

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Spring 2006

Volume 41, Number 1

*Stahlmann's Cellars:
The Cave Under
the Castle*

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Lost Neighborhood

Mary Hill's Lowertown, 1867–1891

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Mary Mehegan Hill (1867). This painting is from a wedding photograph. The date of the painting and the artist are not known. In 1956 a member of the Hill family gave this painting to the James J. Hill Reference Library. Reproduced by permission of the James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, Minnesota. Photograph by Maureen McGinn.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 41, Number 1

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect,
preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public,
recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make
available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major
responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

Our Spring issue leads with dual articles presenting a vibrant portrait of old Lowertown, which now remains only as a fragment of a neighborhood tucked within a spaghetti-like web of freeway lanes. Eileen McCormack describes the social and economic framework that nourished Jim and Mary Hill from 1867 until 1891, when they moved to their Summit Avenue mansion. And David Riehle portrays the homes and businesses of working-class St. Paul citizens in the same neighborhood. Greg Brick leads a reader's tour underneath the streets in the West Seventh area, through thirty miles of corridors leading to caves that once cooled German-style lager beer brewed by the Stahlmann, and later Schmidt, breweries. Bernice Fisher provides an evocative remembrance of attending St. Adalbert's Catholic school in a Polish neighborhood full of traditions. Finally, many treasures await readers who sample our reviewers' picks marking, among others, Minnesota's state capitol building, the career of a recent riverboat legend, and the story of a gifted educator who grew up on a farm supplying butter and meat to city dwellers. We are proud of the last, *Pearl and the Howling Hound Farm*, which is one of our own recent publications, available through RCHS. Happy reading!

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

Book Reviews

Minnesota's Capitol— A Centennial Story

Leigh Roethke

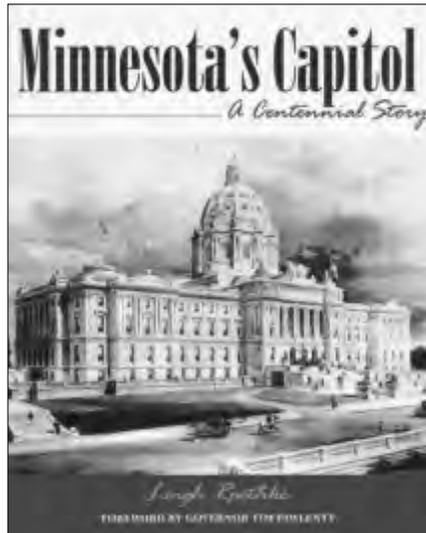
Foreword by Governor Tim Pawlenty
Afton Historical Society Press, 2005
120 pages, 100 color and black-and-
white illustrations, index, \$24.

Reviewed by Virginia Brainard Kunz

This is an informative and entertaining look at the three houses Minnesotans built as homes for their government. Only the last, however, which opened 100 years ago, in 1905, has been as replicated in so many venues, from thousands of postcards, to an elaborately decorated cake to a replica painstakingly sculptured in butter.

Author Roethke, who is completing a Ph. D. in art history at the University of Minnesota, traces the evolution of state government's first official home: a red brick pillared structure built in 1853 at Tenth and Cedar Streets and destroyed by fire thirty years later. It was followed by a rather incongruous building with a square tower that rose on the same site. Perennially outgrowing its space, the Capitol soon needed to be replaced. In 1895, a State Capitol Board of Commissioners awarded the task to architect Cass Gilbert. The rest, as they say, is history.

Roethke recalls some of the glitches along the way, such as the tale of "Jolly Joe" Rolette's successful effort to thwart a politically-driven effort to move the state's seat of government to St. Peter. The lively narrative moves the reader through the history not just of a state Capitol but of the city itself. The photographs illustrate the story beautifully. This reviewer's favorite is Nicholas Richard Brewer's "Wabasha



Streetscape," a view from downtown St. Paul that incorporates the last two Capitols as they looked in 1908.

The late Virginia Brainard Kunz was the editor of Ramsey County History. She wrote this review in late 2005.

