

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

*Whistles, Crowds, Free Silver*  
**Election Night – 1896**

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**Fall, 1992**

**Volume 27, Number 3**

The  
Mexican-  
Americans  
and their  
Roots in  
St. Paul's  
Past

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Growing Up  
on The  
East Side

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*Mexican women attending a class in English presented by the St. Paul WPA's adult education department—April 23, 1936.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 27, Number 3

Fall, 1992

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**his issue of *Ramsey County History* matches in diversity the varied fall colors we now see all around us. Jane McClure writes in fascinating detail about the history of our Mexican American neighbors on the West Side of St. Paul. Tom Buckley reminds us that the presidential election of 1896, matching Republican McKinley with Democrat Bryan, involved in its day as much hoopla, politics and suspense as the election of 1992 appears to have so far.

Two of our regular features—Growing Up in St. Paul and the Historic Site essay—highlight the colorful East Side neighborhood. And finally we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. Peter Claver Catholic Church and its century of service to St. Paul's African American community in A Matter of Time for 1892. The Editorial Board hopes you will enjoy the richness of Ramsey County's history found in this issue.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

# What's Historic About This Site?

## *St. Casimir's Church*

### *And Its 100-Year Journey of Faith*

*Editor's Note: This is the eleventh in a series of articles on Ramsey County's historic sites.*

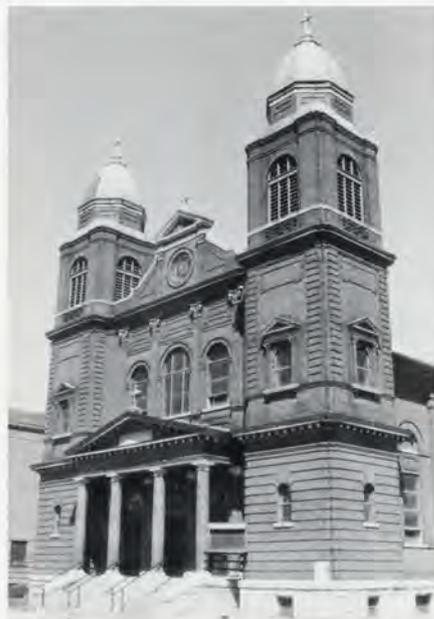
The history of St. Casimir's Church at 937 E. Jessamine Avenue is linked to that of the immigrants from Poland who settled in St. Paul during the latter third of the nineteenth century.

The church, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, is one of three early parishes that were organized to serve the Polish people. The first group of Polish immigrants to St. Paul joined forces with the Czechs to erect St. Stanislaus Church in 1870 off West Seventh Street and behind the C.S.P.S. (the Czecho-Slovak Protective Society) hall at 382 Michigan Avenue.

When a number of Polish immigrants began to move out of the West Seventh Street neighborhood and into other areas of St. Paul, the need for a second Polish language congregation became apparent. In 1879 St. Adalbert's Church was organized. Their first church was the former St. Louis Church building which was moved from Tenth and Cedar Streets to Charles and Galtier.

In 1888 some members of St. Adalbert's parish launched an effort to form a parish that would serve Poles who lived on the East Side. Calling themselves the St. Casimir Prince Society, in 1890 this group purchased the lots where St. Casimir's now stands at a cost of \$1,500, but their first church building was not constructed until 1892. The present church was built in 1904 during the tenure of the Reverend D. Kobylinski and dedicated in October of that year by Archbishop John Ireland.

*(See Growing Up in St. Paul on page 22 for more about St. Casimir's Church.)*



Estimated cost of construction was \$35,000. The church is fifty-nine feet wide, 120 feet deep and forty-five feet in height. It was built of brick with steel roof truss supports. Church records do not list an architect or builder, although its sophisticated design suggests a trained architect.

The church represents the Beaux Arts style of architectural design. Its symmetrical facade is dominated by a three-and-a-half story square bell tower at each corner with small rounded and arched windows on the first and second stories.

The church originally had two galvanized iron spires, but these eventually were removed, according to the church history, and replaced by more enduring spires of brick and cement. In 1960 the church was redecorated. Its cornerstone reads "Kosciol, Sw. Kasimierza Kr., R. P. 1904.

The role the church has played in the life of the neighborhood is indicated by

its setting within a complex which includes St. Casimir's School and two convent or parish house buildings. A black cast iron fence surrounds most of the block.

The East Side is one of St. Paul's oldest neighborhoods and it has been one of its most densely populated. Its southwest boundary originally consisted of two small streams which flowed south and almost converged as they emptied into the Mississippi River. Trout Brook flowed along what is now Interstate 35E. Phalen Creek flowed out of Lake Phalen and through a deep ravine that separates the East Side District from Dayton's Bluff.

Both streams were partially filled in after the Civil War when the railroads used the valley as a track bed for railroad lines that served the industrial Lower-town area in downtown St. Paul. The valley also was the site of one of the city's earliest settlements.

The first residents were temporary settlers living in log cabins strung along the banks of Trout Brook and Phalen Creek. One of the settlers was Edward Phelan whose name (its spelling changed) became attached to the lake and the creek. Beginning in the 1840s and 1850s, Swedish immigrants began moving into the area and the valley became known as Swede Hollow. They built shanties, modest dwellings and commercial buildings along the bottom of the ravine. Swede Hollow eventually was occupied by a succession of immigrants, including Irish, Italians, Poles and Mexican Americans. Many of them moved up and out of the valley as they found employment and more substantial homes. The city condemned Swede Hollow in 1956 and its homes were demolished as part of urban renewal. The area is now a park.



*Saint Paul, Minn. Public Baths, Beach and Bathers, Harriet Island*

*The public baths, beaches and bathers at Harriet Island. Views of St. Paul's parks, as well as the city's vibrant downtown, were popular with postcard publishers, Robert J. Stumm observes in his article beginning on page 18.*

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

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