

RAMSEY COUNTY

History

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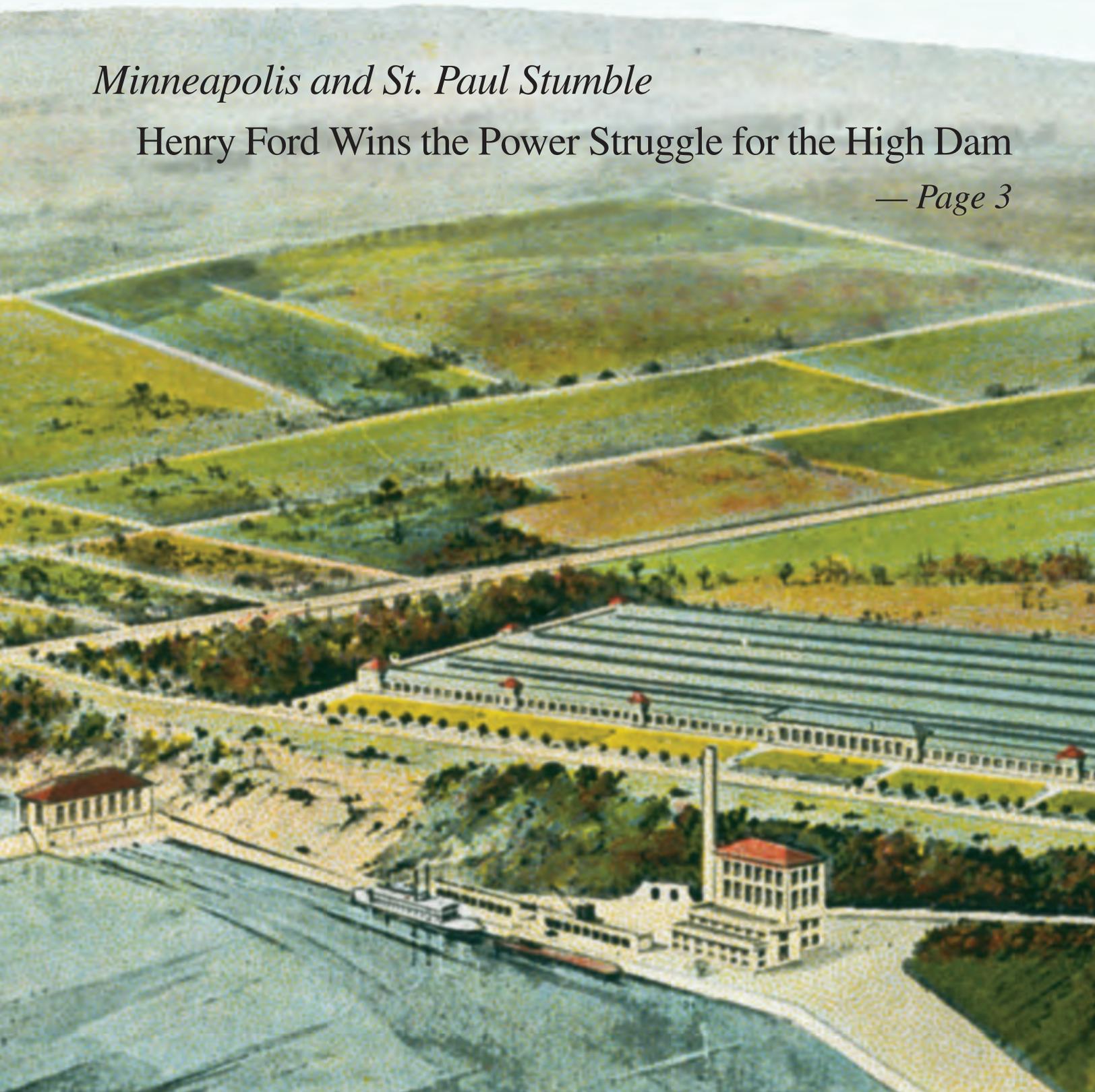
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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