Pearl and the Howling Hound Farm: A Gifted Educator Remembers

Pearl Marea Schenk
St. Paul, Minn:
Ramsey County Historical Society, 2006
151 pages, \$25.00

Reviewed by Anne B. Webb

The story of *Pearl and the Howling Hound Farm*, an autobiography by Pearl Marea Schenk, comes within a beautifully produced book. The cover's yellows, browns, and black catch the eye. Inside, the type is elegantly placed on oversized, cream-colored pages.

Photographs abound and sketches fill any omissions. An unusual detail or a particular incident can merit its own marked off part of a page, an illustration in words.

Pearl Schenk divides her book into three subjects. The early chapters tell of her ancestry, including her immediate family. She devotes the middle chapters to life on the Howling Hound Farm, perhaps the heart of the book. Pearl closes with her career in education, a career that started in a one-room schoolhouse and ended in her office as the school psychologist.

Among the many jobs on American farms, one of the most important for farmwomen has been butter making. From pioneer days onward, farmwomen made the butter and what was not eaten at home, they sold at the local store for cash or credit. Women called the money they received "pin money," money they could spend on some of life's nonessentials. On the Howling Hound Farm, however, Pearl's father, William H. Schenk, made the butter, perhaps because of the illness and eventual death of Pearl's mother. Regardless of who the butter maker was, in winter the churning of butter was done in the kitchen, usually the realm of the women of the house.

Pearl's father made and sold butter from early in the twentieth century, 1904, until 1938, the waning days of the Great Depression. Pearl's father was a wholesaler when he sold his butter to Kimball's Grocery, but he was a retailer when he delivered the butter to the doorstep of individual buyers, one of the advantages of farming close to St. Paul. After Pearl's father had ladled the butter into "Red Wing crocks," he placed three rows of paddle marks on the butter. Pearl's job

was to place wax paper over his trademark. William Schenk's customers left payment for this week's order outside in last week's crock along with a note with the next week's order. Pearl wrote, "He tolerated no nonsense from his customers . . . [and] expected to find a clean jar in the same place with the exact amount charged, to the last penny." Pearl's father was decidedly the boss when he dropped customers he considered unsatisfactory. Because Pearl's father made and collected payment for butter, the women in Pearl's family lacked the limited financial independence that the sale of their butter brought most women on American farms.

The closeness of a city also enabled Pearl's father to raise hens from chicks and sell both eggs and cut-up chickens. The family also slaughtered and dressed hogs and then sold the meat, the family ate their own beef, which Pearl's father cured by placing it on top of the washing machine until "a nice growth of mold" grew. Family members then cut off the mold and stored the cut-up meat in the icehouse, the ice taken from the Mississippi River. Before being eaten, the beef was boiled producing a smell that was less wonderful than the later good taste of the meat. Pearl's father took farm products directly to individual buyers. Today's buyers go to the farm or the farmer's market, and sometimes pick the harvest themselves, willingly paying for the privilege.

Pearl left to the end of the book a description of her training and professional life as an educator in Minnesota. When she was in high school, Pearl wanted to attend college, but the cost made doing so impossible. On the advice of her stepmother, Pearl enrolled in teacher training during her last year of high school. She did her student teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. The next year, 1929, Pearl became the teacher in that school. She earned \$720 a year. After repaying her parents the cost of her teacher education and her expenses, she sent two thirds of her salary home to her father who kept the money in the house. As a result, Pearl did not lose her savings in the 1929



crash. In one room, Pearl taught as many as forty-two students in grades one through eight. Many weekends Pearl went home, her father fetching and returning her to where she roomed and boarded.

When Pearl taught school, married women were barred from teaching although widows were not. Salary discrimination also occurred, men earning more money than women doing the same job. The first major change in school curriculum did not occur until 1945 when ". . . teacherpupil planning [became] as non-authoritarian as possible."

