

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

Sinclair Lewis  
Was Wrong  
*See Letters*

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Fall, 2001

Volume 36, Number 3

*The Financial Angel Who Rescued 3M*

The Life and Times of Lucius Pond Ordway

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*Lucius Ordway with his daughter Katharine around 1909. Photograph from H. H. Irvine, III. See article beginning on page 4.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 36, Number 3

Fall, 2001

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*Virginia Brainard Kunz and John M. Lindley*

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Reading the story of my great-grandfather, Lucius Pond Ordway, written for this issue of *Ramsey County History*, was exciting for me because I really knew very little about him. Today those who do know about his career typically are aware only of his efforts to keep the fledgling Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company—3M—afloat during its uncertain early years. Many men and women who played a role in the history of Minnesota have extensive files at the Minnesota Historical Society, but when I looked there for information about Ordway, I found only five photographs of him. I knew there had to be more to his story.

Working from a few specific leads provided by those of us who are his descendants, the Ramsey County Historical Society has been able to construct an interesting account of Ordway's life, his family, his many business associates, his varied contributions to the city of St. Paul, and his era that spanned one of the liveliest periods in our states' history. Many people contributed to this work. John Lindley did the research into Ordway's life and career, and Virginia Kunz turned these raw materials into a highly readable story. Along the way, they had help from family members John G. and Marge Ordway, Alexandra Bjorklund, and David Nicholson, who shared their memories, photographs, and family papers.

I'm particularly grateful to Carl Drake who gave of his time and memories of the Drake and Ordway families. Kevin Howley, a genealogist with a wide knowledge of New England families, volunteered his time and expertise. Jim Erickson of the Ramsey County Historical Society's staff, provided information about St. Paul's Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church, and Molly Spillman, the Society's curator and archivist, helped gather Ordway photographs. Thanks also are due to Martha Mitchell, archivist at Brown University; Eileen McCormack, associate curator of the Hill manuscripts at the James J. Hill Reference Library; and Loralee Bloom, 3M project archivist at the Minnesota Historical Society.

My final thanks go to Priscilla Farnham, executive director of the Ramsey County Historical Society, for her support for the idea of finding out more about Ordway and her willingness to see this project through to completion. I hope you enjoy reading this biographical account of the life and times of Lucius P. Ordway as much as I did.

*Richard H. Nicholson*, member of the Editorial Board

# Letters to the Editor

## More on Landmark Center

At the time I wrote the article, "Old Federal Courts Building—Beautiful, Unique," about the architectural style of the building that was first published in Ramsey County History twenty-nine years ago, not much was then known about the office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. Locally, the building then generally was attributed to James Knox Taylor, Supervising Architect of the Treasury from 1898 to 1912, a supposition which I questioned. A bronze plaque on the building subsequently proclaimed A. J. Edbrooke, the first of six Supervising Architects connected with the building, as its designer.

Your readers might be interested to know that five years after the article appeared, I presented some of the results of my later research about the Office of the Supervising Architect in a book which I wrote about the building, *A Landmark Reclaimed* (Minnesota Landmarks, St. Paul, 1977). Evidence was irrefutable that by the 1890s the Supervising Architect had become a bureaucrat overseeing a staff of more than 500 employees and did no designing himself. By then a highly standardized collaborative design process depended upon the individual contributions of many people whose names today are unknown. A recent book by Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) is an expanded study of the subject.

Eileen Michels, St. Paul.

## Sinclair Lewis Was Wrong

The University of Idaho Press recently published *Minnesota Diary, 1942-1946*, the diary of Sinclair Lewis edited by



Grace Flandrau at 548 Portland Avenue. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

George Killough, a professor at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth. In his diary, Lewis writes that on September 28, 1942, he went to Grace Flandrau's at the old Flandrau house on Pleasant Avenue in St. Paul: "Down under Summit, with the old farm still stretching up back of it; frame house of the 60s; small library, old Turkish room, picture gallery—built by the old judge to house portrait of his wife which son Charles took out in the yard and burned. Small library also with high top book shelves—'to breed mice,'" said Grace.

Where on Pleasant was that house situated? As many times as I drove old Pleasant from the foot of the streecar tunnel to its intersection with Jefferson, I don't recall any property that could fit that description. The book is a delight,

especially for one who lived in the Twin Cities during World War II and remembers much of what he writes about concerning the same. I got my copy through the St. Paul Public Library

William S. Fallon, St. Paul.

No wonder you couldn't find the "old Flandrau house" on Pleasant. Sinclair Lewis either was confused or simply mistaken. The Flandrau house is at 548 Portland. Other than that, Lewis probably did visit Grace Flandrau there. He spent some time in St. Paul while he was working on a novel.

## The Depression Revisited

With the economic downturn that began last spring, and the turmoil created by the terrorists of September 11, we're reading daily about people losing their jobs right and left. Those of us who lived through the Great Depression of the 1930s remember another challenging time. Perhaps history has something to tell us about these experiences.

Joan Louise Watkins, St. Paul.

Differences in time and circumstances make it difficult to compare the present ordeal with the past. Although the Depression was beginning to ease by the mid-1930s, in 1937 there still were 43,750 men and women partially or entirely out of work in Minneapolis and another 26,047 in St. Paul. Jobs and savings had been wiped out, the poor continued to swell the relief lines, and families by the thousands lost their homes. It was a national calamity during which newly-created governmental agencies struggled to help a suffering nation. Only the outbreak of World War II stopped the Depression in its tracks as the country's industrial plants and its armed forces put people back to work.



*Crane & Ordway about 1906 and 1907 when it was at E. Fifth Street and Rosabel. The architectural firm of Reed and Stem designed the building in 1904-1905. See article beginning on page 4.*

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