

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

**Summer, 1991**  
Volume 26, Number 2



*Education was a serious matter in 1911 when these boys and girls attended the Stoen School on the western prairie of Minnesota. It has been preserved and restored as the one-room country school at the Ramsey County Historical Society's Gibbs Farm Museum in Falcon Heights. See the articles beginning on Page 4.*

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**On the Cover:** School children pose with their teacher, Andrew Peterson, the man in the hat. Ernie Kittleston, who gave this photograph to the museum, is the little boy second from the left in the front row. See articles beginning on page 4.

**Acknowledgements:** Photographs with the articles on pages 4-13 are from former Stoen school students and teachers. Those of Walter Hill on page 18; Walter Sanborn and his family on pages 22-27, and Kittsondale on page 29 are from the Minnesota Historical Society's audio-visual library. Other Hill family photographs are from the James J. Hill Papers at the James J. Hill Reference Library, St. Paul, and are used with the library's permission. The photograph on page 31 is from the Ramsey County Historical Society's historic sites survey file.

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

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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.

## A Message from the Editorial Board

**W**hile this issue of *Ramsey County History* focuses on the school house at the Gibbs Farm Museum, the peregrinating family of James J. Hill and the career of Judge Walter Sanborn, the Editorial Board already is looking ahead to the fall issue. On November 1, the city of St. Paul will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the naming of the city. *Ramsey County History* will share in this celebration with an article on "the real" Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant, a look back at the early days of St. Paul and a fascinating account of the experiences of one of the city's first settlers—the Perry family. We at *Ramsey County History* look forward to this landmark event next fall and hope you will, too.

We also remain interested in your comments on articles in past issues of this magazine. We're inviting you to bring a bag lunch and participate in the second in our new discussion series based on these articles. Please join us from 12-1 p.m. Thursday, July 18, in Courtroom 408, Landmark Center, St. Paul.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

## Books, Etc.

### *Breaking Hard Ground: Stories of the Minnesota Farm Advocates*

Dianna Hunter  
Duluth: Holy Cow Press, 1990.

This book is a collection of oral histories that document the farm crisis of the 1980s. We hear the voices of forty-one Farm Advocates—a program in which farmers helped other farmers through the thickets of government policy and red tape. The stories are alternately sad, infuriating, and heart-warming.

Why should a magazine dedicated to Ramsey County history review a book about rural Minnesota? The answer is simply that you cannot tell the history of a community in isolation. And to understand Ramsey County, we need to recognize the role of St. Paul as the state capital—how it makes us who we are and how we view ourselves. Four of the subjects are from St. Paul: Randi Roth and Lynn Hayes, staff attorneys with the Farmers' Legal Action Group; Anne de Meurisse, coordinator of the Farm Advocate program; and Jim Massey, director of the Farmers' Legal Action Group. The book is sprinkled with further references to trips to the state capital for seminars and meetings with government officials and legislators.

There is a symbiotic relationship between our county and the rest of the state. As a center of political power, St. Paul, in most references in this book, represents a place where changes can be made for the good through the positive intervention of government.

The book offers some thoughts on how we do history, making a powerful argument for a good oral history program that listens to the stories of the "average" person. Dianna Hunter writes, "In studying and discussing how farm

policy was made, [the farmers] realized that mainstream history is really nothing but a play-by-play account kept by the powerful." *Breaking Hard Ground* opens many doors for further historical research.

### *Oakland Cemetery*

A Brochure printed by the Oakland Cemetery Association.

### *Oakland Cemetery Records: Saint Paul, Minnesota.*

Volume One: German Evangelical-Zion Lutheran Church. Sharon Bruckner, Project Coordinator. St. Paul: Minnesota Genealogical Society, 1991.

One of the hazards of working in a local historical society is that people from the past, dead for a hundred years, often seem as real as people from today. So, when I walk through the wonderful Oakland Cemetery, I often feel as if I'm meeting old friends: Norman Kittson of the American Fur Company, Governors Alexander Ramsey and Henry Sibley, William Hamm of the brewery family, and the "Owatonna Thunderbolt," Herbert Joesting, All-American fullback for the University of Minnesota.

This cemetery, first organized in 1853, is a historic treasure for Ramsey County—a tangible reminder of the people who shaped our past. It is further enhanced in its importance by the landscape design of Horace W.W. Cleveland. Two recent publications help us enjoy the cemetery even more. *Oakland Cemetery* is a simple brochure that provides a map of the grounds and helps locate thirty-seven significant gravesites and monuments. *Oakland Cemetery Records* is part of a larger project by the Minnesota Genealogical Society to fully document

every grave. Both contribute to the preservation of an important part of our past.

### *Homecoming: The Art Collection of James J. Hill*

Jane H. Hancock, Sheila ffolliott, and Thomas O'Sullivan. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1991.

In the city of Beverly, Massachusetts, where I served as director of the local historical society, four of America's greatest art collectors kept summer homes: Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Frick, Robert Evans, and Frederic Bartlett. The collections of Gardner and Frick became two highly personal museums while the Evans and Bartlett collections grace the halls, respectively, of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Chicago Art Institute. This new book explores the collection of James J. Hill through three essays and a fine series of plates of the art itself.