In the late 1940s, Pearl gained her wish to attend college. In 1952 she completed her education with a Master of Arts degree from the University of Minnesota. In 1959 Pearl became a certified school psychologist. She was part of the Roseville school district from 1954 to 1976. She returned to Howling Hound Farm in 1968, to care for her ailing father. She lived at the farm commuting to her school by car until her father died in 1976, the same year she retired under a mandatory retirement system. Pearl lived alone on the farm that winter. She ends her book with several pages of special remembrances, both the good kind and the bad.

Anne B. Webb is a retired Professor Emeritus from Metropolitan State Uni-

versity in St. Paul where she had been a professor of history.

Ol' Man River: Memoirs of a Riverboat Captain

Bill Bowell

Reviewed by Don Boxmeyer

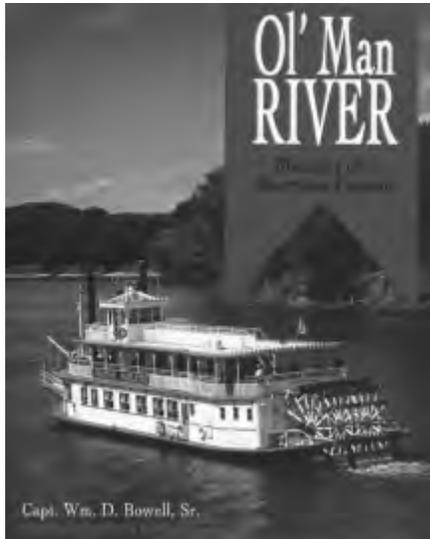
The Big Picture came easily and early to Bill Bowell. He knew as a boy what the world wanted, what it needed. When it needed a newspaper, he was the paperboy. When it needed popcorn, he got the old Fearless Popper going. When his country needed paratroopers, he came jumping out of the sky.

And when the Mississippi River called for a boat, Bowell built one. When the river needed a bigger boat, he bought one of those, and when that wasn't big enough, he sawed it in half and made it 20 feet longer.

Bowell was blessed with what you might call the entrepreneurial spirit. Mix that with equal parts brains and bravado and you have a character. Capt. William D. Bowell Sr., the man who gave St. Paul the Padelford Packet Boat fleet, is a bona fide character.

You would qualify as a character in anyone's lexicon if you turned a \$300,000 riverboat around in a very, very narrow part of the Mississippi to go fetch a \$25 cap that blew off your head. You're a character if you can make your way, at age 57, down 1,700 miles of river in a 12-foot rowboat from St. Paul to New Orleans in 11 days, managing en route to: (1.) almost sink the boat on a wing dam, (2.) dump an heirloom ring overboard and then find a buddy to dive for it to the bottom of the Mississippi, and (3.) survive a whole day on a small hunk of cheese and a quart of scotch. Bowell slept well that night.

In his new book, *Ol' Man River: Memoirs of a Riverboat Captain*, the skipper tells what it's been like to live out a boyhood dream, to spend his life on the river he grew up next to, and to build an empire out of really big things that are fun to plow around in.



“Hook on My Soul”

The Jonathan Padelford is the most famous of 21 barges, restaurants, show-boats, stern-wheel and side-wheel excursion craft, towboats, tugboats and runabouts that Bowell has introduced to the Mississippi, most of those from his headquarters at Harriet Island in downtown St. Paul.

That’s not far from where it all started for Bowell 85 years ago this Valentine’s Day [2006]. He was one of 12 Bowell children who grew up largely in West St. Paul and South St. Paul. His earliest memory, he writes in his book, “is a guy threatening to cut off my ears.” The old skipper has been light on his feet ever since, and it’s with a touch of pride that he writes that his daddy, who hustled new cars, once sold 25 Model A Fords in one day.

There must have been some of the old man in young Bill, because when things got bad during the Great Depression, he energetically added what he could to the family income by shining shoes and selling newspapers and magazines. Later, after his father rigged up a used Model A truck to look like a castle, Bowell sold popcorn and Hire’s root beer out of it at such places as Lake Phalen and Harriet Island.

It was the old river excursion boat, *Capitol*, that drew young Bowell’s attention to the river. The 1879 paddle wheeler was the last such boat on the

Mississippi, and it operated between New Orleans and St. Paul for 25 years.

