

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

*Growing Up in St. Paul*  
Random Recollections  
of Grace Flandrau

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**Fall 2008**

Volume 43, Number 3

*Pith, Heart, and Nerve*

**Truman M. Smith: From Banker to Market Gardener**

*Barry L. and Joan Miller Cotter*

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*An engraved portrait of Truman M. Smith from about 1857 by the Rawdon, Wright & Hatch Company. Engraving courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

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*Ramsey County History* is published quarterly  
by the Ramsey County Historical Society,  
323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St.  
Paul, Minn. 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in  
U.S.A. Copyright © 2008, Ramsey County  
Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 43, Number 3

Fall 2008

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations  
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program  
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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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.  
and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

### A Message from the Editorial Board

Today’s headlines blare news of bank failures and foreclosure notices. But in October 1857, when New York banks failed, there were no federal bailouts and no financial “safety nets”: eighty percent of St. Paul businesses went under. Truman Smith, who had pinned his hopes on fervent land speculation in the young frontier town, lost his bank and later, his house. In this issue, Barry L. and Joan Miller Cotter tell Smith’s harrowing story. But stay tuned for a future issue of our magazine, in which Smith “reinvents” his career. And check out Minnesota Public Radio’s website at mpr.org, where the archives (search “Truman Smith”) contain Dan Olson’s July 2008 report on the Panic of 1857, based in part on the Cotters’s research.

Also in this issue: John Lindley’s look at Crawford Livingston’s role in railroad financing in the 1880s; a personal story of Blair Klein’s 1950s road trip with his aunt, writer Grace Flandrau, in her green Packard sedan; and Steve Trimble’s review of four books celebrating 150 years of Minnesota statehood.

*Anne Cowie,*  
Chair, Editorial Board

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# *Growing Up In St. Paul*

## Random Recollections of Grace Flandrau

*Horace Blair Flandrau Klein*

**M**y earliest recollections of Grace Flandrau fit into that category of very vague but nonetheless poignant memories of a personality rather than a personage. I do remember my mother taking me to the Flandrau house on Pleasant Avenue and being somewhat overwhelmed by the dark, heavy Victorian air of the parlor. My feeling is that I spent more time visiting with one or another of the parrots than I did participating in any conversations or other aspects of such visits.

The feeling that I can summon up at this point is one of being removed by more than time from Grace Flandrau. It was as if more than two generations separated us. Although I recall nothing specific, I am confident that she was warm and solicitous of this very juvenile namesake of her husband. At the same time, there was something almost ethereal about speech and manner and environment that created a great distance.

I can't tell you how often we visited that house: my guess is that I wasn't there more than two or three times.

There were those times, too, when she would come to [our house at] 768 Goodrich. I seem to remember her bringing the parrots when she was preparing to leave for an extended period. If I remember correctly, one of the parrots was named "Albert." I don't remember the other parrot's name. [Ed.: The Flandraus' other parrot was named "Lauro," Spanish for "parrot."] Most certainly, I didn't get along particularly well with either of them. As I sit here now and try to remember specifics, only hazy, very subjective feelings return to me. In retrospect, it seems to me that the parrots had the same, quite haughty grandeur that "Aunt Geese" (as we called her) exuded. (I suppose that we began calling her "Aunt Geese" when we were very young and unable to say "Grace" properly.)

If I do remember her at our home, it was as the center of attention whenever she did visit. She talked a good deal,

but, it seemed to me, always so far over my head and beyond me that I was best advised to listen. I'm sure that I beat a rather hasty retreat when I saw the opening. My reluctance was not a result of any unkindness on her part. Rather, it was the very typical and, I suppose, predictable discomfort of an adolescent in the presence of a person who was so dominant.

During my adolescence, whatever connection I had with Aunt Grace was premised on my very clear understanding that she was an especially close friend of my mother's. The two of them seemed to have the same incisive intellect and appreciation for abstraction and adventure that made them both so captivating. It seemed to me that they would talk at great length about things that I simply couldn't comprehend or didn't have much interest in. And yet I admired them both tremendously.

I can't even guess when it was that Aunt Geese sold the house and moved to Tucson. I visited her there only once. I believe that it was in the winter of 1956. I had spent the previous summer as an American Field Service Exchange Student in Turkey. I had made a number of friends who lived in the Tucson and Phoenix area, and one way or another I wangled my way to Arizona to visit them.

I can remember Aunt Geese's very subtle home but remember absolutely nothing about the visit itself. In retrospect, I'm not even certain that she was at home. The house was low and although



*Grace Flandrau in the mid-1950s when she did the research for her article on Minnesota for *Holiday* magazine. Photo from the Flandrau Family Papers, 1856–1968 [MS 1018], Arizona Historical Society/Tucson, AHS photo 78547. Reproduced by permission.*

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typical in many respects of the adobe architecture of the southwest, it had a grandeur that was entirely consistent with her self-confident characteristics—not a bit gaudy or pretentious, but clearly the home of someone of substance.