How did Hill fit into this grand tradition of private collecting? We never actually hear Hill comment on his art except through invoices and purchase authorizations. Was Hill following the role established by the old Eastern families (he did, after all, hire the Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns to design his Summit Avenue house)?

A portion of that collection has returned to the house on Summit Avenue as part of a year long celebration of the centennial of its construction. Hill's collecting was not adventurous—generally paintings from the Barbizon and School of 1830. He gathered outstanding examples of these popular styles. The core of his collection features beautiful rural countrysides with happy peasants—a lost

*Books, Etc., to page 31*

# What's Historic About This Site?

## *First National Bank of White Bear Lake*

*Editor's Note: This is the sixth in a series of articles on Ramsey County's historic sites.*

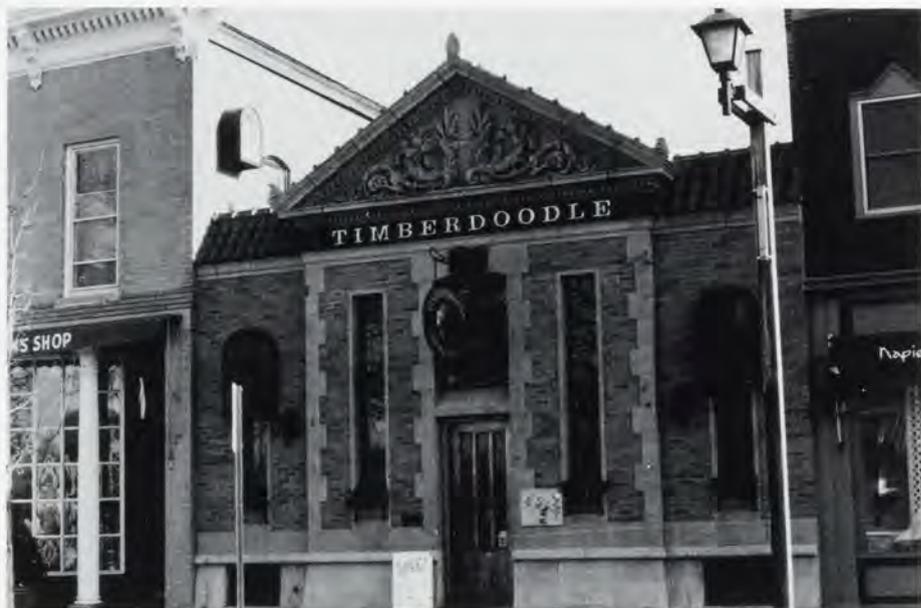
This delightful classically-inspired building is an excellent example of how the older buildings which have added so much character to the downtowns of Minnesota communities can be adapted to new uses.

The former First National Bank of White Bear Lake at what used to be 316 Washington Avenue now houses Timberdoodle, a clothing and gift shop, but it stands on the site it has occupied for seventy years and its original exterior is still intact.

Built in 1921, the year White Bear Lake became a city, the Beaux Arts-inspired bank was designed by St. Paul architect C. E. Vankirk and built by Steenburg Construction Company, with Phil Ulmer as stone cutter. The bank had been established in 1914 as the White Bear State Bank and, in constructing its new building, the bank's founders, Cooper Fulton and Fred Murray, were said to have spared no expense in creating a building that would rival any bank building in Ramsey County. Its pediment, with masonry elaborately carved in the form of a cornucopia spilling out fruit, seems to express the prosperity of the 1920s.

Fulton and Murray had hoped to set off a "city beautiful" building trend in White Bear Lake. This was a community whose origins dated back to the early years of the nineteenth century when the region was inhabited by Ojibway (Chippewa) and Dakota (Sioux) bands who came each season to hunt, fish and harvest berries and wild rice.

In the 1850s, several settlers launched the beginnings of a resort community that, for the next thirty years, attracted vacationers from throughout the Midwest. Beginning in the 1890s, streetcar lines connected White Bear Lake with St. Paul and



*First National Bank of White Bear Lake, now renovated as the Timberdoodle clothing and gift store.*

well-to-do families built summer homes along the lake shore and on Manitou Island, which was connected to the mainland by a small bridge.

As the automobile eclipsed the streetcar, most of the summer residents began to live there throughout the year. Many of their former summer homes still exist, although often greatly altered in their adaptation for year-round use.

A number of other commercial buildings still survive in the downtown district, in addition to the First National Bank building. Among the most important is the Italianate-inspired, brick Reif and Clement Meat Market, now the Wayzata Children's Shop, built in 1886 and standing next to the bank. The Tudor Revival Avalon Theater, built in 1928 at 2179 Fourth Street, has been converted to shops.

First National Bank of White Bear Lake closed after the stock market crash in 1929. The First State Bank of White Bear Lake then occupied the building from 1930 to 1961.

