

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
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To The **N**th Degree™

Fall, 1995

Volume 30, Number 3

# The 108-Year History of Norwest St. Paul—

Page 4



A portion of Ta-coumba Aiken's mural for Norwest Bank St. Paul. See pages 3 and 17.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 30, Number 3

Fall, 1995

## CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** After 108 Years a Transformation  
Norwest Bank St. Paul and its Century-old Heritage  
*James B. Bell*
- 18** Banking on Minnesota's Unfettered Frontier—  
When Barter Was the Name of the Only Game in Town  
*James B. Bell*
- 22** 'Cheery, Refined and Comfortable'  
Episcopal Church Home Begins Its Second Century  
With Its 'Caring Services' that Help the Elderly  
*Marcia Fotsch*
- 24** Growing Up in St. Paul  
A Boyhood Resting on the City's Seven Hills—  
But Once Upon a Time There Were Eight  
*John S. Sonnen*
- 26** Books, Etc.
- 27** What's Historic About This Site?  
The Blair Flats

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in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen  
in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr.

### Ta-coumba Aiken and "The Spirit of St. Paul"

**S**t. Paul painter, sculptor and muralist Ta-coumba Aiken painted the mural, a portion of which graces the cover of this issue of *Ramsey County History*, for Norwest Bank St. Paul's sparkling new retail banking superstore. On page 17 he speaks of how he envisioned his work, "The Spirit of St. Paul—Now and Forever."

## *“Cheery, Refined and Comfortable”*

# Episcopal Church Home Begins Its Second Century With Its ‘Caring Services’ that Help the Elderly

*Marcia Fotsch*

The history of The Episcopal Church Home of Minnesota parallels the history of Minnesota and the Upper Midwest, and the struggles of the Home through the years are a microcosm of the travails faced by the hardy souls who populated the state.

It was in 1894 that Sister Annette Relf, the first consecrated Episcopal deaconess in Minnesota, founded a “home for the aged and infirmed” in Minneapolis. Mrs. C. C. (Emily) King, Sister Annette and Dr. John Wright, all of St. Paul, saw the need for a home for women who had reached the autumn of their lives. They wanted a “cheery, refined, and comfortable home where, for a small amount paid monthly, a woman could feel herself not a subject of charity but a self-respecting member of a household.”

Sister Annette was a remarkable woman who’d had a remarkable career in Minnesota even before establishing the Episcopal Church Home. She was born in Kentucky in 1840, trained as a deaconess in Pennsylvania, and arrived in Minnesota in 1871. She taught for a time in a Faribault parish, then served, beginning in 1877, as matron and nurse of the Cottage Hospital, the forerunner of St. Barnabas Hospital in Minneapolis.

In 1882 new challenges beckoned. Ethel McClure quotes Sister Annette’s decision in *More Than a Roof*, her fine study of Minnesota’s Poor Farms and homes for the aged:

“‘With your approbation and blessing last August,’ Sister Annette wrote Bishop Henry B. Whipple on Mary 12, 1883, ‘I rented a house and made a beginning of a Church Orphanage. Though expecting aid and sympathy of the Church throughout the Diocese, I assumed responsibility of all the debts . . . There is a pledge of \$500 towards a new building . . . It is God’s work and he will provide the

means.’”

This new venture became the Sheltering Arms home for children, which eventually came to rest on the West River Road in south Minneapolis. Next, Sister Annette founded the Church Home for Babies at 2110 Fifth Avenue South in Minneapolis.

“The object of the home,” McClure quoted a contemporary report as stating, “is to prevent mothers from giving away their babies, by providing a home within their income, allowing them to see their children often, thereby keeping up the parental love.”

Sister Annette’s biographer, McClure noted, wrote that during her years at Sheltering Arms and the Church Home for Babies, “she received no salary, but on the contrary, used her own money in her work, while her clothing, be it spoken with reverence, could hardly have been more expensive than that of the Blessed Lord himself.”

The “home for aged and infirm persons”, which she launched in 1894, was to be Sister Annette’s last project. However, money did not come easily. She soon moved the Home to St. Paul, where it occupied a cottage for a time at 719 Martin Street, then a house at 527 John Street. In September of 1897 the Episcopal diocese took it over and incorporated it as the Church Home of Minnesota, dedicated primarily to the care of aged women. Governed by a board of six trustees, all of whom were required to be Episcopal clergymen, the Home was run, under their supervision, by a board of managers composed of Episcopal churchwomen.

It remained, however, a struggle to support the Home and in the following years it would make several more moves: to 549 Olive Street, to 509 Lafayette and in 1905 to 587 Fuller Street where it re-

mained until 1920.

As was only too customary at the time, Sister Annette went door-to-door raising funds, but there also was support from the community. In Ethel McClure’s words, “Without generous donations from Andrew Schoch and other St. Paul merchants and the efforts of board members who drove their carriages to the South St. Paul stockyards to return with loads of ham, bacon, and lard, it is doubtful that the home could have survived. At one time only a check for \$100 from James J. Hill kept the doors open.”

