

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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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.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Ramsey 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

West Against East in the Land of Oz

The antagonism between East and West that reared its head during the Panic of 1857 has been a recurring theme in American history. From the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion under President Washington to the suggestion of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, an Arizonan, that the country would be better off if the Eastern seaboard was sawed off and allowed to float out into the Atlantic, Westerners have viewed the financial power of the East with suspicion.

Never was that division more clearly stated than during the 1896 presidential

campaign between William McKinley and "The Boy Orator of the Platte," William Jennings Bryan. A struggling writer gave the debate a whimsical twist in 1900. L. Frank Baum had been born in New York State, moved to South Dakota as a young man, then settled in Chicago. Baum wrote many children's tales of mixed quality and limited popularity, but an infusion of political allegory into one book made him a famous man.

Dorothy, the heroine, came from Kansas, that archetypal Western state, where she lived with her Aunt Em. When poor Aunt Em, Baum relates, "came

there to live she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray. . . . She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled now." After a cyclone takes Dorothy to a strange land, she must battle the Wicked Witch of the West.

But how? Dorothy is told by the Munchkins to travel through Oz along a yellow golden road using her magical silver slippers. To Baum, the treacherous gold standard could be remedied only by silver—the heart of William Jennings

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really took place in that depreciation. The tumble in Wall Street is simply the bursting of the bubble. The money was lost long ago. The Ohio Trust Company was compelled to suspend through the stock operations of its New York bank, and the history of the great systems of credit that went down with it or followed in its wake, is directly traceable to that one cause—stocks, an amusement peculiar to New York."

In St. Paul, a hopeful sign was slowly appearing. Once again, the newspapers were optimistically reporting the possibility of abundant crops to offset the financial crisis suffered by the West. Still, *The St. Paul Advertiser* warned its readers that, "These are 'shaky times'—periodically so—and are justifying the fact that Banks based on State Stocks are safer than any other class, from the fact of their just claims upon the confidence of the people. . . . Avoid all mere shinplaster* currency, refuse it entirely."

The Minnesotian on August 29, 1857, added that for St. Paul, "The tightness of the money market continues unabated, without material change since last week. The supply of money is light, and banks discount but little. Rates remain as usual at three per cent a month. No sale for Second Class Paper.**

*Paper money of small value

**Of secondary value, perhaps private paper.

"The most important monetary news of the week is the announcement of Eastern failures and a consequent panic feeling in New York. [Banker] Truman M. Smith [of St. Paul] received a telegraphic dispatch yesterday, announcing the suspension of John Thompson, Banker, of New York. . . Messrs. Borup and Oakes [of St. Paul] [lost] a considerable amount in drafts and deposits by the Ohio Life and Trust Co., which was deemed a very sound company, but their losses may eventually be paid."

The Advertiser announced on September 12 that, because of the New York money panic, "there have been further bank failures and suspensions" and added that, "The number of business failures is large, embracing some heavy firms. . . 'There's no money in town!' " Even so, St. Paul newspapers frequently chose to come down on the side of optimism and they bristled at what they interpreted as suggestions that the "virtuous West" was in any way responsible for the crisis.

On September 25, a bright, somewhat tongue-in-cheek note was sounded by *The Minnesotian*: "Hearing that this individual was around we looked about yesterday to see what effect his arrival had produced on matters in the city. We found business as brisk as usual in this season, drays, coaches, cabs and express wagons were running to and fro, apparently all busy. We observed numerous buildings going up along the most prominent thoroughfares,

of splendid and elaborate architecture. Back on the quieter avenues, dozens of elegant and durable mansions, and smaller residences by the score were rapidly going up. The clatter of carpenter's tools, and the ring of the mason's implements were heard on every hand. Fine Churches, the Halls of various Societies were observed in course of construction here and there. We failed to see the effects of the ruinous advent of 'Hard Times.' His advent was scarcely perceptible, in fact, . . . we should not have known it, had we not been informed of the fact."

Four days later, *The Advertiser* stated indignantly that, "We have had occasion heretofore to show how completely the lie has been given at every phase of the present revulsion to the Jeremiahs of the Eastern press against the West; how entirely those journals misjudged the seat of the disease; how utterly mistaken in all their premises and deductions. The great revulsion, which they pretended to foresee, was to come from the West, to have been produced by speculations in Western lands, to have ensued on their depreciation and simultaneous explosion of town sites. While these prophecies were right, we repeatedly pointed out the emptiness of the pretended analogies on which these predictions were based, on how entirely these speculations overlooked the facts upon which the prosperity of the West rested.

