

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

*The St. Paul Volunteer  
Fireman and the Battle  
of Gettysburg*

Page 13

**Spring, 2003**

Volume 38, Number 1

*An 'Attempt' on His Life?*

**Sitting Bull's 1884 Visit to St. Paul**

*—Page 4*



*Sitting Bull around 1880, just before his 1884 visit to St. Paul. Minnesota Historical Society photograph. See article beginning on page 4 on Sitting Bull's visit and an alleged attempt on his life. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.*

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

*Executive Director*

Priscilla Farnham

*Editor*

Virginia Brainard Kunz

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James A. Russell

*Chair*

Marlene Marschall

*President*

George Mairs

*First Vice President*

W. Andrew Boss

*Second Vice President*

Judith Frost Lewis

*Secretary*

Peter K. Butler

*Treasurer*

Duke Addicks, Charles L. Bathke, W. Andrew Boss, Peter K. Butler, Norbert Conzemius, Anne Cowie, Charlton Dietz, Charlotte H. Drake, Joanne A. Englund, Robert F. Garland, Howard Guthmann, Joan Higinbotham, Scott Hutton, Judith Frost Lewis, John M. Lindley, George A. Mairs, Marlene Marschall, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Richard Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Marvin J. Pertzik, Penny Harris Reynen, Glenn Weissner, Richard Wilhoit, Laurie Zenner, Ronald J. Zweber.

### EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chair; James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Mark Eisenschenk, Pat Hart, Thomas J. Kelley, Tom Mega, Laurie Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Paul D. Nelson, David Riehle, G. Richard Slade.

### HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, William Fallon, Robert S. Hess, D. W. "Don" Larson, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Robert Mirick, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

### RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner James McDonough, chairman  
Commissioner Susan Haigh  
Commissioner Tony Bennett  
Commissioner Rafael Ortega  
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt  
Commissioner Janice Rettman  
Commissioner Jan Wiessner

Paul Kirkwold, manager, 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 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 2003, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. **All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.** The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address admin@rchs.com.; web site address www.rchs.com

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 38, Number 1

Spring, 2003

## CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** 'A Shady Pair' and an 'Attempt on His Life'—  
Sitting Bull and His 1884 Visit to St. Paul  
*Paul D. Nelson*
- 13** The St. Paul Fireman Who Rose to Command the First  
Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment at Gettysburg  
*Patrick Hill*
- 17** The Volunteer Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company
- 18** Oakland Cemetery and Its First 150 Years  
*Chip Lindeke*
- 19** Roots in the English John Wesley  
St. Paul's First German Methodist Church  
*Helen Miller Dickison*
- 25** *Growing Up in St. Paul*  
'Homer Van Meter, a Member of the Karpis Gang,  
Was Shot Across the Street from Our House'  
*Bernice Fisher*

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. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

The Society regrets an omission from the 2002 Donor Recognition Roll in the Winter issue of *Ramsey County History*. The list of supporters should have included the name of Albert W. Lindeke, Jr., a generous and loyal supporter. We apologize for this omission.

## A Message from the Editorial Board

In 1884 the Lakota Indian leader Sitting Bull visited St. Paul. Our feature article in this issue focuses on the circumstances of his two brief stays in the city that year and whether during the latter visit there was an attempt to assassinate the man who embodied so much of the conflict between the white settlers and the native inhabitants of the American West. This issue also includes Civil War historian Patrick Hill's account of Wilson B. Farrell, a St. Paul volunteer fireman, who gave his life as a member of the First Minnesota Regiment in the Battle of Gettysburg and a brief salute to the sesquicentennial of the founding of St. Paul's Oakland Cemetery, where Farrell is now buried. This issue concludes with Helen Miller Dickison's history of today's Fairmount Methodist Church, Minnesota's first German Methodist church, which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2002.

Readers of *Ramsey County History* and anyone interested in the history of Ramsey County and St. Paul now have a new resource for history searches: the Society's web site at [www.rchs.com](http://www.rchs.com). On the site's home page, the researcher can click on several links that are of value. One is "Ask the Historian," which provides questions and answers about the area's history that recently have come to Society staff members. Another briefly profiles the histories of some of St. Paul's neighborhoods. All the information on this link comes from the Society's *Ramsey County Historic Site Survey Report*, a major resource in the RCHS library. The final link on the Society web page connects the user to information on the contents of the most recent issues of *Ramsey County History* and ties to a complete listing of articles published in the magazine since its initial publication in 1964. We hope this new link will get many hits from users and increase awareness of the richness of the content of our magazine's back issues.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*

