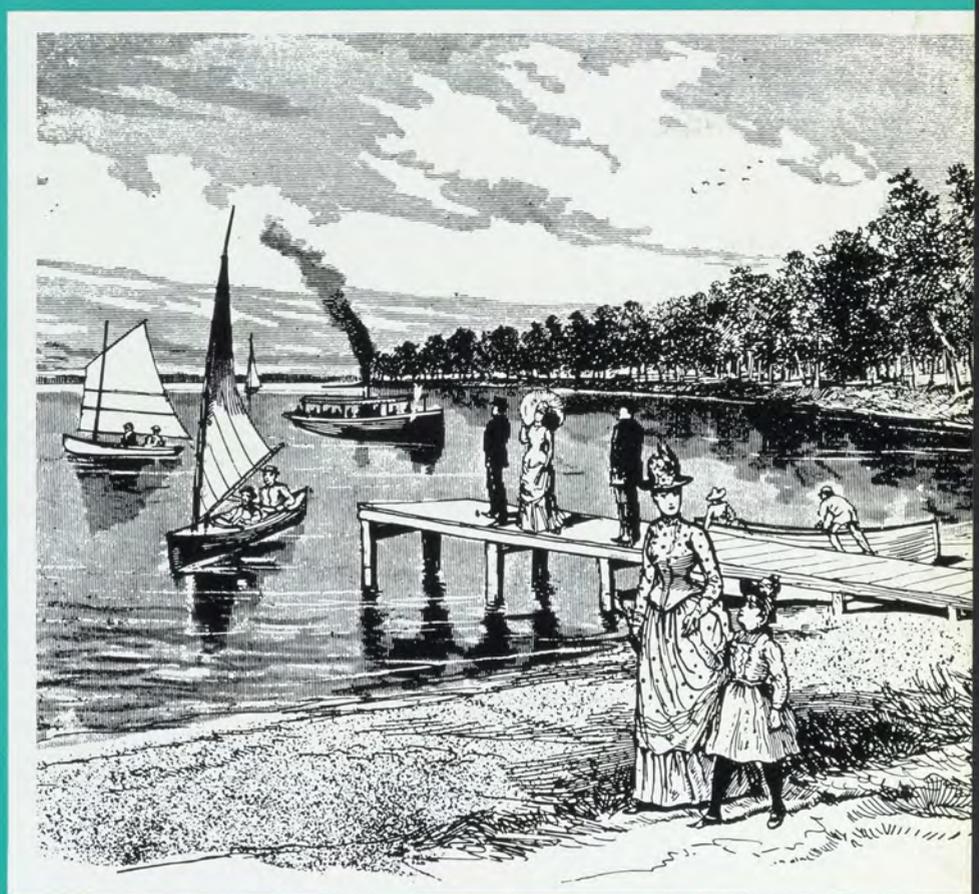


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Spring

1968

Volume 5

Number 1

Ramsey County History

Published by the RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ON THE COVER: During the 1880's, a steamboat took Sunday visitors to North St. Paul on a trip around Silver Lake. Price was 25 cents a person. This tranquil scene of the lake appeared in the March, 1888, issue of The Northwest Magazine and is reproduced here, courtesy of the Picture Department, Minnesota Historical Society.

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

Forgotten Pioneers—V

RAMSEY 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 is the fifth in a series of sketches of "forgotten pioneers," a special feature in Ramsey County History.

WILLIAM H. RANDALL

IN 1853 he was the biggest man in town. He had various vehicles and drivers, any number of horses, dealt largely in real estate, and his note was good almost anywhere for almost any amount. He built well, he planned well. Some of the property he then owned was later worth thousands or even millions.¹

William H. Randall came to St. Paul in 1846, and became the city's first millionaire. Born in 1806 in Massachusetts, he had been a merchant in New York and seems to have been just the man the new community of St. Paul needed. Described as broad-minded with a highly developed business ability, he also seems to have had a profound conviction in the future of the village, and he plunged into ventures that might have been impossible for a timid man. He bought property freely. He was one of the owners of the town site and made public improvements at his own expense, acting all the while the part of a man of sincere conviction and confidence in the future of the settlement. Randall was responsible for converting the Jackson Street levee into something more than a mere landing place at the riverside and making it possible for steamboats to debark their cargoes. In doing so, he undoubtedly did much to impress upon the river men the growing importance of St. Paul.²

HE WAS KNOWN for his generous nature and genial humor, which undoubtedly accounted for his youthful appearance. "Even following the crisis of '57 he carried as jovial a face as if the percentages were flowing into his pockets by the tens of thousands, instead of flowing out by the twenties."³

William Hartshorn, an early merchant who had come upriver from St. Louis in September of 1843 with a stock of merchandise was responsible for Randall's coming to St. Paul in 1846. Hartshorn disposed of his trading business to Randall, David B. Freeman and August L. Larpenteur, who had come to St. Paul as Hartshorn's clerk. Randall had brought considerable money with him and he also invested mainly in real estate.