I did have an opportunity to spend about two weeks with Aunt Geese, but I am going to have trouble remembering the year with any precision. If you are really interested, you could find the article that she ultimately wrote for the then popular *Holiday* magazine about Minnesota. [Ed.: Grace Flandrau's story, "Minnesota," appeared in *Holiday*, August 1955.]

I suspect that it was out of frustration with my indolent presence that my mother

arranged for me to serve as a chauffeur for Aunt Geese, who had been engaged by *Holiday* magazine to write a general background/travelogue piece about the state of Minnesota. In any event, I had no reason not to take the job. As I recall, the pay was quite good and I had always been very fond of Aunt Geese.

The day for our departure arrived and someone dropped me off at Joy Brothers Packard to pick up the brand new four-door, dark green Packard sedan that she had purchased especially for this trip. You can imagine the overwhelming feelings I had as I went back to the shop to get the car. I really wasn't sure that I should be driving this elegant masterpiece of the American automakers' art in the mid-fifties, especially when it was brand new. Nevertheless, with some of the élan with which a teen-ager can pull such things off, I got behind the wheel and managed to get the Packard out of the shop and on my way to the St. Paul Hotel, where I was scheduled to pick up Aunt Geese.

Miraculously, I made it down Pleasant Avenue and to the hotel uneventfully. I parked directly in front of the front door of the hotel and she was waiting inside. A bellman or two carried out what seemed to be an incredible number of bags for what was to be such a short trip, and I remember well Aunt Geese coming down the stairs in her fine suit with a fur over her arm. This would have been in July or August, yet it didn't seem out of place at all in her very cursory trip around the car in what I thought was a tour or admiration. Not so.

When she got to the back of the car, she was aghast. Pointing to the small chromium logo that said "Joy Brothers Packard, St. Paul" placed relatively inconspicuously in the lower left-hand corner of the trunk lid, she said "What is that?"

Any explanations that either the doorman or the bellman proffered were probably very humble under the circumstances, as she made it very plain that she had no intention of advertising an automobile agency on the back of her new car. I was instructed to return it immediately to the Joy Brothers facility and that she would be in touch with them by phone.

I can remember being just as surprised and effectively speechless when I took



*The author in 1957, the year he graduated from St. Paul Academy. Photo courtesy of Blair Klein.*

the car back as was Mr. Joy himself. I doubt that anyone had ever complained of this routine imprimatur in all his years in the automobile business. He pointed out to me, as though I had anything to say about it, that the logo was attached to the trunk by drilling two small holes and attaching with screws. Her insistence that it be removed meant that he would have to fill in those holes and repaint that corner of the trunk, which would take a day or two. I was just smart enough to know that I ought to keep out of this one, and allowed as how he could talk to Aunt Geese about whatever he was going to do and that I would be available when the car was ready to go. I don't remember anything about the next day or two, but we finally did set out on our journey without anything but the word "Packard" on the trunk lid of the car.

The day we left and every day of the trip was hot and sultry as only Minnesota can be in the late summer. Nevertheless, Aunt Geese wore a suit that and every day of the trip. I never saw her in anything but a very fine suit, not exactly what we would call a business suit today but rather something she had purchased either at Frank Murphy's or perhaps in Arizona. I remember brown and maroon tweeds,

with the fine silk blouses that I assumed only wealthy, older women wore. She always had on some jewelry and I recall it as being quietly elegant rather than in any way ostentatious. She always wore a hat as well, sometimes wide-brimmed, other times quite small. I don't happen to remember whether or not she smoked, but I do know that I had to sneak my cigarettes whenever I could.

She had planned the trip very carefully, knowing exactly where we were going and why we were going there from the very beginning. She disclosed our route to me only generally, and I had the feeling that she wanted to leave herself some latitude for side trips or changes in the itinerary as the situation demanded. Oddly enough, I remember only a couple of the specific places that we visited. The *Holiday* magazine article would probably reveal our itinerary by deduction if nothing else.

What I remember most accurately is the day that we visited the Le Sueur canning plant. By prior arrangement, we were ushered into the offices of some official or another, and this was one of the few occasions I was actually with her while she conducted her interview. By this time, I had developed a sense of what she was really interested in and what would impress her, and I remember well squirming in my chair in that office while the company official droned on and wondering when she was going to lower the boom on him for all his self-congratulatory dribble about the company. I was surprised that she very politely if somewhat condescendingly conducted the interview and declined a tour through the facilities as we left.

