

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

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Frederick McGhee and his family on the porch of their home at 665 University Avenue, St. Paul, around 1918. He was among the African-American business and professional men and women who helped nurture, within a gracious community, several generations of achievers. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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On the Cover: The first black criminal lawyer west of the Mississippi, Frederick McGhee, shown with his home and family, was a prominent Democrat and Catholic in St. Paul in the early 1900s.

Acknowledgements: Photographs on pages 5, 7 (James K. Hilyard), 8 (J. Frank Wheaton), 10 (Owen Howell), 11 (W. T. Francis' house), 13 (the Vass house), and 14 (the Adams house) are reprinted from the September 12, 1910, Quarto-Centennial celebration edition of *The Appeal*. The photograph on page 17 is from A. A. Heckman's private files. The photograph on page 30 of the Bishop house as it appeared in 1980 is from the Ramsey County Historical Society collections. All other photographs are from the audio-visual collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Dan Hoisington, the Society's executive director, is fond of saying: "We're all historians." Nowhere is this more evident than when we go through family letters, diaries or old photos seeking to reconstruct some family history. The theme of the Society's current "Have Lunch With an Historian" weekly lecture series is "Memories, Diaries and Letters."

In conjunction with this, the Editorial Board of *Ramsey County History* invites readers who would like to share an especially meaningful letter, diary, photo or artifact dealing with the history of Ramsey County to contact our office at 222-0701. We'll help you determine what bit of history your letter or photo contains.

We're also interested in your comments on articles we've published in *Ramsey County History*. We're inviting you to bring a bag lunch and participate in a new discussion series based on these articles. The first is set for 12-1 p.m. April 20 in Courtroom 408, Landmark Center. We'll invite some of our writers to attend.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

Books, Etc.

Blue Ribbon: A Social and Pictorial History of the Minnesota State Fair

Karal Ann Marling
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1990

At the end of the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, the wizard makes his grand exit in the balloon that brought him to the Emerald City by accident. As he floats off, with the crowds cheering, you can read "State Fair—Omaha" on the balloon. Karal Ann Marling's wonderful book about this Ramsey County institution captures the wizardry found in the Minnesota State Fair.

Marling has a wonderful feel for the glories of the fair: the fireworks exhibitions showing "The Burning of Manila" or "The Fall of Troy"; a butter carving of "The Discovery of Saint Anthony Falls"; a model of the state capitol made from onions; or the ever popular high-diving horse. This annual event, set at the end of summer, is guaranteed to evoke nostalgia because every year, generation after generation, you can experience a bite of a Pronto Pup, a ride through the dark recesses of the Old Mill, an inspection of the latest farm machinery, and a good show in the Grandstand.

She captures the changing fashions in the fair. The Mexican Village, incredibly popular at one time, fell victim to the growth of Taco Bell and Chi-Chi's and closed in 1984. The Young America Center of the '60s gave way, in part, to the Heritage Village. One year pie crusts are thick and crusty, another year, the judges want light and flaky.

What Marling does so well, as shown in her previous book, *The Colossus of Roads*, is to look warmly at our popular culture and then place it in a context that increases our appreciation and understanding.



A farm kitchen, displayed at the Minnesota State Fair in 1920.

One More Ride

Video production of the Minnesota Transportation Museum. Written and narrated by Chick McCuen. 1989.

In the midst of a public debate over the introduction of "light rail" into the Twin Cities, it would be nice if everyone sat down and watched this excellent video production on our first mass transit system. In its peak years, the Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company was the region's largest employer, with more than 3,000 employees, 1,021 streetcars, and 523 miles of track.

The program combines extensive use of old films and photographs that superbly illustrate the huge operation. McCuen's narration brings a sense of romance to the rails. Does the trolley belong in the past or was it the victim of bad planning and poor judgment? It is an good question for the historian. Does the trolley reflect a time when living patterns were more settled and destinations flowed from downtown? Today, a person living in northern Ramsey County is just

as likely to head to western Minneapolis while a worker in Dakota County might work in Eagan or Roseville.

McCuen recognizes that we remember the era of the streetcar for more reasons that its function to move people from one place to the next. Where does the romance come from? Watch this program and you'll see. Or visit Murray Hall at the University of St. Thomas to see the Ramsey County Historical Society's exhibit on "Rails in the Streets." Or take a summer afternoon to recapture the past on the Lake Calhoun trolley that the Minnesota Transportation Museum runs.

Gateway Cities and Other Essays

Leonard K. Eaton
Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989

Grace Flandreau, the St. Paul novelist, looked at her fictional city of

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Horse and buggy at the Minnesota State fairgrounds in 1903. Karal Ann Marling evokes once again the glories of the fair in her book, Blue Ribbon: A Social and Pictorial History of the Minnesota State Fair, reviewed on page 26.

R.C.H.S.
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