

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Spring, 1998

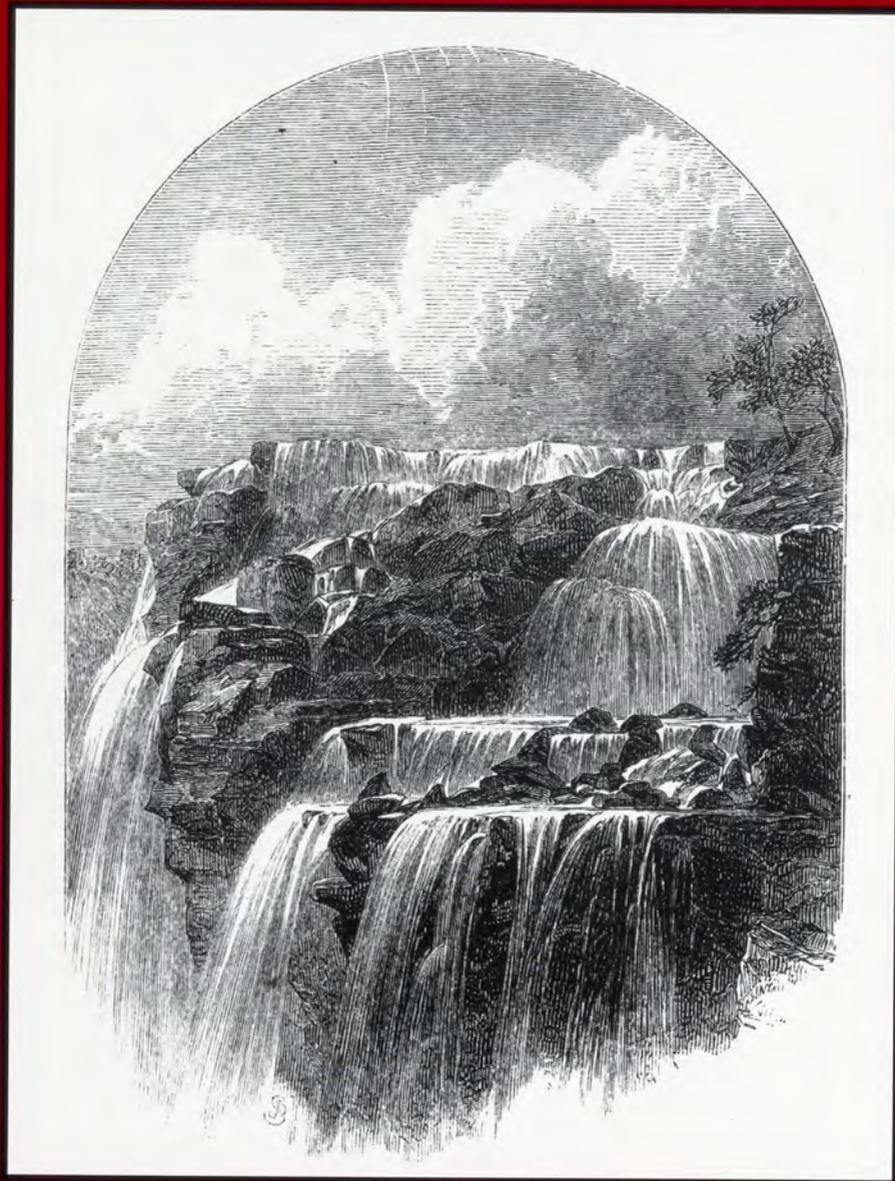
Volume 33, Number 1

Westminster Junction—
Turn-of-the-Century
Railroad 'Highway'

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The Diverting Story of Cascade Creek—Page 4



Cascade Creek, from Harper's New Monthly Magazine, in 1860. The creek was named after a waterfall that was described in early travel literature about the St. Paul area. This engraving probably depicts the namesake cascade. The waterfall, now dry, can be seen today along the Mississippi bluffs near Colborne Street. See the article beginning on page 4. Photo from the Minnesota Historical Society collections.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Two themes run through this spring issue of *Ramsey County History*. One theme is engineering; the other is people. Greg Brick's lead article, which tells the story of Cascade Creek, is another in our St. Paul Underground series, which was suggested some years ago by the late Reuel Harmon. Both this article and that by Andrew Schmidt on the local railroad area known as Westminster Junction represent historical research into little-known sources of St. Paul engineering and transportation history

The theme of people plays a secondary role in the stories of Cascade Creek and Westminster Junction, but this theme is foremost in Jean Hanna's account of her mother, Rose Hanna, and her journey from Palestine to St. Paul in the 1950s; in Joe Lepsche's article on the history and people of the Upper Levee; and in Charlotte McKendree Wright Lewis's reminiscence of the Fourth of July Extravaganza on Grand Hill. These writers convey vividly the enduring diversity of the area's people and how their individual stories are today a part of the larger story of St. Paul and Ramsey County.