“Looking back now,” the skipper writes, “I think the *Capitol* probably set the hook on my soul for the river.”

But he had some stops first: He served as a soil soldier in FDR’s Civilian Conservation Corps because that paid \$30 a month, he signed up for the Minnesota National Guard because he got a new pair of shoes, and when World War II broke out, he became a paratrooper because those guys got medals and made extra money if they survived.

“I was not a good peacetime soldier,” he confesses, adding, “On the battlefield, however, I was all business. I didn’t have much fear in combat. When I saw a job to be done, I just did it.”

His unit jumped into France the day before D-Day in 1944, and he was in the Battle of the Bulge. He came home with frostbite and a chest full of medals including four battle stars, the Combat Infantry Badge, three French Croix de Guerres, the Purple Heart, and the Bronze Star.

After the war he got married, had a child, went to college on the GI bill, and threw himself seriously into his studies at Macalester College. But he was also on the prowl for the rare opportunity, such as the annual Macalester-St. Thomas football game, the big event of the year.

He managed to get exclusive rights to the popcorn and hot dog concessions at the game and spent all his money on buns, hot dogs, popcorn and 500 cases of Coca-Cola. He’d make a fortune at the game. He couldn’t miss.

But a day before the big game, a Mac football player died and the contest was called off.

The Bowell spirit kicked into high gear. He talked Coca-Cola into buying back the pop, sold all his popcorn in the dorms, peddled the buns and hot dogs to neighborhood grocers and wound up breaking even. He was ready for the river.

Building a Fleet

He bought his first boat in 1951, a 26-foot Steelcraft duckboat that he turned

into an excursion boat named *Toka*. The plan was to use *Toka* to ferry passengers from the foot of Jackson Street across the river to the notorious Tugboat Annie’s nightclub on what is now Raspberry Island. He got himself licensed as a skipper and was all set to make a fortune.

Then the St. Paul police raided the joint and put Tugboat Annie out of business.

Bowell sold *Toka* and went on to other things. He was a photographer and writer for a while, got into the publishing business, the manufacturing business, invented a few things that changed the world, and by 1965 was drawn back to the Mississippi because “boats were imprinted in my DNA.”

His next boat was *Ugh the Tug*, a beloved little 26-foot tugboat that Bowell used to tool around the river. Meanwhile, his attraction to the dry land business world was waning when he was running an experimental chicken farm and “got tired of hauling chicken (bleep). An idea floated back to me. No one was doing excursion trips around St. Paul.”

The *Jonathan Padelford* (named for his 10th great-grandfather) was the first, a 121-foot stern-wheeler Bowell designed to haul passengers up and down the river. Business the first year, 1970, was so good he had it sawed in half and lengthened 20 feet. And from that first day on the river, he never looked back.

“Everyone thought I was nuts,” he said. “The *Jonathan Padelford* is still my favorite boat because you couldn’t do it today. Everyone thought I was going through my midlife crisis.”

And he kept adding to his fleet: the *Zebulon Pike*, the *Josiah Snelling*, the *Governor Ramsey* and the *Shantyboat*. Later, there would be the *Viking Explorer*, the *Anson Northrup*, and the *Betsey Northrup* and *Harriet Bishop*.

In 2002, Bowell performed his last bit of magic for the Padelford. Packet Boat Co., which by then he’d passed along to his children to run. After a fire destroyed the University of Minnesota’s *Centennial Showboat*, he built them a

\$2 million boat, which the university owns and the boat company maintains and operates.

These days, Bowell is a passenger on the riverboats (although he says he's still the best pilot around) and listens to the new onboard narration recorded by WCCO's Don Shelby ("Shelby's good, but the one I wrote is still the best"). He devotes much of his time and archives to the National Mississippi River Museum in Dubuque, Iowa. The museum includes many of the scores of river paintings Bowell commissioned from talented St. Paul artist Ken Fox.

Bowell's book also is enhanced by the talents of St. Paul editor Biloine Young and retired *Pioneer Press* editorial artist Jerry Fearing.

