

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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ON THE COVER: The officers quarters at Fort Ripley had long since been deserted when Edward A. Bromley, the Minneapolis photographer and collector published this brooding picture of the old fort in 1906. He may have taken the picture himself.

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The Building of Old Fort Ripley And Its Links With St. Paul

EDITOR'S NOTE: Little remains today of Fort Ripley except its name, later given to the National Guard camp which was established in 1931. The camp's 63,000-acre military reservation surrounds the site of the old fort near the point where the Crow Wing River flows into the Mississippi River north of Little Falls. During the past 40 years, two generations of National Guardsmen have trained at Camp Ripley, perhaps not aware that they are the military descendants of a smaller band of men who manned an older outpost there.

Fort Ripley was established primarily to protect the Winnebago Indians who had been moved from Iowa to a new reservation in what are now Morrison, Todd and Stearns counties. However, the old fort also was one of several outposts built during the years before the Civil War to guard the frontiers, the trade with the Indians, and the federal annuity payments to them for land they had ceded to the government in a series of treaties. Although located in central Minnesota 120 miles north of St. Paul, Fort Ripley's links with Ramsey County were unmistakably strong. All supplies destined for the fort came from St. Paul; St. Paul workmen helped build the fort, and some of the city's leading businessmen were involved in the establishment of the fort. One of the most interesting of these men was Henry M. Rice.

* * *

The following article on the old fort and its relationship to St. Paul and Ramsey County has been adapted by the author from his book, The Muster Role, a history of Fort Ripley published this month.

BY ROBERT ORR BAKER

ONE of the first of St. Paul's citizens to have a hand in the establishment of Fort Ripley, originally named Fort Gaines, was Henry M. Rice who, with General George M. Brooke, selected the site in 1848.

The fort was built to protect the Winnebago Indians who had been placed in the area as a buffer between the warring Sioux and Chippewa. Not liking this arrangement, the Winnebago returned to their old home in northeast Iowa. Rice, however, agreed to move them back to the Fort Ripley area at \$70 per person. (Later, the *St. Paul Chronicle and Register* for May 11, 1850, listed 2,500 Winnebagoes as living in the Territory of Minnesota.)

The first and only stone used in the construction of the fort was obtained under a contract signed with Rice on January 10,

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Henry M. Rice

1849, and calling for delivery in June of 256 perch of stone at \$3.68 per perch.*

THE STONE was used in the construction of the powder magazine, a portion of which still stands at Camp Ripley as the sole remnant of the old fort. Rice also arranged

*Used in measuring stone. A perch was about 24-3/4 cubic feet.

for the appointment of J. H. McKenny as post sutler, and we may infer that many of the necessary supplies came from the warehouse Rice owned at Crow Wing, seven miles north of the fort.

Captain Napoleon Jackson Tecumseh Dana was the quartermaster officer and he was in charge of construction of the post. Dana hired Jesse H. Pomroy, who later was to build many of the fine homes in St. Paul, as the chief builder. Dana later entered the banking business in St. Paul. During the Civil War, he commanded the First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers.

As St. Paul was the head of navigation on the Mississippi, all supplies for the post flowed into St. Paul and had to be forwarded from there. Dr. C. W. W. Borup of St. Paul was awarded the contract for hauling the supplies to the fort at a rate of \$1.36 per hundred pounds delivered there. Borup's contract also reveals the problems of supply. The agreement called for 4,000 bushels of good quality corn, at \$1.18 per bushel, delivered at the fort.

The Minnesota Outfit, an Indian trading agency formed by Rice in St. Paul, acted as an employment service for the fort. In 1850 it advertised for "six good carpenters for Fort Gaines."

REGULAR STAGECOACH service between St. Paul and Fort Ripley was established as early as 1852. Frontier settlers learned through an advertisement in the *Minnesota Democrat* that John W. Corbitt & Co. of St. Paul had bought out Dr. Borup's contract and would start a weekly line of stages to Fort Ripley, leaving St. Paul on Mondays and arriving at the fort on Wednesdays. The fare was \$7 per passenger.

St. Paul merchants also watched the territorial newspapers for advertisements of annuity payments to the Indian tribes. All payments were made in specie, and in considerable amounts. Thus these events were well attended by frontier merchants who saw the payments as a prime source of gold in the territory.

Alexander Wilkin, secretary of the territory of Minnesota, went up to Long Prairie to watch the payment of annuities to the Winnebagoes and from thence went to Fort Ripley where Governor Alexander Ramsey counseled with the Chippewa.

On April 8, 1852, the editor of the St.

HENRY M. RICE

Born in Waitsfield, Vermont, in 1816, Henry M. Rice was 23 when he arrived at Fort Snelling in 1839 to serve as a sutler and to begin a colorful career in Minnesota.

He had studied law in Vermont and also had served as assistant engineer for Michigan in locating the Sault Ste. Marie canal. In 1840 he was appointed sutler at Fort Atkinson, in what is now Iowa. While there he joined Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company of St. Louis as agent in charge of the firm's trade with the Chippewa and Winnebagoes.

Rice moved to St. Paul in 1849 where he "at once bent his whole energies, and employed his capital to the development of the town," as J. Fletcher Williams wrote in his History of the City of Saint Paul and the County of Ramsey. "He built warehouses, erected hotels and business blocks in his addition, diverted trade and commerce from other points hither, and influenced men of capital and energy to invest here largely."

Through his Minnesota Outfit, Rice controlled trading posts throughout Chippewa country in central and northern Minnesota. This relationship with both the Chippewa and the Winnebagoes made it possible for Rice to work with the Indians and the United States government in negotiating the treaties by which this part of Minnesota was ceded to the whites and thrown open to settlement.

