

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*



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**Spring, 1994**

Volume 29, Number 1

**The 'Fighting Saint' —  
The *U.S.S. St. Paul* and Its Minnesota Connection** *Page 4*



*Women from the Yokosuka, Japan, Folk Dance Association perform Japanese folk dances for U. S. S. St. Paul crewmembers as the heavy cruiser prepares to leave Yokosuka for the United States on July 6, 1962. See article beginning on page 4.*

**D-Day Remembered By Seven Who Were There**

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 29, Number 1

Spring, 1994

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

The Ramsey County Historical Society recently lost a loyal and long-time supporter when Lester B. LeVesconte, a grandson of Heman and Jane Gibbs, died in Illinois. In 1849 the Gibbs family established the pioneer farmstead that today we know as the Gibbs Farm Museum. Lester LeVesconte, whose mother was the Gibbs's daughter, Lillie, was instrumental in working out in 1949 the arrangements by which the Gibbs farm became a museum under the auspices of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

The Society's debt to Lester LeVesconte extends beyond the Gibbs Farm Museum because over many years Mr. LeVesconte actively promoted the publication of historical material about the Gibbs family and Ramsey County. Thus he helped support financially the Society's publication of his mother's book, *Little Bird That Was Caught*, about Jane Gibbs's experiences as a young pioneer in the wilderness that became Minnesota. His advocacy of the publication of Ram-



*Lester LeVesconte*

sey County history extended to the Society's broader plans, which included this quarterly magazine, *Ramsey County History*.

We honor Lester LeVesconte's memory and his many contributions to the Ramsey County Historical Society. We are inspired by his example and his vision for history.

—John M. Lindley, chairman,  
Editorial Board

# Letters to the Editor

## Witches' House

It was interesting to see the photo of "The House that Peder Foss Built" in the Winter issue of *Ramsey County History* (What's Historic About This Site?). I grew up in New Brighton and we would drive past the house on our way to Apache Plaza. We called it the "Witches' House" because it had that turret at its southwest corner. I understand the house has been beautifully restored.

—Mary Buscher, Minneapolis.

## Memories of Giesen's

I thoroughly enjoyed the history of Giesen's Costume Shop in the Winter issue of the magazine. It brought back some early memories of my childhood and of my grandmother, Esther Ogren, who worked as a costumer there from the mid-1940s to about 1960. I recall one snowy Sunday around 1958 when my grandmother took my sister and me by bus to downtown St. Paul to see the Christmas Pageant. My grandmother had worked on a jeweled cape for one of the Wise Men which, with its ornamentation, weighed more than a hundred pounds. It was worn that year by Pastor Schmidt of the Como Park Lutheran Church.

I also remember as a child visiting Giesen's shop with my grandmother, passing the glass counter and huge ornate mirror on the way upstairs, to see racks of costumes and the work tables on which, according to my grandmother, they would line up whole troupes of dancers to adjust their hems. My grandmother, a great perfectionist in her work, always spoke fondly of Mrs. Giesen and of how, in 1950, she had encouraged my grandmother to take a trip to Europe, giving her time off and even some money for her trip.



*Peder Foss's house in New Brighton.*

Sometime during my college years—around 1970—I stopped in at Giesen's on St. Peter Street, curious to see it, not knowing if it had changed hands. I mentioned to the man who greeted me that my grandmother had worked there as a costumer and I also loved to sew. He offered me a job on the spot as a milliner (their only business by that time), saying he would hire any granddaughter of one of Mrs. Giesen's seamstresses. (I declined.) I realized then that the Giesen's era I had glimpsed as a child had passed. I have often wondered about its history. Thank you for filling in the details.

—Judy Ogren, St. Paul.

The article about the Giesen Costume Company brought back many memories of the years when I put on operettas at St. Joseph's Academy in St. Paul in the 1940s and assisted Mary G. Kellett, who had charge of the plays. Choosing the costumes was a very important and time-consuming occasion. The principal would accompany me and after much discussion about the forthcoming production, Mrs. Giesen would bring out an array of suitable costumes.