When we got to the car, she commented with words to the effect that ". . . We have had enough of that. Now let's go see how those vegetables really get in the cans."

Off we went into the countryside on what I thought was a somewhat aimless trek. Suddenly she found what she wanted, asked me to stop, and that grand lady got out of the car, notebook in hand, and trudged right across a freshly harvested field to where a group of Mexican workers was standing. I didn't accompany her on that trip. She stayed out there a long

time and, when she got back, seemed terribly comfortable and satisfied.

In another town, somewhere in southern Minnesota, we visited a Campbell Soup factory. I don't remember much about the visit or whether or not we actually toured the premises. What I do remember is her comment afterwards that she had never thought much of Campbell's soup in the past and certainly didn't now.

Each day of the trip seemed much like another. We would meet in the morning after breakfast. I don't remember whether she ate in her room or in a restaurant or café, but she very much preferred to have her breakfast alone. We would generally stop at whatever the best facility was wherever we were for lunch. Lunch was not a major production at all, but I do remember that she abhorred the typical small town café, and would always seek out something nicer and cleaner. At the end of the day, we would find a hotel or motel, and she would set a time at which we were to meet for supper. Inevitably, we took our supper at a place that also served drinks. If I remember correctly, she always had a martini before dinner. Maybe she had two.

More specifically, I remember that she was very impatient with the regular ground pepper on whatever restaurant table we happened to be at. She carried in her purse a small silver pepper mill and unobtrusively used it on every occasion. I also remember that every evening she wore her fur regardless of the outside temperature or the ambience of the place at which we were dining. I do not remember that her eating habits were those of a gourmet. She always seemed much more concerned about the appearance and cleanliness of the restaurant than the bill of fare itself.

Obviously, in the course of two weeks of being together eight or ten hours a day, we must have had many conversations. As I sit here I can't imagine that, at least at the meal, we didn't converse a great deal. Unfortunately, I can remember exactly nothing about any particular conversation or even their general tone or tenor. I have to acknowledge now that it is almost shameful that I could have spent as much time with such an imposing personality and seem to have gotten so little

out of it. That is perhaps more a result of my not having put much into it than anything else.

I was young, on something of a lark and that very real distance I could remember from my earliest days seemed to be present during this trip as well. It was never acoustic, abusive, or in any other way unpleasant. Instead, it was just there.



*A portrait of Grace Flandrau that dates from about 1936, a time when she was at the height of her fame as a novelist, journalist, and lecturer. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

I was reminded more than once about my manners and remembered very quickly what I had been taught at home, i.e., that one opened doors for ladies, stood up when they came to the table, and in general paid substantial deference to all my elders.

What was interesting about Aunt Geese was that more often than not she adopted her arrogant stature only when we were around people who were trying too hard to impress her. She enjoyed visiting with workers of any sort and they seemed surprisingly comfortable in their presence. She seemed to disdain pretense on anyone else's part, and when she came upon it, could rebuke them with as much as a look. In general, I sensed that she had a certain disdain for the decidedly middle-class business managers along the way and was far more empathetic with the more hum-

ble, blue-collar workers that she sought out in the course of our travels.

As best as I can remember, we went to one or two movies in the course of the trip. Otherwise, Aunt Geese would go back to her room after dinner and write. She did a good deal of writing in the car as well. I suppose that I simply went back to my room and read or watched TV. I really don't remember.

Aunt Geese always sat in the back seat of the car. At first this made me a little uncomfortable. Among my peers, it was commonplace to physically fight for the front seat of a car and avoid at all costs sitting in the back. After a day or two, however, I became more comfortable with my role as chauffeur and it seemed entirely appropriate that she should be ensconced in the back seat with her notebooks and her fur.

What impressed me then about Aunt Geese and does now that I have cause to think about it was her amazing sense of presence in all circumstances. I never saw her flustered or at a loss of words. Although I can remember no specific instances or particular words, she had a wonderful sense of humor and was smiling as often as not. But everything she did, and certainly everything that she said, gave one the impression that she was extraordinarily well situated in a world that she met on her own terms. In a sense, she seemed very much alone, except to the extent that she wished to share a thought or an event or an experience with whoever was involved. That sharing, however, was generally warm and certainly satisfying to those around her despite the fact that she was always in control. The feeling that I got was that we were all visitors in our own place, and that she was omniscient in her knowledge of what it was we were all about. While never demeaning, she was inevitably somewhat aloof.

The distance that I have spoken of was a very distinct feeling, but it was not one of coldness or indifference. Rather, she seemed to be existing on a somewhat different plane, highly intellectualized and certainly superior in knowledge and experience. The ultimate feeling or reaction that I had was one of real warmth and a desire to get closer to her, but not knowing how.