"The event has shown that Western

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Bryan's platform. Of course, these metals are measured in ounces, or abbreviated, oz. Along the road, Dorothy is joined by allies: the Scarecrow, who appears as a real "hayseed" with no brain but is really quite shrewd; the Tin Woodsman, the Eastern worker, now rusting away in unemployment following the Depression of 1893, his living parts replaced by the industrial revolution with metal machinery that has no heart; and the Cowardly Lion, Bryan himself, a man unsure of his abilities but truly brave underneath. Keeping Dorothy company through it all is little Toto, the Prohibitionists who are political allies.

Problems abound, once they reach the Emerald City, whose beauty must be seen through green colored glasses. It is ruled by the great Wizard, President

McKinley, frightening to behold but really only made of paper mache, noise and lights. The Wizard asks them to kill the Wicked Witch of the West and the intrepid group heads over the prairie.

The Witch sees their approach and tries to destroy them with the forces of nature, sending wolves, crows and then bees at them. Finally, the Winged Monkeys capture the little girl. The Winged Monkeys are not inherently evil, just creatures linked to the land and ill used by powerful forces.

Their leader says, "Once . . . we were a free people, living happily in the great forest, flying from tree to tree, eating nuts and fruit, and doing just as we pleased without calling anybody master." The first American pioneers faced a similar people, at least in Baum's eyes.

The Witch desperately wants the sil-

ver slippers because she, better than the innocent Dorothy, knows their power. Enslaved by the Witch, "Dorothy went to work meekly, with her mind made up to work as hard as she could, for she was glad the Wicked Witch had decided not to kill her." Fearful of her political power, Dorothy finally extinguishes the Witch's life with a bucket of water. Would not the Western farmer welcome the prospect of irrigation?

At least in children's stories and somewhere over the rainbow, the West gained revenge on the political and financial power of the East. (See Henry Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1964), pp. 47-58.)

—Daniel John Hoisington.

Reshaping the River: The Man-made Mississippi

If one of the colorful French voyageurs who once paddled the Mississippi could return as a time traveler, it is highly doubtful that he would recognize the river that was his highway.

Today, the riverfront that stretches through downtown St. Paul is almost entirely man-made, on both the east and west banks. In the 1840s and 1850s, the river was shallower and wider, its banks low and marshy, its surface dotted with sandbars that are now under water. Joseph R. Brown, editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer*, often skipped across the river on ice floes to reach his home on the West Side. During the dead of winter, the river froze solid, isolating the community from supplies and commerce but making sleighing and skating on the river favorite winter past-times.

The area below the eighty-foot downtown bluffs, now paved with trackage, was once an almost impassable swamp that so effectively separated the Upper Landing at the foot of Chestnut Street from the Lower Landing on Jackson Street that the houses and stores clustered about the landings were for a time virtually separate settlements. Eventually the two landings were connected at water level.

From the river, a voyageur paddling downstream could see a half-a-dozen little streams cutting through the bluffs of what

is now downtown St. Paul and flowing into the Mississippi. One flowed out of the beautiful Fountain Cave and through a secluded gorge to the river. A few blocks downriver from the present 35E bridge, the gorge sheltered the hovel Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant erected in 1838 to sell whiskey to river travelers.

Below the Lower Landing, known today as Lambert's Landing but a century and more ago as the Jackson Street Landing, Robert's Landing or St. Paul's Landing, a vast marsh extended from near what is now Sibley Street almost to the foot of Dayton's Bluff. Trout Brook and Phalen Creek drained the marsh and flowed into the Mississippi. During high water, the valley formed a cove where boats could penetrate as far inland as present-day Third Street. And across the river on the West Side there was a large lake, Lamprey Lake, where Holman Field is located today.

All up and down this stretch of the Mississippi, the river front has been altered dramatically, the streams paved over or diverted into culverts. The bog at the base of Dayton's Bluff, the great white sandstone bluffs the Indians called *Im-in-i-ja*, or White Rock, was drained and filled to create more space for trackage. In the process, the mouth of St. Paul's most in-