In 1909 Sister Annette herself became a resident. The following year, chemical fire extinguishers were added, a Mrs. Berry moved her piano from her room to the parlor, and neighbors provided fresh vegetables from their gardens.

In 1915 Sister Annette died there. She had not lived to see the growth of the Home and the beginning of its modernization that began five years later with the purchase, for \$40,000, of the Home’s present site at 1879 Feronia Avenue in St. Paul’s Midway district.

An electric washer and mangle were added in 1921, three telephones in 1923 and a Sagamore radio console in 1927. In 1922 the carriage house was remodeled to provide a six-bed infirmary, and the state health inspector informed the board that there wasn’t a cleaner or better place in the city.

*The Minnesota Missionary*, an Episcopal Diocesan publication, quoted Mrs. Sarah Ingalls, a resident of the Home about that time, as declaring that “It was a wonderful sight to see the pleased and joyous expressions in our ladies’ faces when they were ushered into their new home. The new infirmary and diet kitchen are splendid additions for the comfort of those who need medical assistance and attention. It is lovely in every



*The Episcopal Church Home at 1879 Feronia in 1920. Photo from the Episcopal Church Home archives.*

way and all feel thankful that so much has been done.”

With the new decade of the 1930s came a new Constitution, and an all-woman board took over the entire operation of the Home. Planning for an addition began in 1935 with the receipt of a \$50,000 gift from Isabella T. Cooke. That June, plans were approved and construction began. An adjoining house was purchased in 1937 and another house behind the Home was acquired two years later. In 1939 Bishop Keeler presided over the blessing of the addition and the other buildings in the complex.

During World War II, a victory garden was planted, and it included red, white and blue flowers. It was a period, too, when Bishop Keeler cautioned the board about the necessity for careful planning. Stained glass windows for the chapel were put on hold because lead was difficult to acquire. It was hard to raise the money to pay the staff and finding nurses, with so many away at war, was a challenge. Each nurse at the Home worked fifty-six hours a week in 1943 and they were assisted by many board members. In spite of sugar rationing, board members and friends each donated one jar of jelly to the Home’s cupboard.

The end of the war brought changes in how the nation cared for its elderly, and by 1947 the county Welfare Board was able to provide assistance to those in

need. The Home’s board also hired its first attorney that year. With the end of gas rationing and cars newly available, the Home’s residents began to enjoy auto rides.

By the early 1950s, the Home had seventy residents, and planning for a nursing home began. As the decade progressed, simple additions were made. A bird bath and two television sets were donated, but when a Milwaukee man offered the Home a sizeable donation with the stipulation that it be open only to Episcopalians, his offer was politely declined.

In 1960 the board recognized the need for a newer, more up-to-date facility and appointed a committee to direct the project. The architectural firm of Lang, Raugland and Brunet was hired and architect George Entriakin was assigned to the project. A large house on Lynnhurst Avenue was purchased, named King Hall and used as a rooming house for Church Home residents while the other three houses were demolished. Construction of a 104-bed nursing home began in 1963.

Nony Jahnke, the Home’s superintendent during this period, remembered the excitement the project generated: “When the news came to us that the homes were to be demolished and a new structure erected—wow! What a cleaning out of closets, under the stairways and hide-aways occurred. We moved all fifty residents into King Hall. No one felt sorry

for herself—life was good, interesting, and comfortable. There was so much to watch. We had a lot of window-watching engineers. In fact, one resident noted that they were not ‘doing it right.’ After checking with our architect, it was found they were indeed not doing it right, so bricks had to be removed one-by-one, and the windows of the chapel moved.”

On October 10, 1965, the new home was dedicated, with Bishop Philip McNairy presiding. In 1970 its name was officially changed to The Episcopal Church Home of Minnesota (ECH). A second addition of forty-six new rooms was completed and dedicated by 1971.

In 1982 the ECH purchased 12.5 acres from the Sheltering Arms School for \$950,000 and a cooperative apartment project of 221 units for seniors was planned. It was named Becketwood, combining the name of Thomas à Becket, the great medieval archbishop of Canterbury, with the wooded glen in which it was to be built. Construction began in 1984 and the first owner moved into the building in 1986.

There was more to come in the ECH program for the elderly. In 1991 the ECH board of directors, working with the Episcopal Corporation for the Elderly, broke ground for an assisted living facility adjacent to the Church Home in St. Paul. The name chosen was “Iris Park Commons,” citing the historic nature of the beautiful little Iris Park across the street from the Home. It opened in 1992 and now provides housing and supportive services for more than forty seniors.

During the past 101 years, the Church Home has grown enormously. The modest facility of 1894 has evolved into a complex of caring services, including the ECH Foundation; Episcopal Health and Housing Services; an overall planning and coordinating parent body; and the Episcopal Corporation for the Elderly, an outreach arm for consulting and developing new projects.

However, one thing has remained unchanged—the tradition of caring begun by Sister Annette continues.

*Marcia Fotsch is Community Affairs Manager for The Episcopal Church Home of Minnesota.*



*Sister Annette Relf who founded the Episcopal Church Home of Minnesota, now beginning its second century of service. See article beginning on page 22.*

**R.C.H.S.**

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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