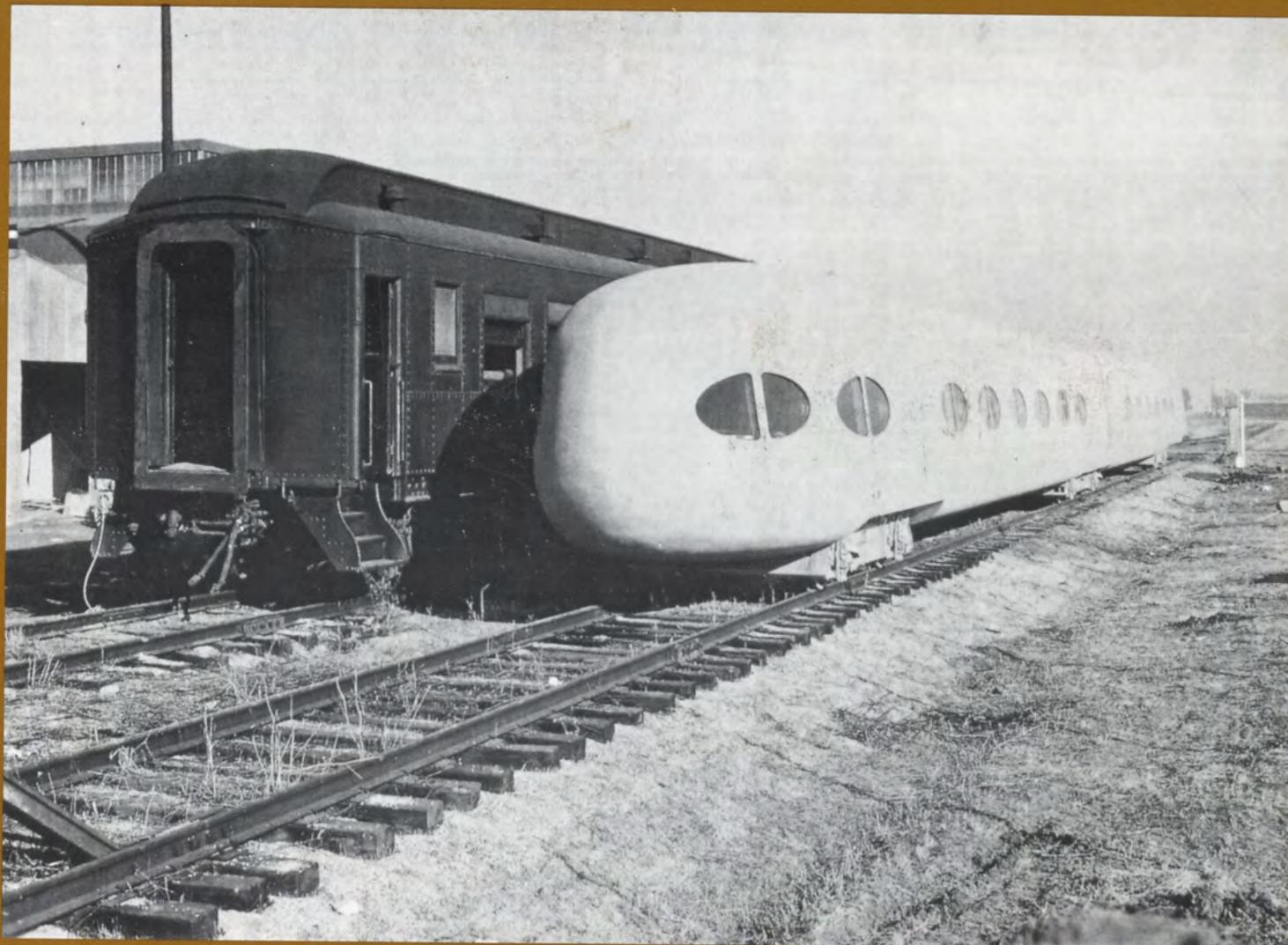
### *Books, Etc., from page 30*

Arcadia with no railroads.

The presence of James J. Hill and his private gallery help point out a continuing facet of how St. Paul views itself. A local newspaper article, written in 1892, said, "Tell a New Yorker . . . that right here in St. Paul is a private art gallery which surpasses anything his nabobs can boast, and, unless he has seen J. J. Hill's magnificent collection, he will simply laugh you to scorn. If he really knows pictures, however, your revenge is easy." Later, in 1922, painter Robert Hale promoted the house and collections as a possible art museum. "Where art is spoken of," Hale said, "St. Paul would flash into the mind along with the Louvre and the Metropolitan." The article's title expressed a hope that is still expressed today: "With Hill Art Collection, St. Paul Would Be Famed As A Cultural Center."

*Homecoming* is a fine book.

—Daniel John Hoisington



*Prototype of a streamlined passenger coach next to a standard railroad coach of the 1930s at Inglewood, California. The new coach was designed by Cortlandt Hill, grandson of James J. Hill. At 32,000 pounds, the bullet-shaped coach was one-fifth the weight of the older coach. See story beginning on page 14.*

**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

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St. Paul MN  
Permit #3989