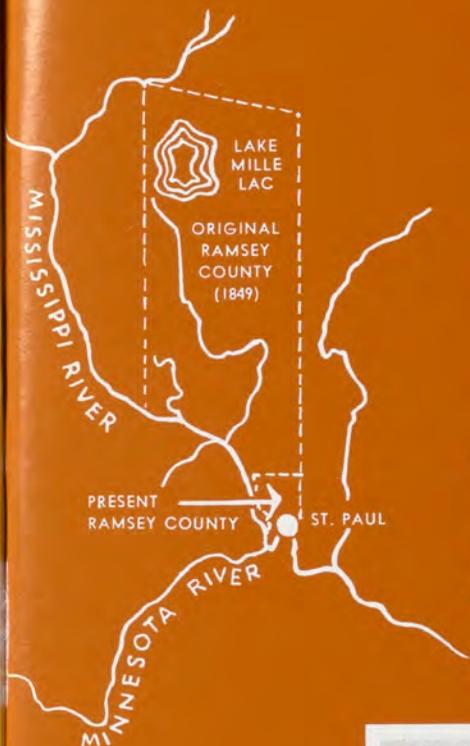


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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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.

Rice Park-- How It Changed!

EDITOR'S NOTE: In most cities today, the parks — those precious green spaces dotting crowded urban areas — may seem to have more to do with environment and the quality of contemporary living than with history. Yet, it is all one and the same. Earlier generations also recognized the need for parks and they did something about it.

This short article on Rice Park, one of St. Paul's three earliest parks and perhaps its best known today, came from the Junior Pioneer Association which has issued a variety of interesting papers on the history of St. Paul and Ramsey County. Park-like, Rice Park was not, in its early years, according to author Max Winkel. But the city grew and the park changed.

When Henry M. Rice and John R. Irvine filed the plat for the addition bounded by what is now Washington, Main, West Fourth and West Ninth Streets on May 16, 1849, they designated one block as a "Public Square" — the block now known as Rice Park.

Although there never was a formal dedication of the square for public use, the term "public square" meant in those days a public park.

Originally the square was almost barren. Sometime during the early years, a florist was permitted to raise flowers and vegetables on the land in return for caring for it. On June 21, 1856, the H. H. Smith American Circus exhibited on the square.

The first step toward improvement of the park was the erection of a fence in July of 1858. At that time, the St. Paul City Hall stood at the corner of Washington and Fifth Street, the present site of the Old Federal Courts Building.

IN THE SPRING of 1860, the mayor decided to do something more about the park, and so he procured some trees which were planted by the chief of police and his men. Because of the underlying rock formation, so close to the surface in that area, many people were skeptical. The *Minnesotian* of May 23, 1860, commented:

"It is a fact, ascertained by actual observation, that at least one, if not two, of the shade trees in the City park are alive."

Progress evidently was slow, however, for on June 25, 1865, the St. Paul *Pioneer* commented on the forlorn condition of the park, and suggested that a monument to the First Minnesota Infantry, of Civil War fame, be erected.

In May, 1873, the chief of police of Memphis, Tennessee, learned that the park lacked squirrels, and sent a pair as a gesture of good-will. A few days later a letter appeared in the *Press* signed "Philadelphian" and warning the citizens that they would regret turning them loose. Whether all the squirrels now swarming about the city are descendents of this Memphis pair we leave to the Fish and Game Commission to say.

THERE WERE other problems. For one thing, the neighborhood women were in the habit of beating their rugs in the park, and so this was prohibited by law. Despite the law, a police officer one day found several women beating rugs. He thundered, "This is no place for such vandalism. The mayor has said stop, the chief has said stop, and now I say unto you stop!" The bed-bug scattering brigade scattered, according to the newspaper story.

Cows were another headache — they got into the park, in spite of the turnstiles which had been placed at the entrances. The council solved this by having spikes placed in the arms of the turnstiles. Gradually the park improved. On May 11, 1872, the Great Western Band started a series of summer evening concerts that continued for many years, and on June 16, 1875, the *Pioneer Press* noted that the fence had been whitewashed.

As the city grew, Rice Park became more and more of a beauty spot in the downtown area. For many years, an ornate, Victorian fountain occupied the center of the park, but eventually it was taken out. After World War II, a slow process of deterioration set in again until the decade of the 1960's when a group of civic minded women added a lovely new fountain and transformed the park into a beautiful green square once again.

In 1969, the Ramsey County Historical Society erected a historic site marker in the center of the park.



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.