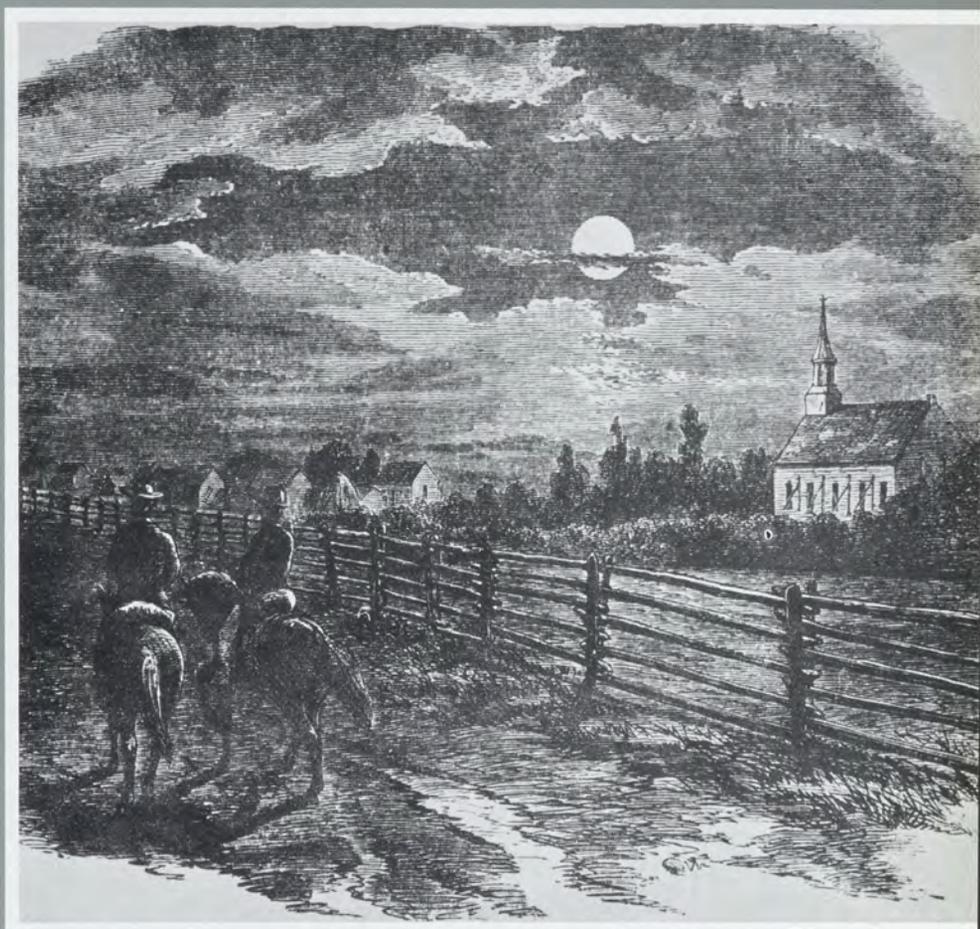


RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



Spring

1970

Volume 7

Number 1

Ramsey County History

Published by the RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Editor: Virginia Brainard Kunz

Spring 1970 Volume 7 Number 1	St. Anthony Park: History of a 'Small Town' Clang! Went the Trolleys, And Memories Echo St. Paul's Colorful Streetcar Era Murder Most Foul! Forgotten Pioneers . . . IX	Page 3 Pages 12-13 Page 14 Page 16 Page 21
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ON THE COVER: This somewhat romantic illustration, "The Beautiful Moonlight in Dakota Land," is from the equally romanticized, imaginative "history" of St. Paul by Col. Hankins described in the article beginning on page 16.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Pictures used with the St. Anthony Park article are from the Ramsey County Historical Society. Those with the stories on the old trolleys and John R. Irvine are from the Minnesota Historical Society. Pictures with the story on Col. Hankins' St. Paul history are from the book itself. The editor is indebted to Eugene Becker and Dorothy Gimestad of the Minnesota Historical Society's audiovisual library for their help, and also to Henry Hall, chairman of the Ramsey County Historical Society's Publications Committee, who reproduced the pictures from Hankins' book.

Forgotten Pioneers... IX

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 ninth in a series of sketches of "forgotten pioneers," a special feature in Ramsey County History.



JOHN R. IRVINE

TODAY the grass on the little square of land wears thin in summer. Below the nearby bluff are railroad tracks, factories and warehouses. The square itself is rimmed with a dozen and more old houses, a number of them with an appealing, fading elegance. During the last thirty years of the Nineteenth Century, this neighborhood was inhabited by the wealthy, the glamorous, the influential. In recent years Irvine Park, the little park a block from the Ramsey House, has been almost as forgotten as its founder.

John R. Irvine was born in Danville, New York, in 1812. In 1831 he married Nancy Galbraith and in 1849 they settled in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. There Irvine entered the grocery business with A. B. Coy and C. C. Blanchard, although he had been apprenticed as a blacksmith in New York and was listed in the *Minnesota Pioneer* for April 28, 1849, as a plasterer.

Irvine's interest was in the frontier. At Prairie du Chien, in the winter of 1843, he packed a sleigh full of groceries and headed upriver to St. Paul to "look over the field which had been represented to him by his old friend, Henry Jackson, as the Eldorado of the Northwest."¹ He found St. Paul to be a small, bustling village which he decided

offered abundant opportunities for settlers, and so he sold his goods and bought part of the old Phalen claim from Joseph Rondo for \$300. (The rest of the claim was owned by Sergeant Mortimer.)

THE PROPERTY extended from the river bluff to what is now Seven Corners. A section on what was later upper Third Street was a quagmire; on the hill near Pleasant and Cottage stood a forest of cedar and tamarac, and a small log cabin was located near what is now West Third Street and Franklin.

Irvine returned to Prairie du Chien to pack up his family and more merchandise. He piled the goods onto a Mackinaw boat and hired the steamboat "Otter" to pull it up the river.

In 1845, he purchased the rest of the Phalen claim from Mortimer. In 1848 Irvine deeded half of the northwest quarter, bounded now by Washington, Main, West Fourth and West Ninth Streets, to Henry M. Rice. This area was known as the Rice-Irvine Addition and later became one of the most valuable properties in St. Paul. When the plan for the Addition was filed in 1849, the men designated one block as a "public square." It is now Rice Park.



Irvine Park as it looked about 1900. The lovely fountain, one of many which once graced St. Paul's parks, now is gone but the area still shows the unmistakable mark of a gracious neighborhood.

Irvine invested the money he made from the Addition in business blocks, such as the Flat Iron Block on Eagle and Third Streets, mills, warehouses, and other real estate. Between 1849 and 1855, he purchased 29 parcels of land and sold 177 separate plots to other pioneer settlers, such as A. L. Larpenteur, Louis Roberts, Henry Rice and Justus Ramsey.

IN 1850, Irvine secured a license for a ferry across the river at the Upper Levee, near Fountain Cave. In 1851 he opened a sawmill at the foot of Eagle Street, and in 1854 he went into banking. From 1854 to 1857, he served on the city council. Earlier, he had served in the territorial legislature.

Irvine's activities seem to bear out the description of him by T. M. Newson in *Pen Pictures of Saint Paul*:

"He was a man of ordinary physical development, somewhat compact, cool and deliberate in speech, and eternally and everlastingly doing something."

Footnotes

1. J. Fletcher Williams, *History of Ramsey County, Minnesota*. St. Paul: North Star Publishing, 1881, Page 168.
2. T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul*. St. Paul, 1886.

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Photo by Henry Hall

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.