---

# *Roots with the English John Wesley—* **St. Paul's First German Methodist Church**

*Helen Miller Dickison*

The United Methodist Church is best known for its roots with the English John Wesley. For nearly a century, however, thousands of German immigrants to the United States found their spiritual home in the German Methodist Church, a branch of the denomination with its own administration and its own language. St. Paul was home to several German Methodist churches in the nineteenth century, including the first German Methodist Church in Minnesota. This congregation, established in 1852, continued until 1917 when it moved to Fairmount Avenue and Saratoga Street and became affiliated with the English-speaking Minnesota conference. It continues today as Fairmount Avenue United Methodist Church.

The German Methodist Church had its roots in Cincinnati, where a large group of Germans had settled. Many of them Evangelical Lutherans, they apparently were drawn to Methodism for its emotional content and its emphasis upon individual salvation. The founder of German Methodism was Wilhelm Nast, who had begun Lutheran theological studies in Germany but left in disillusionment. In America, he came under the influence of the Methodists and, in 1833, asked to join them.

Nast's first assignment as a Methodist clergyman was in 1835, as a missionary to Cincinnati. Recruitment to the new church was slow for the first years but the booming German population was hungry for "anything in their own tongue" and Nast's message was welcome. In 1838 the first German Methodist Society was formed, with nineteen members. In 1839 the Methodists authorized a German language newspaper, the *Apologeten* (*Apologist*) and Nast was named its editor. This publication lasted for an entire century, defending the fundamental principles of evangelical Protestantism and Puritan morals with a conviction that never weakened.



*The John Wesley stained glass window, a memorial to Caroline Schurmeier who died in the Lake Gervais tornado, July 1890. All photographs with this article are from the church archives.*

Through the 1840s and 1850s, the German church grew and expanded, as immigrants settled farther north and west. Arguing that they had problems and needs that did not concern the English-speaking brethren (especially the need for religious materials in their own language), the German Methodists sought the formation of their own governing group. In 1864, the General Conference (national Methodist meetings) formed four German-speaking conferences, the Central, Northwest, Southwest, and East. The churches in Min-

nesota became part of the Northwest Conference. By the end of the century, when membership was at its peak, the German churches in America counted 644 preachers and 64,000 members, most of them in the Midwestern states. Sixty-three of these churches were in Minnesota, both in the larger cities and in rural areas.

A large number of Germans were among the throngs who made their way to Minnesota after it became a territory in 1849. St. Louis was another favorite destination for German immigrants, and

many of them then came up the Mississippi and settled in St. Paul. To the Methodists, the growing city became a promising area for extending their faith.

In 1851 the first German missionary visited St. Paul and shortly afterward, eight new arrivals organized themselves into a Mission. They held their first meetings in the home of Georg Haas, at the southwest corner of Seventh Street and Broadway in what is today Lowertown. The formal organization and the first church building followed soon after.

The first election of trustees for the First German Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Paul was held February 3, 1852, and certified before a justice of the peace the following day. The first trustees were Benjamin F. Hoyt, George H. Spencer, William D. Chilson, Ferdinand Knauft, and Henry Witte. (Only Knauft was a member of the church; the others were established citizens in the city.) The official name became Zion's Church and the trustees approved the first set of bylaws.

In September, 1852 the trustees bought a piece of land adjacent to the Haas property for \$1; it was sold to them for the sole purpose of erecting a "house or place of worship." This lot bordered Sixth Street between Broadway and Rosabel (now Wall Street), and extended for 165 feet toward Seventh Street. The first church building was erected in that year, a frame building 24 by 36 feet in size, at a cost of \$750. Few descriptive records exist from those first years, but trustees' records show that by 1856 the financial and legal matters were in the hands of church members, namely C. H. and J. H. Schurmeier, Eduard Zimmerman, Ferdinand Knauft, Georg Haas, Wilhelm Metz, Johann Ortmann, G. Henneberg, and Louis Krieger. Lists of church members, marriages, and baptisms provide evidence of a rapidly growing, youthful congregation. By the end of 1858 it numbered nearly 100 members, with twenty-one marriages and fifty-four baptisms during the first six years.

By the end of 1858, a larger church was needed. The second building was erected adjacent to the first, but facing Rosabel Street. Modeled after existing Methodist churches on the East Coast,

the Rosabel church was a two-story building with a steeple, the sanctuary on the second floor, and Sunday School and meeting rooms on the ground floor. The original building was remodeled and used for the parsonage. Sunday services met at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. with Sunday School in the afternoon. Men and women sat in separate sections and ushers were appointed "to show people to their seats . . . so that good order prevails." The choir first occupied the front pews but soon moved to a choir loft. In 1872 it was noted that "Older children are not to sit in the back pews of the gallery [balcony] but in the middle pews."