John M. Lindley
Chair, Editorial Committee

Growing Up in St. Paul

Dawn to Dusk: Grand Hill and Its Grand Fourth of July Extravaganza

Charlotte McKendree Wright Lewis

The neighborhood where I spent my youth is full of magic and secret places, special people, traditions, and celebrations. Especially celebrations. It did not take much to find a reason for festivity: annual alley clean-up party (which continues today), pigtail day, tea parties on the front lawn, plays and musicals, and in summer we played kick-the-can and capture-the-flag until long past sundown. On May Day, neighbors awoke to find homemade paper baskets full of flowers hanging from their doorknobs. At Christmas there was always a caroling party where everyone, even the teenagers, sang with feeling. Clearly, this was, and still is, a neighborhood that revels in celebration. Of them all, the grandest and most enduring is the annual Grand Hill Fourth of July extravaganza.

The Fourth of July is the one happening during the year in which everyone participates, from the newborns to the oldest of the old. It is a welcoming ceremony for newcomers and a welcome back for those who have moved away. It is a celebration that attracts and holds the attention of the whole neighborhood for an entire day. How? Why? It has a great and undeniable drawing power of togetherness like a village assembly offering ritual, games and entertainment, food, catching up on neighborhood news, and a strong sense of belonging.

The Grand Hill celebration actually had its inception approximately thirty-six years ago in the first neighborhood I grew up in. In Tangle Town we observed the holiday with a parade each year at high noon. I remember the parade of 1959 because on a very hot day my brother wore a heavy parka and carried a spear and paper fish to commemorate the statehood of Alaska. I was more fortunate—I got to represent Hawaii. When my parents



Poster announcing the Fourth of July festivities in 1971. All photos with the article are from the author.

moved into the house on Grand Hill that my father grew up in, the parade followed, and many embellishments were added. Events and responsibilities are figured out in an informal meeting about a week before the holiday. Most important is to select a theme—usually influenced by current events in the world, nation, or neighborhood. Examples are “Saving Energy” (during the oil shortage), “Exploration of the Moon,” “The Arts,” “Great Inventions,” “The Postal Service,” and, when the neighborhood sewer system was being replaced, “Digging up the Past.”

Today the merriment lasts all day, beginning with reveille about 9 a.m. and

ending with a walk down Summit Avenue to see the fireworks. The series of events are well choreographed and have remained curiously consistent for at least twenty years, despite neighbors moving out and in, children growing up and out. You could find at least twenty years worth of posters in my parents’ attic stating activities, times, locations, and the theme for the year—each one with two holes in it from being nailed to the front-lawn maple tree.

Reveille, played through a neighbor’s stereo, wakes up some of the teenagers, but not the neighborhood preschool set, who have been up much earlier decorating bikes, wagons, strollers, rollerblades, and reveling in the sort of sweet anticipation normally associated with Christmas. There is a Ping-Pong tournament that lasts throughout the day until a winner from the ten and under, and eleven and older categories are declared. Today the competition is named in honor of Jack Lightner, a long-time organizer of the Grand Hill Ping-Pong tournament who passed away two years ago.

At 1 p.m. (naptime moved it back from noon) everyone gathers for the parade. Each year a neighborhood dignitary volunteers to be the Grand Marshall, leading thirty or so colorful participants up and down the block. One year there were horses in the parade, one year a convertible, one year a racecar, often there are dogs with ribbons, there are floats, costumes, and bicycles—lots of bicycles lately! The parade is important in part because it is the genesis of the entire celebration.

The parade is followed by a patriotic speech given by the marshall. It usually incorporates the theme unique to that year, and ties in the reason for us gathering—commemoration of the birth of our nation. We pledge allegiance to the flag,

sing "My Country 'Tis of Thee," "The Star Spangled Banner" (inevitably someone shouts "play ball!" after it ends), and disperse to different activities. Usually children are rounded up for organized games, like a treasure hunt and three-legged race. There might be a magic show. One year there was a deflated hot-air balloon.

Posters made by the children are displayed and judged. Posters reflect the theme, such as creating stamp designs the year we honored the United States Postal System. At 3 p.m. we collect for a casual game of softball. As long as I can remember the teams were automatic—the north side of the street versus the south side of the street. No one is turned away, and with small children there may be strikes but not strike outs. When the game comes to a conclusion, we move on to the egg toss. There is actually a rotating trophy for this activity—eligible only to married couples living in the neighborhood. It is wonderful to see one of your parents toss an egg to your other parent, knowing that it is quite likely that one of them will end up with a handful of dripping egg mess.