This issue brings us Brian McMahon's illuminating story of Henry Ford and his role in the licensing of hydroelectric power at the Ford Dam on the Mississippi River and its relationship with commerce and government in Ramsey County. Read it along with David Riehle's review of James Bell's new book, *From Arcade Street to Main Street: A History of the Seeger Refrigerator Company, 1902–1984*, published by RCHS and available from our office. Together, these two accounts show how Ramsey County helped drive the American consumer economy in the early 1900s: Henry Ford's commitment to hydroelectric power for the new Ford plant and the refrigeration techniques developed by Seeger allowed many Americans to enjoy a Model T in their driveways and a *Coldspot* refrigerator in their kitchens. We also offer Billie Young's mystery involving the St. Paul Public Library's acquisition of a rare set of art books, which were saved from a fire from the library's location over a candy store in 1915. And Susanne Sebesta Heimbach has written a charming memoir of growing up in St. Mark's parish. Finally, other book reviews include the Rev. Mary Bigelow McMillan's look at our own John Lindley's recently published history of the St. Paul Area Council of Churches. Enjoy, pass the magazine along, and recruit new members to keep us all reading for years to come!

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Remembering Tom Kelley



The Ramsey County Historical Society lost a true friend and supporter on July 19, 2007, when Thomas J. Kelley, age 81, died in St. Paul. Tom Kelley was a man of many talents and diverse interests.

The RCHS Board of Directors and staff express their deepest sympathy to Kathy Stack, Tom's partner, and to Tom's family for their loss.

Prior to his retirement in 1984, Tom worked as a journalist and then served the community as Ramsey County auditor (1966 to 1973), county administrator (1973 to 1976), St. Paul city administrator, and deputy commissioner of finance. For a time in the 1970s and '80s, he was St. Paul's director of community services, which included supervision of the city's parks and recreation programs.

Tom Kelley also had a more private, behind-the-scenes role as a volunteer at the Ramsey County Historical Society. In a way that was typical of Tom, he took history seriously by reading, writing, and talking about how St. Paul and Ramsey County came to be what they are today. In the early 1980s, for example, when the Parks and Recreation Department decided it no longer wanted to house hundreds of photos and glass-plate negatives, most of which dated from the 1930s, that documented WPA building projects in local parks and related youth programs of that era, Tom had them transferred to the Ramsey County Historical Society. Today these photos are an untapped visual resource for those who are interested in the Depression-era history of St. Paul.

From 1979 to 1981 Tom served on the RCHS board of directors, but he greatly preferred doing history rather than discussing budgets, staffing, and policy issues associated with the Society's operations. For Tom doing history meant writing about St. Paul

and Ramsey County. This was one of Tom's greatest passions and he did it well. Over the years he published seven carefully researched and well-written articles in *Ramsey County History*. He wrote a history of American National Bank and the role that the Bremer brothers played in the organization and management of the bank (1988). Then he wrote about one of his favorite topics—the Mississippi River—with a history of the Minnesota Yacht Club and the Minnesota Boat Club (1989). In 1990 he gave us a history of the early years of the St. Paul Fire Department.

In about 1988, Virginia Brainard Kunz, who was then the editor of the Society's history magazine, recruited Tom for the RCHS Editorial Board. He served until May 2007, nearly twenty years, during which he frequently shared his understanding of local history and encouraged others to pursue it with energy and good writing.

At the same time that he was providing wise counsel to the Society's editorial efforts, Tom continued doing history. In 1991 he researched and wrote several chapters of a book-length history of Family Service of St. Paul, a social service organization that is now part of the Children's Home Society of Minnesota. An excerpt from this material was also published in *Ramsey County History*. Two years later Tom wrote two essays that documented the history of the St. Paul City Hall and Ramsey County

Courthouse. Their publication in the Society's magazine coincided with the completion of the extensive restoration and renovation of that celebrated landmark and represents some of Tom's finest writing.

In articles published in *Ramsey County History* in 1999 and 2000, Tom turned his attention to local politics, an arena that he knew first-hand. The 1999 essay was a memoir of Tom's efforts as county auditor to persuade the county board to streamline a system of governance that, in Tom's words, "had remained virtually unchanged for a half-century." Tom took "great pleasure and satisfaction" that he had played a part in the work of modernizing county government.