In keeping with the Methodist model, the congregation was divided into study classes, which met before or after worship services or sometimes in the evening. In addition to Sunday services and classes, members were active in prayer meetings, Bible study groups during the week, and frequent camp meetings, "love feasts," revival meetings, or other special gatherings. The church purchased property in Woodbury and the first German camp meeting was held there in 1855. Chauncey Hobart, in the 1887 book, *The History of Methodism in Minnesota*, wrote about that event. Four preachers participated, including the presiding elder of the Upper Iowa Conference.

"There were seven tents on the ground. Two editors from St. Paul had come out to report on the doings. Each preacher preached once or twice a day and on the Sabbath they had six sermons. Thus they kept themselves well employed and in the right spirit. Souls were converted and Brother Zollman claims it was the best camp meeting he ever attended."

Music was an integral part of worship services from the beginning. Hymnals were purchased for visitors and members early on, and a choir organized by at least 1863. The congregation purchased an organ in 1864, and a larger one in 1869; a person was employed for "pumping air for the organ," to be paid from the administrators' fund. In 1885 the congregation purchased another new organ, made by a Mr. Gabler of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, for \$1,500. Reflecting their wish for reading materials in German, members sub-

scribed to a number of religious publications, both for adults and Sunday School children. The church also maintained a library that, in 1889, contained 221 books. Funds were regularly allotted for new purchases.

By all accounts, the German Methodists in St. Paul were a close-knit, active faith community. In addition to their church associations, a number of them were in business together. The *St. Paul City Directory* for 1876, for instance, lists the following businesses: C. Fischer and F. J. Schulze, stoves and hardware; B. Diether and T. Beulke, meat market; H. Gotzian, W. Funk, and F. Knauft, boots and shoes; C. Mathes, E. Good, and J. H. Schurmeier, wagon makers; and F. Kaese, W. Mahle, and L. Sutmmer, wagon makers and blacksmiths. All of these names appear frequently in the church records.

All members were expected to participate in the church's strenuous schedule of activities. Frequently the preachers and church leaders expressed concern that members were not as faithful in attendance as they should be. Indeed, church membership and living a Christian life were matters to be taken very seriously. Of special concern was the importance of keeping the Sabbath in an appropriate way, a particular tenet of the Methodists. Several church members were designated as "admonishers" and frequently warned individuals for lapses in Christian behavior. In addition to laxity in attendance, grounds for admonishment included improper behavior toward a spouse or acquaintance, questionable business dealings, serving or drinking alcohol, card playing, or visiting the theater. In 1893 the pastor urged parents and older church members to strive in guiding the youth so that they would "avoid the dangers that threaten us in this direction."

As an institution the church supported public policies that extended their religious beliefs. Their emphasis on keeping the Sabbath paralleled the struggle in the labor world to establish a six-day work week. They supported the cause of the Union in the Civil War and sent money to the South for "free Blacks" in the years that followed. A matter of grave concern was the manufacture and consumption of



*Zion's Church, 1852–1859, at Sixth Street between Broadway and Rosabel (now Wall) Street in St. Paul. Zion's Church was the official name for what was known as the First German Methodist Church.*

alcohol. The Northwest Conference resolved in 1878 that “it is therefore our holiest duty . . . to raise our voice as a trumpet to warn people of this threatening danger.” For the Rosabel congregation and those that followed, temperance (actually, prohibition) continued to be an issue for more than a century, until the late 1960s.

The membership of the Rosabel Church increased through the 1860s and stabilized at about 215. In addition, the Sunday School enrolled between 150 and 200 children. The church's first members lived nearby, in the Lowertown neighborhood. As the church and city grew, so did the drawing area of German settlers. Many members lived in the area known as Dayton's Bluff. No bridges had yet been built across the ravine, so each Sunday, as well as for other church meetings, these parishioners came down the bluff and across the ravine to church, many of them on foot. Eventually, as part of its mission outreach, the First Church spon-

sored a new congregation to serve the bluff neighborhood and, in 1887, thirty-six of its members left to join the Dayton's Bluff German Methodist Church, at Fourth and Maple Streets. This congregation was the parent church of Christ United Methodist Church in Maplewood. The First Church already had been active in starting mission churches in other parts of St. Paul. In 1875 they established a mission at 510 Bradley, a congregation that later merged with the Dayton's Bluff Church. In 1885, they sponsored the West Side German Church at Bidwell and George Streets. They also began a mission on Rice Street, but its exact location and later history are not known.