The skipper's next big challenge? To explore the old Erie, Champlain, Oswego, and Cayuna-Seneca Canals of New York by boat.

But before that, he'll take his *Captain's Super Boat* for a voyage on the Mississippi River above the St. Anthony Falls, "looking for new adventures on these waters.

"This is my river, after all, and it's time I explored more of it."

Unfortunately, both of those adventures will have to wait until the captain meets his next big challenge, which arose earlier this month.

"Was quite sudden," the old skipper says. "I was dressing for dinner and my left leg gave out. I had terrible pain, and it was a blood clot, so they took the leg above the knee.

"I'm going to get fitted with an artificial leg, and then I'll be back out on that river."

Editor's Note: The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks Don Boxmeyer and the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* for their permission to reprint this article from the February 10, 2006, edition of the *Pioneer Press*. Retired *Pioneer Press* columnist Don Boxmeyer can be reached at donboxmeyer@comcast.net. Capt. Bill Bowell Sr. published a *Growing Up in St. Paul* that recounted his experiences with the "Fearless" Popcorn Popper and Harriet Island in

the Summer 1994 issue of this magazine. We wish Capt. Bowell good health and happy times as he continues his explorations of the Mississippi River. *Ol' Man River: Memoirs of a Riverboat Captain* by Capt. William D. Bowell Sr., edited by Biloine Young, with cartoons by Jerry Fearing is published by Afton Historical Society Press (2005). The cost is \$32.00.

Our Hallowed Ground: World War II Veterans of Fort Snelling National Cemetery

Stephen Chicoine
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 2005
262 pages, \$19.95

Reviewed by John M. Lindley

In Stephen Chicoine's words, his book "is not intended to glorify war, but to pay honor to the valor of those who sacrificed for the nation" in World War II and are buried at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery. Established in 1939, the cemetery today is the final resting place for nearly 170,000 U.S. servicemen and women and their immediate families.

Chicoine begins with a very brief history of Fort Snelling and its role in World War II. He explains who is eligible for burial at the 436-acre national cemetery and how it is laid out. He also provides a short history of the cemetery's Memorial Rifle Squad. Chicoine's focus, however, is the individual stories of ninety men and women who served in World War II and are buried at Fort Snelling. He wants the reader to know who these men and women were, what they did during World War II, and if they survived the war, a little of what they did after their military service ended.

This book is organized into seven chapters that take the reader chronologically from the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 through the defeat of Japan. Within each chapter Chicoine recounts the wartime stories of a number of men

and women who were connected with each theater or campaign. All the military services plus the Women's Army Corps, army and navy nurses, the National Guard, and the merchant marine are represented.

The profiles are well written, generally only two or three pages long, and are often accompanied by either a photo of the veteran or a photo that is relevant to the veteran's service. St. Paul is the hometown that appears most often among all the service personnel who are represented in this book, but Minneapolis is a close second. More than twenty of the service members whose stories are included were killed in action and five won the Medal of Honor. Most of the men and women profiled in this book survived the war.

One of the strengths of this book is that the author places each man or woman who is profiled within his or her military unit. Consequently the reader is able to understand the broader military context of what was happening for the veteran whose story is being retold. The book's only shortcoming is its lack of an index, but it does have an appendix that serves as a guide to the book page and grave location of each individual who is profiled.

Among all the service personnel who have hallowed the ground at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery, this book has accounts of such Minnesota heroes as Richard E. Fleming, Denzil Carty, Charles H. "Ace" Parker, Catherine Filippi Piccolo, Ernest B. Miller (and his son, James, who was killed in action in 1944), Albert A. Svoboda, and the four Spreigl brothers from St. Paul (two of whom were killed in action).

Stephen Chicoine has vastly increased our awareness of the diversity of local people who served in World War II and of the need for our society to continue to take stock of just what these men and women did in the war and what they gave of themselves for their country.

John M. Lindley is the editor of Ramsey County History.



The Stahlmann Cave Brewery as depicted on the company letterhead. Courtesy of Paul Clifford Larson. See article beginning on page 12.

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