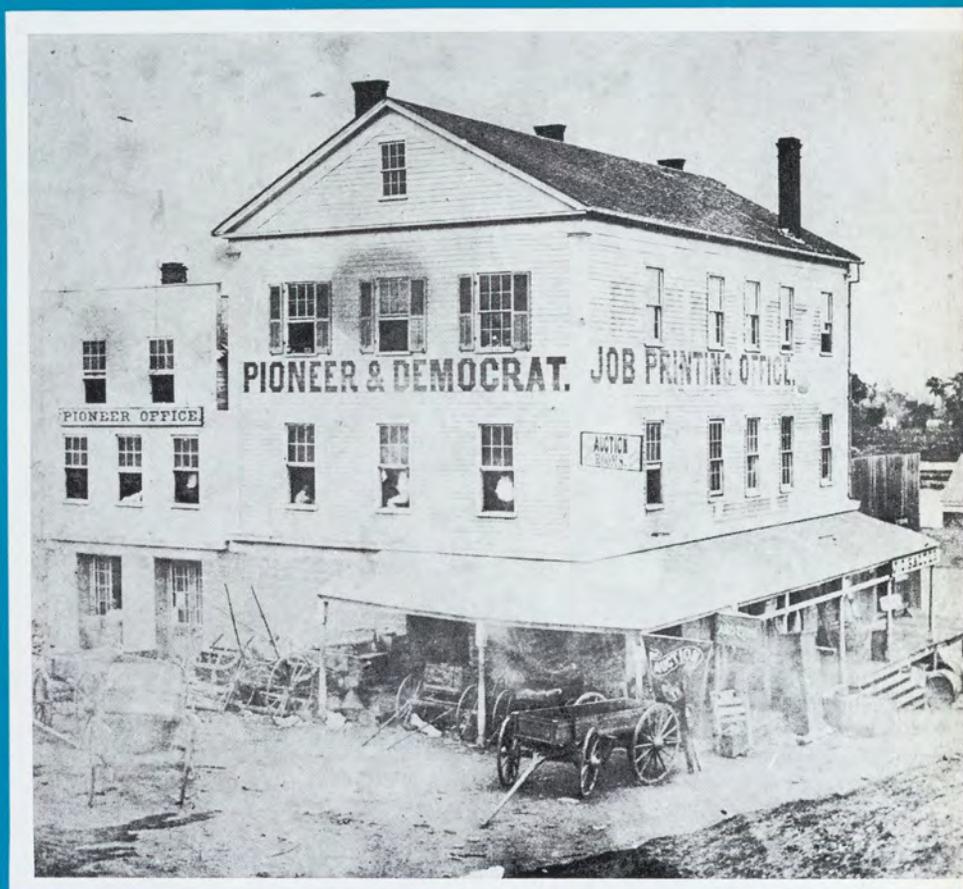
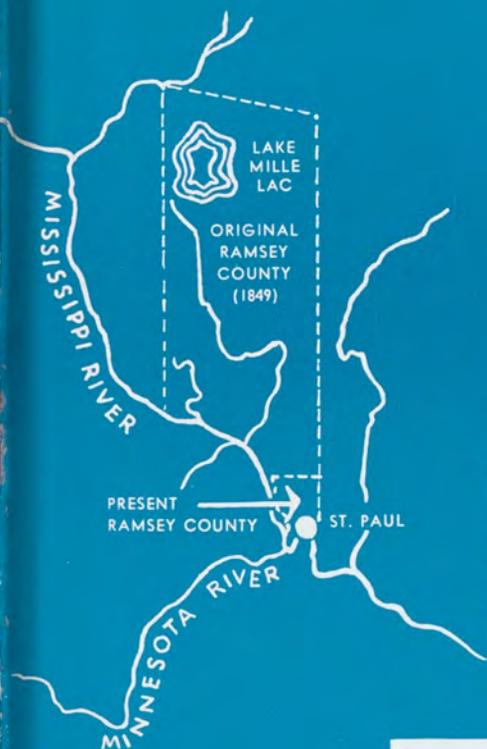


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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# Ramsey County History

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ON THE COVER: *The Pioneer and Democrat* office, as it looked between 1854 and 1857. It stood on the corner of Third and Jackson Streets.

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## Forgotten Pioneers—I.



For most of his life, Justus C. Ramsey seemed to live in the shadow of his brother, Alexander Ramsey, Minnesota's first territorial governor. Yet, Justus was a successful business man, civic leader and politician during his lifetime.

He was born in 1823 near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> Orphaned at an early age, he completed a common school education and learned the trade of printing. His first job consisted of carrying a chain in the survey over the Allegheny Mountains for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company.<sup>2</sup> Shortly before Alexander Ramsey was appointed territorial governor of Minnesota, Justus won \$10,000 in a lottery. He decided to go west with his brother and invest his money in Minnesota.

