

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
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**Fall, 1990**  
Volume 25, Number 3



*A group of smiling youngsters at the Thomas-Dale Child Care Center, part of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's Child Care Services Program. Child care issues are one of the many concerns of the Saint Paul Foundation. See article beginning on page 4.*

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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**On the cover:** Children at the Thomas-Dale Child Care Center attend one of the many needed child care centers operated by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation in the East Metro area of St. Paul and Ramsey County.

**Acknowledgements:** The photographs on pages 4-19, page 28 and on the front cover are from the archives of The Saint Paul Foundation and used with the Foundation's permission. All other photographs in this issue of *Ramsey County History* are from the audio-visual collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

**R**amsey County History welcomes the submission of manuscripts dealing with the history of St. Paul, Ramsey County, and their environs. In particular, the Editorial Board encourages writers to contact the editor with proposals for neighborhood histories, stories about local leaders and their families, accounts of prominent institutions, businesses or organizations and articles on the racial and ethnic diversity of Ramsey County.

The intent of the Editorial Board is to encourage and support writing about urban and local history relating to St. Paul and Ramsey County. Our quarterly magazine needs a continuing flow of well researched and thoughtfully written articles that reflect the richness of the people, places, and institutions of the county. The members of our society are enthusiastic about history. They deserve the best historical writing we can provide to them.

—John L. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

# Book Reviews

## *The Days of Rondo*

Evelyn Fairbanks  
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical  
Society Press, 1990

Evelyn Fairbanks has written a richly-detailed account of her childhood and growing-up years in a neighborhood that was virtually wiped out by post-World War II urban renewal and the construction of Interstate 94.

Fairbanks, however, has reconstructed the sense of community she and others found there during the 1930s and 1940s. After the death of her mother, Fairbanks was adopted by George and Willie Mae Edwards, but both adoptive parents also died before she was 9. Her Aunt Arke and Aunt Arke's two sons, Morris and Oscar, shouldered the responsibility for raising the child.

St. Paul's black community, which centered around Rondo Avenue, was a vibrant community that, historians say, was independent for the most part, of the surrounding white society. According to David Taylor, dean of the General College at the University of Minnesota, the black community had just finished the process of ghettoization:

"The racial detente [in housing] so delicately balanced for many years collapsed during the war. The use of restrictive covenants in housing and discrimination in employment resulted in the ghettoization of the St. Paul black community. Although the process took longer than in other northern centers, it was complete by 1930."

The Rondo community was divided into three areas, ranging from least desirable to best, and status derived from neighborhood: "The servant of the banker who lived on Rondo and Lexington recognized but did not socialize with the packinghouse worker who lived on Rondo and Farrington."

There also were far fewer opportuni-



*Intersection of Rondo and Arundel Streets about 1940. This view looks south on Arundel from Rondo.*

ties for African-Americans in St. Paul. Fairbanks writes that "the blacks in St. Paul earned their money in work that fell into four categories: entrepreneurs, professionals, servants and packinghouse workers." She added that, "It might be simpler to say that there were no black factory workers, office workers, retail clerks, waitresses, waiters, or health or education workers, except in black-owned enterprises."

Another traditional component of African-American life in St. Paul was the church. Before her mother's death, Fairbanks writes, they went not just on Sunday "but Mama and I went all the time. Fridays there were prayer meetings and people gave testimony as to how God had uplifted them and changed their lives for the better." Sunday was often an all-day event, but later in her life, post-church

time was the main social event of the week.

Fairbanks does not gloss over the pain of racism. In an event that foreshadowed action in the South, blacks who had been refused service at Bridgeman's in downtown St. Paul staged a sit-in and won the right to be served there.

Evelyn Fairbanks joins the ranks of a number of other blacks who have written of their lives in St. Paul, and it is well to once again remind readers of them here.

## *Standing Fast*

Roy Wilkins  
New York: Viking Press, 1982

Roy Wilkins and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People were synonymous for

*Book Reviews to page 34*

tacked the Communist-controlled Soul La Tin Valley in what the newspapers called the biggest operation of the war. Bomb explosions rocked Saigon; 10,000 people marched in New York protesting United States involvement in the war but there was stiff opposition from on-lookers. Indonesian President Sukarno announced that he was safe after reports of an attempted coup.

