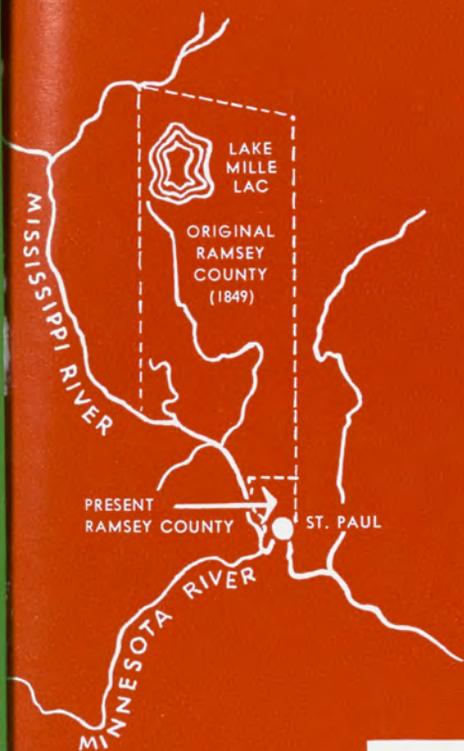


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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CONTENTS . . .

	Early Explorers' Trails Alan R. Woolworth	Page 3
Spring 1967	Portrait of a Pioneer Photographer Henry Hall	Page 9
Volume 4	A Bridge, A Street, A Levee Patricia Condon	Page 14
Number 1	The Saga of Charley Pitts' Body Forgotten Pioneers . . . III A Pioneer Seeks a Farm The Waterways of Minnesota	Page 19 Page 20 Page 21 Page 22

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ON THE COVER: This picture of Fort Snelling, taken about 1870, is an example of the work of William H. Illingworth, pioneer St. Paul photographer whose career is described in the story beginning on Page 9. This is an appropriate cover picture because it also illustrates the story of the early explorers of the Ramsey County area, beginning on Page 3. It was from the Fort that expeditions of exploration set forth into the "howling wilderness" of the Minnesota area between the 1820's and the 1850's.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: All pictures in this issue, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Picture Department of the Minnesota Historical Society. The editor is indebted to Eugene Becker, picture curator, and his assistant, Dorothy Gimme-stad, for their help.

The Saga of Charley Pitts' Body

On September 7, 1876, seven men rode into Northfield, Minnesota. Thus began the famous raid on the First National Bank by Jesse James' gang. Two weeks after the raid, one member of the gang was shot by a posse near Madelia. He was Charley Pitts.

Pitts' body was packed in ice, transported to St. Paul and exhibited in the state capitol. The traditional story is that a St. Paul physician later dissected the corpse and the skeleton still occupies a niche in the office of yet another St. Paul physician.

Lillie Gibbs LeVesconte, a pioneer Ramsey County resident, adds to the saga of the mortal remains of Charley Pitts in the following account written in 1946 when Mrs. LeVesconte was 80 years old. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Heman Gibbs who in 1849 established the farm home which now is the museum of the Ramsey County Historical Society. Her account is from the Society's documents collection.

"I was a child (10 years old) when the raid occurred. Our folks took special interest in all that happened in Northfield—our relative, Mr. Skinner, owned the store directly across the street from the bank; it was peppered with bullets. . . .

"Now . . . the thought comes to me that perhaps my brother [Frank Gibbs] and I are the only ones left to tell *what* became of Charley Pitts. His body was brought to St. Paul. Some years ago I met a woman, who was a little girl at the time and attending school near Rice St. Some mention was made of Northfield and the Raid.

"She told me 'All us school children were ordered to go and look at that dead man Pitts—we had to walk by where he lay stript to the waist and that awful bullet hole in his breast.' (Perhaps that was the way in those days of curbing Juvenile Delinquency.)

"The story doesn't stop here. Charley Pitts' body was sold to Dr. [John H.] Murphy—(I think it was Murphy and Quinn).



Charley Pitts—After the Fact

They needed a skeleton.

"The body was put into a box and with weights it was lowered into Lake Como. This happened at a part of the lake usually covered with water lilies and rushes. Joshua Robertson owned the shoreline there and his helpers chopped holes in the ice and watered the cows.

"Now it happened the ice was clear and the men could 'see a box down there.' The mysterious box was brought up and was ours a horrified community. The police were notified and the somewhat embarrassed doctors explained everything.

"Then the box and its contents were put into Hoyts field [now the southeast corner of Larpenteur and Snelling Avenues] to bleach the bones. An intimate friend of mine had the nerve to peer in and see what was to be seen—but perhaps I've told enough—in fact, that is as far as I know of the fate of the Outlaw Charley Pitts. It's altogether possible that his bones are still in St. Paul. If the walls of the Lowry [Medical Arts] Building could speak, they might 'a tale unfold'."



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.