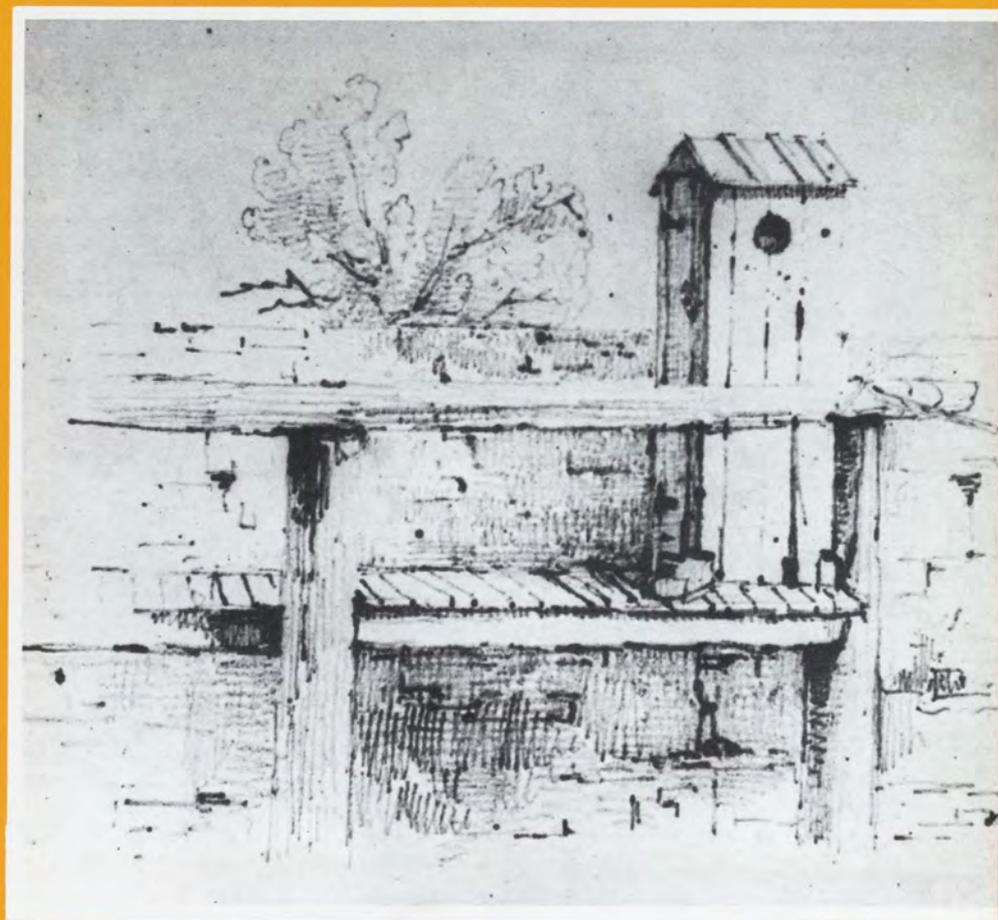


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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*ON THE COVER:* This sketch by Seth Eastman shows a sentry box at Fort Snelling. Eastman is known today as one of the great painters of the old Northwest and particularly the Mississippi river valley. What is not so well known is that he was an army officer who served four stints as commandant of Fort Snelling, then became a brigadier general after the outbreak of the Civil War.

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## Forgotten Pioneers...VII

RAMSEY COUNTY has had its share of famous pioneers whose names fill the pages of the history books. But there also 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 seventh in a series of sketches of "forgotten pioneers," a special feature in Ramsey County History.

### DR. JOHN H. MURPHY

JOHN HENRY MURPHY was one of the most colorful of the frontier physicians to practice in St. Paul, and he was, moreover, virtually the first formally-trained doctor to settle in what is now the Twin Cities area.

A veteran of service with several Minnesota volunteer regiments during the Civil War and the Sioux War, a surgeon general of Minnesota and an early King Boreas Rex of the St. Paul Winter Carnival, Dr. Murphy became an institution during his 45 years in Minnesota.

He was born January 22, 1826, in New Brunswick, N. J. About 1833 or 1834, his family moved to Quincy, Illinois. He studied medicine with Dr. Abram Hull of Lewiston, Illinois, and graduated from Rush Medical School in Chicago in 1850.