Finally at dusk, it is time to get ready to eat. The Kentucky Cup, a julep made from mint leaves from various neighbors' gardens, has been a tradition started by a former, long-time resident of the



Celebrating the Fourth. In the above photo, the author is third from left in the white shirt. Behind her (on the right) is Patty Hugus. Next are Tim Hartnett and Molly Martin, with an unidentified friend on the ground beside her. Mrs. N. D. Jackson is standing in the background. Those in the photo below are, left to right, Francine O'Brien with Claire Rosemary, Tim O'Brien, Harriet Lansing as Grand Marshall, Maura O'Brien, Stuart Klein, and Hennessey Donovan.

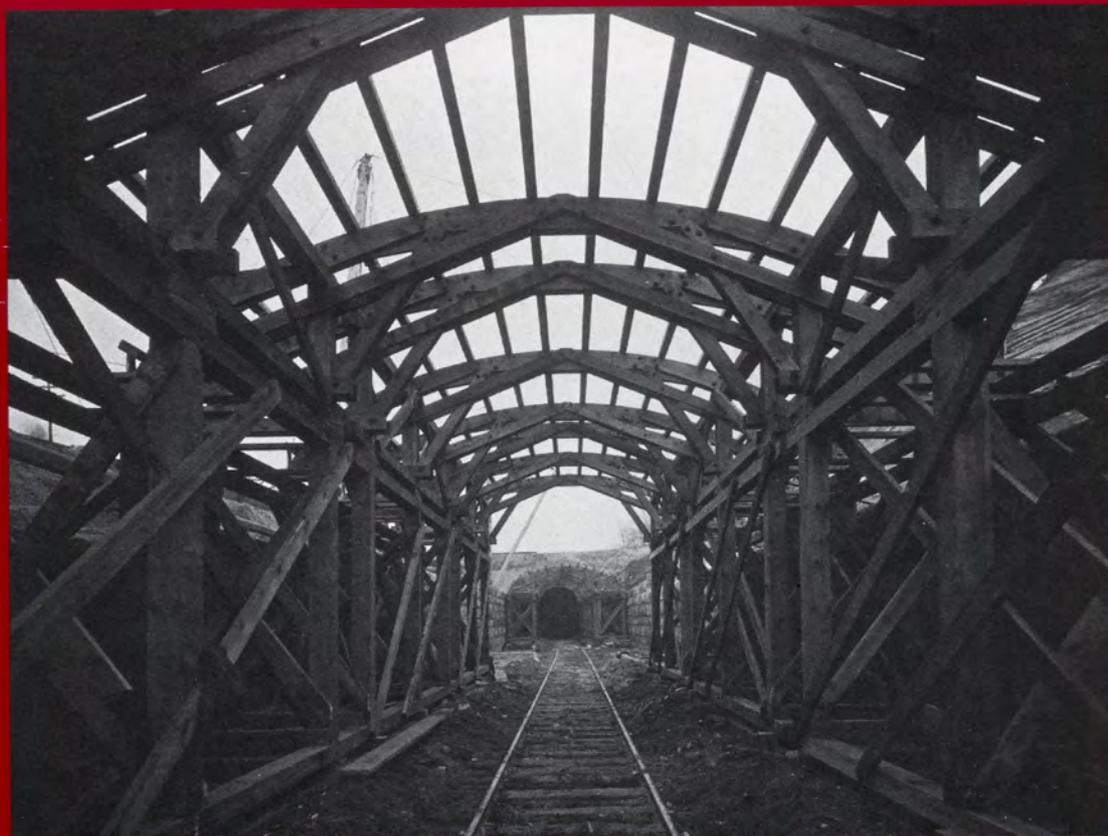
neighborhood and native of Louisville, Kentucky. While the adults enjoy hors d'oeuvres, the children watch a movie—originally something like "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," but now anything goes. Then comes the feast. Always there is too much to eat, and always it is a ban-

quet. I won't forget the year we roasted a pig over a spit and the children were allowed to turn the crank under careful supervision. After dinner there are awards, after awards there is clean up, then the trip down to the Capitol.

As a child it seemed to me that the day lasted at least forty hours. It was hard to see it end but I felt very full of the enchantment of the day. Today, I see my children reliving the wonder of all that the day offers. Firecracker noises usually are heard for several days after the holiday. Often if I am out of context, in another neighborhood, and a firecracker pops, I am transported to the stomping ground of my youth, and a little firework explodes inside, bursting with a momentary warmth of happy childhood memories.

Charlotte Lewis recorded her memories of Grand Hill's Fourth of July in collaboration with her brother, John Wright. Both are lifelong residents of St. Paul.





Centers for the flat arch of the Westminster tunnel. This view, taken on April 9, 1886, is looking toward the south. Photo courtesy of the National Railway Historical Society, North Star Chapter. See article beginning on page 9.

R.C.H.S.

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