

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.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Priscilla Farnham
Editor
Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William S. Fallon
Chairman of the Board

Joanne A. Englund
President

John M. Lindley
First Vice President

Margaret M. Marrinan
Second Vice President

Richard A. Wilhoit
Secretary

James Russell
Treasurer

Sidney P. Abramson, Arthur H. Baumeister, Jr., Thomas Boyd, John Harens, Marshall Hatfield, Liz Johnson, Laurie Murphy, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Thomond O'Brien, Robert Olsen, Darrell Rooney, Evangeline Schroeder, Jane Thiele, and Laurie Zenner.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Charlton Dietz, Thomas J. Kelley, Arthur McWatt, Laurie M. Murphy, Dr. Thomas B. Mega.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Coleman Bloomfield, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, Clarence Frame, Otis Godfrey, Jr., Ronald Hachey, Reuel D. Harmon, Robert S. Hess, Ronald M. Hubbs, Fred T. Lanners, Jr., Don Larson, George Latimer, Lewis Lehr, David Marsden, Robert B. Mirick, Samuel H. Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome Plunkett, Peter S. Popovich, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hal Norgard, chairman
Commissioner Diane Ahrens
Commissioner John Finley
Commissioner Ruby Hunt
Commissioner Warren Schaber
Commissioner Brenda Thomas
Commissioner Richard Wedell

Terry Schutten, 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. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1994, 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.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 29, Number 2

Summer, 1994

CONTENTS

3 Letters

4 Once Upon a Time—'Tasteful, Elegant' Lafayette Park and the Homes of the Elite *Marshall R. Hatfield*

14-15 'Aristocratic Woodward'

22 Growing Up in St. Paul— Harriet Island and the 'Fearless' Popper *William D. Bowell, Sr.*

25 How Good Were the 'Good Old Days?' *Tamara C. Truer*

27 Books, Etc.

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 Reuel D. Harmon.

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

Letters to the Editor

Grace Flandrau's Work

A St. Paul friend has just sent me a copy of *Ramsey County History*, Spring, 1993, with Frances Sontag's literary criticism and ranking of Grace Flandrau's work. I hadn't seen it earlier. Ms. Sontag's interest is timely, considering the Grace Flandrau biography and memoirs that have resulted from my six years' research in Flandrau's papers and will be published over the next several years. While I don't agree with Sontag's general opinion of Flandrau, I must admit that her focus on this neglected Minnesota author cannot help but reawaken public interest in her work.

I am surprised that Sontag draws her conclusions about Flandrau's attitude and craftsmanship based on such a small sample of Grace Flandrau's entire oeuvre. Anyone who had read Flandrau's most famous book—*Then I Saw the Congo*—could not find that "her human sympathies are understanding are narrow."

Unfortunately, Grace Flandrau's more mature work—her short fiction, essays and travel writing of the 1930s and 1940s—are out of print and difficult to find. But her immature work—three of the four novels cited by Ms. Sontag—are readily accessible. That is why an anthology of her finest work, all out of print, is timely.

To add enlightenment to the discussion, a list of Grace Flandrau's publication credits, prepared by me, is available. Almost all of the listed work can be found in the collections of the Twin Cities' major libraries. When Grace Flandrau's biography comes out, readers will learn what editors, publishers, critics, other famous writers, agents, filmmakers, and a wide readership thought of her work in her own day.



Grace Flandrau. Lee Bros. Photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

Some of the local unawareness and discounting today is also due to the fact that much of Flandrau's most choice work was not written or widely read in Minnesota.

—Georgia R. DeCoster, Plymouth.

My comments on Grace Flandrau's writing referred only to her novels, and then only to a specific comparison of her work to that of Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald. I did not mention her other writings because they lay outside the scope of my article, but I certainly agree that her short stories and her history and travel articles are rewarding and that she deserves to be better read today.

—Frances Sontag, St. Paul.

The Giesens Again

Your Winter, 1994, issue is super. The Giesen story recalls climbing those worn stairs to be fitted for St. Paul

Academy dramatics! A fascinating—even spooky—place! And John Larson, a friend from Taylors Falls, told his story beautifully. Thanks.

—James Taylor Dunn,
San Antonio, Texas.

We Remember When

We are of the generation who watched and will later watch as buildings are raised, razed and raised again and again; streets are laid out and developed and later re-routed and sometimes are long gone; bridges span and are replaced about every three-quarters of a century by new spans; and the Mississippi is kicked out of its bed and dug and filled, diked, degraded and squeezed tightly into a deep cut by man's puny efforts to control and improve it.

St. Paulites look down from their high bluffs and are comfortable looking at that silver thread that sews together their whole panorama of hills and valleys. Yet, strangely enough, historians a century hence will probably resolve that the river was the one constant throughout the last 300-year period.

—Harvey C. Stiefel,
Grey Cloud Island.

Thank You

My mother and I both thought the tribute to my father, Lester LeVesconte, in the Spring issue of the magazine was very nicely done. When I opened my copy, what a pleasant surprise to see him right there. In the later years, I believe, he was pleased that the Gibbs Farm Museum was doing so well. It did take awhile to "get off the ground," so to speak. Thank you for honoring him in the magazine.

—Ruth Phipps, St. Paul.



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

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

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