

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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A Roof Over Their Heads:
The Ramsey County Home

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Summer, 2000

Volume 35, Number 2

Dilettante, Renaissance Man, Intelligence Officer
Jerome Hill and His 'Dearest Mother' Letters

—Page 4



James J. Hill, II (Jerome Hill) in Air Corps uniform, photographed around 1942, probably at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. See article beginning on Page 4.

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Message from the Editorial Board

Because the more recent issues of *Ramsey County History* have concentrated on the mid-nineteenth century and the area's pioneer heritage, this issue shifts to the mid-twentieth century with the wartime experiences of Jerome Hill, grandson and namesake of the Empire Builder, James J. Hill. Historian and author G. Richard Slade uses Jerome Hill's letters to his mother while Hill was serving as an Army Air Forces intelligence officer in France in the summer of 1944 as a window on southern France and Paris immediately following liberation by the Allies. Jerome Hill's reports of what he saw allow the reader to glimpse Paris through the eyes of an observer who knew it well before the German army overran it in 1940. We then turn to a subject close at hand—the story of the Ramsey County "Poor Farm" and its adjacent cemetery in Maplewood. Authors Pete Boulay and Robert C. Vogel both make a strong case for the value and usefulness of local history in current policy-making decisions. Rounding out this issue is Tom Kelley's account of the 1962 gubernatorial election recount. Although the recount itself is a familiar story in Minnesota politics, Kelley provides the perspective of an insider who participated in the process as the state's first Election Procedures Advisor. His reminiscences remind us that balloting in elections is a serious business that is sometimes overlooked in the heat of a campaign.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Plans for Preserving 'Potters' Field'— Heritage of the Public Welfare System

Robert C. Vogel

The Ramsey County's old "Poor Farm" cemetery is an historically important site that represents the heritage of poor people and the public welfare system in Ramsey County. In May, 2000, concerns about proper management and future use of the site, spurred by the interest of community historians and genealogists in preservation of the historic site, led Ramsey County's property management to retain my firm as its consultant in preparing a management plan for the property.

The task was to devise a comprehensive management plan that would demonstrate the county's commitment to preserve the site by providing a framework for coordinated efforts to protect and enhance its cultural and aesthetic values. To this end, the management plan articulates a vision of the cemetery's future with specific guidelines and recommendations for their implementation by the county.

The underlying reason for developing the site management plan was the county's recognition that the cemetery possessed cultural and historical values warranting preservation as an enhancement of the county's White Bear Avenue campus. The plan presents a vision for its preservation and use and includes specific recommendations for site maintenance, security, landscaping, recreational use, and interpretation. It is based on four assumptions: the plan will treat the cemetery as an historical and archeological site; the county will rehabilitate the cemetery and adapt it for use as a heritage park, with its physical development focusing on recreation and historical interpretation; the county's requested management plan will use the tools and practices of cultural landscape and archeological site protection so that the historical integrity of the cemetery will not be impaired; and, finally,

the plan assumes the future use of the site as public open space, with plantings, trails, and interpretation stations that enhance its cultural, recreational, and educational values. The first draft of the cemetery management plan will be submitted to the Board of Ramsey County Commissioners in September, 2000.

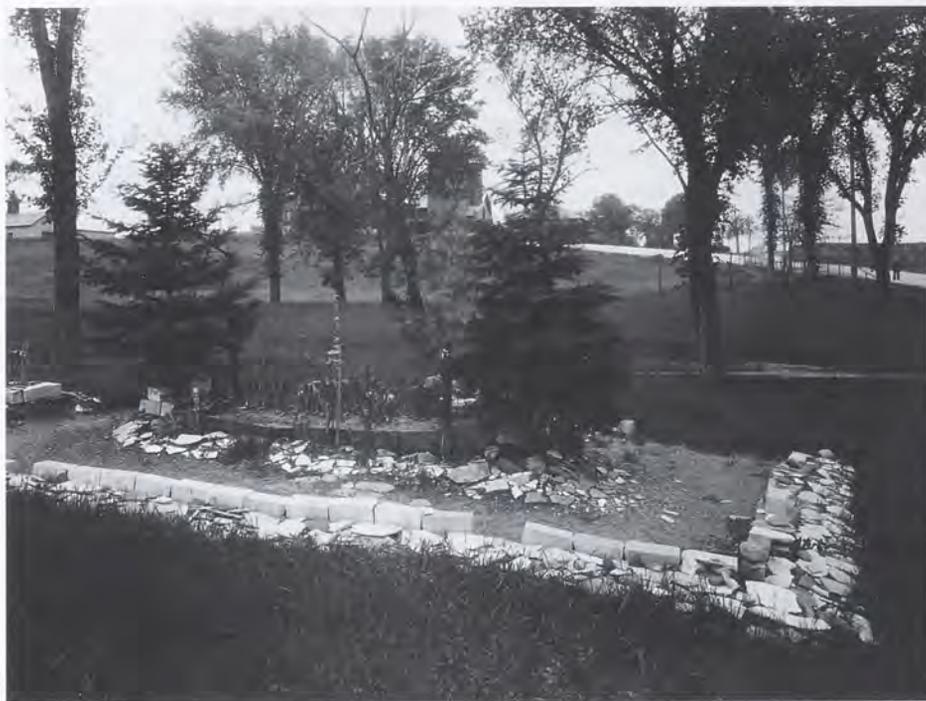
The following paragraphs provide brief answers to some frequently asked questions about the project.