ON JUNE 5, 1849, Alexander wrote to his brother-in-law, John Speel, that "everyone in St. Paul likes Justus." Justus Ramsey helped organize the first Masonic Lodge in Minnesota on September 8, 1849, and became its first treasurer.<sup>3</sup> On October 20, 1849, he became one of the charter members of the Minnesota Historical Society.<sup>4</sup> On May 3, 1850, he helped establish the first Minnesota Lodge of Odd Fellows and founded Lodge Number 2, I.O.O.F., Old Settlers Society.<sup>5</sup>

Justus invested in real estate with Henry

**R**AMSEY COUNTY has had its share of famous pioneers whose names fill the pages of the history books. But there have been many more men and women who have been almost forgotten but who also made outstanding contributions and left their names upon streets, parks, buildings and in the official records. The following article begins a new feature in Ramsey County History, a series of sketches of "forgotten pioneers."

### Justus Ramsey

M. Rice, Henry H. Sibley and John R. Irvine. In July, 1849, these three men gave Ramsey power of attorney to dispose of their jointly-held properties, and in August they formed the "St. Paul Land Company."

The *St. Paul Chronicle and Register* reported on August 25, 1849: "Messrs. Ramsey, Rice, Irvine and Sibley are at present expending a considerable amount in building a new road, down the steep bluff, so as to make their landing more accessible to their property and the central portion of the town. These gentlemen appear determined to spare no expense in improving and beautifying upper St. Paul. . . ."

In June, 1850, Justus and Henry Jackson laid out a new town of Washington at the foot of Sauls Rapids,<sup>6</sup> on the Mississippi River across from what is now St. Cloud. Justus and James Whitehead also tried to mine iron ore in the Itasca region.<sup>7</sup> However, his interest in a grocery house, Ramsey, Tyson and Case on Robert Street, and his stationery store proved more permanent and profitable business ventures. During the financial crash of 1857, Justus lost the "greater part of his estate but through thrift and good management regained most of it." The same year, he was elected to the Territorial Legislature.<sup>8</sup>

GOVERNOR RAMSEY was ex-officio

superintendent of Indian Affairs in Minnesota and he employed Justus at times as a special messenger. In August of 1862, the Sioux War began. A major cause was the fact that the United States government's annual payment to the Sioux for lands ceded by the Indians was long overdue. It is ironic that the failure of this precious money to arrive on time caused so much bloodshed and suffering. The day before the Sioux took to the warpath on August 18, 1862, Justus Ramsey and four other men left St. Paul with wagons filled with kegs containing \$71,000 in gold coin. They arrived at Fort Ridgely on August 18. The annuity money and the men remained in the Fort for several days while the Fort was under attack by the Sioux. After reinforcements arrived, Justus Ramsey and the other men took the money, still packed in kegs, back to St. Paul.<sup>9</sup>

Alexander Ramsey scrupulously avoided using his influence on Justus' behalf, but they still were bitterly criticized for supposed collaboration. William Hollinshead, in a letter to Colonel A. M. Mitchell in Washington, D. C., denounced Justus as a "low fellow who spends his time in grogeries and halls," and accused Alexander of using his brother as a "front" in defrauding the Indians.

Alexander's diaries and letters provide some insight into Justus' character and personality. Like the other Ramseys, Justus kept track of every penny in family business transactions. Alexander's diary frequently mentions that he or Mrs. Ramsey owed Justus money with interest charged.

Justus was frugal in his personal habits and reportedly never wore an overcoat "except once or twice in the coldest weather." He seems to have been shy and retiring in social life, for he never married. Yet he was devoted to Alexander's daughter, Marion.

In 1880, Alexander, then Secretary of War under President Hayes, considered running again for the Senate, the seat he had held before becoming a cabinet member. In one of his few letters, Justus warned his brother not to enter the contest:

"You can't afford it, you are in debt heavily, you have a large am't of unprofit-

able property which is running you in debt every year more and more. . . . Mr. McMillan [the incumbent] is entitled to another term and as sure as the sun rises and sets you will be defeated. . . . My health is very bad, my mind is effected [sic]. . . ."

This proved to be a prophetic letter. Alexander did not receive the Republican nomination. Justus was suffering from dyspepsia and "valvular disease of the heart" and was depressed about his health. To this was added anxiety over the "scandalous and malicious falsehoods" published in the St. Paul newspapers "during the recent senatorial campaign."<sup>10</sup>

On January 24, 1881, in his room over George Rochat's jewelry store, Justus Ramsey shot himself in the head. He was 58 years old.

His brother came from Washington for the funeral. The service, on January 26 at Alexander's house, was heavily attended by "all classes," especially the old settlers who knew him well.

Justus left an estate estimated at \$250,000, divided equally among his eight nieces and nephews and the Catholic and Protestant orphanages in St. Paul.

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#### THE GIBBS HOUSE

*Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue W., St. Paul, Minn.*

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958 the Society erected a barn, behind the house, which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.