

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Who Built the
Minnesota Capitol?*

John Rachač,
Master Carpernter

John Sielaff

—Page 13

Summer 2012

Volume 47, Number 1

St. Paul's Beaux-Arts Carnegie Libraries
Philanthropic Architecture in a Local Context

Lauren M. Freese

Page 3



St. Anthony Park Free Public Library, 1917



Riverview Free Public Library, 1917



Arlington Hills Free Public Library, 1917

Three public libraries in St. Paul; three façades; one gift of money from the Carnegie Foundation to build all three; one architect for all three buildings; and one approved set of architectural plans. What do these façades tell us? The top and bottom photos are from 2010. The middle photo is from 1994. Photos courtesy of the Saint Paul Public Library.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director

John M. Lindley

Founding Editor (1964–2006)

Virginia Brainard Kunz

Editor

John M. Lindley

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Paul A. Verret

President

Cheryl Dickson

First Vice President

William Frels

Second Vice President

Julie Brady

Secretary

Carolyn J. Brusseau

Treasurer

Thomas H. Boyd

Immediate Past President

Anne Cowie, Nancy Randall Dana,
Joanne A. Englund, Howard Guthmann,
Richard B. Heydinger, Jr., John Holman,
Kenneth H. Johnson, Elizabeth M. Kiernat,
David Kristal, Carl Kuhrmeyer,
Father Kevin M. McDonough,
Nancy W. McKillips, Susan McNeely,
Laurie M. Murphy, Robert Muschewske,
Richard H. Nicholson, Jay Pfaender,
Jeffrey Slack, Ralph Thrane.

Directors Emeritus

W. Andrew Boss

EDITORIAL BOARD

Anne Cowie, *chair*, James B. Bell,
Thomas H. Boyd, John Diers, John Milton,
Debra Mitts-Smith, Laurie M. Murphy,
Paul D. Nelson, Richard H. Nicholson,
Jay Pfaender, David Riehle, Steve Trimble,
Paul A. Verret, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

William Fallon, William Finney, George
Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Marvin J. Pertzik,
James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Rafael Ortega, *chair*
Commissioner Tony Bennett
Commissioner Toni Carter
Commissioner Jim McDonough
Commissioner Jan Parker
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt
Commissioner Janice Rettman

Julie Kleinschmidt, *manager*,
Ramsey County

Ramsey County History is published quarterly
by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323
Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN
55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copy-
right © 2012, 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 47, Number 1

Spring 2012

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

CONTENTS

- 3 *St. Paul's Beaux-Arts Carnegie Libraries:
Philanthropic Architecture in a Local Context*
Lauren M. Freese
- 13 *Who Built the Minnesota Capitol?*
John Rachač, Master Carpenter
John Sielaff
- 19 *Community Health with a Heart:
The History of Open Cities Health Center*
Katie Jaeger
- 26 "As If in a Law Office in Illinois"
An Interview with President Lincoln
General John B. Sanborn

*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*

A Message from the Editorial Board

The thread running through the Spring issue of our magazine is buildings and builders. In the lead article, art historian Lauren Freese examines the facades of three Beaux-Arts style Carnegie Libraries in St. Paul. What makes her analysis so interesting is that all three public libraries were built by the same construction company using similar budgets and nearly identical architectural plans prepared by one architect. Yet the facades are not identical. Freese analyzes the neighborhood setting for each library to explain why. From libraries, the focus then turns to the construction of two other St. Paul landmarks: James J. Hill's mansion on Summit Avenue and the Minnesota Capitol. John Sielaff uses little-known records to tell us about one master carpenter, John Rachač, and how he used his skills in finishing the interior of the Hill family's residence and to build the seat of Minnesota's government.

This issue then turns to Kate Jaeger's history of a more recent building effort: the establishment of the Open Cities Health Center (OCHC), which is now in its 45th year. Since its founding, OCHC's mission has been to provide health care to economically disadvantaged residents of St. Paul, especially among people of color, recent immigrants, and those who lack health insurance. This is a remarkable story because it began as a grass-roots effort led by women from the neighborhood OCHC serves. Our final article is a short and poignant account of General John B. Sanborn's brief interview with President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. This excerpt comes from Sanborn's privately printed *Speeches and Addresses*, which the Society has reprinted and will publish this summer.

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

“As If in a Law Office in Illinois”

An Interview with President Lincoln

General John B. Sanborn

Shortly after Minnesota began sending volunteer units to support the Union Army in the fight with the Confederacy, John B. Sanborn, a St. Paul lawyer and former legislator, was appointed colonel and given command of the Fourth Minnesota Infantry Regiment. In the summer of 1862, Sanborn and his men joined the Army of the Tennessee, then under the command of Major General Ulysses S. Grant in northern Mississippi. For the remainder of 1862 and for the first half of 1863, Sanborn and the Fourth Minnesota took part in several attempts by Grant to take the Confederate fortress of Vicksburg on the east bank of the Mississippi River. Although Sanborn was a citizen-soldier whose formal training in for war was minimal, he proved at the battles of Iuka (September 19, 1862) and Corinth (October 3–4, 1862) to be a very capable commander and a talented leader. Finally after laying siege to Vicksburg, the Confederates surrendered on July 4, 1863, thereby yielding control of the entire Mississippi to the Union. As a consequence of his gallant leadership at Iuka and Corinth, General Grant recommended Sanborn for promotion to brigadier general. President Lincoln also endorsed advancing Sanborn in rank. For reasons that are unknown today, politics, probably involving local Minnesota issues, intervened and confirmation of Sanborn's promotion by the Congress was delayed.

