

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

Lafayette Park—  
Vanished Home of  
the Elite

Page 4

Summer, 1994

Volume 29, Number 2



*A Lafayette Park corner. This charming watercolor was painted by Frances James sometime during the 1880s.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 29, Number 2

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

This Summer issue of *Ramsey County History* features Lafayette Park in St. Paul. Marshall Hatfield's article tells the story of the park, and the two watercolors by Frances Haynes James show how one artistically talented resident saw the park in the 1880s. Although Frances Haynes was born in New Hampshire in 1853, she and her family moved to St. Paul after the Civil War. She married Henry Clay James in 1874, and they lived, at the time she painted these watercolors, on the southwest corner of Lafayette and East Seventh streets. The watercolor on the front cover shows the horsecar tracks that ran along Lafayette in front of their home. The man in the foreground is her husband with their children. The painting on the back cover presents a different view looking west. Both paintings are reproduced here with the permission



*Frances James, about 1874. Minnesota Historical Society photo.*

of Clifford Sommers, grandson of Frances James.

*John M. Lindley,*  
chairman, Editorial Board

## Books, Etc.

### *Our Wildflowers and Trees*

Margaret W. Harmon  
Margaret W. Harmon, 1993

I love my garden and look forward to the first blooms of spring and to the continuous changes that Minnesota's seasons bring to it. *Our Wildflowers and Trees*, with photographs and text by Margaret W. Harmon, reveals an appreciation and love for a fifteen-acre garden of wildflowers and trees which Margaret and her husband, the late Reuel Harmon, planted and tended at their home at Loch Gregor in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota. As the Foreword, written by Reuel states, the book is more than a botanical listing; "It is also a book of sharing—sharing the satisfaction of watching the flowers grow and bloom through the seasons, from early spring to late fall"

*Our Wildflowers and Trees* is not a book that includes all of one species. It is a portrait of a variety of plants that grow on the Harmon property, as well as a collection of information related to those plants. And, it is a book about a family's contribution of individual talents towards the realization of a special project. The end sheets were designed and drawn by one granddaughter, another shared her knowledge of plants, a grandson contributed his guidance and talent with photography and is responsible for the photograph of Margaret and Reuel Harmon on the jacket flap.

The book is filled with examples of family and friends sharing time, talents, and, yes, plants with the Harmons who have remembered each special gift—"A good many years ago Reuel dug this bush from Evan and Martha Cary's summer home at Balsam Lake, Wisconsin . . ."



*Reuel and Peggy Harmon at their home in Inver Grove Heights. Photo by Rick Weyerhaeuser, 1992.*

*Our Wildflowers and Trees* proceeds from spring's first flower, the Skunk-Cabbage, through autumn's New England Aster, revealing the beauty of each season's wildflowers. The author's exquisite photographs capture the essence of each specimen: the delicacy of the Wild Columbine, the iridescence of the Smooth Rose, the perfect spring color and gaiety of the Wild Geranium. The photographs of the Common Burdock and the Common Milkweed bring to mind fragrant summer evenings in my garden which is full of the milkweed, the seeds carried in the fur of my dog. They reveal these plants, which some think of as roadside weeds, as contributing as much to the beauty of the landscape as the prized beautiful Bottle Gentian, the cover photograph of the book. Margaret Harmon watched for the right moment to permanently capture on film each of her specimens, photographs beautifully printed by Sexton

Printing, St. Paul.