Rice was elected a delegate to congress from the territory of Minnesota in 1853 and 1857. When Minnesota became a state in 1858, he was elected to the United States senate, where he served a six-year term.

Williams wrote of him that he was "truly a pioneer. He resided in Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota, while each passed from a Territorial to a State government and has borne his share of the hardships, and dangers, and vicissitudes of frontier life."

Paul *Pioneer* observed: "Supplies are brought up the river for the semi-annual payment of the Chippewa, Sioux and Winnebago annuities. All these Indians are paid in Minnesota. The payment and supplies furnished Fort Snelling and Fort Ripley and the goods and provisions furnished by the traders to the Indians constitute much of the largest share of the business of the port of St. Paul."

BIDS ALSO WERE advertised for the annuity goods to be delivered to the Chippewa Agency, just 10 miles from Fort Ripley, and their distribution required a detachment of soldiers from the fort. Of course, this, too, provided great business for frontier suppliers. Rations for the fort were advertised each year, and one requirement for the successful bidder was that the provisions "must pass St. Peter's* by June." Since little augmentation to the ration could be made within the Fort Ripley area, everything had to be brought from "below," that is St. Paul or Fort Snelling.

Other supplies went up to the fort from St. Paul. In August of 1852, the St. Paul firm of LeDuc and Bohrer arranged for Captain John Blair Smith Todd, the post commander, to purchase a melodeon which was forwarded by Corbitt's teams. However, low water on the Mississippi put a stop to the river boats and the music and anthems were delayed.

The same firm supplied the literary needs of the post at the request of Lieutenant Carlin, who enjoyed the additional duty of

the post's special service officer. Irvin's complete works in 15 volumes, bound in calf for \$22, suggest the immense number of books ordered, as does the *Battles of Mear* by Kimball, at a price of \$60.

St. Paul served as a distribution depot for mail and in 1853, the postmaster invited bids for carrying a tri-weekly mail to Fort Ripley at an annual rate of \$1,200. In 1852, congress had appropriated \$10,000 for a military road, a stretch of 146 miles between Point Douglas, at the mouth of the St. Croix River, and Fort Ripley. Mail was to be carried over this road, leaving St. Paul every Monday at 7 a.m. and returning to St. Paul by 4 p.m. each Saturday.

THE 1856 RECORDS of the quartermaster at Fort Snelling noted that about 50 tons of forage were in St. Paul and intended for Fort Ripley, and that there was an agency under contract to haul it to the fort. The quartermaster further suggested that until a town sprang up at Fort Snelling, a store should be rented in St. Paul and a clerk hired to attend to the business of the quartermaster. His estimate of expenditures for quartermaster supplies, including forage, was \$65,000 for a three-month period. Fort Ripley's needs were included in this estimate.

The August 28, 1852, issue of the *Minnesotian* noted that, "Our papers published on

*St. Peter's was the name early explorers gave to the Minnesota River.

A typical treaty payment to the Chippewa in the early 1860's.





Fort Ripley, above, in 1862, published by Edward A. Bromley of Minneapolis from his collection of the negatives of B. S. Upton, an early St. Paul photographer. At left is the powder magazine, the only remnant of the old fort still in existence. It now stands within the Camp Ripley military reservation.

Saturday always get to Fort Ripley on Wednesday evening. The people up there must be a reading people judging from the number of newspapers from St. Paul and St. Anthony that go up."

DURING THESE YEARS, visitors to Fort Ripley included Bishop Joseph Cretin, of the diocese of St. Paul, and his deacon, Monsignor A. Oster. They spent several days at the fort in 1855. The bishop said mass in the post chapel, heard confession and preached to the soldiers.

In December of that year, the deacon returned and remained until after the beginning of the new year. The weather was extremely cold, so cold that the water froze in the pitcher in the chapel and so did the wine in the chalice on the altar. The deacon stated that a trip to Fort Ripley was a hardship, even during the summer.

In 1856, the Right Reverend Jackson Kemper, bishop of the Episcopal church, visited the territory of Minnesota and journeyed to Fort Ripley where he also preached to the troops. Also present on this occasion was James Lloyd Breck, formerly of St. Paul, but at that time Episcopal missionary to the Chippewa at the Gull Lake Mission.

During the Civil War, the regular army troops that garrisoned the fort were called into federal service. They were replaced by volunteer companies, of which the first was

Company A of the First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers. The company had been St. Paul's famed Pioneer Guard, a pre-war militia company. Its commander was Alexander Wilkin. Among others in the company were Orderly Sergeant Josias R. King, who claimed to be the first soldier to volunteer for Civil War service, and First Lieutenant Henry C. Coates, who later commanded the First Minnesota after the Battle of Gettysburg.

DURING THE PERIOD of the Indian Wars, the Eighth Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, with headquarters at Fort Ripley, guarded the northern frontier, and Company K, made up of men from Ramsey County, was stationed there. Captain T. M. Newson, editor of the *St. Paul Times* and author of *Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Biographical Sketches of Old Settlers*, was quartermaster at Fort Ripley while the Eighth Regiment was stationed in the area. All troops were under the command of Major General John Pope, whose headquarters were in St. Paul.

The former Confederate soldiers who had taken the oath of allegiance to the United States and had been sent north to fight the Indians also passed through St. Paul. Among these were the First United States Volunteer Infantry and the First Connecticut Cavalry.

But the history of Fort Ripley was drawing to a close. The frontier gradually disappeared as settlers crowded into Minnesota and the Indians were more and more closely confined within their reservations. Finally, in 1877, Fort Ripley was closed.



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.