A frustrated Sanborn waited patiently for his promotion to be confirmed, but in August 1863 he decided that his only recourse was to resign from the army, which he did, and go in person to Washington to present his case. In his 1887 address titled “Reminiscences of the Campaigns Against Vicksburg,” Sanborn explained why he resigned and then recounted his meeting with President Lincoln and several of his cabinet officers. What follows is an excerpt from General Sanborn's speech.

About the first of August, the whole list of appointments of those recommended for promotion came back, with the single exception of my name. I thereupon wrote out my resignation, and took it to [General] McPherson, who approved it and then rode with me to General Grant's headquarters, and the General accepted it, and directed the proper staff officers to give me transportation to St. Paul, to allow me to take out

my horses, and to turn over to me the colors captured by my command at Jackson.

One of General Grant's staff officers communicated the secret, that Grant had written a personal letter in regard to my case, and that the promotion would surely come.

Soon after my arrival home, the senators offered to give me letters to the President, and really seemed anxious that I should return to the army. But in the Army of the Tennessee, I had lost relative rank to such an extent that my usefulness would be much curtailed. But after much deliberation, I concluded to return to the army, and went to Washington with the letters of the senators. General Frank Blair was there, and wanted to go with me to meet the President. I had not seen the President since March, 1861. The interview was peculiar, amusing and interesting. We were invited in immediately upon sending in our cards, and found most of the cabinet officers present. Seward, Chase, Welles

and Stanton remained quite a while, and heard us answer questions asked by the President about the campaign. At length I handed to Mr. Lincoln the letters from the Senators. He looked at them, and says, “Then they are ready for this now. I will give you a letter to Stanton.” He immediately wrote it, and after the interview closed I took it over to Mr. Stanton, who opened it and handed it right back to me, and I have it still, and said, “Why didn't you come to me in the first instance? What did you go to the President for?” And he immediately revoked the order of General Grant accepting my resignation, and made the appointment a second time, saying that he had known all about the case all the time. Hence I was not out of the service a day, from December 22d, 1861, the day I mustered in, to June 1st, 1866, the day I mustered out.

The course of Minnesota was certainly very different from that of other States. Other States seemed to push their men and officers forward with great zeal, while Minnesota seemed disposed to hold hers back, and lost all opportunity of commanding influence in the army, and otherwise diminished her power.

This was the last time I ever saw Mr. Lincoln. He seemed as genial and social as if in a law office in Illinois. After handing to me the letter he had written to Stanton, he turned over another leaf of his portfolio, and says, “Blair, I want to read to you a letter I have written to [General] McClelland, and get your opinion of my epistolary powers. McClelland has applied to me to call a court of inquiry upon his conduct and that of General Grant, in the campaign against Vicksburg; and you know McClelland and I are old friends, but this is something that I can't do, and I am trying to get out of it the best way I can. You see Grant has given us about the only good things we have had so far in this

war, and the people of the country won't see him ordered before a court of inquiry now; so here is what I have written."

And he read the letter. It was quite lengthy for an official letter. The chief point of it was, as I now remember, that the orders and acts of both McClelland and Grant, had been in the presence of tens of thousands of their fellow citizens, and it would matter little what a court composed of a small number of these citizens might find the facts to be, basing their findings upon the evidence of a few more such citizens, and closing with declining to call the court. He added that he had studied pretty hard on that letter, and that he believed that was the best he could do. General Blair congratulated him on his success. Mr. Lincoln then illustrated the case by a very apt story, which, like many of his illustrations, cannot be given just as he told it. But the gist was, that long years before, when he was district attorney in Illinois, he had proceeded with the trial of a case of assault with intent to murder, without any previous consultation with the complaining witness; the county attorney having attended on the grand jury, and drawn the indictment. He proved his *prima facie* case easily by the complaining witness. The prisoner had shot at him with a pistol loaded with a leaden bullet, and hit him; proved the time when and the venue, and rested. The counsel for the defense commenced to cross-examine the witness with great ferocity. "In whose house were you when you were shot?" The witness stammered out, "In the prisoner's house." "Who was there with you?" With still more stammering, he said, "The prisoner's wife." And so it went on, till the question was asked, "Where did the bullet hit you?" Whereupon the witness stopped and refused to answer. The judge told him he must answer, and he still refused; and at last Mr. Lincoln said to the witness, he couldn't see as it would do any harm for the witness to answer so simple a question, and, "You may as well answer the question; it can do no harm." Whereupon the witness, with great emotion, said, "Well, Mr. Lincoln, if you must know all about this, the fact is, that he took me on the rise." With a hearty laugh, he added, I think McClelland wants to take Grant on the rise, for he has already risen pretty high in the estimation of the people.