In the earliest years, the organization of the congregation was comparatively simple. Its affairs were managed by three groups: the trustees, the church leaders (or administrators), and the class leaders. By 1876, formal committees began to be named in a number of areas: Sunday School, tracts (religious literature),

music, and assessments (finance). Auditors were added in 1881 and a committee on education in 1883. As elsewhere in nineteenth century society, men were the decision makers and administrators. In the 1880s women began to serve in Sunday School leadership positions and on church committees, but the full involvement of women in the administrative and financial affairs of the church was far in the future.

Two special features of the Rosabel Church are noteworthy. First, in 1860 the church established a graveyard adjacent to the church on Rosabel Street. The cemetery existed until 1889, when the city condemned part of the property for street widening. The remains then were moved to Oakland Cemetery or a place of the family's choice. Even while this graveyard existed, however, individual church members were purchasing their own family plots at Oakland and a number of their graves are identifiable today. The church records contain many references to the “cemetery property” even after the Rosabel graveyard was closed and the church relocated. The trustees apparently bought land elsewhere that never was used for this purpose; it was finally sold in 1909.

A second special feature of the Rosabel Church was the day school established in 1863. These German settlers sought to sustain their common heritage, their language, and their sense of community; they also were strong advocates of education, both religious and secular. A decision to arrange for religious instruction and Bible study for children is recorded as early as 1860. The school met daily on the lower floor of the church and in October, 1865 it became an official part of the church—a “congregation school.” The school master was John Seebich, who had received technical and professional training in Germany. The day school also attracted children from the larger community. In a master's thesis, “Germans in St. Paul” (University of Minnesota 1932), Margaret Mussgang wrote,

Quite a number of American [i.e., non-German] families attended and received instruction in German at a flourishing elemen-

tary school connected with the German Methodist congregation at Rosabel and Sixth Streets. . . . Its programs of German and English readings and dialogs, musical selections, and its exhibitions were always well attended and received favorable comment from friends of education. In 1867 the school was able to engage two teachers for its growing classes. [p. 79]

The day school continued until 1876 and the reasons for its termination are unclear. It is possible that the declining interest in the use of German by the younger generation contributed to the school's closing. By 1888 the pastor reported, "It is greatly to be desired that more of the children could read and speak German better, for many are inarticulate, even in memorizing." The pastor now needed to instruct children in reading German along with their catechism. Even with the great increase in English usage, however, German continued to be used in the church into the twentieth century.

The Rosabel Street church served the congregation for a third of a century and was a thriving St. Paul institution. In 1876 the editor of *Haus und Herd (Home and Hearth)*, a German Methodist publication, spent a week in Minnesota and reported:

The church life of the Germans in St. Paul might well be described as spirited and progressive. Outstanding is the First German Methodist Church, "Rosabel Street," a large and vigorous congregation with a well established Mission in another part of the city. What a strong, healthy congregation and what a fine group of young people the fathers and mothers of the congregation raised to follow in their footsteps and carry on the activities of the church! . . . I hope and pray that First Church will be a great influence for good in the community.

By the late 1880s the church was increasingly assessed for city improvements—road widening and paving, sidewalks, sewers—as St. Paul's commercial and business interests expanded. In 1889, in addition to the street widening, the city condemned part of the property for bridge construction on Sixth Street. Church leaders already had recognized the difficulty of attracting new members



*Van Slyke Court, 1892–1917, the First German Methodist Church located on Van Slyke Court between Olive and Eleventh Streets.*

to the area and had begun to seek a new site. By spring, 1891, the property at Van Slyke Court, Olive and Eleventh Streets, had been identified as promising, and the trustees authorized the purchase of two lots, for a church and parsonage. The architectural firm of Cass Gilbert and James Taylor was chosen to design the new church and it was clearly intended to be one of the "show places" of the thriving city. Its style was Richardson Romanesque; interior plans have been lost, but a contemporary report referred to it as a "well arranged modern church." Several stained glass windows, installed as memorials, were moved to the Fairmount Avenue church building when it was erected and they continue to be focal

points of the sanctuary. One window, believed to be unique, depicts John Wesley, Methodism's founder. It was a memorial to Caroline Schurmeier who, along with several others, died in the Lake Gervais tornado in July, 1890. The windows, which have been described as "Tiffany quality," were made by the St. Paul Stained Glass Company for a total of \$461, just over \$9,000 in today's dollars. The cornerstone was laid at Van Slyke Court on September 13, 1891—First German Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church—and the new church was consecrated on July 3, 1892.