Tom's last article had a broader scope. It was part history and part memoir. In this essay Tom explained what had happened in the 1962 gubernatorial election recount, when the DFL candidate Karl Rolvaag out-pollied incumbent governor Republican Elmer L. Andersen by only 91 votes and the outcome was not known until March 21, 1963. He was a witness to these events because he was Minnesota's first Election Procedures Advisor, a Civil Service position for which he was selected in 1962. Thus he participated in the recount trial that began in February 1963.

Tom Kelley used his retirement years for doing history, for writing about the history of St. Paul and Ramsey County. The role he chose when doing history was that of RCHS volunteer. All of us who value local history are grateful for what Tom did for our community and for his legacy of writing that will, like those photographs and glass negatives, be preserved for future historians and our posterity.

J.M.L.

Henry Ford was an accomplished bird-watcher and an early environmentalist who camped regularly with noted naturalist John Burroughs. His love of nature was reflected in his personal attention to the design of the Twin Cities Assembly Plant as he admonished the engineers to protect the surrounding landscape in building the "most beautiful plant in the world".

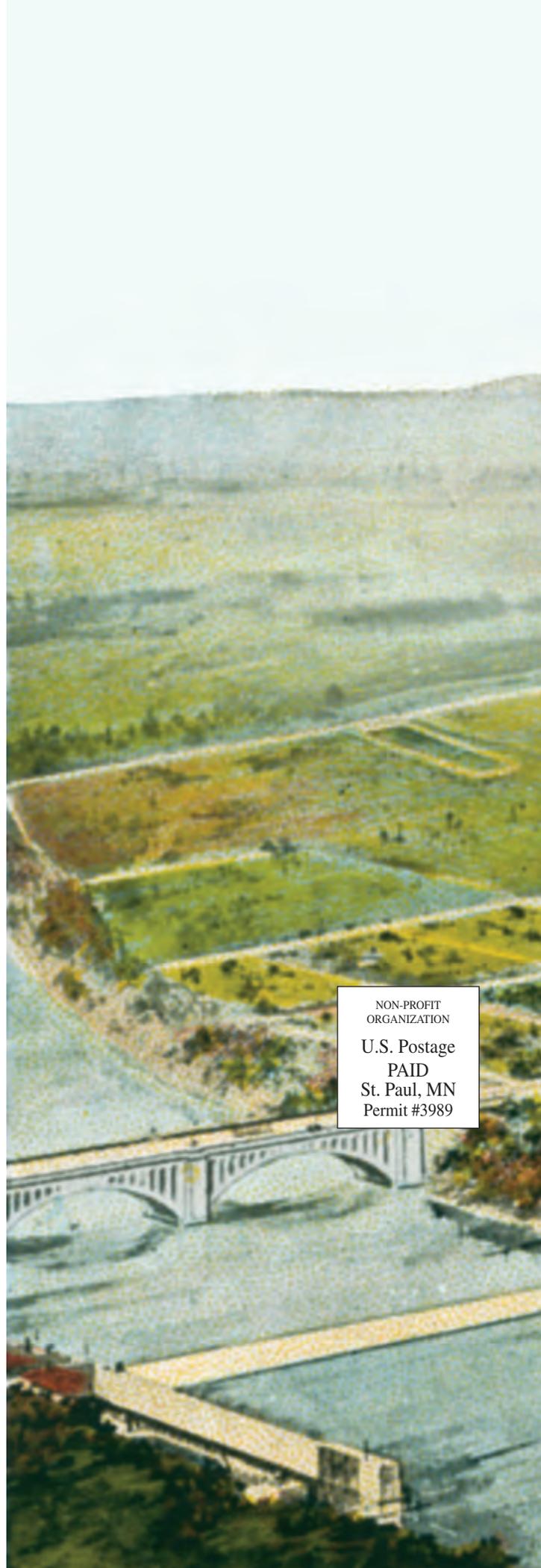
The image on the cover is taken from a postcard of the early 1920s, showing the stately Ford Twin Cities Assembly Plant sitting atop the beautiful bluffs of the Mississippi River. This factory is the virtual embodiment of the classical image of the "machine in the garden" popularized by a book with that title by Leo Marx. The postcard shows the adjoining community of Highland Park, named after an earlier Ford plant in Detroit, as largely undeveloped. It is a tribute to Ford's environmental sensitivity that a vibrant residential neighborhood could be built in the shadow of a heavy manufacturing facility

Postcard is in collection of author.

R.C.H.S.
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