John B. Sanborn

Brigadier General John B. Sanborn (1826–1904). Engraving by H.B. Hall & Sons in about 1865. Photo courtesy of Jennifer H. Gross.

But sixteen years have passed away since the events above detailed, and the saddest, gloomiest feature of this review of unwritten history and unrecorded events, is the havoc made by death with the actors in those days. Not a group comes before the mind that has not been thinned or annihilated by death. Of the five colonels of the first brigade, Boomer, Alexander, Eddy and Mathias, that were wont to meet and converse as friends during the siege of Corinth, are dead, and I alone remain. Of the group that met at my tent the evening of the 21st of May, 1863, Dana, of the New York Sun, and myself, are all that survive. McPherson, Boomer, Alexander, Eddy, are all gone. Of all those met in September, 1863, in the Executive Mansion, not one continues but myself. Lincoln, Seward, Chase, Welles, Stanton and Blair, are all numbered with the dead; of the staff, Rawlins, Bowens, and others are gone. And this deeply impresses me with the thought, that if any of us who took part in those exciting days and scenes, are carrying in our minds portions of the unwritten history that may be of interest or profit to posterity, we must commit it to writing soon, or the darkness of the grave will exclude it from the light forever.

Thanks to President Lincoln's intervention, John B. Sanborn received his well-earned promotion to brigadier general. He subsequently served in Missouri from late 1863 to the end of the war. Some months after General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox brought the long, bloody war to an end, General Sanborn received orders to Kansas. There he negotiated the terms by which those slaves who were then living in the Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) were emancipated. During this assignment, Sanborn received promotion to brevet major general for his service in Missouri. He then was mustered out of the army and briefly returned to St. Paul before he was appointed by President Andrew Johnson to a commission of current and former military officers and civilians to negotiate treaties with the Native tribes of the Great Plains, who were hostile to the postwar expansion of settlers and railroads in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming. At last Sanborn returned to Minnesota in 1870 and resumed his law practice. He died in St. Paul in 1904, where he was honored following his passing for his service to Minnesota and the United States.

This summer the Ramsey County Historical Society is publishing a reprint of General John B. Sanborn's *Speeches and Addresses*. This volume was collected and printed in the 1960s by General Sanborn's descendants. It contains ten speeches and addresses that Sanborn published between 1869 and 1887, including the speech from which this excerpt of his interview with President Lincoln is taken. The Ramsey County Historical Society has added an Introduction written by John M. Lindley to the reprint volume. The Introduction provides an extended biographical profile of General Sanborn that concentrates on his service in the Civil War and gives a brief explanation of the themes found in each of Sanborn's speeches and addresses in the book. A generous gift from General Sanborn's great-granddaughter, Jennifer H. Gross, has made the reprinting of the *Speeches and Addresses* possible. Copies of this reprint will be available from the Society at its offices in Landmark Center.

R.C.H.S.

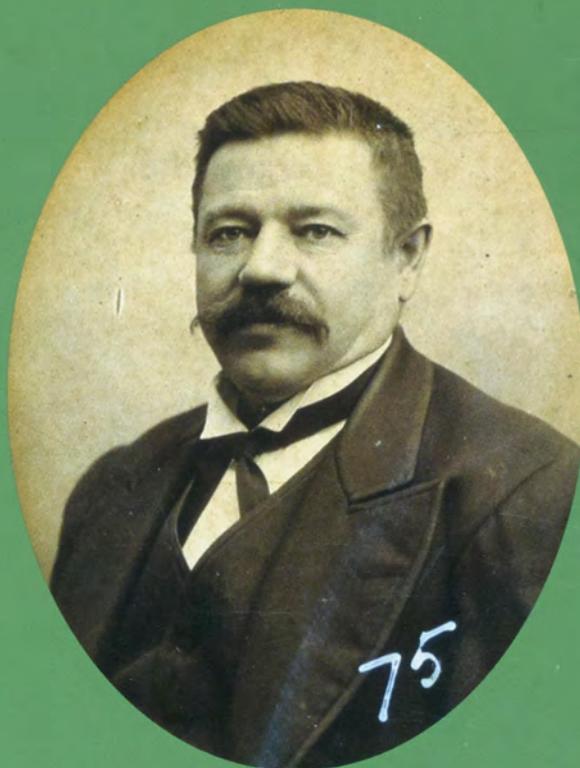
RAMSEY · COUNTY · HISTORICAL · SOCIETY

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
Twin Cities, MN
Permit #3989



The CSPS Hall in St. Paul displays this photo of John Rachač, a master carpenter who helped to build the Summit Avenue mansion of James J. Hill and the Minnesota Capitol. For more on John Rachač, see page 13. Photo by Julia Kierstine. Photo courtesy of the Czech-Slovak Protective Society, St. Paul.