Following the move to Van Slyke Court, membership increased to 290 and names of the second generation begin to

appear in the records. Before long, however, some of these offspring moved to other parts of the city and changed their church affiliation as well. Sunday School attendance reached its peak of 150 in 1894; by 1901 it had declined to ninety, suggesting an aging congregation and a lack of new, younger members.

Throughout the first decade at Van Slyke Court, the trustees made a concerted effort to eliminate indebtedness. Although the new church had been built debt-free from proceeds of the Rosabel property, the church had long-standing financial obligations that resulted from borrowing from individuals, banks, and the German Mission Society. This situation may be attributable to the vigorous efforts to start mission churches in the early years, or to fluctuating economic times. In its daily operations the congregation continued to pay its salaries, contribute generously to missions, and make all building repairs and improvements, but it paid heavy interest—sometimes as much as 10 to 15 percent—on its loans. In 1894 the congregation agreed to a program of increasing assessments to members by 25 percent over the previous year. This effort met with some success, but the debt was not fully retired until 1905–1906, and then through a vigorous program of soliciting subscriptions or pledges. The church celebrated that accomplishment and its fifty-fifth anniversary with a Jubilee on May 6, 1906. The pastor reported at the Quarterly Conference on May 16:

The celebration was a success in every respect and will remain in grateful memories. . . . Brother [William] Mahle gave an encouraging report, showed the paid-off notes, and said there were no more unpaid notes. Thereafter he thanked Brother Jacob Mathes, the president of the trustees and one of only four still living members who were present at the founding of the original congregation and [who] gave witness to God's grace which has come his way.

Even as the congregation celebrated, however, there were signs of change. At the same meeting where the church leaders celebrated the end of indebtedness, the pastor noted the many changes in the neighborhood and recommended that a

long-range planning committee be appointed. In September, 1906, although membership stood at 276, he noted that “our people are still moving away from the lower city district, which makes it especially difficult to keep up the numbers of members in Sunday School and is also harmful to the prayer meetings.”

Membership directories, published every three years from 1895 to 1911, show a steady decline in numbers, to 227 by 1908. In May, 1914, perhaps reflecting the changes that were occurring, the congregation held a homecoming celebration during the morning worship service. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported the event, saying, in part:

The day was one of the greatest in the history of the church. The sermon was preached by Dr. C. F. Blume, pastor of the church, in English . . . The services yesterday were participated in by many of the older members of the congregation. William Funk and William Mahle gave reminiscences of the early history of the church. On the church roll is found the names of many of the most prominent Germans of the city. Among the family names familiar to old residents of the city . . . are Haas, Knauff, Schurmeier, Henneberg, Krieger, Klinkerfus, Zimmerman, Bueneman, Knapheide, Nippolt, Nienhauser, Gotzian, Schulze, Gottschammer, Beulke, Feldhauser, Nienaber, Tubbesing, Habighorst, Good, Lindeke, Hulsick, Mathes, Adams, Loy, Wilhelm, Ickler, Diether, Heinlein, Dieter, Kluckhohn, Miller, and others. The heads of a few of these families are still living, and the descendants of a number still worship at Van Slyke Court church. The services yesterday were followed by an informal reception at which those who have found new church homes but had returned for the day renewed acquaintances with those who have remained true to the First German church of St. Paul.

The gradual, but inevitable, transition from German to English emerges as an intriguing theme in church records. We have noted that by the late 1880s the preachers were having to teach German to children in Sunday School and catechism. Although the trustees' minutes continue in German until 1901 and those of the Quarterly Conference were in Ger-

man until 1907, some “official” notices and reports in English had begun to be inserted by 1894, and are found more frequently thereafter.

As part of the consecration ceremonies for the Van Slyke Court church, an evening service was conducted in English. It apparently was well received, for by January, 1893 the congregation had begun to offer English sermons on Sunday evenings every two weeks. The pastor reported attendance of forty to fifty at the German service and fifty to 100 at the English. (Attendance at the morning German service continued to be between 190 and 200.) By 1900, attendance at the English services had tripled. Reports of members' subscriptions to church publications show that, although many continued to read the German publications, an increasing number subscribed to English-language materials. This was especially true of publications for children, and it was reported that the Sunday School was using a mixture of German and English by the turn-of-the-century.