Since the majority of the operettas and plays were for an all-girl cast, we had to

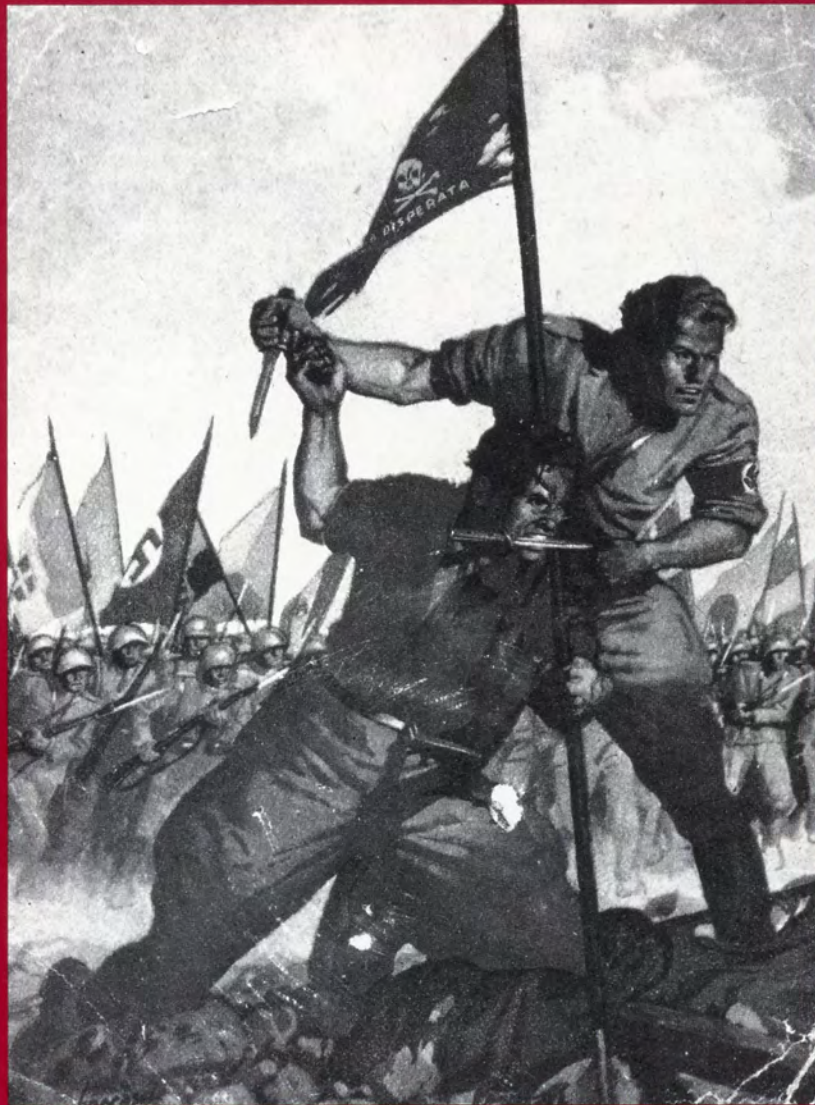
keep this in mind. When we put on the *Nutcracker Suite* with a cast of 100 singers and dancers, Mrs. Giesen made stunning costumes of gold and silver. The costumes would be delivered in huge baskets with copious amounts of tissue paper between each set. Each would be carefully marked with the name of the character. After the last performance, I would carefully check to see if all the pieces were collected and they were again packed to be returned. Louise Giesen Murphy and I were students in the class of 1936 at the College of St. Catherine. I enjoyed her comments and hope she is well.

—Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson,  
C. S. J., St. Paul.

## Red Rock Revisited

In the Fall, 1993, issue of *Ramsey County History*, the answer to "What is Red Rock?" is not entirely accurate. Newport United Methodist Church members moved the rock from Mission Farms at Medicine Lake (not Camp Koronis) in 1964 (not 1990). No doubt you already know something more of the Red Rock story—its connection to the Red Rock Campmeeting and why the rock and the Kavanaugh cabin, also on the Newport UMC's grounds, were moved to Medicine Lake and then returned to the Newport area. I've written a paper on Benjamin R. Kavanaugh, the second missionary in charge sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church to what became Minnesota. He left under somewhat of a cloud, so his story and that of the Red Rock Campmeeting are interesting segments of our history.

—Thelma Boeder, archivist,  
Minnesota Annual Conference,  
United Methodist Church.



*A German propaganda card given to Russell W. Anderson by a German soldier taken prisoner during the Normandy landings. "He was a nice guy," Anderson remembers. See the article beginning on Page 9: "D-Day Remembered by Seven Who Were There."*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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