What is the Ramsey County Cemetery?

The cemetery was established by the county board of commissioners in 1895 as a "potters' field" for indigent persons. Located at the county poor farm, the burial ground was in use until about 1923. It covers approximately three acres and contains 2,991 unmarked graves.

Why prepare a management plan? The cemetery is county property and an important historic site in its own right. The management plan is needed to help county officials maintain and enhance the cultural and aesthetic values of the site as a functional part of the White Bear Avenue campus.

Why not remove the burials and use the site for some other purpose? Two reasons: First, while the names of those who are buried in the cemetery were recorded, the individual graves were not marked, and due to the large number of burials in such a confined area disinterment and reburial of human remains would be extremely costly. Second, the historical significance of the cemetery is embodied in its location and physical setting; moving the cemetery would destroy this important connection with its historic time and place.



The only marked grave in the old Potters' Field at the Ramsey County Home, 1937. A. F. Raymond photography, Minnesota Historical Society.

How will Ramsey County use the cemetery? *Definitely not as it was historically! The proposed management plan treats the cemetery as a historic resource to be preserved and protected for the benefit of the citizens of Ramsey County. Specifically, the plan calls for the creation of a three-acre Ramsey County Cemetery Heritage Park to be preserved and rehabilitated as public open space, with walking paths, ornamental plantings, and limited facilities for historical interpretation.*

What is meant by "rehabilitation"? *Historic preservationists define rehabilitation as the process of making possible a compatible use for a historic site through repairs and minor alterations while preserving those features which convey its historical and cultural values. In this case, rehabilitation work will emphasize restoration of eroded surfaces and revegetation of the site with native plants, along with limited landscaping, pedestrian pathways, and signs that help interpret the site's history.*

How will graves be protected? *The planned future use of the cemetery as a heritage park will require minimal physical alteration of the site. All areas likely to contain human remains will be treated with sensitivity and safeguarded against damage caused by natural forces (erosion, weathering, vegetation), human action (vandalism, vehicle use), and adjacent land development. Wherever possible, the ground surface will be built up with clean fill to prevent soil erosion and compaction.*

What happens if human remains are accidentally uncovered? *This has happened in the past, during construction of the horseshoe pits and widening of White Bear Avenue. Under the proposed management plan, no excavation or grading would be allowed within the cemetery "protection zone" where graves are believed to exist. Necessary erosion control and slope stabilization work will be carefully monitored by a professional archaeologist.*

What will the heritage park look like after rehabilitation? *When completed, the cemetery heritage park will resemble a protected natural area, with a native prairie meadow, beds of wild flowers, a restored oak grove, and small areas landscaped with ornamental plantings commonly found in historic cemeteries (such as lilacs). Pathways following the site's natural contours will take pedestrians and bicyclists through the cemetery. Two "interpretation stations" are planned. One will consist of a cemetery memorial and historical marker, to be placed in the general vicinity of the barn overlooking the cemetery from the south. The other will be a scenic overlook off the Gateway Trail near the existing grove of pine trees in the northwest corner of the cemetery. Out of respect for the unmarked graves, all of the proposed park improvements will be designed to be "light on the land" and there will be no fences, monuments, or freestanding signs anywhere within the historic site boundaries.*

Who will use the heritage park? *The White Bear Avenue campus contains several county facilities and the Maplewood Community Center is just two blocks north of the historic site. The Gateway Trail maintained by the Minnesota DNR cuts across the north end of the cemetery and is a popular walking and biking trail. People of all ages from the surrounding neighborhood already visit the site while walking or biking, and last year the county installed a paved sidewalk along White Bear Avenue. (Special precautions were taken to insure that no burials were disturbed by the sidewalk construction.)*

What impact will the County Fair have on the historic site? *The White Bear Avenue campus has been home to the Ramsey County Fair since 1950 and the fairgrounds include both the old racetrack and the 1918 brick dairy barn. Project planners envision the heritage park as a fairgrounds amenity, functioning as a passive recreation area where families attend-*

ing the fair can relax in a natural and historic setting.

What will happen to the horseshoe pits? *Construction of the horseshoe pitching area off White Bear Avenue in the 1960's uncovered several burials. Because it is a unique community recreation resource, the horseshoe pits will be retained as part of the heritage park. However, because of the likely presence of human remains, no excavation of any kind will be permitted in this area.*

Where can I learn more about the Ramsey County Cemetery? *Information about the history of the Ramsey County Poor Farm and the Ramsey County Cemetery can be found in Pete Boulay's *The Lost City of Gladstone: A History of Maplewood from its Beginnings* (privately printed, 1996) and in Ramsey County's *Forgotten Cemetery*, compiled by Mary Bakeman and Richard Swanson (Park Genealogical Books, 1998). You may also want to contact the Maplewood Area Historical Society, 1100 East County Road C, Maplewood, MN 55109-1051, tel. (651) 779-3541. For a copy of the Historic Site Management Plan (due in September), contact Ramsey County Property Management, 600 Government Center West, 50 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102-1657; tel. (651) 266-2260.*

Robert C. Vogel is principal/research director for Robert C. Vogel & Associates, Historians and Preservation Planners, New Brighton, Minnesota.



Dairy herd at the Ramsey County Home in Maplewood in 1923. Minnesota Historical Society photograph. See Pete Boulay's history of the Ramsey County "Poor Farm" beginning on page 13.

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

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