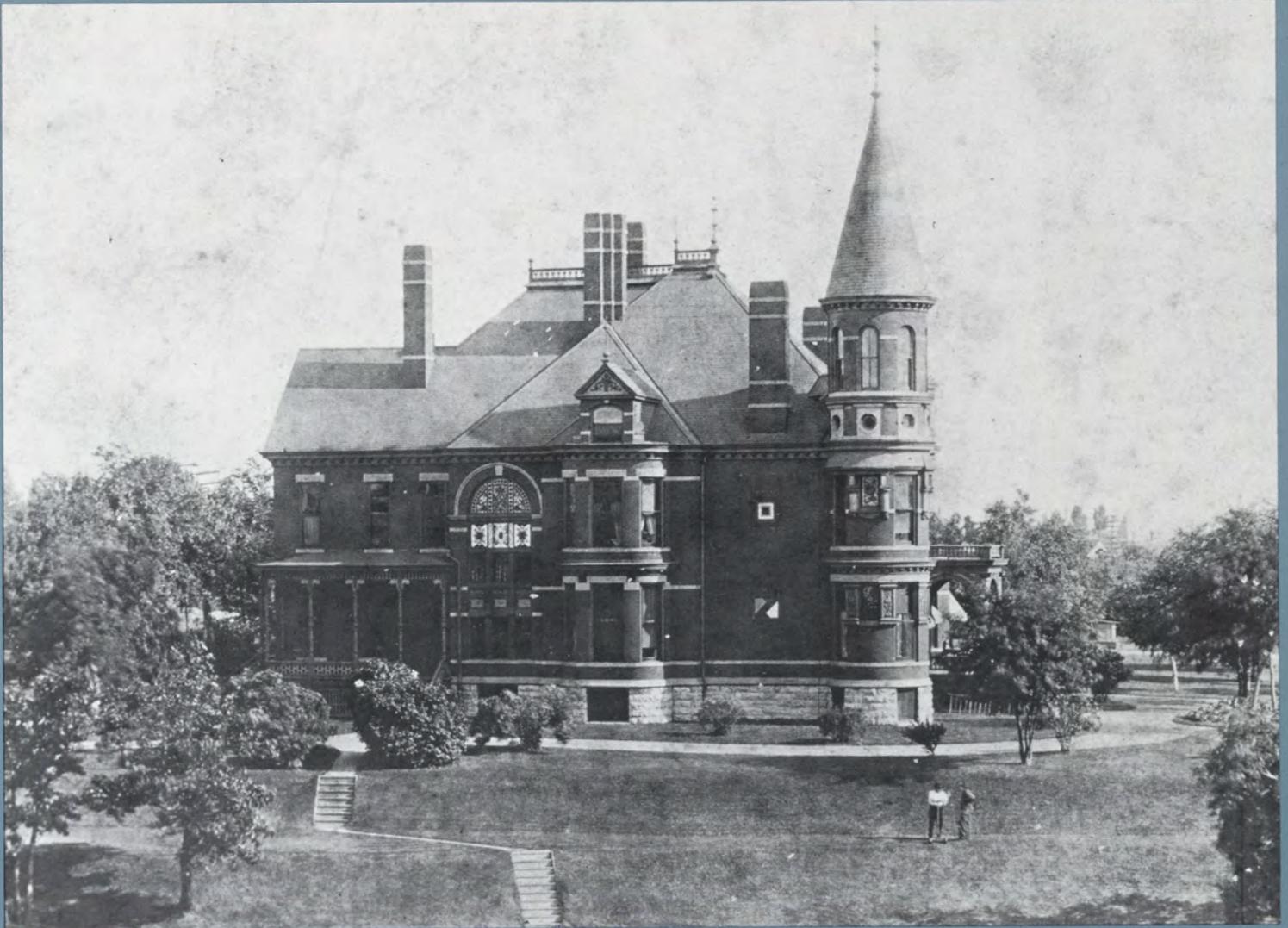
triguing landmark, the romantic and mysterious Carver's Cave, also was cut back.

Filling of the lowlands along the Mississippi effectively narrowed the river. This was the handiwork principally of the railroads that at first laid their tracks on trestles extending out into the river and following a series of sandbars that ran parallel to the river's edge. As time went on, the open spaces between trestles and shoreline were filled in, the trestles abandoned, and tracks laid on the fill.

The reshaping of the riverfront to fit the changing economic needs of a growing commercial center was as much a matter of public subsidy as it was of private enterprise. In the 19th century, the city of St. Paul maintained the public levees, granted rights-of-way to railroads, bought the bonds that financed construction of the rail lines, and encouraged industry to build on the West Side through use of \$1 per year leases.

But the most extensive use of public subsidies, and that which changed the river the most dramatically, was the dredging of the nine-foot channel in the 1930s and the building by the federal government of the twenty-six locks and dams that once again made commercial navigation on the Mississippi possible.

—Virginia B. Kunz



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

R.C.H.S.
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