The preachers continued to carry the primary responsibility for teaching German. In 1896 one pastor said he had “tried to keep the children so that they learn how to read and write some German. Some of them are making good progress in this respect.” But by 1899 he had surrendered, and was offering catechism instruction each Saturday in both languages, each for one hour. Sixteen students were enrolled in the English class and nine in the German.

It was clearly difficult for the church leaders to give up their language heritage, even though most of them, and surely their children, were thoroughly assimilated into the English-speaking society. The “language problem” continued to be an issue into the twentieth century; periodically the question arose among church leaders and each time they resolved again to hold German services on Sunday mornings and services in English in the evenings. In a 1973 history of Minnesota Methodism (*Forever Beginning*, by T. Otto Nall), an 1887 speaker is quoted on the views of German Methodism at that time. He said, “With the prospect of continued German immigra-

tion we still have great work to do, not only that we should be good Methodists, but that we remain German in every good sense of the word.” The attempt to “remain German” in the First German Church continued until the time of the First World War. Robert J. Rice, a long-time leader of Minnesota Methodism and the church’s pastor from 1921–1924, wrote, “Many of our people who had the roots of their religious thinking in German life found it difficult to accept a war in which Germany was involved, but their loyalty to the land of their adoption was marked and definite.”

The end of the church’s identity as the First German Society occurred only a few years after the homecoming celebration. In 1916, in order to expand its St. Paul switching yards, the Great Northern Railroad offered to purchase the Van Slyke Court property for \$55,000. The congregation faced a decision as to whether the Society should be dissolved, turning over its assets to the Conference and allowing members to affiliate with other churches, or to start anew in another part of the city. The majority decided on the latter course.

After some exploration of prospects “up on the hill,” the trustees were authorized to purchase three lots at the corner of Fairmount and Saratoga. The new Tudor-style church building and adjacent parsonage were designed by the architectural firm of Albin and Price. The cornerstone was laid on May 30, 1917, and the church was dedicated on December 2 of that year. In addition to the stained glass windows, pews and other furnishings were moved to the new building. The Van Slyke Court cornerstone was installed in the new narthex but, because of the prevailing anti-German sentiment, it was covered by a hinged wooden plate. The cover remained in place until 1965, when it was removed and the congregation reclaimed its heritage. The changeover from the First German Society was soon complete. The church name became Fairmount Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church; new English hymnals were purchased and members subscribed to the mainstream Methodist magazine, the *Christian Advocate*. In June, 1918, the Official Board voted to transfer mem-



*Fairmount Avenue United Methodist Church, 1917, at Fairmount and Saratoga, where it moved in 1918.*

bership from the Northern German Conference to the Minnesota Conference.

The German Conference itself was absorbed by the Minnesota Conference later in 1918 and English became the prevailing language in all church services. By the early 1920s the German church—where it still existed—had become an “old people’s church.” One by one the German conferences in other regions merged with their geographical conferences. The Central Conference was the last, merging into the Ohio Conference in 1933.

The Fairmount Avenue Church congregation soon created a new identity as a community church that appealed to a broad range of St. Paul residents. It thrived in its new, rapidly growing neighborhood, and has been a strong community institution for the past eighty-six years. Reflecting the demographics of the surrounding area, its membership reached a peak of 698 in 1948, then began a slow decline as young families moved to the suburbs and remaining members aged. By 1989, membership was down to 244, but young families had begun to return to the area and the Sunday School enrolled more than 100

children. This trend has continued: current membership is 320, with nearly 150 preparatory (pre-confirmation) members. Throughout its history, Fairmount Avenue church has conducted a vigorous program of education for all ages, maintained an active music program, and given strong support to local and worldwide mission projects. In 2002 the congregation celebrated its first 150 years of faith and service in St. Paul, with special emphasis on and appreciation for its German beginnings.

*Helen Miller Dickison has been a member of Fairmount Avenue United Methodist Church since 1961. She serves as church historian and last year completed a book on its history, Fairmount Avenue United Methodist Church, 1852–2002: 150 Years of Faith and Service. This article is excerpted from the book. She gives special acknowledgment to Helen K. Johnson, church historian from 1963–2001, and to Alison Anderson, a former member, whose translations of the church’s German records made this publication possible.*



*"Little Sure Shot," Annie Oakley. Photograph from the Annie Oakley Foundation Collection, Greenville, Ohio. See article beginning on page 4.*

**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

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage  
PAID  
St. Paul, MN  
Permit #3989