On June 28, 1848, Murphy had married Mary Adelaide Hoyt at Marietta, Illinois. She was the daughter of another Ramsey County pioneer, the Reverend Benjamin F. Hoyt. The Murphys came to Minnesota and settled first in St. Anthony in 1849. At that time, there was no other trained physician in the vast area between St. Anthony and the Rocky Mountains and Dr. Murphy often was called to attend patients as far away as Sauk Rapids, 75 miles to the north. He made many such trips on horseback through the wilderness.



On April 30, 1851, Colonel John H. Stevens, four boatmen and a Methodist minister rowed Murphy across the Mississippi at St. Anthony. The river was unseasonably high as well as stormy that day, but Murphy arrived safely and delivered the Stevens' baby daughter, the first white child to be born on "the west bank of the falls" in what is now downtown Minneapolis.

Philip Jordan described Murphy in his fascinating book, *The People's Health*, published in 1953 by the Minnesota Historical Society:

"Murphy, like many of his nineteenth-century colleagues, wore a Prince Albert coat. A spool of silk thread rested in an ample pocket. When Murphy needed to suture, he fished for the spool, snipped off a length, sharpened his pocketknife on his bootheel, and said: 'This is going to hurt and hurt like Hell, but I can't help it, so look out.' Yet many preferred his rough, but kind manner to the slick tricks employed by some physicians."

IN 1851 Murphy served in the Territorial legislature. As a young man he had supported the Whig party, but after 1856 he became an ardent Republican. Later in life he often was urged to run for public office, including that of mayor of St. Paul, but he declined almost all such offers. He did serve one term in the state legislature in 1885.



When the Civil War broke out, Dr. Murphy volunteered his services to the Union Army. In July of 1861, he was appointed surgeon of the famous First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment. He has been described in regimental accounts as follows:

"... his great humor and love of fun worked many cures, especially among the malingerers and pretenders. He pretended to believe the doleful tales of misery and suffering endured by these characters, and then blistered, starved and physicked them unmercifully. His favorite remedy for a stipulated sickness was castor oil taken on the spot! He always effected a cure in such cases."

In December of 1861, Dr. Murphy left the First Minnesota to become surgeon of the Fourth Minnesota Infantry Regiment. After the battles of Corinth and Iuka, he received special mention in the reports of the regiment's commanding officer, Colonel J. B. Sanborn, and of Captain Ebenezer Le Gro.

IN JULY of 1863, Dr. Murphy resigned from the Fourth because of ill health and returned home. During this period, he moved his practice from St. Anthony to St. Paul where he hung out his shingle on Front Street.

Several months later, Governor Stephen Miller appointed him to visit Minnesota soldiers in Iowa, Missouri and the southwestern states. Though Murphy traveled extensively, he was officially assigned to the Eighth Minnesota Infantry Regiment and served with it during the campaigns

**During his years in St. Paul, Dr. Murphy saw the capital grow from a tiny settlement into the city it had become by the 1890's when this picture was taken. This is a view eastward from Grand Avenue — and in the foreground, a householder's laundry blows against the hill in the spring breeze.**

against the Sioux in the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming.

In July of 1865, he resigned from service and returned once again to private practice. Throughout his career, his interests were broad and varied. He served as secretary-treasurer of St. Anthony's first fire department and worked hard for a sewer system for the area.

HE WAS president of the St. Paul school board and during his term of office, he backed a bill to punish trespassers on school property. He was appointed to a committee to find a suitable cemetery site for St. Paul — "the appointment, we may be sure, had no reference to his calling."

He served as accredited surgeon to most of the railroads based in the Twin Cities area and also served as surgeon for the Ramsey County Poor Farm which stood on the site of what is now the Minnesota State Fairgrounds.

He was elected vice president of the American Medical Association and, for 20 years, from 1874 until his death in 1894, he was surgeon general for the state of Minnesota.



### THE GIBBS HOUSE

*Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota.*

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 farm 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. In 1966, the Society moved to its museum property a one-room rural schoolhouse, dating from the 1870's. The white frame school came from near Milan, Minnesota. Now restored to the period of the late 1890's, the school actually is used for classes and meetings. In the basement beneath the school building, the Society has its office, library and collections. In 1968, the Society acquired from the University of Minnesota the use of the white barn adjoining the Society's property. Here is housed a collection of carriages and sleighs which once belonged to James J. Hill.

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.