

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

**D**an 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

# What's Historic About This Site?

## *Woodland Park Historic District*

*Editor's Note: This is the fifth in a series of articles on Ramsey County's historic sites.*

**W**oodland Park is a district of predominantly single residences, Queen Anne style homes built in the Mackubin, Marshall and Dayton additions in St. Paul between 1880 and 1924. The district is located on the plateau west of the downtown area and adjacent to the Summit Avenue/Historic Hill District. Bounded by Marshall Avenue to the north, Selby on the south, Dale Street to the west and Kent to the east, the district was the preferred residence of middle- to upper-middle-class white professionals at the turn-of-the-century. Today the district is part of the Summit-University area that is marked by a variety of racial/ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Many of the stately homes that characterize this neighborhood are more than a century old. Although noted for the number of Queen Anne structures, the district also is rich in varied architectural styles ranging from Italianate, French Second Empire, Victorian Romanesque, and Chateausque, to Mission Revival and Richardsonian. In all, approximately twelve distinct architectural styles are represented. Excluding those structures built as multiple-family residences, the cost of construction ranged from \$5,000 to \$12,000. Many of these homes were built during a period of economic growth following the Depression of the early 1870s. Railroad expansion, commerce, agriculture, construction and renewed immigration were responsible for the population growth and prosperity. The greatest single year of construction in the Woodland Park District appears to have been 1885. The onset of another econom-



*Judson W. Bishop's house at 193 Mackubin, circa 1888. The house still stands today as part of the Woodland Park Historic District. From Pyles' Picturesque St. Paul.*

ic Depression that began in 1893 and lasted until 1897 brought a halt to formal development in the district.

Over the past century, many of these single family residences have been divided up into apartments, condominiums or other mixed uses. Some have had their exterior appearance altered. Others were demolished because of structural problems. With the renewed interest in the architectural heritage of St. Paul in the 1970s and the resurgence of neighborhood restoration programs, many of the structures in Woodland Park have undergone restoration or rehabilitation.

The homes constructed in this district are a visible statement of the financial successes of these early immigrants to Minnesota. The preferences for particular architectural styles and the large size of the structures are a testimony to the owners' professional prominence in the



*The Bishop house as it looked in 1980.*

St. Paul social community. In 1882, General Judson Wade Bishop, a Civil War brigadier general and later president of St. Paul Trust Company, built a large

Second French Empire home on the corner of Dayton and Mackubin Avenues. General Bishop, an engineer by training, was at one time general manager of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad company and owner of the Bishop Block in Lowertown.

D. W. Lawler built a home at 546 Marshall Avenue in 1889. Lawler had come to St. Paul in 1884 after completing a law degree at Yale University. From 1886 to 1888 he served as assistant United States district attorney; he was a candidate for Minnesota governor in 1892 and served as St. Paul mayor between 1908 and 1910. His home, situated prominently on a hill site, is an example of the Queen Anne style.

William Rainey Marshall built his last home in St. Paul at 496 Marshall Avenue, before retiring to California. The house, constructed in 1891, was of the Queen Anne style. Marshall was governor of Minnesota between 1866 and 1870. He was also a real estate developer, after whom the street and Marshall addition were named. Marshall County in southwest Minnesota also bears his name. Additional homes were built by the less prominent but aspiring skilled craftsmen and businessmen. Of the forty-four structures identified on the 1885 Hopkins Insurance Atlas of the district, only eighteen remain today.

Unlike the Woodland Park district, large and impressive homes built along lower St. Anthony and Central Avenues (the northeast quadrant of the Summit-University area) became the victims of neglect and subsequently of urban renewal programs. Although not as varied in architectural style, fine examples of Victorian and Queen Anne were constructed by upward-aspiring professionals before the turn-of-the-century. The 1910-1911 Quarto-Centennial Edition of the *St. Paul Appeal*, the black newspaper serving the Minneapolis-St. Paul black communities, printed photographs of many of these homes then owned by members of the black middle class. Some of these photographs are published with the article beginning on page 4 of this issue.

## Sources

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form, Woodland Park District, 1977, pp. 1 & 7; Ramsey County Historical Society/St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission, Historic Sites Survey forms 5/82-7/82.

Historic Sites Survey, 7/2/82; National Register Nomination Form, pp. 4 & 7.

Historic Sites Survey, 6/30/82; National Register Nomination Form, p. 3.

National Register Nomination Form, p. 2.

*The Appeal*, Quarto-Centennial Edition (paper's founding), 1910; *The Appeal*, Quarto-Centennial Edition (editorship), 1911.

—David V. Taylor

*David V. Taylor grew up on Dayton Avenue in St. Paul. He holds a doctorate in history from the University of Minnesota where he now is dean of the General College. His doctoral dissertation was on the settlement of the early black community in St. Paul between 1870 and 1930.*

### *Books, Etc., from page 26*

Columbia through the eyes of her character, Louisa Denby: "She knew more or less well, several hundred people. They lived, generally speaking, within a radius of half a mile or so and were connected with the prominent businesses. Especially the older businesses—banking, railroading, manufacturing, wholesale merchandising being among the perfectly respectable. Not retailing." In Ramsey County, the wholesaler, following the example of the early career of James J. Hill, shaped the life of the city.

Leonard Eaton brings his considerable knowledge of the social history of architecture to this collection of essays that compare the "Gateway Cities" of the Midwest—St. Paul, Minneapolis, St.

Louis, Omaha, Kansas City, and St. Joseph, Missouri. His conclusions were that "the wholesaler was the single most important type of American businessman in the period 1850-1890." The warehouse district, in his view, becomes a central part of urban history. "I came to believe," Eaton writes, "that the planners and people of Gateway city had to understand the quality of the jobbing district and the warehouse if they were to appreciate their potentialities."

Eaton devotes a whole chapter to St. Paul's Lowertown and its preservation. He gives short profiles of some of his favorite buildings, including Cass Gilbert's Gotzian Shoe Company, the Noyes-Cutler Warehouse, and the Great Northern Railroad headquarters. His work expands our view beyond the narrow focus of local history and places it in a regional context.

This is a thoughtful book that recognizes the social context of architecture and helps us become aware of the truly significant historic treasure we have in downtown St. Paul.

Daniel John Hoisington

### *A Matter of Time from page 29*

The plant was to be built by the H. S. Kaplan Scrap Iron and Metal Company.

► Spring floods threatened the Twin Cities. Up in Elk River, 120 families were forced from their homes. With the Mississippi at 8.5 feet and approaching the 14-foot flood stage in the St. Paul area, Lilydale residents were warned to expect to be evacuated by April 3 as a precaution.

► Governor Karl Rolvaag and Lieutenant Governor A. M. (Sandy) Keith both were claiming victory in their struggle for the DFL party's nomination at its June convention. Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey told the state DFL's Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner at the Leamington Hotel in Minneapolis that the war on poverty could continue, despite the costs of the Vietnam war, but he warned that inflation must be avoided.



*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.**  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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