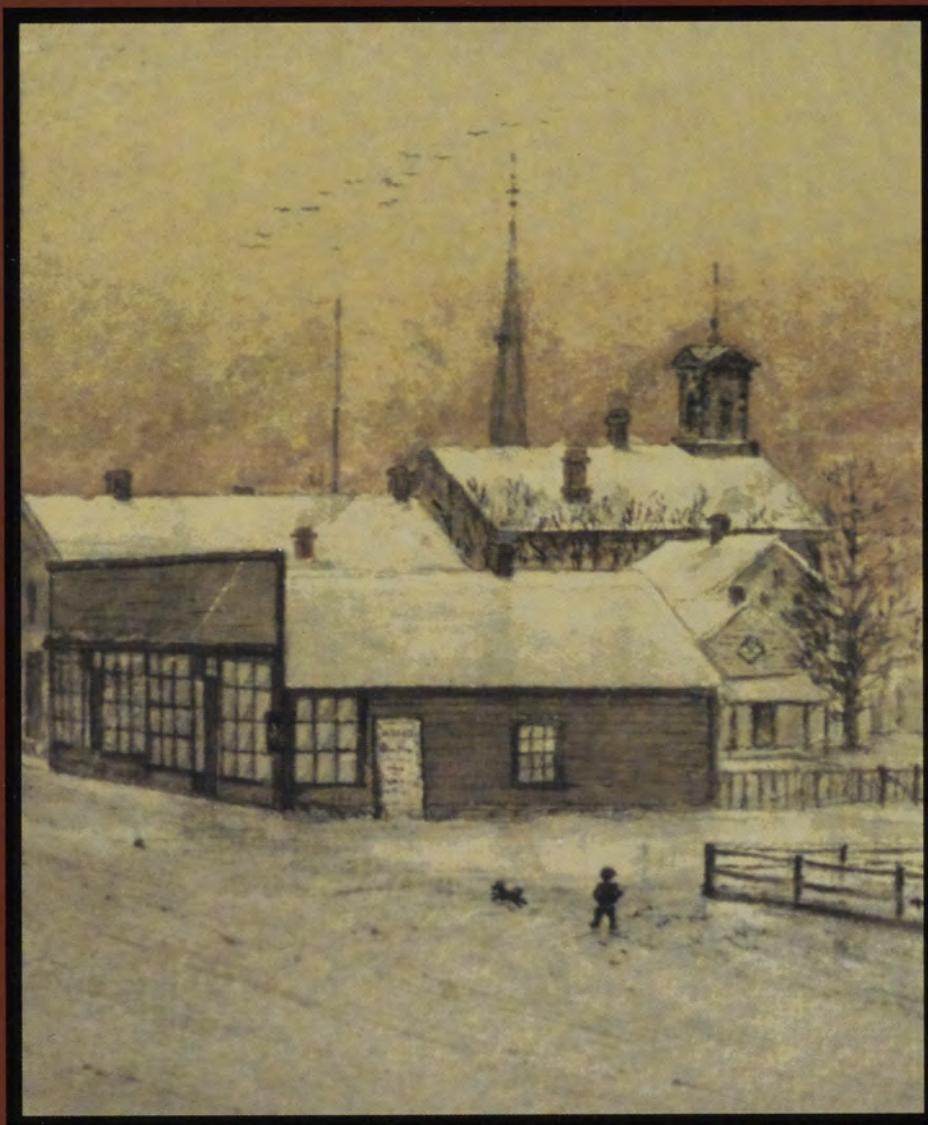
For accomplished gardeners, the seasonal arrangement of the book can evoke thoughts of their own gardens and the flowers which, as they begin to bloom, are a prelude to new color arrangements in the landscape and new scents in the air. For those who wish to learn to garden with wildflowers, the seasonal arrangement of the book tells the beginner, with pictures and descriptions, how to use specific plants to introduce bloom into a garden from early spring to late fall.

Another of my favorite kinds of information that the book presented was exactly where each of the plants grew on the Harmon property: fields, woodlands, meadows, sun or shade. This makes the book particularly useful for beginning gardeners.

Besides providing the correct botanical information for each specimen and its location on their property, the book imparts an array of other fascinating information. Did you know that the fly mushroom caused the death of Czar Alexis of Russia, or that Abraham Lincoln's mother is said to have died from the milk of the White Snakeroot? Do you know that the down of the dying flowers of the Bull Thistle is a favorite nesting material for goldfinches who build their nests in the fall rather than the spring?

The book is available for sale at the Dodge Nature Center Rookery, and proceeds from the sale of the book go to the Dodge Nature Center. For more information, call 455-4531.

*Vera Trent is assistant director of the Ramsey County Historical Society and, as the reader will note, an enthusiastic and accomplished gardener.*



*Another of Frances James's watercolors of a Lafayette Park scene in the 1880s. This view looks west from the James home, a double house at the southwest corner of East Seventh street and Lafayette. The tall steeple is First Baptist Church at Ninth and Wacouta. The cupola is on the Washington School at Ninth and Olive streets. See article beginning on page 4.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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