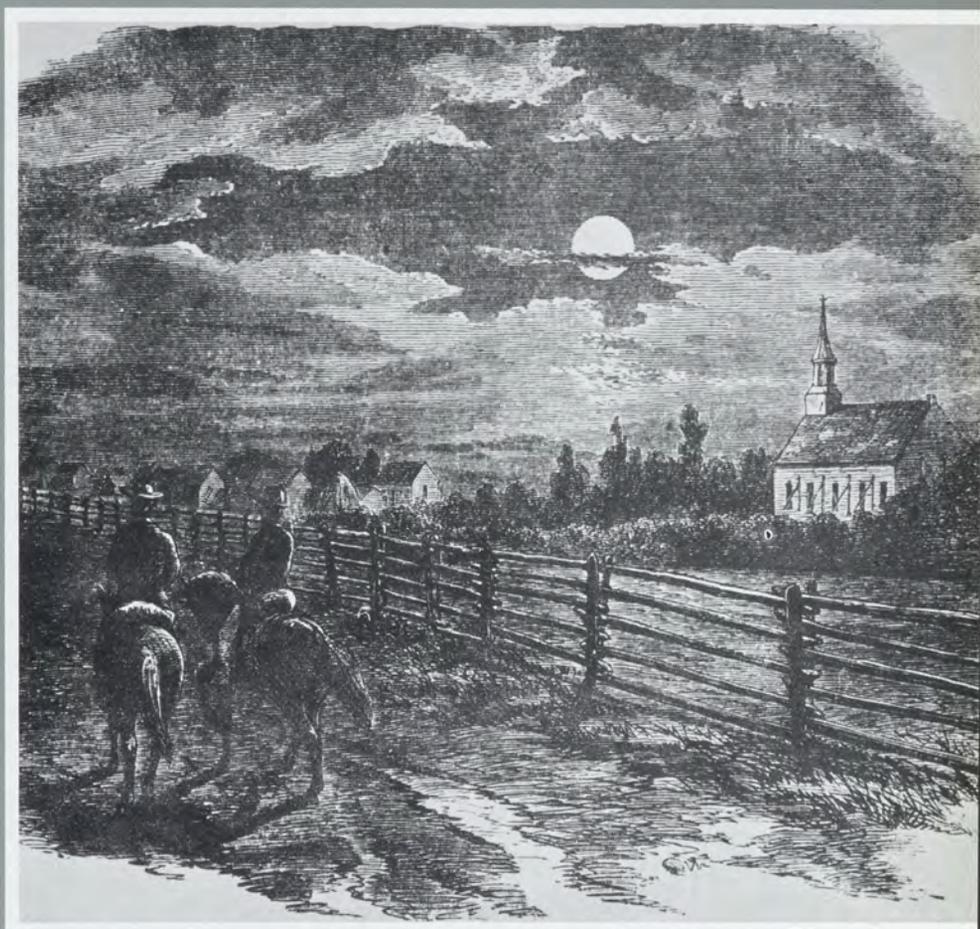


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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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 Gimstad 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.*

# To Stillwater, Hastings, White Bear Lake St. Paul's Yellow Trolleys Rocked, Rumbled Through a Colorful Era

By Virginia Brainard Kunz

Just after midnight on October 31, 1953, the last of St. Paul's familiar yellow streetcars rocked along into the car barns after its final run. And since it seems to be an American custom, honored by time and tradition, to revere what we have lost, torn down or otherwise disposed of, the barn doors scarcely had swung shut before the entire era of the streetcar was enveloped in the romance and mystique of another time, a simpler time, perhaps — or so it seems today.

It was an era which began on May 9, 1872, with the founding of the St. Paul Street Railway Company under a charter granted by the state legislature the preceding February. On July 15 the city's first "streetcar" — old horsecar No. 1 — rumbled forth along a two-mile track which began at Seven Corners, ran east along Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) to Wabasha, then to Fourth Street and from there to Jackson, to East Seventh, to Locust, and finally, to the junction of Lafayette and Westminster.

Six cars, restricted to a six-mile-an-hour speed limit, gave the line "day-long" service. Fourteen drivers and 30 horses were needed. Later, more lines were added, but costs were high. Rails were expensive and each horse cost from \$135 to \$155.

