

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Lafayette Park—
Vanished Home of
the Elite

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Summer, 1994

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

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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



Horace Thompson (upper right) was a pioneer St. Paul banker. His house (above) as it looked about 1880, was one of the first of the spacious homes to be constructed in Lafayette Park. Built in the 1860s, it also might have been among the first of the region's Italian Villa style mansions. The Thompson portrait is by Zimmerman. Minnesota Historical Society photos.

'Aristocratic Woodward'

The homes of St. Paul's notables who lived in Lafayette Park during the waning years of the nineteenth century clustered along or close to Woodward avenue. Consciously or not, these wealthy bankers, merchants and entrepreneurs seem to have chosen houses with architectural styles that reflected the exuberance of the post-Civil War era. They ranged from Horace Thompson's Italian Villa to John Prince's Second Empire to Elias Drake's Victorian. This lovely neighborhood lived for little more than thirty years. The development of St. Paul as a railroad center marked its doom when the rails spread into the Trout Brook valley.



Elias Franklin Drake (left) was an attorney who built railroads in Ohio and Indiana before arriving in St. Paul in 1860. Under contract to build Minnesota's first railroad, he saw to the laying of the first rails linking St. Paul with St. Anthony. His house (above) was designed by Monroe Sheire. Minnesota Historical Society photos.



Bruno Beaupre in his horse and buggy outside his Lafayette Park home, his family ranged behind him on walk and porch. Beaupre made his money in the grocery business. The Victorians, wealthy or not, were fond of photographs that displayed whatever affluence they had attained. Ingersoll photograph, Minnesota Historical Society.



Amherst H. Wilder (above) an entrepreneur whose fortune would create the A. H. Wilder Foundation, lived in still another Second Empire mansion (left) on Woodward avenue. But by the end of the 1890s, the Wilders and other pioneer families were fleeing to Summit avenue where many of them built even more lavish houses. Minnesota Historical Society photos.





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.
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