The Flandrau home at 385 Pleasant Avenue. Only a small portion of this street in St. Paul remains today. The house was built in 1872 and demolished in 1955, at Grace's direction in accordance with her husband Blair's wishes. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

I never saw Aunt Geese again after our tour of Minnesota. By the time I was a senior in high school, she had become quite ill and was something of a recluse, as I understood it, in Tucson. It may be that she had become somewhat senile. I remember writing her a letter shortly before my graduation from high school,

hoping that she would remember our trip of some years before fondly. I think what I really wanted was some sort of response from her that she was well and wishing me well. I never did hear from her.

I also remember the funeral in St. Paul some time in the sixties.\* St. John's church [St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church at Portland and Kent streets] was no more full on that day than on any Sunday in those years. I remember that my mother was there, but don't remember any other people or faces. The service, I suppose, was the standard Episcopal funeral.

What was so marvelously memorable about the occasion was the trip to the cemetery. It was cold and snowy. Although it hardly seemed necessary for the relatively small number of people that traveled from the church to the cemetery, there was a policeman on a motorcycle in front of the hearse. The cemetery was somewhere in what I think is called "North St. Paul" or "Little Canada" or one those places, not far from downtown. [Ed.: It was at Oakland Cemetery.]

As we approached the entrance to the cemetery, it was necessary to make a rather abrupt right turn. The motorcycle policeman with his lights on attempted to pull out into the intersection to stop any oncoming traffic and spun completely around, laying his motorcycle on its side. We laughed in the car, thinking what a wonderful scenario for Aunt Geese's last trip.

As I remember her headstone, it is a large piece of granite with nothing but "Flandrau" chiseled into it.

*Horace Blair Flandrau Klein (Blair Klein), the son of the late Horace Klein Jr. (Bud) and his wife, the late Kate Dudley Klein (Doodie), was named for William Blair Flandrau, Grace Flandrau's husband. The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks Georgia Ray for her editorial assistance in readying this memoir for publication.*

\*Grace Flandrau died on December 27, 1971, in Farmington, Conn.

### Partial List of Published Works of Grace Hodgson Flandrau (1886–1971)

(From Fulton Brylawski's copyright list, expanded by Georgia Ray, 1998)

#### Books

- Cousin Julia*. D. Appleton and Company, August 24, 1917.
- Being Respectable*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., January 25, 1923.
- Entranced*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, October 23, 1924.
- Then I Saw the Congo*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, September 9, 1929.
- Indeed This Flesh*. Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, May 14, 1934.
- Under The Sun*. Charles Scribner's Sons, October 9, 1936.

#### Short Fiction, Historical Journalism, Essays, Travel Writing, Reviews

"Dukes And Diamonds," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 22, 1919, 192:21.

- "Let That Pass," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 17, 1920, 192:42.
- "Terry Sees Red," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, December 1920, 142:847.
- "Rubies In Crystal," *The Smart Set*, February 1921, 65:2.
- "St. Paul, The St. Untamable Twin," in *The Taming of the Frontier*, Duncan Aikman, editor. New York: Milton, Balch & Company, October 25, 1925.
- "What Africa Is Not," *Contemporary Review*, December 1930.
- "One Way of Love," *Scribner's*, October 1930, 88:4.
- "The Happiest Time," *Scribner's*, June 1932, 41:6.
- "She Was Old," *Scribner's*, September 1932, 42:2.
- "Return to Mexico," *Scribner's*, December 1934 and January 1935, 97:6 and 98:1.
- "Speaking of Cats and Dogs," *Harper's*, July 1937.
- "Nice Man," *Harper's*, January 1941.

- "Princess," *New Yorker*, May 16, 1942.
- "What Do You See, Dear Enid?" *New Yorker*, September 26, 1941.
- All the Modern Conveniences," *New Yorker*, April 3, 1943.
- "St. Paul: The Personality of a City," *Minnesota History*, March 1941 (originally a speech at the MHS Annual Meeting in 1941).
- "Light on Mexico," *Yale Review*, March 1948 (book review)
- "On What It Is to be French," *American Quarterly*, Spring 1949.
- "Minnesota," *Holiday*, August 1955.

For a complete list of Grace Flandrau's published works, see pages 257–59 of Georgia Ray's *Grace Flandrau: Voice Interrupted* (Roseville, Minn.: Edinborough Press, 2007). Georgia Ray has also edited and published *Memoirs of Grace Flandrau* (St. Paul: Knochloe Beg Press, 2003).

R.C.H.S.

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Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society  
323 Landmark Center  
75 West Fifth Street  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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*An 1857 wood engraving from Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion of the Fuller House and the Truman M. Smith Bank in St. Paul. Engraving courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. See Barry and Joan Miller Cotter's article on page 3.*