THE RESULT was that in 1877 the company went into receivership. The next year a new company was formed and, about 1880, a central barn, with space for 30 horsecars (called "cracker boxes" by the residents), stalls for 150 horses and space for repair and blacksmith shops, was built where the Lowry Medical Arts Building now stands. Company offices were upstairs.

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Wire gates at the rear of the trolley — who can forget them? Here one entered and left the car. Sometimes it was a long step up, or down.

By 1884, Thomas Lowry, founder of the Minneapolis Street Railway Company, and other Twin Cities businessmen had acquired the St. Paul company and formed the Twin City Rapid Transit Company.

Thus was launched a colorful era, perhaps more so for those who did not live through it. The first of these horsecars seated 14 persons on benches which ran along either side. The fare was a nickel, and the farebox was at the front of each car. After dark, an evil-smelling oil lamp provided a feeble light, and a small stove gave off some warmth, but straw also was used — 12 inches of it spread on the floor so passengers could keep their feet warm.

For the driver, outside on the open platform at the front of the car, there was no protection from the biting winter winds. Dressed, usually, in a buffalo fur coat, felt-lined boots, fur cap and mittens; he had to

guide his horse, watch for passengers, collect fares and make change. He worked 12 to 16 hours a day, with 20 minutes off for dinner, and was required to wash his car once a day. His salary: \$35 a month.

ST. PAUL'S HILLS presented problems for the horsecars, so cable cars flourished briefly during the late 1880's — one ran up the Selby Avenue hill and the second along East Seventh Street from Broadway to Duluth.

But the era of both the horsecars and the cable cars was ending. By 1891 all the lines had been converted to electricity, and with electricity came the expansion of the city lines into a vast network which by 1906 had spread throughout Ramsey County and into Dakota and Washington counties.

This was the heyday of the suburban lines, of the hair-raising rush at 50 to 70 miles an hour, through the open country on rails that linked St. Paul with Hastings, Stillwater, White Bear Lake, Mahtomedi, North St. Paul, Wildwood, the famed amusement park on the southeast shore of White Bear lake, was built to increase business on that line.

For 50 years all Twin Cities streetcars, as well as many of the streetcars used in other cities throughout the country, were built in the shops at Snelling and University Avenues which were erected in 1904 by the Twin City Rapid Transit Company.

The Snelling shops made cars which were noted for their ruggedness and their extra width — nine feet instead of the customary eight. Suburban trams were equipped with "cow-catchers." Cars open on both sides were designed and built for use during the summer months, particularly on such runs as that to Wildwood. During the 1920's, the first lightweight "noiseless" streetcars in the country were built at the Snelling shops.

Through the years, the design of the cars

changed with the time. Many people today have fond memories of the open vestibules with their wire gates at the back of the trolleys. Here was where one entered and left the car. Eventually, front exits were added, and the wire gates at the back of the car were replaced by doors with glass panels.

AFTER STREETCAR service ended, almost all of the 300 trolleys which once were a familiar sight in Ramsey County were sold to other cities.

However, at least one has been preserved by a group of transportation enthusiasts who joined together in 1962 to form the Minnesota Transportation Museum, Inc., an affiliate of the Minnesota Historical Society. In 1954, Minnesota Railfans Association saved Car 1300 from the scrappers' torch. A 1908 wood-sided trolley, it has been restored by the Museum, which also has rescued and preserved such other representatives of transportation history.

Another Museum project has been the restoration of the Minnehaha Railroad Depot in south Minneapolis. It is now open to the public on Sundays during the summer.

And Car 1300 will help mark the comeback of the trolley, as the result of rising interest on the part of the public in sharing the memories of a not-too-distant past. The Minnesota Transportation Museum and the Minneapolis Park Board are working together to put old 1300 back on the track — on tracks, specifically, that will be laid again on the right-of-way of the old Como-Harriet line, from Forty-Second Street in south Minneapolis, around the west side of Lake Harriet.

In the meantime Car 1300 waits in storage in the Minnesota Transfer Railway roundhouse in St. Paul.

The Snelling yards at University and Snelling Avenues. Midway Shopping Center now stands on part of this land.





*Photo by Henry Hall*

### THE GIBBS HOUSE

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

**T**HE 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.