► Blacks and whites attempted to march in Natchez, Mississippi, but were stopped by police who arrested 278 marchers. Thurgood Marshall was appointed solicitor general of the United States.

► Ramsey County Welfare workers were allowed to discuss birth control, including the Pill, with clients. Metal-studded tires were introduced for winter use—legal only from October 15 to the following spring.

► Murphy's offered a smorgasbord featuring roast beef and fried chicken for \$1.29. Star-Kist Tuna cost \$1 for five cans, a ten-pound bag of onions sold for fifty-nine cents and a twenty-five pound of flour cost \$1.49. A 1964 Dodge 880 hardtop was selling for \$1,795 and a 1964 Olds Jetstar for \$2,195.

► At the University of Minnesota, Carol Rylie Brink, author of children's books, spoke at the annual Book Week dinner. The university's 42,178 student enrollment was up 3,775 over the fall of 1964.

► Minnesota beat Indiana 42 to 18; Notre Dame won over Army, 17-0 and Ohio beat Illinois 28 to 14. The Minnesota Twins went 102-60 for the year, capturing the American League but losing the World Series to Los Angeles in seven games.

► Sluggo discovered the power of reading in Ernie Bushmillers' "Nancy." The Minnehaha theater offered Jane Fonda and Lee Marvin in "Cat Ballou," plus Maurice Chevalier and Jayne Mansfield in "Panic Button." At the St. Croix Drive-in (\$1 a car), a triple feature was playing: "You're Never Too Young," "Boy Ten Feet Tall" and "Robinson Crusoe on Mars," plus a cartoon.

#### *Book Reviews from page 31*

nearly fifty years. His life began in St. Louis, but he moved to St. Paul with his uncle, aunt and two siblings, Earl and Armeda, at the age of 6 after his mother died of tuberculosis.

His uncle, soon to be his legal guardian, was chief steward on the private railroad car of Howard Elliott, president of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Of his uncle, Wilkins writes: "As far as I know he never earned more than \$85 a month, but he bought that cottage, saw three children through college, and left Earl and me the deed, mortgage paid in full, when he died."

His years in St. Paul spanned an earlier era than Evelyn Fairbanks'. In Wilkins' day, schools were integrated. When Wilkins entered Whittier Grammar School for the first time, he recalled, "I looked around at my new classmates with a timidity any new child feels in a new school. I got a quick shock. All the children were white." Wilkins does not mention any racist incidents during his childhood and he writes that his best friend "was a shy blond boy named Herman Anderson."

In high school he edited the literary magazine and the yearbook. At the University of Minnesota, he was the first black reporter on the *Minnesota Daily*, the campus newspaper, and he edited the *Northwest Bulletin* and the *St. Paul Appeal*, the leading black publication at the time, before moving on to the *Kansas City Call*.

St. James A.M.E. Church and Pilgrim Baptist Church were the chief religious centers for the blacks of Wilkins' era. "Their congregations," he wrote, "probably accounted for half the Negro families" in St. Paul. He recalled that the African-Americans of his day were not clustered in one residential area but, "a great many Negroes lived around Rondo Street and St. Anthony Avenue."

Lynchings in Duluth in 1920 revealed a violent side to the lives of Minnesota blacks. To fight such racism, the St. Paul branch of the NAACP had been formed

in 1913, with Wilkins' uncle as number 42 of 54. This marked the beginning of Wilkins' involvement with the NAACP. *Standing Fast* is cast against the broader struggles of the black movement and it presents an important account of the civil rights movement from President Truman to President Carter.

### *A Choice of Weapons*

Gordon Parks

St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986

**I**n this book, Gordon Parks writes of his attempts as a struggling student to survive during the Great Depression, and his descriptions of St. Paul and his experiences differ from that of Wilkins.

