

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Spring, 1990
Volume 25, Number 1



James J. Hill's yacht, the Wacouta of St. Paul. See Page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Daniel J. Hoisington

Editor
Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gregory K. Page
Chairman of the Board

William S. Fallon
President

Richard Lee
First Vice President

Anne Cowie Wilson
Second Vice President

Robert Hess
Secretary

James P. Wicker
Treasurer

John Costello, Joanne Englund, Deborah Gelbach, Joan Grzywinski, Lorraine Hammerly, Craig Jilk, John M. Lindley, Frank Marzitelli, Dr. Thomas B. Mega, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Marvin Pertzik, Douglas Skor, Robert O. Straughn, Stephen Urion, Gary Woeltge, Laurie Zenner.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Charlton Dietz, Craig Jilk, Thomas J. Kelley, Dr. Thomas B. Mega.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hal Norgard, chairman
Commissioner Diane Ahrens
Commissioner John Finley
Commissioner Ruby Hunt
Commissioner Duane McCarty
Commissioner Don Salverda
Commissioner Warren Schaber

Terry Schutten, executive director, Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1990, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISBN Number 0-934294-00-3. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.

Design by: Don Leeper, Stanton Publication Services; Little & Company

On the cover: The *Wacouta*, James J. Hill's yacht, passing through the locks at the Sault Ste. Marie, seen in the background.

Acknowledgements: Except for Page 9, photographs with the articles on James J. Hill and the yacht *Wacouta* are from the James J. Hill Papers in the James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, and used with the library's permission. Photographs on Pages 9, 12, 13 and 27 are from the Minnesota Historical Society's audio-visual collection. The photograph on Page 22 is from the Ramsey County Historical Society's photo collection. The photograph on Page 10 is from the Debs Foundation, Terre Haute, Indiana.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 25, Number 1 Spring, 1990

CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 Railroader as Yachtsman
James J. Hill and the Yacht *Wacouta*
Thomas C. Buckley
- 12 Eugene Debs, James J. Hill and the Great Northern Railway's Strike of 1894
Tamara C. Truer
- 14-15 St. Paul and the 1940s Revisited in Pictures
- 20 The *Wacouta* in Two World Wars
- 22 Book Reviews
- 23 Cooper and Goodrich and the Famous Duel
- 24 A Matter of Time
- 27 What's Historic about this Site?

Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the "new" *Ramsey County History*. In 1987 the Society's Board of Directors established a task force to develop a strategic plan. One of the principal recommendations of that task force was to publish our magazine on a quarterly basis. For that purpose an Editorial Board was established and as a result of their efforts over a two-year planning period, we are proud and happy to present to you, our members and our readers, this new, enlivened format. You will note the additional new features, such as "A Matter of Time," Letters to the Editor, book reviews, descriptions of St. Paul's historic sites and other features.

We hope you will enjoy this new format, and request your comments and reactions to it. We also would like to remind you that we always are looking for manuscripts, for writers and particularly for reminiscences, those colorful and personal accounts of your experiences and memories of St. Paul and Ramsey County. If you would like to contribute to our new magazine, just call the editor.

—William S. Fallon

What's Historic About this Site?

The Dahl House: The Last of Old Lowertown

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles on Ramsey County's historic sites which will be published in forthcoming issues of Ramsey County History.

One of the most unlikely of Ramsey County's historic sites, for those of us who think of them in terms of the mansions of the rich, is a one-story, stucco-covered cottage on the edge of the approach to the capitol. But the William Dahl house at 136 Thirteenth Street, deserves its listing on the National Register of Historic Places as the last surviving residence of the once-residential Lowertown district.

William Dahl, who came to Minnesota Territory from England about 1849, was a man of several occupations. Early St. Paul records list him as a clerk, census taker, shopkeeper and general agent for the Hudson's Bay Company.

In 1857 Dahl purchased a lot on the edge of Lowertown and around the corner from the sturdy two-story stone structure fur trader Norman Kittson was building on Jackson between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets. Dahl completed his wood frame Greek Revival cottage the following summer. His contractor was Ireland and Donovan. The "Ireland" in the partnership was Richard Ireland, whose son, John, became the first archbishop of St. Paul.

The original Dahl house measured twenty by thirty feet with a low-pitched gable roof and a full basement. As the years passed, two additions were made to the house. The first, added around 1886, included a nineteen by sixteen-foot kitchen attached to the rear of the house. In 1962 a fifteen by sixteen-foot dining/recreation room was added to the kitchen and the entire structure was covered with stucco.



William Dahl's house (arrow) in St. Paul in 1866-7 (top photo). This view from Mount Airy was taken by Whitney's Gallery, St. Paul. Below is the house as it looked in 1936. A. F. Raymond photograph.

The main living rooms for William Dahl and his family were in the basement of their new home. Unheated sleeping quarters occupied the main floor. William lived there only a few months, however. He died of consumption in September, 1858, leaving his wife, Catherine, who was pregnant with their third child, to support the family. She did so by taking in washing.

The Dahls' only son, Edward, went into the furniture business at the age of 13 to help with the family's expenses, and he inherited the homestead when his mother died in 1901. By that time Edward had retired from the furniture business he had operated for twenty-five years and was devoting all of his time to serving as a secretary for the St. Paul Junior Pioneers. In 1889 he had been a founder of the Pioneers, a civic-minded group

dedicated to supporting the city's development and preserving its heritage.

Edward and his wife, Sophia, lived in the house until the summer of 1936, when he sold it to Roy Patterson. The next year Edward died at the age of 81. The Pattersons remodeled the house extensively and raised their children there before Mrs. Patterson sold the property to the state of Minnesota after her husband's death. The state used the house as offices for the criminal system ombudsman. The house still stands as one of the last remaining reminders of St. Paul's pioneer past.

When Edward Dahl moved from his boyhood home in 1936, he recalled for a newspaper reporter some memories of the years when he and the city were growing up together:

"There's a lot of sentiment stored away in this house," he said. "Father died here and so did mother. . . . When I was a kid [in the 1860s], I used to pick hazel nuts up the hill yonder," he continued, pointing toward the state capitol, "and across Robert Street were the Tipperary flats. It was covered with shacks."

Kittson's house has long since been demolished, as have all of the other homes that once graced Lowertown, but the home that William Dahl built for his family 132 years ago expresses the lifestyle of the common folk of that period.



Henry H. Sibley's house at 417 Woodward, St. Paul, from the 1874 Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota, published by A. M. Andreas.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul MN
Permit #3989