

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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Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported
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"

St. 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."

Letters to the Editor

Ma Barker and Her Girls

In the Winter, 1995, edition, you aroused my interest when you identified the name of a roadhouse ran by Ma Barker during the time of Prohibition. On doing my own research to determine the exact time she operated Paradise Park, I failed to find any direct references to it. But I came across something and I would like to see if it could be verified.

In the book *Look for the Women* by Jay R. Nash, he's written a short report of Ma Barker. Nash interviewed "Blackie" Audett, who robbed banks with the Barkers in 1932 and '33 and this is what he said: "... and it was [Alvin Karpis'] job to go out through the Minnesota countryside—the Barkers always hid out in country places up there—and find these poor, dumb farm girls, and bring 'em back to ugly old Ma and, God, she would abuse these poor girls terribly and then Freddie (her son) and Karpis and another gang member would kill the girls at Ma's orders... Why, there must be thirty or forty bodies of young girls still at the bottom of a half dozen Minnesota lakes to this day!" He interviewed Audett in 1979.

Is there any record that during that time there was a large number of young women reported missing and never accounted for? If so, was it ever tied in with Ma Barker and her gang? All other publications I've read concerning Ma Barker never mentioned anything like this.

—Bob Barklow, West St. Paul.

We've consulted Paul Maccabee, author of the fascinating and just-published book, *John Dillinger Slept Here: A Crooks' Tour of Crime and Corrup-*



Ma Barker. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

tion in St. Paul, 1920–1936, and this is his response: *There's no question that Ma Barker despised the girlfriends of the gang members. Probably she simply was jealous. Whether Ma ever ordered these girls killed is completely contrary to anything in the thousands of FBI files I saw. "Blackie" Audett's story is part of the glamorous lore—nostalgia—of the crime era, and he evidently was a marvelous storyteller.*

Epidemics Past and Present

The recent outbreaks of meningitis and Legionnaires disease reminded me of a long-ago family tragedy, the death of my grandmother's brother in the great Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918.

They were living in St. Paul and she remembered that people wore masks to try to prevent the spread of the disease.

—Harriet Putman, Anoka.

This fearsome epidemic is still recalled with dread. As the disease began to spread, St. Paul physician Dr. Egil Boeckmann, a member of the state health board, warned his fellow physicians that this particularly virulent form of influenza "spreads like fire, very severe in onset and very prone to complications of Lobar Pneumonia... I want to impress upon the Board that you are dealing with the most serious epidemic of any kind you have ever been up against."

The Right-to-Vote

Since we're observing the seventy-fifth anniversary of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote, I'm curious as to when Minnesota ratified the amendment.

—Julia Hill, Lake Elmo.

On September 8, 1919, St. Paul women celebrated with a "Jubilee Banquet" at the St. Paul Hotel.

Dancing at the Lexington

My mother once told me that she and my father used to go dancing at the Lexington Pavilion back when they were courting. Where was this located?

—Georgianna Allen, St. Paul.

At Lexington and University. The Pavilion advertised "25,000 feet of dancing floor smooth as glass." Dances costing 50 cents for men and 25 cents for women were held every Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday night.



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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