In 1849, a law for the establishment of common schools was enacted. Three teachers were hired, one of them a Miss Scofield, was to teach in a school on Jackson near Sixth Street. The lot for that school was donated by Randall.⁴ (In 1876 the building was being used as a second-hand store.)

In September of 1856, the new hotel, the Fuller House, was completed and was opened with a grand ball. Cost of the building was \$110,000. A. C. Fuller was the builder and owner. Randall and J. W. Bass contributed the land.⁵

CONSIDERING HIS ROLE in the early development of St. Paul, it is not difficult to understand how Randall began to be called "Father Randall," by others in the community. There were many people who owed their start and success in life to his generosity. The customary extravagant language of the early biographers seems to contain a core of truth in such descriptions of Randall's life as this: "Many others, stricken by sickness in a strange land, owe life itself to his nursing; and in our cemeteries scores of mounds mark the graves of those who, having no relatives to minister to them in their fatal illness, were soothed and comforted by the tender hand, open purse, and sympathizing voice of the

kind old man with whom suffering was always a bond of friendship."⁶

Randall has been described as a man of medium size, and always finely dressed. "He invariably carried a gold-headed cane and his movements on the street were of an energetic character. He had a soft, pleasant voice, winning ways, and was always polite. We might say that he was the advance courier of gentlemanly culture and true civilization."⁷

WHEN RANDALL came to St. Paul, he brought with him one of his three sons, William Randall, Jr. Before his death in 1851, this son displayed a marked gift for caricature and contributed sketches to some of the early political literature.⁸

A second son, E. D. K. Randall, was born in New York in 1839, educated in the east, and came to St. Paul in 1856. For a number of years he worked in the wholesale notion and toy business. He also traveled as a salesman. He was a member of the Baptist Church and described as being a "stirring man, full of energy, hope and good deeds."⁹

The third son, John H. Randall, was born in Massachusetts. At age 15, he moved to New York and worked in a wholesale silk house until 1857, when he came to St. Paul to look after his father's business. In 1862 he worked in the office of the chief engineer's department of the old St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company. Later he became general freight agent, assistant treasurer and chief clerk of the company under

the administration of George Becker.

WHEN THE CRASH of 1857 came, Randall's property, because it was mortgaged, went down, and he with it. "Were he the possessor of the real estate in the city which he once owned, he could be the richest man in St. Paul. Litigation followed his death, and the two sons, who ought to be well off, are paddling their own canoes."¹⁰

Randall died July 31, 1861, at the age of 55. While he may not have left a legacy of material wealth, he left two sons who "forgot what might have been" and were thought of as worthy and enterprising citizens. He also left behind him a mental picture of a dapper gentleman strolling down the streets of early St. Paul, a gold-headed cane in his hand, and a smile on his face.

Notes

1. T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul and Biographical Sketches of Old Settlers*, 1886, page 50.
2. W. B. Hennessy, *The Past and Present of St. Paul, Minnesota*, 1861, page 49.
3. *Minnesota Pioneer and Democrat*, St. Paul, Wednesday, July 31, 1861.
4. Henry A. Castle, *History of St. Paul and Vicinity*, Vol. II, 1912, page 455.
5. J. Fletcher Williams, *History of St. Paul and the County of Ramsey*. Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, Vol. IV, 1876, page 365.
6. *Minnesota Pioneer and Democrat*, St. Paul, Wednesday, July 31, 1861.
7. T. M. Newson, *op. cit.*, page 51.
8. W. B. Hennessy, *op. cit.*, page 49.
9. T. M. Newson, *op. cit.*, page 572.
10. *Ibid.*, page 51.

The Governor Talks About History . . .

MEN IN public office often have a sense of history because they help to make history. Governor Harold LeVander spoke out on the importance of history, in a talk he gave August 31, 1967, to the Minnesota Territorial Pioneers. Here are excerpts from his remarks:

"We owe [the pioneers] a great debt. Yet too many fail to acknowledge that debt. We become preoccupied with the present and push aside the past. We become obsessed with our present problems, our present powers, our present successes, our present failures. We have a tendency to ignore the past and neglect the future.

". . . We understand only a part of the

whole. We become like Mrs. Albert Einstein when she was asked if she understood her husband's theories. She replied, 'I understand the words, but I don't always understand the sentences.'

". . . It has been said that we can best pay our debt to the past by putting the future in debt to ourselves. Our fathers have bestowed on us a great heritage, our sons must be bequeathed the same.

"Alexander Ramsey, our first territorial governor, observed that history is 'philosophy teaching by example.' The men who have made Minnesota have given us the example. . . . Now we must learn."



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.