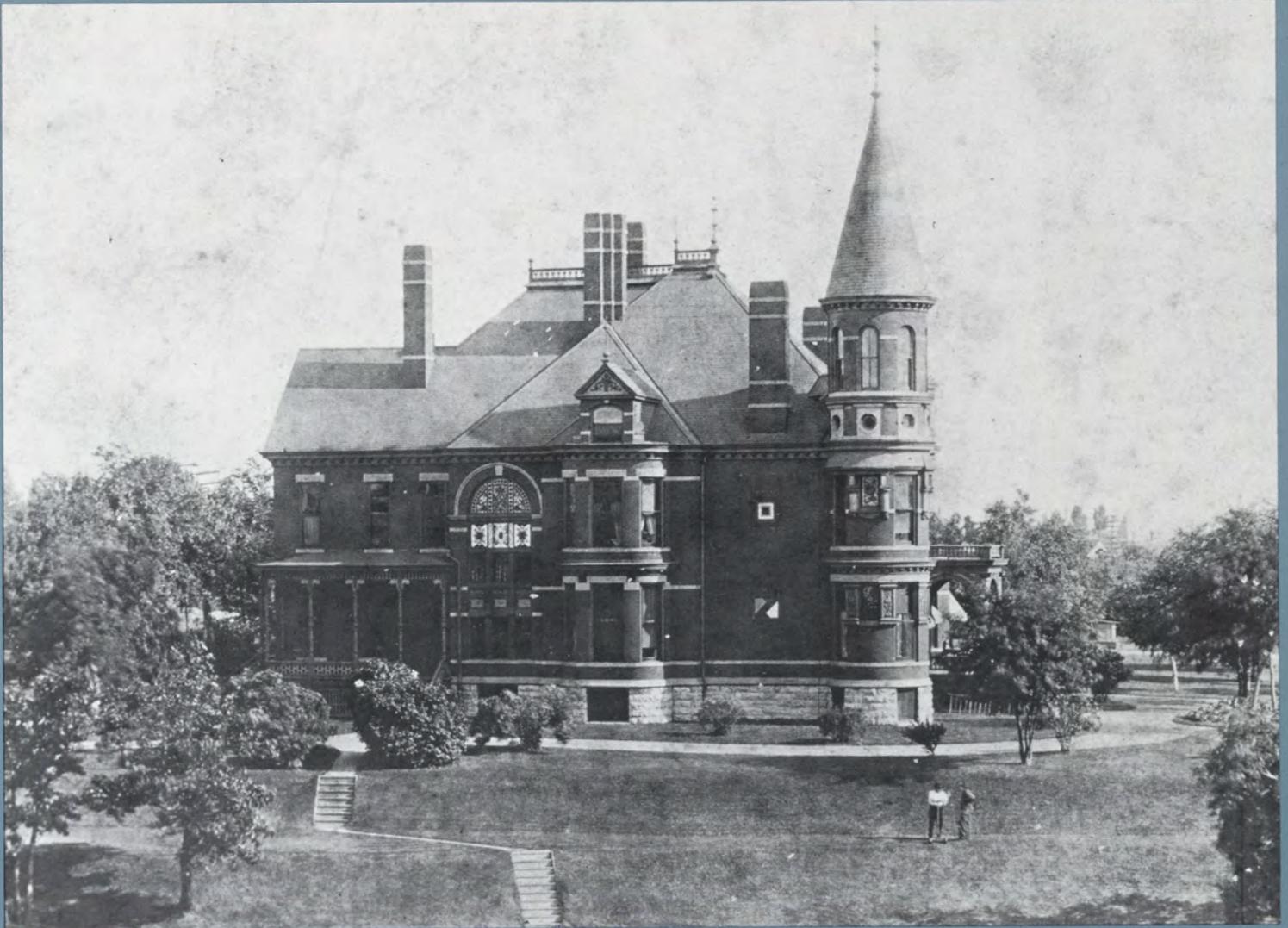
Parks' St. Paul is considerably poorer than Wilkins' and it was more overtly racist. He worked many jobs, ranging from busboy to professional basketball player, in St. Paul, Chicago and New York, before finding steady and challenging work with the Farm Society Administration in 1942. But for much of his stay in St. Paul he did not have a permanent place to sleep so he slept on the streetcars that crisscrossed the Twin Cities.

Parks writes of the racism he encountered: "The White Castle chain was probably the most notorious for this, but after ten of us dumped our sandwiches on the floor one night and doused them with water, the practice stopped, at least at that restaurant."

Racism dogged Parks wherever he went. When he got a steady job as a pianist in a jazz orchestra, he was not allowed to stay at the hotel because he was black.

Taken altogether, Parks' and Wilkins' books present to different view of the St. Paul African-American community at different points in time. They are well worth rereading, along with Fairbanks' gentle memoir.

Steve Haebig  
Macalester College intern



*The Theodore Hamm mansion at 671 Greenbrier Avenue, as it looked around 1900. See page 3.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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